

**Acts 8: 9-25; “The Faith of Simon – Not True Faith, Sermon # 37 in the series –  
“Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on  
January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2017, in the Morning Worship Service.**

It is very important to our understanding of what a true Christian is, that we come to terms with the idea which is presented to us in this text, that there are different kinds of faith. There is saving faith, and then there is a faith which is less than saving. Simon did not have true and saving faith, even though he did certain things that he needed to do in order to identify with true Christians. And he himself, and others around him thought that he was a true Christian for a time, until He did something that proved that he was not a Christian. This should show us that being a true Christian is more than going to church and hanging out with true Christians. It is having a heart which has been changed by grace; having a mind which is willing to turn from all error and learn the truth.

There are a number of things which are said here in this text which will tell us much about what a person can have and still not be a true Christian. Let me list them for you, and then I will attempt to open them up one by one for your instruction and edification. 1<sup>st</sup> – A person may have experienced having great spiritual power and yet not be a Christian. (verses 9-11) 2<sup>nd</sup> – A person may have believed in the gospel of Jesus Christ, and have been baptized, and yet not have really understood what saving faith is. (verse 12 and 13a) 3<sup>rd</sup> – A person may continue on with other Christians, and not understand their own need of the Spirit’s saving work in their heart. And 4<sup>th</sup> – A person may receive the admonition of an apostle to repent and yet not act upon it. I pray that these truths will convince each one of us that we should carefully search our mind and our heart to see whether we have true and saving faith.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – A person may have the experience of possessing great spiritual power and yet not be a Christian.** (verses 9-11)

This man, Simon, was a very well-known man in the city of Samaria. It says that he had previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished them, claiming that he was someone great. And, seeing what he did, it says, they all gave heed to him, from the least to the greatest. And he demonstrated such power that he astonished them with his sorceries for a long time. I want you to notice that there is actual power in sorcery. Sorcery is defined as the use of power which is gained from the assistance or control of evil spirits; especially for divining, or foretelling the future. You should understand that there are 2 greatly different sources from which people try to obtain spiritual power. They are: God and the Devil. God is the all-righteous, all-holy, all powerful One who has created all things for His good pleasure. God created Satan to be one of His holy angels in the beginning. But pride entered Satan’s heart and he fell from his original righteousness and he convinced a third of the angels which God had created, to join him in his rebellion against God. And this is the source of the great spiritual battle which has been taking place during the whole history of the world until this very day.

God is the source of all power, but the Devil who rebelled against God’s authority, has been trying since his fall into sin at the beginning of the world, to fight against God’s holy purposes and plans. God has purposed to triumph over Satan’s evil works through His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, we can say, that Christ has already triumphed over Satan at the cross where the ruler of this world was cast out of his position of being ruler. For Christ has conquered sin and death. The battle continues on for the souls of men, but Christ shall not fail to save one of God’s elect people. All true Christians are on God’s side in this great battle because they have received Christ, the Lord of Glory, to be their Savior and Lord. All unbelieving people in the world are called children of the devil and are spiritually in the domain of darkness unless they are converted to Jesus Christ and transferred from the kingdom of the Devil, to the kingdom of God. Christ came into the world to destroy the works of the Devil. (1<sup>st</sup> John 3: 8) And all true Christians have openly

pledged their allegiance to the Lord Jesus, to follow Him, and to help His kingdom and cause in the great spiritual battle; the goal being that all of the nations shall be discipled; shall have the gospel preached to them, and God will call out from the kingdom of darkness all of His elect people.

So, as we read this passage, we should understand that when Simon came to Samaria, his purpose was purely selfish. He wanted to be seen by others as “the power of God”. He did not deny this; he did not hide this. His purpose was to be seen as a spiritually great person. It was not the power of God that was working in him, but it was the power of the Devil which had deceived him into thinking that this was a perfectly legitimate way to live and to get much attention to himself. He did not realize that he was the pawn of the Devil. He thought that this kind of power that he was dabbling with was good, when it was actually bad. He was actually being totally deceived by the Devil. The Devil was trying through this man to deceive many other people, and Simon had been “succeeding” with them for quite some time.

This power which comes in the practice of sorcery is a very deceptive power which enters a person’s mind and heart when they pursue contact with the unseen world of spirits, to obtain either some forbidden knowledge or greater-than-normal personal power which they believe that a spirit can give them. In this case Simon had succeeded. He had gained some sort of power from an evil spirit and was in some way able to demonstrate that power, because he was called, the great power of God. Let us understand that this is a sin in the sight of Almighty God. It is true that Satan has power, and he and all of his demon forces are able to interact with men to a certain degree, but they only can do that which is granted to them by God Himself in order to work out God’s own good purposes in the conversion of his elect people. This is why we are reading of these things this morning and thinking about them.

What is pertinent to our study is this; if you dabble with the occult, if you delve into the paranormal, if you seek to have contact with familiar spirits, God will eventually deliver you over to it. What a person seeks for, they will eventually find; whether it is good or evil; whether it is true or false. If you seek for Christ you will find Him. If you seek for the Devil, you will eventually find his power. This is why I must give a warning to all who are here today not to dabble in the least little occult things; things like Ouija boards, just to give you an example. A Ouija board is a pagan form of communication with the dead supposedly. But actually, if you are able to contact anyone in the spirit world it will not be the dead. It will be an evil spirit impersonating someone who has died. Dabbling in white magic is also something you ought to strictly avoid.

It is a very foolish and dangerous thing try to make a distinction between black magic and white magic. I am told that some foolish and sinful people actually pray a prayer that says – “I invite those spirits who are only for my highest good.” “Any spirits who come through who are not for my highest good are to be absorbed into the white light of protection, harming none.” What sinful foolishness, and even eternal harm, is done through trying to obtain power or wisdom from demons posing as your dead relative or a supposed spiritual friend. Whatever power Satan gives to you, he will use it for his own evil purposes, and then when he done using you, he will take it back, and cast you aside. How foolish and ignorant people are duped, and deceived in this regard!

We see a good example of this right here in this passage. Simon had this power, and he astonished the people for a time. But when Philip came preaching Christ, the unclean spirits came out of many who were possessed. And so Simon began for the first time to realize that there was a greater power in the world than that which he had come across before. It was the power of Christ. Let us realize that Christ has infinitely great power, because He is God who has been made manifest in the flesh. He has greater power by far than all the powers of darkness combined because He is the Son of God. So let us not be enamored with the powers of darkness, as Simon was; let us be enamored with the Person of Christ who has all power in heaven and earth. And let us be astonished at His power to save people from their sins and to change their hearts. Let us glory in the fact that power belongs unto God. But sorcery is a sin which needs to be repented of;

for the lust for power over people, or to impress people, is something that is very God dishonoring, because God is to receive all glory and Christ is to be believed in, and followed by faith. It is the Devil's strategy to get you to believe in him and his power as supposedly being for your personal good, and that you will somehow be wiser for doubting the truth of the Bible. Don't you believe it.

**2<sup>nd</sup> – A person may have believed in the gospel of Jesus Christ, and have been baptized, and yet not have really understood what saving faith is.** (verse 12 and 13a)

“But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.” “Then Simon himself also believed; and was baptized.” Now, you will notice that when Philip came to Samaria, he did not preach himself; he preached Christ, and the things concerning the kingdom of God. I believe that he talked to them mostly about how to enter the kingdom of God. He no doubt declared to them the facts of the gospel. He spoke to them about the fact that the first man Adam, whom God created upright, fell from his original righteousness. Adam was created with a heart that was inclined to righteousness; to love doing those things which God commanded him. He and Eve truly had hearts which greatly desired to have fellowship with God and to do God's will. But God did not create Adam and Eve immutably unchangeably righteous. He created them with free will to choose for themselves what they would do in relation to God's one good commandment that He gave to them. He told them that He wanted them to abstain from eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil which was in the center of the garden of Eden.

This was a very reasonable command because God knew that man could not handle the knowledge of good and evil apart from Him. But Satan, disguised as a serpent in the garden, came to Eve and questioned the wisdom of God in not allowing her to eat of this fruit, as though God was withholding wisdom from her. And he lied to her about the fact that she would not die if she ate of this fruit, and said that she would become wise like God. And so, being deceived, she ate, and gave some of the fruit to Adam, and he ate, and they both died spiritually at that moment. Now, I think that it is important for you to realize that it was because they did not live by faith in God and His word at that point, that our whole race fell into sin. I know that they had the capability to obey God, but they did not, and we must assign a reason. It was because they did not hold fast to the word of God, and the reason that they did not hold fast to the word of God was that they trusted in themselves; that they didn't absolutely need to have the wisdom which came only from God, in what He had told them. They would think it through, without asking God if their thoughts were right, and we can see, in hindsight, that they most certainly were wrong, for sin entered the world, and death through sin.

No doubt, Philip had said something like this to them, and then showed them that Christ had come into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He preached and told them of Christ's begin born of the Virgin Mary, and thereby coming into the world sinless instead of having a sinful nature like all the rest of us have. He told them of Christ's being willing to undertake the fulfilling all of God's holy law on our behalf, and then going to the cross and taking our place in judgment; bearing our sins in His body on the tree, so that those believing in Him would die to sin and live to righteousness. These, most probably, were some of the things which Philip preached to them. And it says in verse 6, that multitudes were hearing these things and heeding them, which in all likelihood means that they were believing and being saved. It says that Simon also believed and he was baptized. He was amazed at what was happening; so many people believing, that he was persuaded that there really was power behind the words that Philip preached, and so he did what the others were doing; he confessed Christ publicly with them, and he was baptized.

He was caught up with the real excitement of people who were realizing that their sins were forgiven. He saw what the procedure was. It was to confess that Jesus was the Son of God, and that you must have Him and His salvation to inherit eternal life. And so he believed in the truth of

the gospel. But what we are compelled to say, with much sadness, is – He was not genuinely converted to Christ. It was not as though he was not following the right procedure in line with the gospel. He was. But we must also say that he really did not have the Holy Spirit working in his heart; bringing him to conviction of his sins, and then to cry out to God to be given grace to repent of his sins and believe in Christ's finished work; to receive that precious truth to himself with a true sense of his own guilt and shame, because of his sin. He simply saw what others had, and he wanted it for himself, because it would enhance his portfolio. He had impressed the people of Samaria with his spiritual power for some time now, and suddenly Philip comes into town and the people are no longer listening to him, or watching him. And so, he thought to himself, I must acknowledge this new power and enhance my own present power with this new power, and I will continue to be the great power of God.

This was Satan coming to him and stealing the word, and continuing to blind him to his true need of Christ. Perhaps you remember the parable of the sower and the soils in Matthew chapter 13? "A sower went out to sow." "And it happened, as he sowed, that some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds of the air came and devoured them." "Some fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth." "But when the sun was up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered away." Jesus also taught on the seed falling among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundred-fold, some sixty, and some thirty." What was the interpretation? Jesus said this. "When anyone hears the word of kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart." "This is he who received seed by the wayside." But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. He who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word and he becomes unfruitful." "But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understand it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty."

Now I hope that you are seeing some things about the difference between true saving faith, and faith which is only temporary and false. There were four types of soils and only one was true and saving. It was the last one which received the seed of the word of God on good soil; that is, the word of God was planted in the heart, and that person was born again by the Spirit of God. That person who has been born from above by the Spirit of God will receive the word because the Holy Spirit has given him understanding. But with relation to the first type of soil, Jesus said that the seed of the word of God fell by the wayside, and the birds of the air devoured them. This was no doubt what happened to Simon. He had trafficked so long in sorcery, it was no doubt easy for the demons who had deceived him, to deceive him once again and steal the word of God which might bring him to conviction of sin. It would be easy for Simon to rationalize why he himself was not needing to be saved, but yet he could believe. There are many people who have this kind of faith, but it is not saving faith.

Saving faith has come to see that the wisdom of this world is not the wisdom of God, because the mind of such a person has been illumined by the Spirit of God, so that they will not lean to their own understanding. They will not see themselves as being wise because they have come to see that the nature of sin is to deceive the mind, not only to corrupt and pollute the heart. It is Satan and his hosts who attempt to lead the mind of the unbeliever to think that their own reasoning is enough to figure out spiritual matters; that their mind is not totally depraved, that sin has not affected the mind, or that it cannot be led captive, as it is, by Satan, to do his will, before conversion. I pray that you will listen to me now; sometimes the seed of the word of God is sown on stony ground. And immediately there is a response. It springs up because there is no depth of soil; no depth of a prepared heart, which has been worked on by grace. The person makes a

profession of faith, is even baptized, but there is no root of saving grace in the heart. In the third type of soil, the seed sown among the thorns, Jesus says that it too sprung up, but it was choked by the thorns which He says were the cares of life and the deceitfulness of riches. We will talk of this further in just a few minutes, but was it not the truth, that Simon was so used to buying his way into knowledge and power that it was easy for him to think that he would not really need to change in his heart?

My friends, it is not a small matter to believe and yet not have saving faith. Saving faith comes from hearing the word of God and a person's praying for the Lord to come and illumine their darkness and give them the power to become a child of God; even through believing in His name. Believing in a general sense, and being baptized, by themselves, will not be enough to save, if there is not grace at work in the heart and mind of that person. The demons believe and they tremble, but it is not enough for them to be saved. Simon's faith was that he believed in Jesus because he saw power at work in people's lives, and he selfishly wanted this power for himself; not to be saved from his sins, but to maintain his own popularity and to gain more. If his faith was true, he would have renounced his own popularity, his own wisdom, and his own power, to save himself from his many sins; especially his sin of using sorcery.

**3<sup>rd</sup> – A person may continue on with other Christians, and not understand their own need of the Spirit's saving work in their heart.** (verse 13-19)

“And when he was baptized Simon continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.” Simon continued on, which was the right thing to do. If you have believed in Jesus, it is the beginning of a life of walking with the Lord. But it is also a life of continuing on with the other disciples of the Lord. So far so good, but there came an immediate test to his supposed faith, and it was providentially from the Lord. “When the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who when they had come down,” it says in verse 15, “they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.” “For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” “Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.” Take notice of this, though. Verse 18 – “Now when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, ‘Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.’”

There are some things which a person may do which may reveal their entire heart, and this was one of them. And Peter recognized it immediately. He said to him, “Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!” “You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God.” This is real proof that Simon did not understand his own heart. Now, we need to understand that the reason that Peter and John came down from Jerusalem was not to give these Samaritans the Holy Spirit in salvation. They already had the regenerating, sanctifying grace of God at work in their hearts. What Peter and John were giving some of the believers there, was an outwardly observable bestowal of revelatory gifts; the gifts of tongues and prophecy. This was what Simon saw, and he wanted that kind of power. He wanted to buy the office of an apostle if he could. He did not see his own problem with covetousness and greed and selfish ambition.

Let us understand that sometimes we do not understand our own heart, or the sins or errors which may be entrenched there. It is good to go to church. It is good to continue on with the people of God. But the reason that we go to church and receive the word of God is so that that word might lead us to repentance over our many sins, and that we might receive the wisdom that will lead us to become people who will trust in the Lord with all of our heart, and then live for His glory. Listen to the good words of Paul in Philippians 1: 21 – “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” “But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell.” “For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ,

which is far better.” “Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.” “And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, that you rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.” There ought to be in each of us as Christians, a joy of faith, and the desire to be useful to the Lord and to make progress in faith and holiness. Let us rejoice in all the spiritual truth that the Spirit of God has enlightened our minds to receive, in terms of wisdom and grace and the understanding of the word of God. And let us look to see how we can build each other up in our most holy faith. Simon did not understand the sinfulness of his own mind; that the things that he thought and desired for himself, were utterly sinful.

**And 4<sup>th</sup> – A person may receive the admonition of an apostle to repent and yet not act upon it.**

In verse 22, Peter said to Simon – “Repent therefore of this wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.” “For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.” Peter addressed him very directly, but not too directly. What Simon had said revealed his wickedness, and Peter exhorted him to repent. Peter was faithful to Simon’s soul when with the infallible wisdom in the discernment of spirits which had been given to him, he said to him, “you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.” When he said that Simon was poisoned by bitterness, I think that it must have been the case that Peter was able to clearly discern that Simon thought that since could not be the great power of God, that it had made him bitter. There was someone greater than himself, and that Person was the Lord Jesus Christ whom Philip preached to him. Simon had every reason to repent of his wickedness at this point, and yet he did not. Simon answers by asking Peter to pray to the Lord for him that none of the things which he had spoken would come upon him.

And yet there is not one word coming from Simon that he would pray for himself, that he might have the grace to repent of these sins. Let me close this message by telling you this about faith. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things unseen. But how does a person come to saving faith? They come to it by hearing the word of God preached, and they behold the glory of what God has done for sinners like themselves, through Christ. And faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ. You will not turn to the world’s wisdom for your answers to the question, “What is truth?”; answers which contradict the Bible. For you have been given the grace to see that God has placed this wisdom in the Bible and nowhere else. If you have true and saving faith you will pray for grace to repent of all of your spiritual errors and all of your besetting sins. Psalm 19, verses 7 and following – “The law of the Lord (the Bible) is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.” “More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.” “Moreover, by them Your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward.” “Who can understand his errors?” “Cleanse me from secret faults.” “Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me.” “Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression.” “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.” This is where faith comes from, from hearing, and hearing from the word of God. (Romans 10: 17) Let us always remember, my brethren, your faith should not be in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. May our God count each one who believes in Him worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 1: 11)

