

“Spurious Faith”
Acts 8:9-25
(Preached at Trinity, June 15, 2005)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In the first part of this chapter we found the church coming under intense persecution. This was the first widespread persecution of the early church. It followed as the result of Stephen’s martyrdom. Paul became very zealous in crushing this new religious sect known as Christianity.
2. As we saw last time, this was all a part of God’s redemptive plan. The early church was content with their own fellowship.
Acts 2:46 – “And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,”
God used this persecution to scatter the church and thus advance the Gospel into Samaria, Judea and ultimately, the uttermost parts of the earth.
3. As we come to this section of **Acts 8** we find further results from Philip’s preaching in Samaria. This is the account of one named Simon. He was a sorcerer of great notoriety.
Acts 8:9 – “But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one.”
The Latin word for great is *Magus*. History gives him the name of Simon Magus.
 - A. **Verse 9** describes him as having amazed the people of Samaria with his sorcery.
 - B. He presented himself up as being somebody great and a saying circulated about him, “This man is the great power of God”
4. When Philip arrived in Samaria and preached the Gospel of Christ multitudes believed and were baptized.
Verse 13 states that Simon also believed and was baptized.
The question that overshadows this passage: Was Simon’s faith a genuine faith? Does Simon take his place among the children of God? We’ll see that Simon’s faith was a mere illusion. He professed something that was not truly in his heart.
5. Tonight I want to set before you the dangers of a spurious or counterfeit faith. Simon had fooled everyone but then Peter, with apostolic discernment, exposes him,
Acts 8:23 – “For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and *in* the bond of iniquity.”

- I. Simon's profession of faith in Christ
- A. **Verse 13** declares that Simon believed
1. πιστεύω means "to have faith"
 2. Simon heard Philip's preaching and was pleased by what he heard
Acts 8:12 – "But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women."
 3. There is not evidence of Simon being broken in his sin. He was a sorcerer!
 - a. Simon was considered to be a great one, and he probably believed it.
 - b. His keen interest was in the miracles he saw – **Verse 13**
- B. Simon's profession, however, convinced Philip
1. He appeared to be sincere
 2. His profession was convincing enough that Philip baptized him
- C. The text says that Simon continued faithfully for a season
Acts 8:13 – "Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip. . ."
- D. His motives, however, were not pure
1. We find a hint of his heart in **Verse 13**
Acts 8:13 – "Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done."
 2. Simon was a sorcerer by profession. He was a skilled magician and he amazed multitudes with his magic. He was enamored by Philip's miracles and signs. If he was to continue in his profession he had to obtain that which Philip possessed.
 3. In the end he would expose himself by trying to purchase the ability to bestow the Holy Spirit upon men – **See Verses 18-19**
 4. Simon also exposes his heart in **Verse 24**
 - a. In **Verse 22** Peter commanded Simon to repent of his wickedness
 - b. Simon did not seek repentance. He did not turn to Christ because he did not know Christ. Instead he asked Peter to pray for him.
 - c. His concern was not that he had dishonored God but that he might be punished. He didn't want to escape the sin, only the consequences – "that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me."
- E. Simon takes his place among the hoards who believe God's blessings can be purchased.
1. Jesus speaks of them in Matthew 7
Matthew 7:22-23 – "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."
 2. In medieval days people sought to buy papal favors through indulgences to release their souls from purgatory

3. It still continues today as souls seek to gain God's favors through their efforts. Our motivation for all that we do is Christ. Christian disciplines are excellent – but they will never gain God's approval. We do them to the honor of Christ.
 4. Simon was only seeking personal gain
- E. Peter immediately saw his corruption
1. Peter told him that he would perish with his money
 2. Simon had not interest in spiritual things, no interest in Christ and His kingdom.
- Acts 8:21** – “Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.”

II. There is a great danger of possessing a counterfeit temporary faith

- A. The Bible has much to say about those who possess a temporary faith
1. The Parable of the Sower speaks of a temporary faith
Luke 8:13 – “They on the rock *are they*, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.”
 2. Paul spoke of believing in vain
1 Corinthians 15:1-2 – “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; ² By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.”
 3. Hebrews speaks of believing to the saving of the soul
Hebrews 10:39 – “But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.”
 4. The Gospel of John often spoke of those who temporarily believed in Jesus
John 2:23-25 – “Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast *day*, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. ²⁴ But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all *men*, ²⁵ And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.”
John 8:31 – “Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, *then* are ye my disciples indeed;”
To the same people Jesus said . . .
John 8:44 – “Ye are of *your* father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.”
- B. Characteristics of spurious faith
1. The spurious believer wants Christ, but not without exception
 - a. They want the grace of Christ, but not the government of Christ
It’s like the prodigal son who wanted his father’s goods but not his father’s government
 - b. They want to go to heaven without bowing before Christ. They want to be saved from the consequences of sin but not from the sin itself.
 - c. They want Christ but they want their other lovers also

2. The spurious believer does not want Christ as He is offered in the Scriptures
 - a. In the Bible Jesus is the only Mediator between God and man
 - b. As Mediator His has three offices: Prophet, Priest and King
 - c. The spurious believer only wants Christ as Priest to procure his pardon from sin
 - (1) He doesn't want Christ as Prophet to instruct him
 - (2) He doesn't want Christ as King to rule over him
3. The spurious believer does not want the inconveniences that come with following Christ
 - a. He doesn't want the inconvenience of living the Christian life
 - b. He wants Christ on his terms. Any service will be done when its convenient for him
4. The spurious believer has not had his heart changed.
Simon believed but his heart was not right before God

- III. Misunderstanding about the nature of saving faith has led many errors in the church
 - A. It creates an atmosphere of easy believism
 1. People are being taught today to simply make a decision and he is instantaneously saved
 2. They are simply to believe the promises of salvation. They are told to trust Jesus as Savior. At some later point they can turn to Christ as Lord.
 3. This promotes the false assurance that plagues our generation.
 - B. It creates such dangerous errors as the Carnal Christian Theory
 1. When churches are filled with people who do not have a heart for Christ what do you do? You create a new class of Christians – the Carnal Christian.
 2. The carnal Christian is one that has made a profession of faith in Christ, but also lives for self. He does not bear the marks of Christian conversion.
 3. The carnal Christian does not live in obedience to our Lord's commands. He does not think or act spiritually. He doesn't care for spiritual things. He seldom reads his Bible; is bored with worship and preaching. There is little difference between him and a lost man.
Yet, he has confidence that he will go to heaven because of his profession.
 4. This theory fosters sin and loose living. A person can be saved and yet live like a worldling.
 - a. It is a denial of Biblical repentance
 - b. It is a mockery of the Biblical doctrine of Perseverance
 - c. It is a perversion of the Biblical doctrine of Regeneration
 - C. It fosters a belief in a deeper or higher life that some Christians can attain.
 1. They teach that some Christians are living the Spirit filled life characterized by obedience.
 2. These Spiritual Christians love spiritual things, enjoy worship, appreciate preaching, serve and labor in Kingdom duties.
- IV. What are some of the characteristics of saving faith
 - A. Characteristics according to Ernest Reisinger
 1. Continuance or perseverance – pressing on in devotion to Christ and His service

2. Desire to be useful in Christ's church
 3. Attendance to Christian duty
 4. Love of prayer and the Word of God and assembling with God's people
 5. Devotion to loving the people of God
 6. Progress in the knowledge of self, sin, and the Savior
 7. Progress in loving holiness and hating sin, with increased conviction of and humility concerning personal sinfulness.
- B. The true believer follows Christ without exception
1. He loves Christ with his whole heart
 2. He loves to honor and obey Christ and to serve Him
- C. The true believer desires to submit to the Holy Spirit
1. Simon saw the Holy Spirit as a power but not a person
 2. Many today are guilty of the same error. They think of the Holy Spirit as a power – a power to overcome problems, live a victorious life, etc. If you want more power you need more of the Holy Spirit.
 3. The Holy Spirit is a person, He is God. What we need is not to have more of Him but that He might have more of us.

Conclusion:

1. The church of Christ is weak today because we have lowered our standards. We have lowered our expectations. For many today all that is required for church membership is to say the right words. There are no expectations for holiness.
2. The period of American when the church was the strongest was during the age of the Puritans. Church membership represented 6-7 percent of the population, yet the church was effective. Today church membership runs 40-50 percent but the church is far less effective.
3. James Montgomery Boice – "Today, if a church has a membership of two thousand people, it probably knows where about one thousand of those members are, and about five hundred come to church. But in the days of the Puritans, if a church had five hundred members, one thousand were in church and the congregation was having an impact on at least two thousand."
4. We must not lower God's standards. Peter did not.
Acts 8:21-23 – "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.²³ For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and *in* the bond of iniquity."