

God's Work, God's Way

Acts 8:1–25

"Peter answered: 'May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money!'" [v. 20].

Ice Breakers: Don't forget to start this session with an ice breaker from the back of last week's guide OR online at www.fbcportland.org/icebreakers.

*Have someone in your group read **Acts 8:1–8***

What did Philip do in Samaria? [8:5]

- **What did the crowds do in response to Philip's teaching and miracles? [8:6]**
- **Why did the people rejoice? [8:8]**

How is FBC, through its mission work, scattered throughout the world?

- **How can we help spread the gospel in Portland?**

*Have someone in your group read **Acts 8:9–13***

Was Simon a believer?

- *[Acts 8:13 says, he "**believed**" and that he was even baptized, but the rest of the passage above raises serious questions about his faith.]*

After the stoning of Stephen, a great persecution broke out in Jerusalem, led by the inquisitor Saul of Tarsus. While the apostles remained in Jerusalem to strengthen the church, the other leaders were scattered abroad, and in the providence of God, the Gospel spread throughout Judea and Samaria [**Acts 8:1–4**].

Philip, one of the Hellenistic converts, went to a city in Samaria. He preached and performed miracles, and many of the Samaritans converted into the church. One of the leading men in the city, Simon, was a noted sorcerer. He had been like a "witch doctor" for the people and had claimed to be operating in connection with a familiar spirit called "The Great Power." Now the Samaritans were turning from his magic and were becoming baptized. Simon himself eventually believed and was baptized. He began to follow Philip around, being amazed by the signs and miracles.

When the Jerusalem apostles heard about Philip's successes, they sent Peter and John to confirm his work. Peter and John prayed that the Holy Spirit might be given to the Samaritans, and the Spirit fell upon them as He had fallen on the disciples on Pentecost. This was the sign needed to show the apostles that these Samaritans were to be received on an equal footing in the new body of the church.

*Have someone in your group read **Acts 8:14-25***

When Simon saw this, he offered money to the apostles so that he too might be able to bring down the Holy Spirit. Peter rebuked him strongly. But Peter went on to encourage Simon to repent and seek God's forgiveness. Simon's only reply was to ask Peter to pray that nothing bad would happen to him **[Acts 8:18-24]**. Early church tradition knows Simon as Simon Magus, Simon the Magician, and tells us that he became a great enemy of the church and a fore runner of the arch heresy of Gnosticism.

One of the great problems in the Medieval church was simony, the sale of ecclesiastical offices for money. Church offices were given to those with money and power, not to those who were just and good. Several times in the Middle

Ages, godly reformers tried to do away with simony, but it was not until the Reformation that this pitiful practice was finally stopped.

What are some of those questions?

- Peter told Simon to "**perish**" (Acts 8:20),
- That Simon had "wickedness" (Acts 8:22) but "**neither part nor portion**" (Acts 8:21) with them,
- That his heart is "**not right**" with God (Acts 8:21) but "**poisoned by bitterness and bound by inequity**" (Acts 8:23).
- This is not the description of someone who has been born again through Holy Spirit. Someone who is bound by "**inequity**," which means "sin," isn't someone whose sins have been wiped clean by the blood of Jesus, so Simon was not a believer. According to church history, Simon later became and died as an enemy of the church.

Then why do you think Acts 8:13 say that Simon "believed"?

- *For the same reason that James chastises in James 2:19, "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe - and tremble!"*
- *The root of the original Greek words translated "believe" is πιστευω (pisteuo), which can mean "to think to be true," "to trust," or "to have Christian faith."*
 - *Both Simon and demons "thought it true" that God is God, but they didn't "have Christian faith." Jesus wasn't their personal Lord and Savior.*

What does this passage indicate about baptism's power to save people?

- *Simon was baptized but died unsaved and went to hell.*
- *Baptism is supposed to outwardly express that one has been saved; it does not bring about salvation.*

What did Simon want?

- *He wanted the "power" [Acts 8:19] that he saw.*
- *Wanting the power of God or anything else "of God" but not God Himself is "wickedness" [Acts 8:22].*
 - **Do we see this attitude [wanting power and presence] in the church today?**
 - *In a lesser way, simony is still a problem in the church. All too often those who are elected elders, deacons, or officers in the church are voted in almost entirely because they are known, they are successful at business or have important connections. **This should make us think seriously about this matter the next time you vote for your church officers.***

In your opinion, do we see this attitude [power and presence] in Christianity today?

- **If you were to go into Walmart or Barnes & Noble, what books by which authors would you see on the bookshelves?**
 - *Joel Osteen, Joyce Meyers, TD Jakes*

What kind of gospel are these authors primarily known for?

- *The prosperity gospel - Prosperity theology is a religious belief among some Charismatic Christians that financial blessing and physical well-being are always the will of God for them, and that faith, positive speech, and donations to religious causes will increase one's material wealth.*

Why is this teaching dangerous? What does it say to the world about Christianity when these authors are considered "best sellers"?

Closeout your group time in prayer