

Sermon Title: Glory And Gall In Samaria  
Scripture Text: Acts 8:6-24 (Acts #19)

Speaker: Jim Harris  
Date: 7-2-23

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The words we are going to pay attention to this morning come from Acts Chapter 8.

As of last Lord's Day, we have entered the second phase of this astounding spread of the Gospel that Jesus announced and predicted before He ascended to the Father. Remember these famous words, just before He ascended? Acts 1:8—"but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (NASB-1995—and throughout, unless otherwise noted).

Now, that is unfolding in time, as we go through Acts. Over ten thousand people have already believed in Jerusalem, and it has spilled over to the surrounding area of Judea. And that is despite the Apostles being arrested and jailed and scolded, and even flogged and ordered not to be speaking any more "in the name of Jesus" (Acts 4:18; 5:40).

And then, one of the first deacons, a man named Stephen, was used by God in the very same manner as the Apostles. He, too, was arrested, but in his case, he was stoned to death; and that was the end of Chapter 7.

And that very day marked the beginning of *great persecution* against the church in Jerusalem. It also marked the first public introduction and recognition of a man named Saul, who became the leader of a protracted time of persecution against Christians, not only in Jerusalem but wherever they were to be found; and we will get back to him when he comes to Christ in Chapter 9.

We saw last week that another of the deacons—one of Stephen's cohorts—a man named Philip was among those who fled from Jerusalem, and he went as far as the region known as Samaria, and the city called Samaria, about 45 miles north of Jerusalem.

It was the area that was formerly occupied by the Northern Kingdom of Israel—after the kingdom divided after the death of Saul. Before the Assyrians came, that was the Northern Kingdom. They showed up in 722 B.C. and took some of the Israelites captive; they scattered others, and they then moved in other peoples to that region, peoples that they had conquered from elsewhere; and the Jews who remained there wound up intermarrying with those Gentiles imported by the Assyrians, and that resulting culture was known as the Samaritans.

There was *great* antipathy between Samaritans and Jews, and Jews and Samaritans. That's why it was so *astounding* when Jesus actually *intentionally* visited Samaria—walked through Samaria, which was the straight line from Jerusalem to Galilee—and He actually engaged a Samaritan woman there. And we have this interesting little comment from the Apostle John in the midst of that interaction: John Chapter 4, Verse 9—"Therefore the Samaritan woman said to Him, 'How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?' " "Samaritan, strike one; woman, strike two—*what are You doing*, talking to me?" And then John inserted this: "(For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)" That is a summary statement, and it's a mild statement, compared to how strong the feelings actually were (cf. Jn. 8:48).

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It was no small thing that Philip went there. We surmised last time that he may have been one of only a few present that day, when Jesus ascended, who *realized* that it was the plan of God, and actually thought about taking the Gospel to the Samaritans.

We also theorized that perhaps one of the things that set him up for this was that he, being a Greek-speaking Jew—one of those "Hellenistic" ones—he may have had a softer spot for understanding people who did not feel accepted in the larger group, like those Greek-speaking ones in the church in Jerusalem who brought up the issue of "their widows" being sometimes "overlooked" in the daily food ministry of the church (Acts 6:1).

But for whatever reasons, Philip went there, and we are glad he did.

Today, we return to Samaria, and some new characters are going to enter the scene. Philip is still at the center, but we are also going to meet a man named Simon, whose story will teach us a very important lesson. We are also going to see a visit from Peter and John, and what they do will also bless us with a very important lesson.

And both of those lessons are going to underscore what we always say: *Doctrine matters!* What you believe *matters* a lot (cf. Matt. 15:9; Jn. 3:36; 8:32; 14:17; 16:13; 18:37; Rom. 1:25; Eph. 4:13-15; 2 Thess. 2:10-12; 1 Tim. 1:3; 4:1, 6, 16; 6:3-4; 2 Tim. 4:3; Titus 2:1, 7; 1 Jn. 2:21; 4:6; 2 Jn. 9).

It has been a long time since I've used the word "gall" in a sermon, so I came up with: "Glory And Gall In Samaria" to describe this passage. It's not an alliterated outline, but here is where we are going:

1. New Believers Rejoice (vss. 4-8)
2. A Pseudo-Christian "Believes" (vss. 9-13)
3. The Holy Spirit Comes (vss. 14-17)
4. Simon Is Exposed As A Phony (vss. 18-24)

Now I'm going to back up and overlap two verses with where we left off last week: Verses 4 and 5—"Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word." You take committed Christians, they get scattered for whatever reasons—in this case, persecution; sometimes weather, sometimes famine, sometimes family, sometimes job; whatever it is—wherever committed Christians go, they preach the Christian message; they take the Gospel with them (Matt. 28:19-20; Mk. 16:15; Lk. 24:46-47). Well, it says, "Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them."

So the central role shifts from Stephen to Philip. And remember, it's not Philip the Apostle but Philip the Deacon. The Apostles had stayed in Jerusalem, but we are told about this Philip when we get up to Acts Chapter 21, Verse 8; he is going to be referred to there as "one of the seven"—and that refers to the seven who were chosen in Chapter 6 to help with the issue of the widows ministry. And, an interesting bit of trivia: He is the first one in the New Testament to be known by the title "evangelist" (same verse). So he began by serving meals, and God raised him up to be an evangelist and make quite the impact.

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God began working through Philip in just *exactly* the same way that He had worked through Stephen, which was exactly the way that He had worked through the Apostles. God did miraculous things at the hands of Philip to go along with his proclaiming Christ to them (cf. Ex. 4:1-5; 1 Sam. 12:18; 1 Kings 17:22-24; Matt. 9:6-7; Jn. 2:11; 3:2; 5:36; 11:42-45; Acts 4:29-30; 14:3; Heb. 2:3-4).

Well, the reception was wonderful. Look at Verse 6—"The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing." What they "heard" was the Gospel. What they "saw" were the miraculous signs that confirmed the message and the messenger.

An untold story lies behind that scene. Part of the story is that even though the religious background of the Samaritans was littered with syncretism from absorbing, over years, the spiritual cross-pollination with several pagan influences brought by the people that had been imported there by the Assyrians (cf. Ex. 23:32-33), nevertheless, even though there was a mess, theologically, the foundation was still Judaism and the Law of Moses.

Jesus' interaction with that Samaritan woman at the "well" of "Jacob" (Jn. 4:6) shows that even a *very worldly* Samaritan was aware of the promise of the coming Messiah. They were a people looking forward to the Savior. That's quite *different* from the background of Gentiles.

Another likely factor could be the lingering effect of Jesus' famous visit there, and His interaction with that woman. If we go back again to John Chapter 4, Verses 25 and 26—"The woman said to Him, 'I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ)'—"Messiah" is the Hebrew version; "Christ" is the Greek version—"when that One comes, He will declare all things to us.' Jesus said to her, 'I who speak to you am He.' "

That is *profoundly* significant, that Jesus made His *first* declaration in clear words—"I am the Messiah"—He made it to a Samaritan woman *in Samaria*. That's a *big deal*! He was the Savior, *is* "the Savior of the world" (Jn. 4:42).

And that also confirms to us that Samaritans, in general, believed the Messiah would come—they were expecting Him. So if we go down further in John 4, to Verse 39—"From that city many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, 'He told me all the things that I have done.' So when the Samaritans came to Jesus, they were asking Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. Many more believed because of His word; and they were saying to the woman"—you know her reputation; apparently they couldn't resist a little tweak—"they were saying to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world.' " (vss. 39-42).

That might have been a mild putdown of her, but it is also a way of saying, "You were right! This is the Savior of the world, and He has come here!" So they asked Him to "stay," and "He stayed" with them "two days." Jesus can say *a lot* in two days. But they understood that He was the Savior.

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We are not told anything specifically in Scripture about those in Samaria from the city of "Sychar" (Jn. 4:5), where Jacob's well was. We are not told what went on between that visit and where we now find Philip coming to the city of Samaria, the capital city; but *surely* the story *must* have spread. And even though we don't have the details, we can tell from this encounter that the Holy Spirit had prepared *many* to hear and receive the Gospel; their hearts were prepared (cf. Jer. 24:7; Ezek. 36:26; Jn. 3:3, 5; Acts 16:14).

And so, when Philip starts preaching, there is a wholesale spiritual awakening. And some of the same phenomena that happened when Jesus preached also occurred when Philip preached in Samaria. We are told in Verse 7 of Acts 8—"For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed."

There was the physical healings, but also there is the phenomenon that when people are so immersed in false worship, to the point that they are inhabited by unclean spirits—which is demons, fallen angels—when those people came into the presence of Jesus, the demons often *freaked out* and manifested themselves. You can check that out for yourself in the Gospels (e.g., Lk. 4:33-34; 8:28), and we are going to be seeing it in our daily e-mails as we work through Mark; you'll see that in the early chapters of Mark, as well. The same thing happened with Philip.

But other than expelling demons, the other miracles flowed, just as by Jesus and by the Apostles and by Stephen, and now by Philip—and that all attested to the truth of the message and the validity of the messenger.

So, Verse 8—"So there was much rejoicing in that city." That's the "Glory" of the "Glory And Gall In Samaria." Stick around—we'll get to the "Gall" in a little bit.

First: New Believers Rejoice. Secondly: A Pseudo-Christian "Believes"—and we are putting "Believes" in scare quotes.

It is significant that of all the people that believed—how many was it? A lot! "Many," "crowds"—only one person's story is singled out. Well, *that* means that there is something very important about it.

So look with me at Acts 8, starting at Verse 9 through 11—"Now there was a man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great; and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, 'This man is what is called the Great Power of God.' And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts."

So this man Simon was well-known. He *wowed* people with his quasi-spiritual "magic arts." He was very high on himself—didn't mind letting people know he was "someone great," someone very important. Maybe he was self-deceived to the extent that he actually believed he had supernatural power. It is also possible that maybe he *did* have a certain measure of special power; but if he did, it came from demons (cf. 2 Thess. 2:9).

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And whatever the underlying belief in Simon's life, he basked in *astonishing* the people, "claiming to be someone great." Now, you have a bit of an ego if you don't mind people calling you "the great power of God"! Think Nebuchadnezzar. He had honed his craft for a long time; he had gotten very good at it. He had the limelight! Then came Philip and the Gospel—the Gospel about the true Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ.

And so we go back to Verse 12—"But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike." *Many* people "believed." Now, *that* is glorious!

"They were being baptized." Now, that's telling you: that's an imperfect verb—it was an ongoing thing. This wasn't just an overnight thing; this was a big deal. And they were being baptized as public declaration of their faith in Jesus Christ—that's also glorious.

But if you were the local superstar, if you were the local spiritual honcho who wowed people with your trickery and your deception, then all of these people suddenly turning to Christ—well, *that* ate into your following! So, Simon decided he needed to get in on this new demonstration of power. It all looked *really good at first*. And I wish that in our culture, people would get the point that "celebrity" conversions are *almost always* problematical—they *almost always* go bad. I thought about naming some names, but I decided not to. You know; there are a whole bunch of people. "Oh, wow! He's a *Christian* now!" And then, a couple of weeks later, he's into all sorts of weird, weird things.

Here's what happened, though. Verse 13—"Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed."

Now, "Simon himself believed." The word "believe" means: to exercise faith, to put your faith in someone. He bought into the fact that there was something very special about Jesus behind all of this power that he saw. Well, the bandwagon was headed that direction, so he, too, was "baptized." That required a public declaration of faith in Jesus.

And then, it says "he continued on with Philip"—he kept hanging around Philip. Now, that is *also* a good thing, *if—if*—it means that he wanted to learn about the Lord. If he wanted to sit at Philip's feet and say, "Tell me everything you heard from Peter and John and James. And you were around when *Jesus* was around? *Tell me* about it!" If *that* is what he meant, that's good. But as we are soon going to see, Simon was *not* a genuine follower of Christ. He wanted to be where the action was, he wanted to be in the limelight, and he wanted to find the best angle he could find to keep himself in the limelight and be back to where *he* was the one who would "astonish" people.

Now, it is crucial to understand the facts about Jesus Christ, and *believe* that they are true. That's where it starts: You have to "know" the right "truth" (Jn. 8:32; 17:8); that is the foundation of saving faith. But if it is *only* a matter of believing the *facts* about Jesus, that's not enough (cf. Lk. 6:46; 11:28; Jn. 13:17; 1 Cor. 16:22; 1 Jn. 5:3). James, the half-brother of Jesus, wrote this in James 2:19-20—"You believe that God is

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one. You do well"—it's a *good thing* to believe that! Then he says: "the demons also believe, and shudder"—because *they know* that they are going to be judged by that one true God (Matt. 8:29). Then he says: "But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?" If you don't let the facts penetrate your heart and bring you to repentance and genuine, saving, life-long trust in Jesus, *you've missed it!* It's useless (cf. Ps. 66:3; 145:18; Matt. 7:21-23; Titus 1:16; 1 Jn. 2:4; Rev. 14:12).

The fact that Simon "continued on with Philip"—that was good optics. We can see, however, at least three aspects of what he was apparently doing.

First of all: Simon wanted to stay in contact with the people who formerly followed him, but now they're following Philip. So he wanted to stick around with them. He hoped to keep his own influence alive so that when Philip left town, *he* could go back to being "the man." He was seeking attention for himself before Philip came, and apparently that did not change.

Second: Notice, it said that Simon "was constantly amazed." The power of God on display in the miracles through Philip was something Simon had never known; and to him, it was apparently kind of a professional curiosity that drove him; he wanted to know the source of Philip's power. I can watch somebody who plays golf far better than me—they're easy to find—and watch them do something: "How did you *do* that? Can you *show* me that?" That is, in essence, what Simon seemed to be doing here.

The third factor, as we are going to see in a few minutes, is that Simon ultimately wanted to acquire that power for himself. Magicians have been known to sell tricks to one another, and Simon figured that for the right price, he too could do the things that Philip was doing.

Now, before we finish Simon, we're going to put a pause on him. Here comes a crucial development in the plan of God. So don't forget Simon; we'll be back to him.

New Believers Rejoice—that's the "Glory"  
A Pseudo-Believer "Believes"  
And then: The Holy Spirit Comes

Now, this is *fascinating*. Verses 14 through 17—"Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit."

Now, understand: All this took a while. This was not a one-day-only event. This was not the Weekend Gospel Fair in the city of Samaria. It went on for however long it took for many, many people to believe and be baptized—long enough to make that huge impact, and long enough for the news to travel all the way back to Jerusalem to be heard and discussed among the Apostles, and them to send down "Peter and John."

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The news that Samaritans were included in the Kingdom—that would have been *hard to swallow* for devout Jews—even *saved* devout Jews (cf. Acts 11:2-3). "*What? You mean those half-breed outcasts with all their goofball doctrine—they are included in the Kingdom of God, just like we are?*" Tough sell. So, "they sent them Peter and John." And that accomplished at least three things by them coming to Samaria.

First, it is obvious: They came to help Philip. Remember when the Holy Spirit was first poured out, and "three thousand" people believed? All twelve of the Apostles and others pitched in when all those people were first saved in Jerusalem. So they understood what needed to be done to care for the souls of those new believers. *Every single one of them* to be baptized needed to be spoken to, personally. There is *a lot* of work to do, and there is *way too much* for one man by himself.

Secondly: Peter and John brought the blessing of the Apostles on Philip's ministry and on the Samaritans. The Apostles were the leaders of the Church (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 2:20); they were recognized by all believers in Christ (cf. Jn. 13:20; 15:20). They maintained their position, even after the church spread from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria, and then to the Gentiles (1 Thess. 4:2). As I said last time, we are going to still see much more about the "mother church" in Jerusalem, as we go through the Book of Acts.

And then the third thing that they did: They "prayed for" the Samaritans, "that *they* might receive the Holy Spirit." Now, *that* tells you that they understood that the message was the same, the response was the same, the "faith" was the same, the "baptism" was the same (Eph. 4:5; cf. Acts 15:9; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11); and so they wanted them to have the fullness of it all.

Although they had believed and they had been baptized—no Holy Spirit yet. And that raises a very good question; it's an often-asked question, so we need to pause here for a moment. This is one of a few passages—as a matter of fact, we are going to see three in the Book of Acts—where some people professed faith in Christ and had not, at that point, received the Holy Spirit. So some professing Christians use this passage, and the other two, to prove that Christians receive the Holy Spirit as a second blessing that comes after salvation. And some add to that: "And you haven't received the Holy Spirit until you have 'spoken in tongues.'" They claim that this group of people who were saved, and yet did not have the Holy Spirit—that's normal. Now, the part is true: They were saved. They did not have the Holy Spirit; that's true. But what is *not* true is saying that that is *normal*.

My dad was a bit of a character in a lot of ways. I wish he had walked with the Lord; he didn't. But he had a little plaque affixed to his toolbox at work, at Lockheed. I saw it several times. The plaque simple read: "One of the great tragedies of life is the murder of a beautiful theory by a gang of brutal facts." Well, it applies here. The theory is that you receive Christ, and *then* sometime later you receive the Holy Spirit *well after* you put your faith in Christ.

Well, here are the "brutal facts" that you need to recognize:

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Number 1: This passage is not a command, and it is not a statement of what happens all the time. So, Fact #1 is: The Book of Acts is *transitional*. Now, it is accurate—accurate history. This records how it happened in the first 30-plus years after Jesus ascended. But the events of the Book of Acts are *not* "normative."

Let me see if I can illustrate. It might have just been the fog of getting up too early, but I thought of this this morning as I was doing my final run-through and prayer time for this:

I was thinking in light of, well, Independence Day is coming up; we think about our country. Just in the last couple of days, we have had some very significant decisions handed down by the Supreme Court, and they are operating within our Constitution. We are a constitutional republic; not a pure democracy, we are a constitutional republic—and that Constitution is a *great big deal*, and we live under the wonderful blessings and fruits of the Constitution being in effect. And on Tuesday of this week, we are going to celebrate Independence Day because it says in the Declaration of Independence: "In Congress, July 4th, 1776"—so we celebrate July 4th. Well, never mind that it was actually signed early in August, but you know, things did not happen quite as fast in those days; they didn't have electronic "Docu-Sign"; they actually had to be there and use pens and all of that stuff.

So, the beginning is 1776, but you know what? They did not live in a constitutional republic in 1776, or 1777. The Constitution wasn't *written* until 1787; it was adopted in 1788; it went into effect in 1789. So if there was a book of the "Acts of the Founding Fathers," it would cover that *transitional time* before the normal that has now been in effect for 234 years. We live under the Constitution, *but they didn't*—but that was where they were headed.

Well, the same thing is going on in the Book of Acts. There is a new normal thing now, *but* they did not have it all yet; there was more revelation to be given. This was the transition.

Here is Brutal Fact #2: The transition is over. The teaching that says you can be saved and *not* have the Holy Spirit *flies in the face of* definitive, crystal-clear texts of the New Testament! Let me give you the two most famous ones, the two best-known ones:

Romans Chapter 8, Verse 9—"However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit..." "In the flesh" in Romans 8 means unsaved; "in the Spirit" means saved. "You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him." So, what do you call a person who does not have the Holy Spirit? An unsaved person, a non-Christian (cf. Jude 19).

Then there is First Corinthians 12:13—"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks"—you could add "Samaritans" in there—"whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." (cf. Gal. 4:6; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:13-14) *That* is normal *now*. What happened in Acts 8 was *extremely important* and *very significant*—but it is not the eternal normal (cf. Jn. 14:17).



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Here is Brutal Fact #3—and I'm going to break this into two parts; here is 3a: It was *very* important for the Jewish Apostles to witness and confirm the fact that the coming of the Holy Spirit was the same in Samaria as it was in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 2:4; 10:45-46). Jews and Samaritans had, for *so long*, been *bitter enemies*. If the Samaritans had received the Holy Spirit independent of the Jerusalem Church, it would have been *very* easy for that rift to have just perpetuated through the centuries. There could well have been two separate churches—a Jewish church and a Samaritan church—but that was not God's design (cf. Jn. 10:16; Eph. 2:15).

Another statement of normal, speaking about being "in Christ": Galatians 3:28—"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (cf. Col. 3:11) It was *very important* for the Apostles to *see for themselves*, and be able to go back home and give firsthand testimony to the whole Jerusalem church that the Spirit came on the Samaritans just as He had come upon them (cf. Acts 11:17).

Brutal Fact #3b: It was vital for the *Samaritans* to learn that *they* were connected to something that had to do with the leadership of the Apostles. The common message of the Gospel, the common miraculous phenomena at the coming of the Holy Spirit, the common indwelling of the Holy Spirit, made sure that the Samaritans and the Jewish believers knew they were linked together in *one new spiritual entity*—the "body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12; cf. Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12, 27; Col. 1:24; 3:15).

And then there's Brutal Fact #4: Once the Jews, the Samaritans, and the first Gentile believers were all confirmed in one body, *there was no need* for any delay in the coming of the Holy Spirit. Ever since the days of the ministry of the Apostle Paul—we are going to get him saved in one more chapter—it was through his ministry and his writings that were given to him by the Holy Spirit: the final touches of the whole Doctrine of Pneumatology (The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit), the Doctrine of Ecclesiology (The Doctrine of the Church)—that was all finalized later, so there is no delay since then.

You receive the Holy Spirit the moment you put your faith in Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:13-14). So, don't take what happened in a *transitional* time and turn it into the statement of normal for all time. People say they want to go back to the "early church." Really? You don't *want* to have a church building? You don't *like* being able to sit here in air-conditioned comfort? You really want to have to meet in a temple that is under the control of people that want to kill you? You really want to believe that if somebody tells a fib in front of the church, they're going to be struck dead? *Really? That* is what you want? *That really happened!* But that was *transitional*; and now, we have the long-lasting normal.

So, "Glory And Gall In Samaria."

Number 1: The "Glory" is, New Believers Rejoice

Number 2: A Pseudo-Christian "Believes"

Number 3: The Holy Spirit Comes

And now, the "Gall": Simon Is Exposed As A Phony

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We don't use the word "gall" much anymore. If you spell it G-a-u -l, it's an old name for what is now France—or part of France, anyway. G-a-l-l—its literal meaning is: the contents of the "gall bladder," also known as "bile." That is the fluid secreted by your liver; it is stored in your gall bladder, and it is used in the process of digesting your food. *It's gross!* In First Corinthians where it talks about the "unseemly parts" of the body (12:23, AMPC [Amplified Bible, Classic Edition])—this is it: the parts that are covered up, and it is *good* that they are covert up, and you want to keep them covered up; and you just want them to work right, and not call attention to themselves. You never see somebody and say, "Oh, man, *look* at that gall bladder! Woo!"

The *metaphorical* meaning, the proverbial meaning of the word "bile" or "gall" is based on the *bitterness* of that stuff (e.g., Ps. 69:21). So the word is used in a metaphorical way for bold, impudent behavior. It's perfect, and Peter used it in this passage; that's why I did. The contrast is between the glory of the salvation of many who believed, and the tragic example of Simon the Phony. His gall is going to unmask his true spiritual state.

We already saw that Simon was full of himself, and he was just fine with that. And it didn't bother him if somebody thought he was "the great power of God." If his repentance, if his faith in Christ was genuine, he would repudiated that, he would have rejected that kind of talk (e.g., Ps. 115:1).

But you know, we have this tendency to get so excited. We say, "Well, I've talked to this person. Oh, *he would make a great Christian!*" No. Only God makes great Christians. This whole idea of "celebrity conversions" is always, as I said, problematical.

Look at Verses 18 and 19—"Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands"—here comes the first hint—"he offered them money, saying, 'Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.' "

You see, Simon treated Peter and John as if they were fellow magicians, driven by a desire for stardom and money and power. He presumed that they, and the power of the Holy Spirit, were *for sale*—because *he* was. He wanted power, he wanted fame, he wanted wealth.

Well, shy, retiring Peter speaks just the same in Samaria as he does in Jerusalem. He didn't mince any words. Look at Verse 20—"But Peter said to him, 'May your silver perish with you'—by the way, that means: you are perishing—"because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!" That is blasphemous false doctrine. "You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity.'" (vss. 20-23)

God's blessings are not for sale! Salvation is His "free gift." The "wages"—what God owes you—"the wages of" your "sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

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And by the way, don't go thinking that Simon was just a little misguided. He *wasn't* "right before God," he had "*no* part or portion in this" salvation; he was on his way to perishing.

"Gall of bitterness" is *really* vivid language. It is the Greek word for bile—"gall"—tied with the Greek word for "bitterness," and it describes a bitter, harsh, distasteful, disgusting condition. Simon was a wicked man. Peter calls him [someone] "in the bondage of iniquity." He was trapped in his own "sin" (Jn. 8:34). He was "bitter" that he did not have the power that he wanted, and his fan base was crumbling; and that just tied him in knots. Proverbs 5:22 says: "His own iniquities will capture the wicked, and he will be held with the cords of his sin." That was Simon.

Well, his response was cynical, and his response was sarcastic. Verse 24—"But Simon answered and said, 'Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.'" (cf. Num. 23:10b)

Now, he might have been a little bit shaken. He certainly *had* to be embarrassed to have Peter talk to him like that in front of everybody. I assume it was in front of everybody. But Simon refused to ask the Lord for forgiveness. His only concern was: "I hope you are wrong about all that bad stuff happening to me." His concern was avoiding the earthly consequences of his sin.

Now go back to the theme: Doctrine *matters*. Simon had wrong doctrine.

He had a wrong view of himself: "I'm good! I'm important! Why, I can *wow* people! They can be 'astonished' at what I do!" That's not the right place to *be*.

He had a wrong view of salvation: He had the idea that the "gifts of God" could be *bought*! "Pay off the right people, you get the blessings." Have you ever heard of "indulgences"? Ouch! Have you ever heard of "Seed Faith"? Ouch! (cf. Is. 44:20)

He had the wrong view of the Holy Spirit: "The Holy Spirit is a toy that I need to learn to work with and show off my power!"

He had a wrong view of sin: He had *no concept* of it applying to *him*! There was no repentance. There was arrogance, instead (cf. Prov. 28:13).

It is just like Jesus taught in several of His parables, like the first one of all of them: The Sower and the Four Kinds of Soils, where there are many people who hear the Gospel, and they have what looks like they have a very favorable first initial reaction, but it proves not to be genuine faith—there is no fruit; they "fall away" (Mk. 4:17); they are taken away and "burned" up, as in the parable [of the Tares] (Matt. 13:40; cf. Jn. 15:2, 6). That initial declaration of faith proves to be nothing more than an emotional response, and *not* saving faith (cf. Lk. 8:15; Heb. 3:14; 1 Jn. 2:19; Rev. 14:12; 17:14b).

Now, if you care to see parallels to "celebrity conversions," you would be right on. If you see parallels to the "Word Faith" preachers, you would be right on. If you want to see parallels to the "New Apostolic Reformation" preachers, you would be right on. If you

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want to see parallels to all of the "Prosperity Gospel" preachers, *go right ahead!* The "Prosperity Gospel" works just right *for the preachers* who preach the phony gospel, and *they* get the prosperity! (cf. 1 Tim. 6:5; Jude11) You would be correct to say all of those things fit. Simon is a *tragic* example, and his own "gall" revealed his true spiritual condition.

Oh, may there be *no* "Simons" among us! May there be only the humble, only the penitent, only the ones who trust in Christ and Christ alone (Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12; Eph. 2:8-9; Phil. 3:3, 9), who say, "Be merciful to me, the sinner" (Lk. 18:13).

If you have come to that point today of realizing that you have a sin problem that has alienated you from God (Is. 59:2; Ezek. 18:4), oh, do I have good news for you! The same Gospel Philip preached, that Stephen preached, that the Apostles preached, that Jesus preached: "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures...He was buried...He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:2-3), and everyone who turns to Him "will never perish" (Jn. 10:28), "but have eternal life" (Jn. 3:16).

Let's be part of what brings God glory, shall we?

And let's pray:

*Our Father, again, thank You for the riches that are ours in Christ. And Father, we grieve over the condition of a man like Simon. I would love to hear that that's not the end of the story, but we know You have included this in Your Word for our edification, and we pray that we will learn what we should from it. May we always be faithful with the message. May we always be faithful to invite others to come in repentance to this wonderful Savior in whom we stand. Father, please, create opportunities among us for the Gospel to be spoken in truth and in love, and please bring people to Yourself—whether it be in our own homes, in our own version of Judea in the city and the county and the places around us, or even in "the remotest parts of the Earth" through missionaries we support, or through places that You would take us: May the Gospel go with us, and Your power be evident to save souls, like You have saved ours. Thank You! And we pray that You will give us the wisdom to see, with the eyes of faith, Your hand upon our lives, and then use us for Your glory, in Jesus' name. Amen.*