

Counterfeit Conversions

Acts 8:9-24

I. THE **FEATURES** OF AUTHENTIC MINISTRY (Acts 8:4-8)

"Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. And there was great joy in that city" (Acts 8:4-8, NKJV).

- A. JESUS CHRIST IS CENTER STAGE - "Philip went down to Samaria and preached Christ" (v. 5). Not methodology, not personality, not entertainment - CHRIST is the message.
- B. GENUINE FREEDOM FROM BONDAGE - People were genuinely set free from demons and physical ailments. Real ministry brings real liberation from sin's power.
- C. AUTHENTIC JOY - "There was great joy in that city" (v. 8). Romans 14:17 says, "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

II. THE **FACADE** OF COUNTERFEIT CONVERSION (Acts 8:9-13)

"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, to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, 'This man is the great power of God.' And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time" (Acts 8:9-11, NKJV).

- A. SIMON'S DECEPTIVE FOUNDATION
 - 1. Self-promotion: "claiming that he was someone great"
 - 2. False power: Sorcery and magic, not God's power
 - 3. Public acclaim: People called him "the great power of God"
- B. SIMON'S APPARENT CONVERSION - "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" (v. 13).

Note: Even Simon "believed" and was "baptized" - but appearances can deceive.

III. THE FALSEHOOD EXPOSED (Acts 8:18-24)

"And 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.' But Peter said to him, 'Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!'" (Acts 8:18-20, NKJV).

Peter's diagnosis:

- "Your heart is not right in the sight of God" (v. 21)
- "You are poisoned by bitterness" (v. 23)
- "Bound by iniquity (habitual, lifestyle sin)" (v. 23)

NOTE: We derive the term "simony" from Simon Magus, who attempted to buy spiritual office or power with money.

IV. THE FOUNDATIONS OF GENUINE FAITH

- A. THE FRUIT TEST (Matthew 7:15-23)
- B. THE HUMILITY TEST (Luke 18:9-14)
- C. THE PERSEVERANCE TEST (1 John 2:19)
- D. THE LOVE TEST (1 John 3:14; 4:7-8)
- E. THE OBEDIENCE TEST (1 John 2:3-6)
- F. THE SPIRIT'S WITNESS TEST (Romans 8:16)
- G. THE TRANSFORMATION TEST (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- H. THE CONFESSION TEST (Romans 10:9-10)

V. THE FATE OF SIMON MAGUS

Simon Magus was widely condemned as a heretic and the "father of all heresies" by early Church leaders for his unorthodox teachings and challenge to apostolic authority (Justin Martyr, Irenaeus). Apocryphal accounts describe a final, dramatic confrontation between Peter in Rome, where Simon's attempt to demonstrate his divine power through levitation ended in a disastrous fall.

APPLICATIONS FOR TODAY:

1. **TEST YOURSELF** (2 Corinthians 13:5 - "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith.") A faith that can't be tested can't be trusted.
2. **EXPECT TARES AMONG WHEAT** (Matthew 13:24-30) - Jesus said false believers will remain among true believers until the harvest.
3. **FOCUS ON PREACHING CHRIST** - Don't get distracted by counterfeits, but like Philip and Peter proclaim the genuine truth of Jesus Christ. Study the genuine so thoroughly that you can spot the counterfeit!