



**Acts – Can I get a Witness?
Wk. 25 The 1st FAKE Convert
By Pastor Jody May 03/19/2023**

Acts 8:9-25 ESV

Simon the Magician Believes

⁹But there was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. ¹⁰They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the power of God that is called Great." ¹¹And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. ¹²But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. ¹³Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.

¹⁴Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, ¹⁵who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, ¹⁹saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." ²⁰But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! ²¹You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. ²²Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." ²⁴And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."

²⁵Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

[INTRODUCTION – HANG IN THERE]

A man named Jack was walking along a steep cliff one day when he accidentally got too close to the edge and fell. On the way down he grabbed a



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branch, which temporarily stopped his fall. He looked down and to his horror saw that the canyon fell straight down for more than a thousand feet. He couldn't hang onto the branch forever, and there was no way for him to climb up the steep wall of the cliff. So Jack began yelling for help, hoping that someone passing by would hear him and lower a rope or something. "HELP! HELP! Is anyone up there? HELP!

He yelled for hours, but no one heard him. He was about to give up when he heard a voice.

"Jack, Jack. Can you hear me?"

"Yes, yes! I can hear you. I'm down here!"

"I can see you, Jack. Are you all right?"

"Yes, but . . . Who are you, and where are you?"

"I am the Lord, Jack. I'm everywhere."

"The Lord? You mean, GOD?"

"That's Me."

"God, please help me! I promise if You'll get me down from here, I'll stop sinning. I'll be a really good person. I'll serve You for the rest of my life."

"Easy on the promises, Jack. Let's just get you down from there; then we can talk. Now, here's what I want you to do. Listen carefully."

"I'll do anything, Lord. Just tell me what to do."

"Okay. Let go of the branch."

"What?"

"I said, let go of the branch. Just trust Me. Let go."

There was a long silence. Finally Jack yelled, "HELP! HELP! IS ANYONE ELSE UP THERE?"

You see Jack's problem was not that he didn't believe in a God it was **'what' He believed ABOUT God**. True saving Faith in God, specifically the Lord Jesus, comes with **Obedience and Trust**. If Jack had a True Faith well then, he would of let go. And that is how life is for many of us, we tentatively go through life trying to live in Faith but when things get a little scary we have tendencies to grasp on to what we control and neglect what we know to be true about our Lord.

Those tendencies, those fears, many times come from bad doctrine, or bad teachings about God. Often people who walk away from faith are people who



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are brought up in the church and developed bad theology, they developed some warped views about God and man. Sometimes these things are taught on purpose through churches that have gotten off on track usually pressured to please man and sometime churches, because of traditions, teach things they don't understand and go against some of the basic things found in the Apostle's Creed.¹ Whatever the reasoning when people run into conundrums in life, when they go through pressure, if the software (beliefs) that is downloaded has problems then the system, their worldview, begins to collapse, and they will seek a new operating system (leave the faith).

In his comments on this of chapter 8 Pastor, on **Simon the first fake convert**, John MacArthur puts it this way²,

*“True Salvation is not based on Faith, it is based on Faith based on **Truth**. It's based on a Faith in True Theology.” – John MacArthur*

This past week in our Bible reading plans we saw that between Job and his friends the **biggest problem** they were running into was not a belief in God but **what they believed** about Him. Both Job and his friends rightly thought that God was perfect and could not be questioned **BUT** they also believed man could attain righteousness by his works, which is why Job thought he was innocent, and why his friends thought he was guilty. Elihu sets them all straight though in Job 33

²³ If there be for him an **angel**, (heavenly intervention)
a **mediator**, one of the thousand,
to declare to man what is right for him,
²⁴ and he is **merciful** to him, and says,
'Deliver him from going down into the pit;
I have found a ransom; (heavenly redeemer)
²⁵ let his flesh become fresh with youth;
let him return to the days of his youthful vigor';

²⁶ then man prays to God, and he accepts him; (**repentance**)
he sees his face with a shout of joy,
and he restores to man his righteousness.
(**original state**)
²⁷ He sings before men and says:
'I sinned and perverted what was right,
and it was not repaid to me.
²⁸ He has redeemed my soul from going down into the pit,
and my life shall look upon the light.'

¹ <https://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/creeds/apostles-creed>

² <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/1726/the-faith-that-does-not-save>



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Elihu is like no one is good it takes a heavenly being to judge rightly and to intercede for man, to save him. This is a pre-Abrahamic cry for the gospel as it is pointing to the **need of a Savior**. Job had this problem thousands of years before the church and it still exists today, it's not that people don't believe in God it is that they **don't believe rightly!**

As to make 1 main point today to help lead us through our reading let me offer this today:

It takes more than **"a"** belief about Jesus to be saved, it takes **faith (obedience and trust)** in the **right things** about Him.

[THE PROBLEM] That's what Simon's problem is today, he definitely believed in Jesus but what he believed was all **askew**. What makes this so important for us to learn today, is that **we see this all the time in the church**. People make a sincere confession of faith, they cry out to God to be saved, they even get baptized only to walk away from the faith when life gets too much. Understanding what happened to Simon helps us to understand how it happens today, and even perhaps helps us to combat the tragedy of a false conversion.

To help us battle false conversions, today I want us to go through different things that the Gospel must do, or three different Imperatives in the text.

1. The Gospel must not be confused with man's ideology.

Philip is now the focus of the story of Acts. He and a bunch of other Christians have just been run out of town and scattered to other areas of Palestine and Samaria. But as we learned last week that is OK for the **more the church is Persecuted the more, she Proclaims!** It is the never-ending battery in the life of the church, the more she endures hardships placed on her the bolder she gets with the proclamation of the gospel! She's like Rocky, you hit her she gets mad!

Philip is having a great time, first time ever on the road as a traveling preacher, and he's casting out demons, healing the sick, and baptizing people in Jesus'



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name! There is a lot to write home about, and he does, because the Apostles will come to check it out (Peter and John), but right now he's enjoying the success of HS empowerment. As well, anyone that does the work of a preacher and Evangelist would tell you there is nothing like being involved in God's work and seeing the fruit of it before your eyes!

[PROBLEM] I think though that is what has led to part of the problem of having **fake converts** in our church today. People love to see the **fruit of their labor** instead of the fruit of the Spirit.

- It makes churches cut corners on what they preach and over emphasize some parts of the gospel over others.
- It makes churches spend more money and time changing styles and environments to help people feel comfortable.
- It makes churches practice and perfect the emotional altar call ALL so they can see the fruit of their labors and reap the rewards of a war chest (offerings).

Churches fall into that trap because they know **everybody likes** to hear about being saved by the **Grace of God**, but no one wants to hear about the **expectations for obedience and trust in God**. To have a true Gospel Faith you got to have it all... - It takes more than **"a"** belief about Jesus to be saved, it takes **faith (obedience and trust)** in the **right things** about Him.

Simon the Magician Believes

⁹But there was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. ¹⁰They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the power of God that is called Great." ¹¹And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic.

Imagine Philip, would be there seeing incredible things done by the HS of God, healings and exorcisms, so it would be nothing to have a warlock (wizard), to get interested in what he was doing, after all Philip is doing things this guy can't do! This is what got Moses his fame when he beat out another two magicians in Egypt, the power of God gets the attention of those who want power.



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The people of Samaria sure do see the similarities between them. Simon can obviously do things that they can't explain. Whatever he was doing looked like the things Philip was doing for they **associated** those things with **God**. We also learn Simon is a **Narcissist**, he has taught the people to call him the '**Great One**'. Perhaps Simon moved in after Jesus left the area a couple of years earlier (Luke 4) and brought the powers of hell with him to gain money and power much like the magic users you meet in Ephesians. But when Philip shows up with the HS under the mandate of Jesus to go there (1:8), it makes what Simon was doing pale in comparison as shown in what happened next.

¹² But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. ¹³ Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.

The **people saw the Truth** of the Gospel, because of the world in that day, as demons worked to emulate God's power to gain worship, it was necessary for Philip to demonstrate the true power of God, again emulating Jesus himself – the **Gospel must be separated from Man's Ideology!** They believed in Jesus, they believed in the good news of the kingdom, and they were baptized in Jesus' name.

The Samaritans, to practice this new faith, had to make a choice to either stay with Simon that claimed to work for God or put all their chips on Jesus, and their Baptism into His name means exactly that. Although, it wasn't as much as a challenge as it was for the Jews in Jerusalem. They weren't losing prestige, family, or way of life for they had no temple life like the Jews where Philip came from. Being baptized in Jesus' name, under the demonstrations of power that had just happened was **all gain for them!** To them it was just switching to the better gift giver.

This is where it **gets a little squirrely**, Philip does nothing wrong, he gives them the good news, it was exactly what they needed. It was easy for them to let go of what they already had, but that sets up for some dangerous doctrinal considerations. **Simon** becomes the focus now as he exemplifies a person that had something good but **viewed God as an object** to be **controlled** not a



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person to be loved ALL to help him gain more. Simon had been working in the realms of demons and hell, but he had found a greater power source and thought to gain advantages from following Jesus to make him the **first fake convert**.

Simon gets baptized in Jesus' name, but He doesn't recant anything he's been doing, no repentance. For you see, he, unlike everyone else in Samaria, is not feeling unloved, **he's loved by everyone**, he lives to hear them say "**you're great**"! He's using this opportunity, to believe in this guy Jesus like everyone else, to gain an upper hand. He is attempting to mix beliefs, his man ideology with Christianity. I want you to see now how twisted Simon really had it, coming from our text today.

¹⁰ They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the power of God that is called Great." – He's still full of **Pride** and not wanting to let it go.

¹⁸ Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he **offered them money** – He's full of **Envy** and sees the value of God's Kingdom tied up in the world's Kingdom by the use of money, he thinks what God is offering is for sale.

¹⁹ saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." – He uses **Bribery** to gain advantage, let me do the work for you, I can help. You need me as much as I need you.

²⁴ And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me." – He views the HS as a **thing** or power **to be controlled** not as a person that gives grace as He pleases.

In short, he has a misunderstanding of Anthropology (study of man), *God needs me I don't need him*; Pneumatology (study of the Spirit), *the Spirit is an object not a person*; Hamartiology (study of sin), *there is nothing wrong with the desire to be loved for your success*; and Soteriology (study of Salvation), *I can buy my own way into heaven*. All of which led to a belief in Jesus but not a saving faith (trust and obedience) in him.



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False converts come from the fact that people want what God gives BUT they don't want God. And if the church spends all her time and resources trying to manipulate the emotional strings of its' attendees, so they can see the fruit of their hands, then what do you think they are making?

[CHALLENGE + APPLICATION]

This by the way happens in all churches and it happens to all pastors. I heard Pastor MacArthur baptize a man, who later went on and became a leading multi-million-dollar distributor in the porn industry. Was it pastor MacArthur's fault? No, it was the man's fault for trying to use the church to get more power, and when that pursuit failed him, he left it to pursue power in the kingdom of the world.

There is a **warning here for all of us**. You see we run into this problem in America all the time, because it doesn't matter whether you are rich or poor in this nation, the belief, and it's a good one, is that you can make something of yourself by applying yourself to work and you too can have the **American Dream**. What that means though is we have a lot of people with weird ideas like Simon that believe if you get baptized in Jesus' name, He will give you **power to build** your kingdom not His.

I have encountered people whom I have baptized, who recant their sin, but leave their families or slip back into substance abuse because Jesus didn't make them feel good about themselves AS a pretty spouse/partner, a drug of choice, or a good paying job does. No, because what Jesus does is He destroys the need for monetary accomplishment in your life because **He gives you value**, not your work. That's **contrary to the American dream!** What He offers instead is citizenship in an eternal kingdom where **you always have value** based on what **He has done**. When that is realized that is what makes you a better spouse, a better worker, and a better neighbor! But this all must come from not mixing man ideology with the Gospel it **must remain separate!**

Faith takes Obedience and Trust in the right things in Christ, family where are we with that? Take a moment today and do an honest evaluation in your heart



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today, are you here to get Him to make something better for you? Do you want Him to fix your life to make it more cushier, to increase your wealth, your stature, OR are you here by Grace contributing to the Kingdom out of love for a Savior?

It's important to clear that up today and it was important to clear that up back then, so how did they do it?

2. The Gospel must be clarified by **Apostolic Teaching.**

¹⁴ Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, ¹⁵ who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶ for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

Clarity, that's what the Apostle's teachings do. Back then it was their personal appearances in these neighboring towns that clarified the gospel and for us today it is their same appearance in the form of God's Word. The way the Gospel is clarified and kept separate from man's ideology, is by the continual preaching of God's Word. There is no other means by which to help confused people, become fully converted.

In Samaria, Peter and John make an appearance and rightly so, this is the first time outside of Jerusalem that people other than full-blooded Jews have responded to the Gospel. They have come at Philip's request to see what God is doing in Samaria. I think God is picking the best men for the job, He sends Peter who is not afraid to drop the hammer if necessary (remember Ananias and Saphira) and he sends John, who back in Luke wanted to call down fire from heaven when the Samaritans snubbed their nose at Jesus. No, there will be no sympathy from these men.

When they get there though they have compassion, it lets you know that what they see here is real. They no longer see estranged half-breeds who treated Jesus wrongly, they see brothers and sisters and they pray for them and prayed that the HS would fall on them. What we have here is something



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unique, an event in the text when people get saved and then there is a direct prayer and intervention by the Apostles for the HS, that's not a usual occurrence in the NT, this is the exception. Totally different from our conversion experiences today. Only in the fact though, that God was showing by sign that something else was going on here as well.

In Acts 2 we have the Jews receiving the HS, in Acts 8 now we have the Samaritans, and in Acts 10 you will see Cornelius' encounter, **a gentile**, with Peter and the HS comes again. What you have is the physical manifestation of the coming Kingdom of the God/Church which will be opened to Jews, half-Jews, and Gentiles alike by the gate keepers of the Kingdom, the Apostles.

Acts 1:8 ESV

⁸But you (Apostles) will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all **Judea (Jews) and **Samaria (Half-Jews)**, and to the **end of the earth (Gentiles)**."**

The Apostles are the representatives, the ambassadors for God's Kingdom, and as a sign that God is now going outside the remnant of Jews, He sends the physical manifestation of the Spirit to a **representative of each people group**. This is what makes this occasion so beautiful and full of Grace. Peter and John representing Jesus, the true **King of the Jews**, they go to Samaria who is representing **broken Israel**, the lost ten tribes, and they take them back and **reunite the tribes**. This is a sign of endearment from the Lord to His people, that what earlier earthly kings could not fix by politics and warfare, Jesus fixed with His blood.

That's the Gospel, isn't it? Jesus comes to us, gives His blood for us, brings us into His Kingdom, and gives the HS to help us live, sealing us in His family. This has got to be the message that repeatedly gets proclaimed because we all have such short memories. The Gospel must continually be preached by the Apostle's testimony until all of it is fulfilled and we see Him in the flesh. A proper belief in Jesus is faith (trust and obedience) in Him as a conquering King and only then can you find peace family. And you must hear that over and over again, because the temptation is to add the Gospel to your ideology.



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As a way to continually find peace then, we must continually combat those false beliefs about God, and here's how the Gospel does that.

3. The Gospel must address false beliefs about God.

¹⁸ Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, ¹⁹ saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." ²⁰ But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! ²¹ You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.

- It must **Convict**.

Peter is not going to have any of it. He's not fooled by attempts at bribery or attempts of feigned help. In the text Peter's wording translated into today's vernacular would be to say, "*to hell with you and your money*". Our attempts to buy favor from God by any means is a **display of our depravity**.

How many stories has the church seen over the years as people have offered money for building improvements or ministry embellishments if the church will just give something in return. Many times, what starts out as a nice sentiment or gesture becomes a veiled attempt at elevation on behalf of the individual.

The Gospel to hear it rightly, so you may receive it rightly, one needs to hear the **condemnation of sin** in the story of God. You must first hear that your **heart IS not right** with God and trying to do a god thing for God to get into His good graces is as old as the story of **Cain** itself. Cain offered to God his best to demonstrate to God he was worthy in contrast to Abel who gave to God out of a humble heart. In the message of the Gospel is also the news you cannot earn Salvation and a desire to do so means you have not changed. Luckily it doesn't stop there, the Gospel always gives grace.

²² Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³ For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity."



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- It must **Convey Grace**

For the Gospel to fight False Beliefs it must also Convey Grace.

Peter offers a solution still to this fake convert and it's the same solution for us. You may be even sitting there today knowing that your commitment to God is not real. God is still offering you grace, **REPENT and PRAY** that if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven.

That's a **serious need**, Peter is not telling Simon, sure you will be forgiven as long as you say in Jesus' name at the end, **NO**, he says **if possible**, your intent may be forgiven. Peter remembers a friend called Judas, who died an apostate after faking his need for Christ. Folks it is a serious matter to use God like a stepping tool to get your wants because it **hardens your heart** towards Him. It's not that God can't forgive you, but even when God came to Cain to love on him after the offering fiasco when he got mad at his brother, God's love was not what he wanted, **Cain STILL murdered Abel!** Our only hope, if we find that we have been using God to get things from Him is to throw ourselves on His mercy. Simon knew he was wrong, do you?

²⁴ And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me." ²⁵ Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

There are legends of Simon not in the Bible, that say he never converted. Some say he became the father of the Gnostics we see in scripture, while others say he became the personal enemy of Simon and everywhere Peter went Simon was there to challenge him. We don't know for sure, but if Simon is in heaven, it will all be based on God's grace ALONE and not his work.

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[CHALLENGE + APPLICATION]

Family today, how do you know if you are following God rightly? This last thing I want to share with you, was a helpful tool given by Pastor MacArthur almost 50 years ago. It is a way to see if what you have found in God is real or if it is fake, it is a way to understand if the fruit of the spirit is actually present:

Signs of a True Believer:

- **To Believe**
- **To Obey**
- **To Continue**

To Believe that it to trust in Him to take Him at His Word, to respond to what you are seeing in the Bible, part 1.

To Obey, to be baptized, to repent and turn from the world, to be Holy for He is Holy, part 2.

To Continue, that's the kicker huh? Do people stick with it?

There's only one place that you find this type of person, **the church**... If a person calls themselves a Christian, then they will live in obedience to the call of living in community with other like-minded folks practicing their faith together (Act 10:42 "WE" are commanded to preach). People who believe, obey, and continue until their time is done are most likely the ones you will see in eternity. Will that be your story today?

Let's not be like so many others we know and fall away family, recommit to not just believing in and obeying but continuing together in the faith. Let's also recommit again today to praying for those that have walked away that God may still show them grace, and let us pray for their hardened hearts.

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[PRAYER]



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[COMMUNION]

[BENEDICTION]

Go in the name of the Father, that continually reaches out to His children so that they may learn the right things about His Son.

Go in the name of the Son, that graciously gave His blood to free us from the desire to try and prove ourselves, trust in Him.

Go in the name and power of the Holy Spirit, that helps us to obey what we see in scripture, keeping us from falling away, now go and share this Gospel with those that need to hear this today.