

These stories just keep getting better and better! This is one of the most interesting stories in the book of Acts AND contains one of the most important lessons for Christians, especially in our day and in our culture!

There are some things in this story that may challenge some of your beliefs. But my roll as a teacher is not to protect you from your Bible, but rather to teach all that is in it! Someone said, "It's a wild ride if you teach the whole counsel of God!" I say "Amen" to that! One of the main things that people differ on in this passage is whether Simon's belief in Christ was genuine or false.

I take it that he did believe but that he succumbed to a sinful tendency from his old life. I believe this story shows how tendencies, attitudes or values, that were deeply embedded in our hearts can creep over into our Christian life. IE we can bring baggage from our old life into the new life.

Marriage is a good example of this: When you get married you bring baggage into your marriage and your partner brings baggage. This baggage is mostly invisible or ignored BEFORE your wedding. But AFTER you are married, this baggage, suddenly shows up: insecurities, emotional problems, expectations of one another, set ways of doing things, carried over from your parents and the home you grew up in, and various sins or blind spots. All that baggage needs to be dealt with or removed for the marriage to survive and thrive.

The same kind of things happen when a person becomes a Christian. An angry man or woman can bring the baggage of anger into the new life. A very clever and manipulative person can bring that

tendency over into the new life. A person who loved to gossip and slander others can fall into that tendency in the church. A person who is very greedy and willing to step on others to get rich, can bring some of that obsession over into his or her Christian life. A person who is very slothful or lazy can carry over some of that attitude. A person who is very pessimistic can bring negative and hopeless thinking. A person who is very proud and or very critical or judgmental can find ways to put a Christian spin on that and that can break out in pride and condemnation of others. This does not have to happen and it is not to be tolerated in our lives, as something that is ok.

This story of Simon shows the grave danger of bringing this kind of worldly or natural human thinking into the church. This story is a warning to us. These matters need to be dealt with as strongly as Peter deals with it in this story.

Paul wrote to the Colossians, “But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language...” and “Put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed..”.

Paul wrote in Romans 12 “Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind”. When you become a child of God you enter a whole new way of thinking. We are to have the thoughts and attitudes and values of the kingdom of God. And those are all new and many of them 180 degrees different from the world’s way of looking at things.

We are to have the attitudes God shows us in his word about our sexuality, money, work, problems and trials. We are to give thanks in all things and rejoice always. We are to live in forgiveness and

love and to bless all people, even those who wrong us. In all attitudes and in all responses to life and people, we are to live in newness of life. We are to jettison the baggage of our old life so we are not held captive to it any longer.

We do NOT have to retain this baggage! In fact I think the story of Simon shows that by pointing to him as an exception among those saved in Samaria.

Christ bought and paid for our release from sin. Christ completely broke the power of every sin and lie of the devil. Paul said, “Do you not know that you died with Christ and that he who died is freed from sin!” We do not have to be in bondage to attitudes and thought patterns. We can live free from these things. We can live in righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, but we must choose to go live in that freedom!

When we discern unspiritual thoughts and attitudes, we can decisively repudiate, and renounce them and we can put on the new thoughts and attitudes that God has put in us.

Now let’s look at Simon. Simon was what we would call a celebrity. He was a rock star in Samaria, a city of perhaps about 40,000 people. He amazed people with his magic. He was a sorcerer. The Bible shows us there are real spirits that are not on God’s side! He used these dark and demonic powers to produce real supernatural phenomena. He became a very popular and famous man in doing that.

Like many of today’s celebrities, he did was not content to wait for others to say how great he was. He promoted himself! Verse 9 says, “He boasted that he was someone great”. Verse 10 says, “All the

people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, “This man is the divine power known as the Great Power”. It’s possible the crowds gave him that name, The Great Power. But I think it is more likely that is a name he called himself. If he came into a town, he might have put up signs announcing “The Great Power” will be here for 3 nights!

Verse 11, “They followed him for a long time because he amazed them for a long time with his magic”. He was used to being in the limelight. He was used to having attention. He was used to glory. He was used to exercising power over an audience. I think he had some of the same baggage we often see in the conversion of athletes, movie stars, famous musicians, and other celebrities in our culture.

But something happened to change things in Samaria. Verse 12 says, “But when they (all the fans of Simon, the Great Power) believed Phillip as he preached the good news of the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized both men and women”. Simon’s fans were gone! They became enamored with Jesus Christ, NOT with Simon. And even Simon believed the message!

Verse 13 says, “Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Phillip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw”. Simon believed, was baptized, and went wherever Phillip went, or he was devoted to Phillip, or stayed close to Phillip. Luke does not say he pretended to believe, or he falsely believed. So I take it that he genuinely did believe.

But then something happens, which exposes a dangerous and unspiritual attitude still undealt with in Simon’s heart. Verse 14,

“When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that men and women in Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. People were getting saved, from the preaching of Phillip. They believed, they were baptized in the name of Jesus. But verse 16 say, “the Holy Spirit had not come on any of them”. The ESV says, “he had not fallen on any of them”. The apostles heard that these men and women had believed in Jesus, they had been baptized in water in the name of Jesus, but the apostles also knew they needed to receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

**Now I don't like to take a detour in a message but I have to, because we come to a part of the story that is meant to be just background to the real story. But because our experience of the Spirit has sometimes NOT been as it is described in Acts for the early Christians, something that is just background to the story, becomes something that has to be explained. The Christians in the first Century, knew what Luke was talking about, so they just went on with the story. But many today read this story and get hung up right here, over the idea needing to receive the Spirit.

Consistently throughout the book of Acts, the pattern is that people believed the message about Jesus Christ. They were baptized in water, as Jesus commanded. And they were filled with the Holy Spirit. (Or they were baptized with the Spirit, or the Spirit came upon them, or fell on them, or they received the Holy Spirit – different terms are used.) The order was not always the same, and I am not trying to make a formula here. I am just saying that, belief in Jesus, water baptism and receiving the Spirit were all specific components of the believers experience in the New Testament.

For example, In Paul's life, 3 days AFTER he was saved by Christ on the road to Damascus, God sent a man named Ananias to his house and prayed for Paul to receive the Holy Spirit. Then after that Ananias baptized Paul in water. All the same experiences but in a different order!

Now the fact that the apostles felt these believers needed to receive the Spirit does not mean that the Spirit had nothing to do with them up to this point. We know that no one can genuinely believe in Jesus, no one can confess Jesus as Lord, except by the Holy Spirit. So the Holy Spirit was at work in and upon these people for them even to believe and confess Christ!

So in one sense we could say they had received the Holy Spirit. If that is true, then what does Luke mean when he said they received the Holy Spirit?

To receive the Holy Spirit, as Luke spoke of it, meant to EXPERIENCE the Spirit, coming upon your life, in such a way that you know, he is there, and that he makes a difference. It means to experience the Spirit in such a way that it leads to spiritual exuberance, and joy, your heart bursting with praises to God, singing, giving thanks, proclaiming the wonders of God perhaps even in tongues or prophecy.

John Piper said, "Luke expects the receiving of the Holy Spirit to be a real, identifiable experience of the living God". (John Piper - "What does it mean to receive the Holy Spirit?".)

All that Christ purchased for you on the cross needs to become a living experience within you. The full experience of that salvation

needs to be ignited by the Holy Spirit! For example Ephesians 5 tells us to be filled with the Spirit, singing and making music in your heart to the Lord. If you are not experiencing that going on in your heart, it doesn't mean that Christ's work on the cross for you was incomplete; it means you aren't living in the EXPERIENCE of all that Christ paid for you on the cross.

So let's go on with the story. Verse 15 "When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit"... Verse 17 "Then Peter and John placed their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit".

Other passages in Acts mention people speaking in tongues, or prophesying when the Spirit came upon them. Those things are NOT mentioned here. But the evidence of the Holy Spirit filling them was so obvious that Simon wanted to be able to produce that effect too.

Verse 18 "When Simon saw that the Spirit was given by the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money and said "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit".

Some very wrong thinking had carried over into his life. I think when he saw people receiving the Spirit, it stirred up things from his old life of being a showman, of being the center of the show, of being able to impress people. But the thing that Luke keys in on as being the core sin, was that he thought he could buy ability from God, or favor from God with money!

Verse 20 “Peter answered, “May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money!”.

This is why many assume he was not a genuine believer. However the word perish, means waste or ruin and does not always mean eternal hell. One commentary said this: “After reviewing the testimonies of Luke, Peter, and Simon, the evidence seems to support the fact that Simon had believed in Jesus Christ, and like the other Samaritans, was saved and baptized, but then sinned greatly. He was in danger of experiencing God's temporal (judgment) for his specific sin of trying to purchase an apostolic power.”

Simon probably had lots of money before he came to Christ. In this world money talks. Money is the way things get done. Money buys access and favor. Simon was used to getting things he wanted with money. But that is not the way things work in the kingdom of God.

Revelation 22:17 puts it so well: “Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.”

You can't buy the Holy Spirit. You can't buy the ability to minister the Holy Spirit to others. You can't buy any spiritual blessing or gift of God. God offers freely all that we need for life and for salvation so that no one can boast and so the he gets all the glory.

Perhaps you are a Christian, maybe you have been a Christian for a long time, but you still hold to the worldly thought that God could use you in greater ways, if you just had more money. Or you think you would be happier if you just had more money, and you blame your unhappiness of lack of money. Or you think you are not a

blessed man or woman because you are not as rich as somebody else. Or maybe you say things like, “I’m going to start giving when I make more money”. Or you think lack of money is your biggest problem in life.

These are all lies from the world, that can infiltrate your thinking as a Christian, UNLESS you decisively repent of them.

Verse 22 Peter said, “You have no share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God”. Those are strong words, but sometimes we need to be told that our heart is not right....that some attitude, some motive, some idea we are allowing to live on in our lives is not right before God! Hopefully somebody loves you enough to tell you that.

Verse 23 “Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart”.

The same commentary I quoted earlier said, “His need was not to get saved, but to repent of that sin. He needed to see how he was terribly wrong and reject the error of his ways, which he seems to do.”

Repentance is the spiritual tool God has given you to break free from the stuff that should NOT be in your life. It is a wonderful thing! When you STOP justifying old patterns of behavior and acknowledge them as sinful, and express your sorrow to God for those things, then God set’s you free from them! That is the God ordained way for you to NO LONGER be held captive to anything!

When you stop justifying things like outbursts of anger, or self pity, or envy of others, or love of money, or pornography, or complaining, or a critical spirit, it is amazing how God can then free you of these things and things like them!

There is a dear gal that Cindy and I have tried to help break free from some bitterness toward God and others. It was destroying her happiness, she was miserable and repeatedly asked us for help. But when we would show her God's way of thinking and living, almost before we could get the words out of our mouth, she would say, "Well, but you see it's like this". Instead of even hearing our words she would say, "Well but the thing is" ..and she would go on to say why we didn't understand and why that wasn't gonna work, and she would go on to justify her present attitudes and responses. And lacking repentance, she was still held captive.

The NIV says "pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart". The ISV says, "Pray to the Lord, that "if possible", this evil intent of your heart may be forgiven you". ESV the same. I think Peter is communicating NOT that the Lord may not forgive, but that the grasp, this sin, has on Simon is so strong, that it is in question in Peter's mind whether Simon will approach the Lord in such a way as to find forgiveness and release from it.

Verse 23 says, "For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin". The Good News Translation says "you are full of bitter envy" and are a prison of (this) sin. It seems that Simon felt inner resentment that Peter and John could come to Samaria and bless people in this amazing way of helping them to receive the Holy

Spirit. So his motive in wanting to give money to obtain this ability stemmed out of a bitter heart.

He wanted to do something or have something that God had given others to do. That is the root of so much bitterness in people's lives. Looking at someone else and resenting that they have gifts that I do not have. Why can't I do what they can do? Or why do they never suffer like I do? When do I get a break? When is it my turn? All such attitudes of bitter envy need to be aggressively and once and for all repented of! OR they will hold you captive!

Verse 24, "Simon answered, "Both of you, pray to the Lord for me that none of the things you have said, will happen to me." 25 After they had given their testimony and spoken the word of the Lord, they started back to Jerusalem, continuing to proclaim the good news in many Samaritan villages."

There are some who say Simon never changed, and others believe he repented and continued with the church in Samaria. I take Simon's statement as a sincere desire to be forgiven and to escape the dire things Peter said about him.

Conclusion:

*It's time to see the seriousness of thing you may have been allowing to hang around. It is not a small thing to keep living with attitudes from your old life before Christ!

*Stop excusing yourself for clinging to old attitudes that you know do not belong to your new life in Jesus Christ. That is the first step in repentance and the first step toward freedom.

*Ask for forgiveness and release from the damaging consequences that sin can bring upon your life. Sin costs a lot. “Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay.” Pray to the Lord to keep you from sin and the painful consequences it leads to.

*Know that when you do these things the Lord will abundantly pardon and shower his grace upon you and restore the joy of salvation to you. 1 John 1: 9 “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness”. Even for the people that killed Jesus, Peter said, “Repent, then turn to God, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord”.