

# False Teachers and Counterfeit Christians | Acts

## 8:4-25 | 2/7/16

- Philip the evangelist | Acts 8:4-8
  - **Read Acts 8:4-8**
  - The book of Acts now turns to the disciple known as Philip.
  - He was one of the seven that was chosen previously to serve within the church.
    - Acts 6:5
  - Philip not only served the church in his appointed duties to help with the distributions of the church but he was also an evangelist.
    - Acts 21:8
      - “The next day we left and came to Caesarea, where we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the Seven, and stayed with him.
    - In fact, Philip is the first one in Scripture to be called an evangelist.
  - Philip was called to evangelize to the Samaritans.
    - The Samaritans were considered a “half-breed” people because they were made up of a mixture of Jews and Gentiles.
    - This nation came about in 732 B.C. when the northern tribes were captured by the Assyrians some of the Jews were exported and the Assyrians brought other people groups in.
      - There was intermarriage between the Gentiles and the Jews.
    - Even though originally this nation consisted also of Jews the intermarriage had developed a new nation of people and the Jews despised them.
      - John 4:9
        - “How is it that You, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” she asked Him. For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.”
  - Philip obediently preached the Word of God and he performed signs among the people with the power of the Holy Spirit.
    - Although Philip was not an apostle God used him to perform the same type of signs by removing unclean spirits just as He used the apostles.
      - This was also the case for Stephen.
    - God primarily used the Apostles, but He did use these disciples to perform His miracles as well.
- The false teachings of Simon. | Acts 8:9-13
  - **Read Acts 8:9-13**
  - We know that there are false teachings in the world that Satan uses to keep us away from the truth of Christ.
    - 2 Peter 2:1-3
      - But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, and will bring swift destruction on themselves. <sup>2</sup> Many will follow their unrestrained ways, and the way of truth will be blasphemed because of them. <sup>3</sup> They will exploit you in their greed with deceptive words. Their condemnation, pronounced long ago, is not idle, and their destruction does not sleep.
    - This describes Simon

- Simon who was used by Satan to spread lies among the people, to spread a false truth.
- Simon the sorcerer
  - The works of Satan, his lies, can come in many forms.
  - In the case of Simon, he was able to do things that made him look like God had given him some power.
    - This was likely a mixture of astrology, divination and the occult.
  - **The works that he did were evil in their intent and solely to bring glory upon himself.**
  - Simon enjoyed deceiving the people and getting their praise and recognition.
- Simon and Gnosticism
  - The early church fathers like Justin Martyr and Irenaeus in their writings attributed this Simon in Scripture to be one of the founders of Gnosticism.
  - Gnosticism is a false belief or teaching that a person gained salvation not by the merit of Christ's death but by special knowledge about God.
    - The Greek word "gnosis" means knowledge.
    - It was a woven mesh of Christianity and Greek philosophy.
    - Gnostics rejected the Old Testament and that its "God" was evil and had trapped human souls in the material world.
    - Gnostics denied the humanity of Jesus.
  - Paul even addresses this false teaching.
    - 1 Timothy 6:20-21
      - "O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called "knowledge," for by professing it some have swerved from the faith. Grace be with you."
  - Gnosticism was one of the biggest heresy's that threatened the early church.
    - It was a lie portrayed by Satan to attempt to turn people from the truth to a lie.
    - The early church fought it frequently to purge its lies.
  - The roots of Gnosticism can be seen in false religions today.
    - There are similarities with the teachings of Mormonism in that they believe that Jesus was a lesser deity and not God Almighty.
    - They believe in many God's.
  - Gnosticism also produced false gospels.
    - As do all false religions and beliefs they have their own writings.
    - Gnosticism has produced false (or lost) gospels like Book of Thomas, Gospel of James and the Secret Book of John.
    - They sought to give an alternative version of Christianity.
  - Gnosticism's traits were seen in the beliefs of Thomas Jefferson
    - That Matthew, Mark, Luke and John passed along a corrupt version of Jesus. That one who was "enlightened" could see the true Jesus.
- Simon had gathered a large following and had mislead many
  - These people that had heard Simon thought he could demonstrate the power of God and he had gained many followers and had deceived them for a long time.
- **In our modern day, how often do you think these false teachers (that are empowered by Satan) turn people away from the truth of Christ?**
- Philip's teaching of Christ was more powerful than the teachings of Satan
  - While Simon's false teachings that were inspired by Satan had turned many, we see that When Philip enters and preaches the Gospel message of Christ that it is much more powerful.
  - The people who had been astounded at the sorcery of Simon were even more impressed by the works that God did through Philip.

- God's acts of healing and the removal of the unclean spirits was something well beyond the misleading actions of Simon.
- Many became believers as is evident by that many were baptized.
- Philips teachings were true and people were coming to know and truly believe in their hearts in Jesus Christ.
- Peter and John visit the Samaritans and they receive the Holy Spirit | Acts 8:14-17
  - **Read Acts 8:14-17**
  - So we have an interesting passage of Scripture where we see that Peter and John are sent to the Samaritans after the apostles had heard that they had welcomed the Gospel.
  - We see that once they get there that these Samaritan believers had not yet received the Holy Spirit and it was not given until they laid hands upon them.
    - This at first seems to be contradictory to our understanding of how one receives the Holy Spirit.
    - We know that Scripture teaches us that the Spirit is received by all who have true faith that become children of God by their belief in Jesus Christ.
      - Ephesians 1:13
        - "When you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and when you believed in Him, you were also sealed with the promised Holy Spirit"
    - **So why was there a delay here and why was the Spirit bestowed by the laying of hands?**
    - This is a time where we need to take all of Scripture into consideration, it clearly teaches that the Spirit is for everyone who believes and is bestowed by God.
    - In this situation though we see similarities with the introduction of the Spirit and the teaching of the Gospel to a people group.
      - At Pentecost all the apostles and disciples were believers but had not yet received the Spirit until God was ready.
        - He came down upon them in a very unique way, but this only occurred a few times in Scripture. It was used as a sign.
      - Then when the apostles were teaching to the Jews those that believed received the Spirit.
      - In Acts 10 when Peter preaches to the Gentiles we see that the Holy Spirit was immediately given to them as well.
        - This was an apostolic introduction and conforming of this people group to the Church.
      - So in the case of the Samaritans which were a new people group (who were despised by the Jews) we can see that it was part of God's plan that Peter and John be there for the initial bestowing of the Holy Spirit.
        - God doesn't tell us exactly "why" but clearly God wanted them to be there and to see it for themselves.
        - It likely affirmed to the apostles that the Gospel message was for the Samaritans just as it was for the Jews and also the Gentiles a short time later.
          - Acts 10:34
            - "Then Peter began to speak: "Now I really understand that God doesn't show favoritism, but in every nation the person who fears Him and does righteousness is acceptable to Him."

- Simon the counterfeit Christian | Acts 8:18-25
  - **Read Acts 8:18-25**
  - When Simon saw the works demonstrated through Philip it was obvious to him that they were in fact far greater than his trickery.
  - So Scripture tells us here that Simon believed and was baptized then followed Philip around.
  - The question we need to address know is was this “belief” genuine and from the heart?
    - If all we had of Simon was this last statement, we might think that perhaps Simon was converted and he truly believed in his heart the truth of Christ.
    - However, as we read further and we see the actions of Simon and how Philip addresses his condition (v.20-23) it is more likely that Simon’s belief was like that of the demons.
      - James 2:19
        - “You believe that God is one; you do well. The demons also believe-and they shudder.”
    - Simon was impressed with the works being performed but that alone will not save you.
      - Simon must also put his faith and trust in Jesus Christ which must come from his heart.
  - Simon sought to buy the power of the Holy Spirit
    - Simon having witnessed the Spirit being given to the Samaritans after they laid their hands up on them made him envious of their “power”.
    - This was obviously something that was far beyond his capabilities and he wanted to be able to do the same thing.
    - He wanted this to benefit himself and for his own glory, not to benefit others.
    - So he thought he could simply buy this God given ability.
      - **This is where the word “simony” comes from.**
      - Simon’s deeds are so well known that he has been immortalized in the dictionary by the word “simony”
      - Which means the buying or selling of a church office or ecclesiastical preferment.
  - Simon’s root problem was the condition of his heart.
    - In verse 21 Peter gives us the greatest indication yet that he was in fact lost as he tells him that his heart was not right before God.
    - Simon desired this for his own selfish desires, it wasn’t so that others could receive the Holy Spirit and have a relationship with Jesus Christ.
    - **Simon treated his “Christianity” as something to use for his own selfish gain and not as a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.**
    - **Do you think this happens today?**
  - Simon in response to Peter’s declaration of his sins, showed no signs of true repentance.
    - After Peter told him of his sins instead of making a confession he simply asked Peter to pray for him so that he might not receive the judgement.
    - He didn’t ask God for forgiveness, there was no relationship.
    - No one can pray for the forgiveness of sins of another, this must come from them. We cannot pray someone unto their salvation without their belief.
  - Simon’s example of a counterfeit Christian.
    - Simon is an example of what a counterfeit Christian looks like.
      - **He had heard the Gospel message, believed in the works, was baptized yet still was not truly a Christian.**
      - He may have looked like it on the outside, he may have done all of the external actions that would give the appearance he was like baptism, but something critical was missing.

- His heart was not right with God.
        - Just because he was baptized and had believed in the works of God through the apostles he didn't truly put his faith hope and trust in Jesus Christ.
        - **He was missing the critical faith that must come from a changed heart.**
  - The modern day counterfeit Christian
    - As Simon and others in Scripture are prime examples of counterfeit Christianity we must be aware and guarded that this condition is alive and well today.
      - One who is a counterfeit Christian is not a believer who is simply going through a time of disobedience, but one who puts on the show and actions of being a Christian whose heart has not truly made a commitment.
      - This is the warning that Jesus gave us.
        - Matthew 7:22-23
    - Our Christianity is not simply a membership to a social group, it is not a life style to look good in the eye's of others by doing good deeds.
      - Just because you attend church, sing songs and own a Bible, this does not make you a Christian.
      - Baptism does not make you a Christian.
      - Just because you agree with the good works of the church and you volunteer and participate this does not make you a Christian.
    - To be a Christian is to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ whom we believe in with all of our heart.
      - We are not truly a Christian unless our belief comes from our hearts.
        - Our heart is the real us. It doesn't matter what our external actions are or what words come out of our mouths. The real us is who we are and what we believe in our heart.
        - Romans 10:9
          - "If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and **believe in your heart** that God raised Him from the dead, **you will be saved.**"
        - Jeremiah 29:13
          - "You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with **all your heart.**
      - The eunuch's heart is in contrast to that of Simon's
        - Philips next encounter was a man whose heart was in the right condition to be a true Christian.
          - Acts 8:34-38
      - **Why do people miss this?**
    - In our world today there are false teachers who teach lies about God and His Scriptures that produce counterfeit Christians.
      - There are those who twist the Scriptures, who take away and add to the Scriptures that produce counterfeit Christians.
      - Their teachings disregard that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, He is God.
        - Jude 4
          - "For some men, who were designated for this judgement long ago, have come in by stealth; they are ungodly, turning the grace of our God into promiscuity and denying Jesus Christ, our only master and Lord."
- **What do you think a counterfeit Christian might look like externally?**