"PHONY FAITH"

("A Belief That Does Not Save")
ACTS 8:4-25
5-31-2026

*** Lets examine the genuineness of our faith**

Is it real? What is a phony faith?

It is a faith based on four wrong doctrinal (theological) views:

Simon had a wrong view of self (anthropology), salvation (soteriology), Spirit (pneumatology), and sin (harmartiology).

I. SIMON HAD A WRONG VIEW OF <u>SELF</u> (V. 9-11)

II. SIMON HAD A WRONG VIEW OF <u>SALVATION</u> (V. 12-13)

III. SIMON HAD A WRONG VIEW OF THE <u>SPIRIT</u> (V. 14-21)

IV. SIMON HAD A WRONG VIEW OF <u>SIN</u> (V. 22-24)

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INTRODUCTION:

V. 4

God used persecution (death of Stephen, etc.) to cause the church to spread.

He didn't want a Jewish church.

Jesus wanted all nations discipled (Mt. 28:19), the Gospel preached to every creature (Mk. 16:15). He wanted them to be witnesses "both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

V. 5

Wherever the message is preached, there are always those who get saved and those who do not. The real and unreal. The wheat and tares, sheep and goats, rocky soil and good soil, good branches and those that don't abide.

Sometimes the unreal can look very much like the real. EX: counterfeit, phony money.

Satan tried to slip a counterfeit into the Samaritan church. Simon looked good externally (see v. 13). He had Philip fooled. Philip was convinced that Simon was saved, so he baptized him.

There are 3 things about one who is saved: 1) he believes 2) he obeys & 3) he continues. and Simon had all three! He "believed", was baptized in obedience, and continued.

Simon looked good (like Judas). From all outward appearances he seemed real. V. 13 - he was always hanging around with the preacher (Philip), and was an attentive observer.

*** Lets examine the genuineness of our faith**

Is it real? What is a phony faith?

It is a faith based on four wrong doctrinal (theological) views:

Simon had a wrong view of self (anthropology), salvation (soteriology), Spirit (pneumatology), and sin (harmartiology).

[The points of this outline are taken from the tape: “Faith that does not save” by John MacArthur; Grace Community Church, Calif.]

I. SIMON HAD A WRONG VIEW OF SELF (V. 9-11)

Man's basic problem is pride.

He thinks he is something he is not.

They think man is good. They say: "God wouldn't pass me by! I give to charity, say the rosary, only drink occasionally, send my kids to church, provide for my family. I even believe in God and Jesus." (Who is Jesus?"

V. 9

Simon made others think he was some "great one." He wanted glory. He sought it.

It's amazing how the world seeks glory, and attention. Simon wanted to be known!

He wanted to be recognized for his power!

People (in pride) want others to see: 1) their looks; 2) their bank account; 3) their car 4) their family 5) their profession 6) their skills 7) their intelligence 8) their achievements

In pride we live so that others will recognize us, and often we don't even realize it. It often wears a mask and hides itself. It may go unnoticed to the conscious mind. Not everyone brags about their greatness like Simon.

Pride grows in every one of our gardens. Are you aware of your prideful (egotistical) tendencies?

The way he received his claim to fame was by his sorcery.

"Used sorcery" = practiced magic. Simon was skilled in astronomy, astrology, charms, horoscopes, hoaxes, etc.

"Bewitched" = astonished, amazed, caused them to be "beside themselves."

V. 10

Simon practiced "white magic."

He wanted credit for having the power of God. Like in the Tribulation (anti=christ and false prophet - Rev. 13:12-14), Simon's power was demonic. His miracles no doubt were real. He called demons into action and exercised power under the guise of godliness.

Gal. 6:3 - "For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself."

James - "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble."

Turn to Luke 18:9 - Pharisee and Publican

For a man to come to God in true faith, he must first of all see himself as he is.

As long as you insist that you are some "great one", you will never be saved. You must rid yourself of pride. When you are broken over <u>your</u> pride, <u>your</u> selfishness, <u>your</u> sin, <u>your</u> need for forgiveness, then you are coming to God in true faith.

II. SIMON HAD A WRONG VIEW OF <u>SALVATION</u> (V. 12-13)

v. 13

"Simon himself believed" = What was the basis of his "faith"?

Not the Word of God, but the miracles he saw. His faith was like those who saw Christ's miracles (Jn. 2:23-25).

Simon was losing his followers (v. 6-7; 12). He figured, "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em."

So he made a profession of faith. He "believed." Gave intellectual ascent to the facts Philip preached. Not with "all his heart" like the eunich (8:37).

The bible teaches about a "dead faith." - a faith (belief) not unto salvation.

The devils believe and tremble (Ja. 2:1a).

True belief looks at salvation as something <u>real</u>. It's a work of God that changes your life. Simon didn't take salvation seriously. He was more interested in the seeming benefits of salvation than salvation itself.

He didn't see salvation as a total transformation of his life.

What were your motives in coming to God for salvation?

Some make a profession of faith for the following wrong reasons:

1) to please someone (ex. girlfriend)
2) to get someone off your back (ex. pressure from a soulwinner)
3) to see what you can get out of it. This amounts to <u>using God</u>, making His salvation like pagan magic.

Some use God for the following <u>selfish</u> reasons:

--fortune (financial gain) (thinking that "gain is godliness")

--fame (use Christianity to make a name for themselves)

--power (ILLUS: Ron Stravel - a Satanic cult leader we met in 1984, who wanted to be baptized, sot hat he might link up with God so that he would have power over Satan and demons)

Simon looked at salvation as a new bag of tricks. A new commodity to add to his "greatness." ILLUS: of the man who testified, "It's so wonderful to now have Jesus Christ, as well as the prophet Muhammed for my salvation."

Why is it evident that Simon was not saved?

1. No change in his life - self-centered before profession and self-centered after (v. 19)

2. His salvation experience was prompted by a longing to have miracle-working power, rather than Christ or eternal life.

3. He doesn't seem to have received the Spirit when the rest of the Samaritans did. He "saw" (v. 18). He seems like an outsider observing what is going on with everyone else.

4. The rebuke of Peter (v. 21-23)

5. His shallow repentance (v. 24)

v. 13

Simon is living proof that <u>baptism</u> does not save.

"Continued" = to attend constantly; to adhere to, or attach to.

Why did Simon continue with Philip?
1. He wanted to maintain a following
2. He wanted people to associate Philip's power with himself.
3.He wanted to figure out a way to attain this gift that Philip had

v. 14

"Sent" = - to send as an official authoritative representative.

III. SIMON HAD A WRONG VIEW OF THE <u>SPIRIT</u> (V. 14-21)

Samaritans - part of the northern kingdom conquered by Assyria. They inter-married and did not remain "pure Jews". So they were despised.

For 500 years, the Samaritans and Jews were rivals. Each had their own worship center - Gerizim and Jerusalem (Jn. 4).

Jews viewed the half-breed Samaritans as "dogs," as inferior (themselves superior).

Now, with the church being almost exclusively Jewish God did not want disunity among believers. Jesus prayed that they be one (Jn. 17).

God delayed the Spirit to teach Peter and John that He was accepting Samaritans just like He did the Jews (cp. acts 10:44-47). And God delayed the Spirit to teach the Samaritans that they were one with the Jewish saints.

Why the delay? It's not -
--because they were not yet saved
--some special power only had by the apostles
--a "second blessing" they had to wait for

Never build a doctrine on an isolated passage of Scripture.

Remember the book of Acts covers a time of transition. Things happen in acts that are not necessarily the norm.

v. 16

This parenthesis shows that the delay of the Spirit was out of the ordinary. Normally the Spirit was given at the moment of belief (EX 10:44; 19:2; Eph. 1:13).

All Christians have the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9; I Cor. 6:19 [body=temple]; I Cor. 12:13 ["all baptized"]).

Peter was given the keys of the kingdom (mt. 16). Peter opened the door to the Jews in Acts 2; Samaritans in Acts 8; and Gentiles in Acts 10.

V. 19

Simon was no so much interested that he himself had the Spirit, as much as he wanted the power to bestow it on other people.

God never gives gifts to magnify self. And God never gives you ability to magnify self.

Simon's motives were wicked!

Simon thought he could buy the gift of God.

v. 20

Some things in life can't be bought nor sold. There are some things money can't buy. The best things in life are free.

EX: The word "simony" means "the buying and selling of church offices or privileges."

"Thy money perish with thee" = Peter is saying "May you and your money go into hell!"

Nothing God has is for sale! Why? Because you don't have anything He wants. Nothing we could give God would be good enough to earn anything from Him.

EX: Namaan the leper tried to buy a cleansing off of Elisha (II Ki. 5).

You can't buy God's miracles! You can't buy God's salvation, gifts. You can't buy God's grace.

You can't earn your way into Heaven. It's free! All that we have is in Christ! (Eph. 1:3ff).

So to try to make a deal with God is to try to avoid going through Christ.

v. 21

God wants your <u>heart</u>! A sincere heart!

Simon was playing the part of a Christian to secretly find out how he might gain access to more power to add to his repertoire.

IV. SIMON HAD A WRONG VIEW OF <u>SIN</u> (V. 22-24)

v. 22

"Thought" = intent, plot. Peter is saying that Simon had an evil or wicked scheme (strategy) up his sleeve.

Peter commands Simon to 1) repent and 2) pray (v. 22)

Does he? NO! He evades the issue of his sin, and is concerned only about escaping punishment. So he asks Peter to pray for him (v. 24).

If you want forgiveness, you must pray yourself!

God can't forgive you by having someone else pray for you. No one can get you into heaven, no one can keep you out of hell. We all individually give account to God.

v. 23

"Bond of iniquity" - chains of unrighteousness. Sin always shackles! It promises freedom, but produces slavery. Simon was bound up, tied up, in rotten, bitter sin.

Proverbs - "The sinner shall be holden with the cords of sin."

The account of Simon ends abruptly in v. 24. We leave him without ever finding out if he truly got saved afterwards.

Justen Martyr, a native himself of Samaria, said that Simon later moved to Rom where he continued his sorcery (Marshall, p. 155).

We leave a man who was sorrowful and scared, but unsaved.

What about your faith? Is your faith a faith that saves?

CONCLUSION:

Do you want to know for sure that your faith is real?

1) Is your view of self what it should be? Do you see yourself as a helpless, lost sinner without Christ?

2) Is your view of salvation right? Did you come to Christ because you needed forgiveness of sin and eternal life; or did you come to Him to get something else?

3) What about your view of the Spirit (and ever gift of God for that matter)? Do you think you can earn it?

4) What is your view of sin? Have you (personally) repented of it?

Today salvation can be yours! But you must come with humility and sincerity; if you accept it freely and personally.