

27. The Lord Showed the Destructive Power of Bitterness

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn why four different groups received the Holy Spirit as a group. We also saw that as Philip preached in Samaria a sorcerer by the name of Simon was amazed as he saw genuine miracles happen as a part of the ministry of Philip. We even read that Simon believed and was baptized. However, in this topic, we are going to need to ask ourselves if the belief of Simon the sorcerer was genuine belief or just sorrow because genuine miracles exposed the fact that his sorcery was not from God.

In our last topic, we saw that the Holy Spirit came on the Samaritan believers as a group when Peter and John laid their hands on the believers. Acts 8:18-19 says, “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.’” Simon immediately saw that something had happened in the lives of those who had placed their faith in Christ when the apostles laid their hands on these new believers. We mentioned in the last topic that it was probable that these Samaritan believers also spoke in tongues just as each of the other groups did when they first received the Holy Spirit.

Simon was quick to see that something had happened when the apostles laid their hands on this initial group of Samaritan believers. For many years, Simon had made much money through his practice of sorcery among the Samaritans of that city. Those who practice sorcery are always looking for new ways to make money. Suddenly, he saw his opportunity to continue to make money by laying his hands on people and charging them money when they wanted to receive the Holy Spirit. As a result, Simon immediately offered money to Peter and John to try to buy this same power. In some cultures, some people buy demonic power with money. In other cultures, they may kill a close relative to gain demonic power.

As one who had practiced sorcery for many years, Simon knew that demonic power had to be purchased by paying some price. We meet another sorcerer in Acts 13:6-12. That sorcerer tried to resist Paul in order to maintain his power. Acts 13:8-10 says, “But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. Then Saul, who also is *called* Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, ‘O full of all deceit and all fraud, *you* son of the devil, *you* enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?’” Paul described this sorcerer as a person full of all deceit and all fraud who was actually a son of the devil. Simon wanted to buy spiritual power. The question we need to ask is, “Was he seeking to buy godly power or was he hoping to get demonic power?” You can determine the answer to that question as we look at the following verses.

Acts 8:20-22 goes on to say, “But Peter said to him, ‘Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.’” Here, we see that Peter made it very clear that the Holy Spirit is given to all Christians as the gift of God. That is why Romans 8:9 says, “But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells

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in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.” Once the Holy Spirit was given to each of the four groups mentioned in Acts, every Christian since then has received the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation. Here, it says that if we do not have the Spirit of Christ, we are not yet Christians.

As a result, Peter told Simon that his money would perish with him. The word translated “perish” is usually translated “destruction” or “perdition.” 1 Timothy 6:9-10 says, “But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” In this case, we see that the love of money can drown people in destruction and perdition. Philippians 3:18-19 says, “For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god *is their* belly, and *whose* glory is in their shame--who set their mind on earthly things.” Here, we see that those who have their mind on earthly things are facing eternal destruction.

As a result, we see that Peter made it very clear that the heart of Simon was not right in the sight of God. The word translated “right” is usually translated “straight.” John the Baptist used this word when he quoted Isaiah in Luke 3:4 which says, “As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.”’” Peter used the word in 2 Peter 2:15-16, where it is translated “right”. Those verses say, “They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet.” The context of these verses shows that the way of Christ is straight or right and the way of Satan is the way of unrighteousness used by people who have set their minds on earthly things.

This led Peter to tell Simon, “Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.” Peter called the fact that Simon tried to purchase the ability to give the gift of the Holy Spirit as wickedness that must be repented of. The word translated “wickedness” is usually translated “maliciousness” or “malice”. Titus 3:3 says, “For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.” Here, we see that before we became Christians, we were living in malice. Peter told Simon to repent and pray that God would forgive him the thought of his heart.

Acts 8:23-25 then says, “‘For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.’ Then Simon answered and said, ‘Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me.’ So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.” The word translated “bitterness” means *extreme wickedness* and is only used four times in the New Testament. In Romans 3:14, it is used in the passage that shows that all have sinned and stand guilty before God. In Ephesians 4:31, it is given in a list of sins that are to be replaced by kindness and a tender heart that causes us to forgive. Then, Hebrews 12:14-15 says, “Pursue peace with all

people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.” Peter made it clear that Simon was bound by his sin.

Peter had just told Simon that his money would perish with him. He had been told his heart was not right with God. He had been told to repent of his extreme wickedness. Peter said he was poisoned by bitterness and bound by his iniquity (unrighteousness). Instead of repenting and turning from his wickedness, we see that he chose to ask Peter to pray that none of the judgment Peter had just described would come upon him.

Since Acts 8:13 says that Simon had believed and been baptized, that leads to a very important question, “Was this a true repentance and belief or not?” James 2:19 says, “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe--and tremble!” In contrast, 2 Corinthians 7:9-10 says, “Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance *leading* to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.” Here, we see that each person faces a choice. Godly repentance leads to salvation. This is true sorrow for sin that leads to faith in Christ. Worldly repentance leads to death. This is sorrow that a person got caught in their sin, which never leads to true repentance. Did Simon have a true faith or a false faith in verse 13? That is a key question that we want our children to know how to explain to others.

We see that for some time after this meeting with Simon, Peter and John continued to preach the Word of God in Samaria. However, they were confident that Philip would remain and help those who had followed Christ until the new believers were mature enough to continue their own spiritual growth. In fact, Peter closed his second letter, in 2 Peter 3:18, by saying, “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him *be* the glory both now and forever. Amen.” Peter and John were confident that Philip would help these new believers grow both in grace and in the knowledge of Christ. On their way back to Jerusalem, Peter and John preached the Gospel or good news or salvation in each of the Samaritan villages through which they traveled. They wanted every Samaritan to hear how to have forgiveness of sin through Christ.

We also want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to share this same good news with the people that they know and meet. In order to help them learn how to explain the Gospel clearly, we need to take them with us and show them how we explain the Gospel to others. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to share the Gospel with others.