

Introduction:

Who are some of the most surprising converts in the Bible? Paul, the people mentioned in **I Corinthians 6:9-11**, the priests, the Pharisees? I don't think you could make this list without Simon the sorcerer of **Acts 8**. What an amazing man for the powerful gospel to overcome. Yet it did. Let's see what we can learn from him. We will begin our look with this lesson and continue in tonight's lesson.

Discussion:

- I. Modern Pentecostal "proofs" are nothing new.
 - A. In our society, Pentecostalism seems to be one of the fastest growing religious ideologies. Sometimes, we may believe it is difficult to overcome their alleged proofs. After all, the people are convinced their testimonials of power are true. The story of Simon the sorcerer stands clear that these same proofs are not new and have always been used by those who would trick.
 - B. From Simon we see the three-pronged approach to asserting their supposed power.
 1. *Tricks* – Simon was a practitioner of magic (**Acts 8:9**). Essentially, this is tricks used to impress people, commonly used by court wise men or magi. This is nothing more than tricks, because even Simon could tell when real power came in the presence of Philip and then later with the apostles. Today, tricks are used to claim power. Some tricks are more elaborate than others. Nonetheless, modern healers use nothing more than tricks like Simon.
 2. *Talk* – Simon was claiming to be someone great (**Acts 8:9**). All you have to do is turn on the TV and listen to Pentecostal preachers to learn this kind of talk is still being used today to impress people and draw followers. Regrettably, it still works. But it is nothing new.
 3. *Testimony* – The smallest to the greatest were giving testimony that Simon was the power of God among men (**Acts 8:10**). This is still being used today. Those who claim modern power often use major portions of their meetings for testimonials about demonstrations of power. These testimonials are often from people that no one in the audience has seen.
 - C. I bring this up, because in **Acts 8**, we see a man who is beyond doubt a false worker of miracles. Yet, he hoodwinked people from the smallest to the greatest. He talked big, he could perform big tricks, and people testified to his greatness. But he was nothing more than a fake. When the real power came to town, his followers abandoned him. Don't be fooled by the modern tricks, talk and testimony. It is nothing new and is no proof. The proof is in the power. **I Corinthians 4:18-20** shows Paul speaking against those who were puffed up. He was going to come displaying the power of the apostle. He wasn't going to put up with words from them, he wanted to see their power. Which leads to our next point.
- II. Real miracles outshine trickery.
 - A. Simon had been able, with his tricks, talk and testimony, to dupe the people of Samaria. But, when the real power of God came to town, people were not fooled (**Acts 8:6**). **Vs. 10** claims they were giving attention to Simon, but **vs 6** shows their attentions had been turned when they saw the signs Philip performed. As long as there was no real power in town, Simon could fool the people. But when the real power came, there was no more fooling.
 - B. This is the way it has always been. In **Genesis 41:8; 41:25ff**, the magicians in Pharaoh's court could not interpret his dreams, but Joseph could. In **Exodus 7-11**, the court magicians tried to match the power of God with their trickery, but could not (**Exodus 8:18**). The same is true of Daniel in the court of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. When no one else could tell the king his dream and its interpretation, Daniel could (**Daniel 2:27-28**). When Sergius Paulus heard the teachings and saw the power of both the magician Elymas and the apostle Paul, the proconsul was not deceived (**Acts 13:4-12**). The power of God has always exposed the weakness of the trickery and fakery of men. Simon was no exception.
 - C. Today, various groups claim to have the power of God. Yet, amazingly, they teach varying doctrines. The Catholics, Mormons, United Pentecostal Church, Metropolitan Community Church, the Assembly of God, et cetera ad infinitum, teach varying doctrines on salvation, morality, worship and so on. Remember, the miracles were signs given to confirm the teaching of those who performed them (**Hebrews 2:4**). How can these churches, which contradict one another, all

have the same power? At least some must be faking. Surely if one had the truth and the miraculous gifts were part of it, one of these groups would stand head and shoulders above the rest. But none of them do, they all rely on the same three-pronged approach which Simon had, tricks, talk and testimony. Because the miraculous power of God is not demonstrated today, they have success in fooling the masses, just as Simon did, but that is all they are doing: deceiving.

III. It is possible for a Christian to become lost.

- A. Those who purvey the once saved always saved doctrine find themselves against a brick wall when they read **Acts 8**. How would they deal with it? Consider a couple of options which the once saved, always saved people rely on.
1. One attempt to reconcile their false doctrine with this scripture is to claim Simon must never have really been saved. Yet, as we have already noticed, to make that claim is to claim no one in Samaria was saved. **Acts 8:12-13** says he did what the others did. If they were saved, Simon was. If Simon wasn't saved, none of the Samaritans were.
 2. A second attempt is that he stepped outside of the river of blessings in Christ and therefore needed to repent, but if he died he would still go to heaven. **Acts 8:23** is a funny way of describing this scenario. Here is a man in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity. We are expected to believe that in this state, he has a hope of heaven. **Romans 6:16** teaches that bondage to sin, leads to eternal death, not eternal life.
 3. A third attempt is to claim that Simon would die saved. That is, he will sin and go in and out of the blessings of Christ, but never so sin that salvation would be lost. Christ, through His providence, would insure that Simon returned to the fold. However, Peter's response, "Pray the Lord that *if possible*, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you." Demonstrates that forgiveness was not going to necessarily come. I believe the "if possible" is based on whether or not Simon changed the intention of his heart, not God's willingness to forgive. But Peter, claimed that it was possible that Simon not be forgiven and thus eternally lost.
- B. The fact is, Simon blows away any possibility that once saved, always saved doctrine is Biblical.

IV. Baptism does not produce perfect Christians.

- A. Many people are distressed when they become Christians and then within a short time realize they are still faced with the same temptations, struggles and stresses they had before they became Christians. New converts often have the naïve idea that baptism makes life and serving God easier. In the mainstream denominational world, people are commonly taught they are born sinners and when they become saved, God comes in and takes over in their lives. It is simply not the case. God taking over in our lives is not a miraculous occurrence, it is a growth process. It comes through continued greater submission to God's will as our knowledge increases. Such is revealed in **II Peter 1:5-8**.
- B. Simon is an example. As already demonstrated, Simon was converted to Christ. However, his desire to impress others had not gone away. Soon, when the apostles come into town and began passing powers on to others, Simon wanted the ability to pass power along also. He had not become a perfect mature Christian by being baptized. He had just become a Christian.
- C. Temptations and struggles would still be there. It is easy to stand in judgment over Simon because of Peter's response to him (**Acts 8:20-23**). But, the fact is, we have all been in Simon's place, having become a Christian but being plagued by all our old temptations, whether lust, fornication, lying, stealing, anger, drinking, drugs, etc. And even submitting at times.
- D. Do not naively think that being baptized will take away all your problems, nor will "rededicating your life to Christ" as some call it. If you have slipped into the world, coming before the congregation and confessing your sins will not take the temptations away. They will continue to be there and will resurface. Only through continued study and submission to God's will and through prayer and reliance on God will you overcome the tempter.

Conclusion:

I want you to understand that baptism won't take away all your problems. Baptism won't take away all the temptations you face. Baptism won't make you a great person. Baptism won't make you a perfectly mature Christian. But understand this, baptism will make you a Christian (**Acts 2:38**).