

The Ministry of the Spirit

Acts 8:9-24

SS Lesson for 10/04/2015

Devotional Scripture: 1 Cor 12:1-11

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Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

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From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

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Introduction

Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson teaches about the true **Ministry of the Spirit**. The **study's aim** is to understand how we receive the Holy Spirit and to recognize erroneous teachings about receiving the Holy Spirit. The **study's application** is rely on the Holy Spirit's ministry in our lives.

(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)

Key Verse: Acts 8:22

Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.

Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

THE PROFESSIONS OF FAITH (8:9-13)

Many traditions revolve around **Simon** the sorcerer. It is alleged: (a) that he was the founder of the Gnostic heresies, (b) that he went to Rome and perverted Christian doctrine there, and (c) that he became involved in a miracle contest with Peter and lost. At any rate, this Simon of Samaria did practice **sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria**. Because of his “sorcery,” the ability to exercise control over nature and/or people by means of demonic power, **people** called him **the Great Power**. They may or may not have thought of him as possessing deity. At any rate Simon **boasted that he was someone great**, and the people of Samaria believed him. Furthermore, he accepted their adulation. Simon’s **magic** means his sorcery, his demonic powers (the Gr. words for “practiced sorcery” and “magic” are related). When **Philip** came to Samaria, **he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name** (cf. 3:16) **of Jesus Christ**. The term “the kingdom of God” refers to the coming kingdom (cf. 1:3, 6). “The name of Jesus Christ” looks to His position as Messiah (cf. 8:5, “the Christ,” lit., the Messiah). In other words, the message meant that some Samaritans would become heirs of the Millennium by faith in Jesus, the Messiah. As an evidence of their faith the Samaritans **were baptized, both men and women** (cf. “men and women” in v. 3). The contrasts and comparisons between Simon and Philip are striking. Both performed miracles, Simon by demonic power and Philip by divine power. Simon boasted and welcomed acclaim to himself, but Philip proclaimed Christ. People were amazed at Simon’s magic, but people were converted to Christ by Philip’s ministry. Amazingly **Simon himself believed and was baptized**. Now rather than people following Simon, **he followed Philip!** His response must have had a profound effect on his own followers. Was Simon saved? Luke did not specify this clearly, so it is difficult to be dogmatic. But seven facts suggest that Simon probably was not born again: (1) The verb “believe” (*pisteuō*) does not always refer to saving faith. Simon’s faith could have been like that of the demons in James 2:19, merely intellectual assent. (2) Furthermore, faith based on signs is not a trustworthy faith (cf. John 2:23-25; 4:48). (3) In addition, Luke never stated that Simon received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17-18). (4) Simon continued to have a self-centered interest in the display of miraculous power (vv. 18-19). (5) The verb “repent” (*metanoēō*) used in verse 22 is normally addressed to lost people. (6) The word “perish” (*eis apōleian*) employed in verse 20 is strong. It is related to the word “perish” in John 3:16. (7) The description of Simon in Acts 8:23 is a better description of a lost man than of one who is saved (cf. Deut. 29:18). Still one cannot be dogmatic on this point. The Lord knows those who are His (2 Tim. 2:19).

THE PROOF OF THE WORK (8:14-17)

It was necessary for **the apostles in Jerusalem** to commission **Peter and John** to Samaria for several reasons. Normally **the Holy Spirit** baptizes, indwells, and seals at the moment of faith, but in this instance the delay served several purposes: (1) Peter and John’s prayer (for bestowing of **the Holy Spirit**) and their laying **on of hands** (resulting in the coming of the Spirit) confirmed Philip’s ministry among the Samaritans. This authenticated this new work to the Jerusalem apostles. (2) Also this confirmed Philip’s

ministry to the Samaritans. This message Philip had preached was validated by the coming of the Spirit, a mark of the coming kingdom (cf. v. 12; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:23-27; Joel 2:28-32). (3) Perhaps the most important aspect of God's withholding the Spirit till apostolic representatives came from the Jerusalem church was to prevent schism. Because of the natural propensity of division between Jews and Samaritans it was essential for **Peter and John** to welcome the Samaritan believers officially into the church. The contrast between John's attitude here and in Luke 9:52-54 is significant.

THE PERVERSION OF THE TRUTH (8:18-24)

The clause **Simon saw that the Spirit was given** implies there was some external manifestation to evidence the coming of **the Holy Spirit**. Possibly it was speaking in tongues, though the Scripture does not say so (cf. 2:4; 10:45-46; 19:6). The term *simony*, which is the buying or selling of things considered religious or sacred such as an ecclesiastical office, comes from Simon's desire to purchase the **ability** to impart the Holy Spirit to others. Luke's purpose in including this incident with Simon was to show the superiority of Christianity over the occult and demoniacs. Several times this kind of conflict took place in Acts, and Christ was always the Victor (13:6-12; 16:16-18; 19:13-20; 28:1-6). Peter's response to Simon's request was one of outrage. **May your money perish with you!** The reason for such strong language was Simon's failure to understand grace, the free nature of God's salvation and blessings. Peter explained his strong language by saying, **You thought you could buy the gift of God with money!** The language of this verse, **You have no part or share in this ministry** (*logō*, "word, matter"), implies Simon was not a Christian. (For similar terminology see Deut. 12:12; 14:27. Just as the Levites had no inheritance in the Promised Land, so also Simon had no portion in the matter of salvation.) The adverb **perhaps** does not mean **God** is reluctant to forgive sin. The question was whether Simon would **repent** of his heart's intention. The allusion to **bitterness** (lit., "gall of bitterness," *cholēn pikrias*) seems to refer to Deuteronomy 29:18, which speaks of idolatry and bitter apostasy (cf. Heb. 12:15). **Simon** had been captivated by false doctrine and sin. Simon's response may have been genuine or simply an outcry of fear. At least he was apprehensive about the outcome of his tragic request (Acts 8:18-19).

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Many people have had their names become famous (or infamous) by their accomplishments, but in some cases the name outlives the person in a different way. For example, Jules Léotard (1838-1870) is now largely forgotten as the father of the modern trapeze act, but his name lives on as the designation of the one-piece, skintight acrobatics outfit that he popularized. Our lesson today features a person who lives on in infamy because his name has given us the English word *simony*. This refers to the practice of purchasing favors from, or even offices of power within, the church. Still today, attempts to buy or sell anything of a distinctly spiritual nature is liable to be condemned as *simony*, an illustration of the fact that some sins can outlive the sinner.

Just before ascending to Heaven, Jesus told the apostles that they were to testify about him "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Acts 2-7 covers the first stage of the plan as the apostles took the lead in proclaiming Christ in Jerusalem; the result was that thousands accepted Jesus as Messiah (2:41; 4:4; 6:7). During this time, two non-apostles by the names Stephen and Philip rose to prominence as Spirit-filled leaders. Initially, these two were included in the group of seven appointed to manage the church's benevolence ministry (Acts 6:1-6). Both were also active as evangelists, and this work led to persecution: Stephen's death by stoning and Philip's departure from Jerusalem (7:59, 60; 8:1b-5). These circumstances resulted in Philip's being a key figure in the spread of the gospel. Leaving Jerusalem, he "went down to a city in Samaria" (Acts 8:5), where he found a receptive audience (8:6-8). Since the death of King Solomon in about 931 BC, the tribes of Israel had been divided into two groups, with the 10 northern tribes following kings who eventually ruled in a city of Samaria (1 Kings 12:25-30; 16:23-29; etc.). The rift between the two groups widened after many in the northern tribes were taken into exile in 722 BC and their territory recolonized with non-Israelites (2 Kings 17:1-6, 24). That situation resulted in intermarriages, leading "pure blood" Jews to view their Samaritan neighbors as spiritually and racially impure (Ezra 4:1-5; Nehemiah 4:1,

2). Looking past historical differences, Philip followed the example of Jesus in outreach to the Samaritans (see John 4:1-42). Philip's message was confirmed with miraculous displays of power that included exorcisms and healings (Acts 8:6, 7). Through the power of Christ, the long-awaited messianic age had finally come even to Samaritans.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Beware of Deceptive Spiritual Powers (Acts 8:9-11)

9 But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great,
10 to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God."
11 And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time.

Deceptive practices (9)

Deceptive practices that must be repented (Zech 1:6)

6 But did not my words and my decrees, which I commanded my servants the prophets, overtake your forefathers? "Then they repented and said, 'The Lord Almighty has done to us what our ways and practices deserve, just as he determined to do.'"

Deceptive practices that causes one not to dwell in God's house (Ps 101:7)

7 No one who practices deceit will dwell in my house; no one who speaks falsely will stand in my presence.

Deceptive practices that bring God's wrath (Ezek 6:11-13)

11 "'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Strike your hands together and stamp your feet and cry out 'Alas!' because of all the wicked and detestable practices of the house of Israel, for they will fall by the sword, famine and plague. 12 He that is far away will die of the plague, and he that is near will fall by the sword, and he that survives and is spared will die of famine. So will I spend my wrath upon them. 13 And they will know that I am the Lord, when their people lie slain among their idols around their altars, on every high hill and on all the mountaintops, under every spreading tree and every leafy oak-places where they offered fragrant incense to all their idols.

Deceptive influence (10)

Influence through false prophets that come as wolf in sheep's clothing (Matt 7:15)

15 "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.

Influence to turn away from the faith (Matt 24:10-13)

10 At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, 11 and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. 12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, 13 but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

Influence through destructive heresies (2 Peter 2:1-2)

2 But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them — bringing swift destruction on themselves. 2 Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute.

Influence through performing false signs and wonders (Matt 24:24)

24 For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect — if that were possible.

Deceptive results (11)

Results that come out of doubt (James 1:6-8)

6 But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

Results that come from walking in darkness (1 John 1:6)

6 If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.

Results that bear bad fruit (Matt 7:17-20)

17 Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

Role of Baptism (Acts 8:12-14)

12 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.

13 Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.

14 Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them,

It starts with hearing God's Word (12)

Hearing so that belief is confirmed (Rom 10:14)

14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

Hearing so that faith is strengthened (Rom 10:17)

17 Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

Hearing because it is the Word of God (1 Thess 2:13)

13 And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.

It is accomplished through faith (13)

Faith in the baptism into one Spirit (1 Cor 12:13)

13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free — and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

Faith in the baptism and clothing with Jesus (Gal 3:27)

27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

Faith in the baptism into a good conscience toward God (1 Peter 3:21)

21 and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also — not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

It is a outward sign for others (14)

A baptism that signified repentance (Acts 19:1-7)

19 While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples 2 and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." 3 So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?" "John's baptism," they replied. 4 Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." 5 On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. 7 There were about twelve men in all.

A baptism that symbolized being buried with Jesus (Col 2:11-12)

11 In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

A baptism that symbolized death (Rom 6:4)

4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Receiving of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:15-17)

15 who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

16 For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

17 Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Through prayer (15)

Pray to God for the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:11-13)

11 "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? 12 Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 13 If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Prayer for the gift of the Holy Spirit (John 4:10)

10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

Prayer for the thirst of the Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39)

37 On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." 39 By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

Through being born again (16)

Born again through the Word (James 1:18)

18 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

Born again through the power of God, not man (John 1:12-13)

12 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

Born again through belief in Jesus (1 John 5:1)

5 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well.

Through laying on of hands (17)

To be filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17)

17 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord-Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here — has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands (1 Tim 5:22)

22 Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.

For the receipt of the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:6)

6 When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

Misunderstanding About the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:18-24)

18 And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money,

19 saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

20 But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!

21 You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God.

22 Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.

23 For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity."

24 Then Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me."

Misunderstanding of the source (18-19)

Misunderstanding that could never be forgiven (Matt 12:24,31)

24 But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons." 31 And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.

Misunderstanding that should be tested (1 John 4:1)

4 Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Misunderstanding that can be corrected by the Spirit of truth (John 15:26)

26 "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.

Misunderstanding of the gift (20-21)

Gift of the Holy Spirit is a deposit guaranteeing ownership of God (2 Cor 1:22)

22 set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

Gift of the Holy Spirit is to signify being a child of God (Gal 4:6)

6 Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."

Gift of the Holy Spirit is a seal until redemption (Eph 1:13-14)

13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession — to the praise of his glory.

Misunderstanding of the remedy (22-24)

A repentance that results in sins being forgiven and a refreshing of the spirit (Acts 3:19)

19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,

A repentance that has as its foundation godly sorrow (2 Cor 7:10-11)

10 Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. 11 See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter.

A repentance that causes one to forsake evil thoughts and ways (Isa 55:7)

7 Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

Suppose that Harry Houdini were alive today and that he lived in Dallas, Texas. If he were scheduled for a performance, a large crowd would surely show up. For years, Houdini amazed the crowds with his incredible escapes. Now suppose that a young preacher came to town and that his preaching was accompanied by many awesome signs and wonders. Imagine that it became known that Houdini was so taken with this young preacher that he gave up his performances to follow that young preacher wherever he went. He would sit in the front row and marvel at the signs and wonders that accompanied the preacher's sermons. Would you not agree that Houdini's awe and wonder, along with his appearances in the crowds who listened to the preacher, would greatly contribute to the popularity of this young preacher?

I think this is what happened with Philip and Simon the magician. For years, Simon had been amazing the folks of this Samaritan city – and the rest of Samaria – with his magic. Through slight of hand (or possibly by employing powers from the dark side), his power seemed unlimited. Simon was not reluctant to promote himself, either. Luke tells us that he “**claimed to be someone great**” (Acts 8:9). We are then told that the people thought of him as God. (In their minds, he is virtually the counterpart of Jesus.) Simon made no attempt to correct the popular misconception. I suspect that he promoted such thinking. In some ways, then, Simon was a Samaritan “messiah.” What an impact his “conversion” made on the people of Samaria. And not only did he profess belief and submit to baptism, he virtually attached himself to Philip, following him wherever he preached. No wonder the Samaritans were listening so intently to Philip.

Until now, signs and wonders had only been performed by Philip (and of course the twelve apostles and Stephen before him). Philip's signs and wonders seemed to be limited to exorcisms and healings. Philip had baptized new believers, including Simon, but none had yet received the Holy Spirit. God sovereignly delayed this until the arrival of two apostles, who were sent from Jerusalem as representatives of the twelve (Acts 8:14). I have to smile when I recall that John was one of the two disciples who had asked permission to call down fire from heaven on a Samaritan village (Luke 9:52-56). Now, as it were, he calls down the Spirit of God to fall upon these new Samaritan believers.

Much discussion has been devoted to explaining why the Spirit waited to “baptize” these new believers. We must begin by noting that our text does not directly give us the answer. Several possible reasons do come to mind. First, these new believers must be embraced as full-fledged members of the church by the Jewish Christians (see Ephesians 2:11-22). Who better to validate their faith in Jesus than two of the apostles from Jerusalem? In Acts 11, Peter will argue that he had to accept the new believers to whom he preached in the house of Cornelius and that he was obligated to baptize them. Here, Peter and John witness the “**baptism of the Spirit**,” which is God's seal on the conversion of these believers. How could they deny what God had done, to which He bore witness through the coming of the Spirit on these believers?

Second, these new Samaritan believers needed the affirmation and confirmation of their equal standing in Jesus by the actions of the apostles sent from Jerusalem. Just as the Jerusalem Jews needed confirmation of the conversion of these Samaritans, so the Samaritans needed confirmation of their acceptance and affirmation by the Jewish apostles, as represented by Peter and John.

Third, there may be a deliberate “division of powers” here. That is, Philip had a certain function, but that function had its limits. The apostles took up where Philip's responsibilities (and authority) left off. This was a matter of practical import. Philip was very highly regarded by the Samaritans. There was a danger of Philip being too highly esteemed (as can be seen with Simon). Notice how quickly Simon transfers his attention to Peter and John after their arrival. It might have been very unhealthy for Philip to have carried out all of the spectacular functions which, instead, were divided between Philip and Peter and John.

I find it interesting that Simon the magician did not express a desire to obtain the power that was demonstrated by the signs and wonders performed by Philip. He was very eager, however, to obtain the power

that he saw as a result of the laying on of hands by Peter and John. What was the difference? While Luke tells us that Philip cast out demons and healed those who were paralyzed and lame ([Acts 8:7](#)), he does not tell us exactly what happened when Peter and John laid their hands on the new believers. Something rather spectacular must have occurred, or Simon would not have been so eager to obtain this power. I think it is safe to speculate that something happened that was similar to Pentecost, as described in [Acts 2:1-4](#). We do know that when the apostles laid their hands on these Samaritan believers, they received the Holy Spirit ([Acts 8:17](#)).

Simon was wrong to offer money to obtain the power to do what Peter and John had been doing. In the first place, this power was restricted to Peter and John. Not even Philip had been given this kind of power. Simon, therefore, was asking to have the power of an apostle. Second, Simon was asking for the power to bestow the Holy Spirit on everyone ([Acts 8:19](#)). Whoever he laid his hands on would receive the Spirit. The Holy Spirit was to come only upon genuine believers. Simon seems to care little about the necessity of belief; he wants merely to market the manifestations of the Spirit as a commodity. Third, by viewing the gift of the Spirit as a commodity to be bought and sold, he implied that this was a matter of works, not of grace. How horrible it would be if salvation could be bought and sold. Buying and selling the presence of the Spirit is just as wrong, and for the same reason. Salvation and the indwelling of the Spirit is a gift of grace, not goods to be bought and sold.

The seriousness of Simon's sin is indicated by the severity of Peter's response to Simon's request:

"May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could acquire God's gift with money!" ([Acts 8:20](#))

J. B. Phillips renders Peter's words, "To hell with you and your money." In a footnote, Phillips indicates that his rendering is precisely how the original text reads, and he bemoans the fact that many translations have paraphrased these words. How ironic that a paraphrase is more accurate than a supposedly literal rendering.

There are many who would like to conclude that Simon never really was saved. They would like to believe that Christians never had such worldly motives, but we should know our own hearts well enough to admit that on occasion our motives are not that different from those of Simon. Think, for example, of the sinful motives of Ananias and Sapphira in [Acts 5:1-11](#), or of Gehazi's sin in [2 Kings 5:20-27](#).

It is not so easy to write Simon off as an unbeliever. We must first come to terms with Luke when he tells us that Simon believed and was baptized ([Acts 8:13](#)). Even after Simon tries to buy apostolic powers, Peter does not call on him to repent and be saved, but rather to repent of this specific sin, and ask forgiveness for it ([Acts 8:22](#)). Peter has a particular sin in mind and not Simon's sins in general.

Furthermore, Peter told Simon that he had "**no share or part in this matter**" ([Acts 8:21](#)). A simple reading of this statement would seem to lead one to conclude that "**this matter**" is the bestowing of the Spirit, not the matter of being saved. Simon is "**bitterly envious and in bondage to sin**" ([Acts 8:23](#)). I understand these words in the light of this text in Deuteronomy:

14 "It is not with you alone that I am making this covenant by oath, 15 but with whoever stands with us here today before the Lord our God as well as those not with us here today. 16 "(For you know how we lived in the land of Egypt and how we crossed through the nations as we traveled. 17 You have seen their detestable things and idols of wood, stone, silver, and gold.) 18 Beware that the heart of no man, woman, clan, or tribe among you turns away from the Lord our God today to pursue and serve the gods of those nations; **beware that there is among you no root producing poisonous and bitter fruit.** 19 When such a person hears the words of this oath he secretly blesses himself and says, "I will have peace though I continue to walk with a stubborn spirit." This will destroy the watered ground with the parched. 20 The Lord will be unwilling to forgive him, and his intense anger will rage against that man; all the curses written in this scroll will fall upon him and the Lord will obliterate his name from memory. 21 The Lord will single him out for judgment from all the tribes of Israel according to all the curses of the covenant written in this scroll of the law" ([Deuteronomy 29:14-21](#), emphasis mine).

This is a very interesting text, a text that applies to Simon and to his sin. In Deuteronomy, Israel is about to enter into the Promised Land. They have entered into a covenant relationship with the God of Israel. These are a people who have a history of idolatry.⁵ They are well aware of the idols of Egypt and of the nations through which they have passed. They could easily be tempted to embrace some of these gods and, at the same time, still profess allegiance to God.⁶ God's covenant was not given as a "good luck charm," a license to do whatever they wanted and still expect God's blessings. And so Moses warns the Israelites not to turn back to their old ways and to serve other gods (idols). He tells them not to expect God's blessings when they continue to live as they once did, before they were redeemed. This would make them a "**root producing poisonous and bitter fruit**" (Deuteronomy 29:18).

Simon seems to be doing what God warned Israel not to do. Previous to his coming to faith, Simon's magic not only appears to have made him a very comfortable living; it also made him a very popular and powerful man. When the gospel came to Samaria, Simon believed, but he did not seem to grasp the implications of his faith in regard to his previous way of life. It would seem that Simon asked to buy the power and authority of the apostles to bestow the Holy Spirit so that this might be his new, and even more powerful, performance. He was seeking to upgrade his previous performance. In reality, this was turning back to his old ways, to his old magic, and thus it was turning away from God. That was a most dangerous thing to do.

Simon's response to Peter's rebuke is less than encouraging:

"You pray to the Lord for me so that nothing of what you have said may happen to me" (Acts 8:24).

Peter urged Simon to repent of this sin, and instead, Simon urged Peter and John to pray for him themselves (Acts 8:24). It is as though he fears that his prayers will not count, but he assumes that the prayers of Peter and John will. At best, this reveals an inadequate grasp of doctrine. As Paul put it,

5 For there is one God and one intermediary between God and humanity, Christ Jesus, himself human, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all, revealing God's purpose at his appointed time (1 Timothy 2:5-6).

The writer to the Hebrews said,

15 For we do not have a high priest incapable of sympathizing with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way just as we are, yet without sin. 16 Therefore let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace whenever we need help (Hebrews 4:15-16).

Simon seems focused on the apostles, as though their prayers for him would be more effectual than his own prayer of repentance. That is a serious error, but I believe there is another error here as well. Simon is not as concerned with the fact that he has sinned as he is about the consequences of his sin. He asks the apostles to pray so that the consequences of his sin might not come upon him. I guess what I am saying is this: Simon does not express concern for the impact of his sin on his relationship with the Lord; instead, he only seems only to be concerned about suffering the penalty for his sin.

Is Simon Saved?

A good deal of attention has been given to this question, and it is interesting to see how many want to disown Simon as a true believer. Let's face it; it makes us uncomfortable to think that a true believer could be guilty of this kind of sin. How much easier it is to explain Simon's actions as those of one outside the faith. After all, if Simon could sin this way as a Christian, then I am in danger of committing the same sin. If Simon is not a true believer, then I don't need to be very concerned about his sin.

I confess that I have been inclined to view Simon as a non-Christian myself. But I am most reluctant to conclude that the Bible does not mean what it rather clearly states. We are told plainly that Simon himself believed (Acts 8:13). In the context, the rather clear inference is that Simon believed, just as other Samaritans had (see Acts 8:13). One might even go so far as to say that some Samaritans were drawn to faith in Jesus because Simon believed.² I think we are better off to take the text as it is rather than set its statements aside.

And so we will deal with Simon as though he was a believer (as the text states). Isn't his sin one which any Christian could commit? I believe so, and thus there is in Peter's strong rebuke a warning for us all.

(Adapted from URL: <https://bible.org/seriespage/13-people-god-uses-acts-81-40>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Visitors to the Vatican in Rome may be surprised to see an unusual painting that depicts a struggle between two men. One of the men seems to be levitating in the air while the other, standing on the ground in a crowd of people, points his hands toward Heaven. The painting reflects an early Christian legend that holds less hope for Simon the sorcerer than Acts 8 might allow. According to the legend, Simon founded a heretical sect and moved to Rome to propagate his teachings by continuing to practice sorcery. Simon Peter, hearing of the sorcerer's growing influence, went to Rome to challenge him yet again. Rather than repenting on this occasion, Simon attempted to prove his superior power by flying through the air. The apostle Simon Peter supposedly responded by calling on God to expose the man's wickedness, which resulted in Simon's falling from the sky and breaking his leg, an injury that led to his death. Of course, there is little reason to believe this legend, and the true ending of Simon the sorcerer's story cannot be known. But that does not detract from seeing two very different approaches to the gifts and power of God in today's text: that of Simon the sorcerer, who sought to use God to serve his own purposes, and that of Simon Peter the apostle, who did the exact opposite. The legacy of Simon Peter is that of a foundational figure who was instrumental not only in helping birth the church but also in protecting her purity. The selfishness of the other Simon, by contrast, has made his name a lasting symbol of greed and false motives. What's your legacy?

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. Many seek power and fame for themselves (Acts 8:9-11)
2. There are those who "seek God" for the power and fame they can receive, not through genuine repentance (vss. 12-13)
3. The work of the Holy Spirit in each believer's life is essential (vss. 14-17)
4. Following Jesus means submitting to Him; it is not merely a way to in> prove our lives (vss. 18-19)
5. God is not necessarily impressed or persuaded by the things that persuade people (vss. 20-21)
6. The Holy Spirit works genuine repentance; the flesh just wants to avoid punishment (vss. 22-24)