

“THAT OLD TIME RELIGION”

“A Counterfeit Christian”

Scripture Reading – Acts, 8:9-24

Now for some time a man named Simon had practised sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, “This man is the divine power known as the Great Power”. They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic. But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised, both men and women. Simon himself believed and was baptised. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptised into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money and said, “Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit”.

Peter answered: “May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin”. Then Simon answered, “Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me”.

‘Jesus said, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”.’

Matthew, 7:21-23, NIV

This series, based on THE BOOK OF ACTS, is entitled ‘THAT OLD TIME RELIGION’.

The reason I want to call this series ‘THAT OLD TIME RELIGION’ is that we need to look back in order that we might really look to the future. The OLD TIME RELIGION needs to become the NEW TIME RELIGION because it is the ALL TIME RELIGION. If we get back to the basics of life in the Christian Church, we might better understand what the Holy Spirit can do through us today.

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The New Testament\Acts\That Old Time Religion\13 A Counterfeit Christian

THE BOOK OF ACTS is the story of success; the story of a church triumphant.

It is the story of a small group of uncultured and generally unlearned people with meagre resources – very little money, no prestige, and no church buildings. This small group of people went out to tell the story of a publicly executed Jew. They went out against three obstacles – the imperial might of the Romans, the intellectual sophistication of the Greeks, and the religious bigotry of the Jews. They turned the world inside out and upside down for Jesus Christ.

The Acts of the Apostles is the story of a church on fire with evangelism and growth...

“A COUNTERFEIT CHRISTIAN”

The finest counterfeit banknotes in circulation today are produced in North Korea.

These counterfeit notes are copies of US dollar bills and because of their very high quality, they are called ‘SUPER DOLLARS’. The notes are produced using only the highest quality ink and paper. Even the security features of real notes are copied – namely, red and blue security fibres, a security thread, and watermark.

Currency experts have to study the notes for a long time before they can be correctly identified as forgeries. These forgeries are used to finance the North Korean Government and have proved to be a reliable source of income for the corrupt regime. The US Government, themselves, view these notes as ‘HIGHLY DECEPTIVE’.

It seems as though wherever there is money and wealth to be earned there will be those who engage in honest labour and those who prefer to take the route of dishonest counterfeiters.

Wherever and whenever God is at work planting saving faith (a genuine response to the Gospel), Satan is hard at work planting a highly deceptive false faith in others.

It is a basic principle in Scripture that wherever God sows his true believers, Satan will eventually sow his counterfeits. This was true of the ministry of John the Baptist and Jesus, and it would be true of Paul's ministry later. The enemy comes as a lion to devour, and when that approach fails, he comes as a serpent to deceive. Satan's tool in this case was a sorcerer named Simon.

Every counterfeit Christian is a testimony to the worth and the validity of the real.

People counterfeit money, credit cards, and passports but they do not counterfeit chewing gum wrappers. Why is that? Because chewing gum wrappers have no real value.

I want us to consider four things about ‘A COUNTERFEIT CHRISTIAN’.

I trust that it will be interesting, but whether it is or it is not, it is vital. If any generation needed to be warned against the false religion of the counterfeit it is this generation. We are living in the last days. These are days when religion will be on the increase. The problem is that much of this religion is of the devil. Whilst it has a form of godliness, it denies God's power to save. Many people need to turn away from religion and turn to Jesus Christ.

What are the four dangers of ‘A COUNTERFEIT CHRISTIAN’?

1. THE POWER OF A COUNTERFEIT CHRISTIAN

'Now for some time a man named Simon had practised sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, "This man is the divine power known as the Great Power". They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic.'

Acts, 8:9-11, NIV

The word translated 'AMAZED' means 'ASTOUNDED, CONFOUNDED, BEWITCHED'.

The people were amazed at the things Simon did. He was so much more than a magician with a cheap bag of tricks. He was not merely performing slight of hand illusions of magic. The Bible makes it plain that Simon was a sorcerer who practiced witchcraft. His devilish, unholy, supernatural power was so great that everybody believed that his power was from God.

Simon's power came not from God, but from Satan.

'The lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendour of his coming. The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.'


II Thessalonians, 2:8-10, NIV

Simon the magician worked miracles by unholy, devilish power.

The devil's duty and delight is to deceive people in order to keep them out of heaven.

Suppose you were deceived by one of the devil's miracles?

Imagine that you are standing before the Judgement Seat of Christ and God asks you why he should allow you into heaven....


 *Suppose you answered, "There was a time when I was seeking you and really wanted to know the truth. Then one day, there was a time when you sent an angel to visit me and assure me that I had a place in heaven. This angel was glorious, magnificent, shining and holy. He was an angel of your light". Suppose at that moment, the devil appeared on the scene and said, "You poor, deluded fool. That was no angel. That was me. I was the one who spoke to you".*

Are you certain the devil cannot do that to you?

'Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.'

II Corinthians, 11:14, NIV

If an angel came right now and told you that you were saved, how would you know it was not the devil in disguise? He can masquerade himself as an angel of light.

 *Suppose you answered, "Lord, remember when I was praying and I asked you to send me a sign. I looked up and saw the heaven's roll back and a glorious fire came down from*

heaven. What a glorious sight that was. I knew instantly that it was an answer to prayer". Suppose at that moment, the devil appeared on the scene and said, "You poor, deluded fool. That was no answer to prayer. That was me. I was the one who did that".

Are you certain the devil cannot do that to you?

'And the beast performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth.'

Revelation, 13:13-14a, NIV

If you cannot be certain that you are saved when an angel tells you so, or you cannot be certain that you are saved when you witness miracles and signs as seeming answers to prayer, how can we know that we are saved...

'I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.'

I John, 5:13, NIV

The only way to be certain is to stand firmly upon the Word of God.

There will come a time when the devil himself is going to perform such great miracles upon this earth that he will make you think white is black and black is white; up is down and down is up. He is such a deceiver that you will do horrible deeds believing that you are doing God a service. There will come a demonstration of such great power and miracles that many will be deluded that this power must be from God. You don't think you'll be fooled? The people of Samaria were completely fooled by the source of Simon's power!

Here is something to consider when it comes to Satan's power.

Basic economics tells us that supply is regulated by demand. Why is it that four out of five restaurants in a city serve fast food, but try as you might you cannot get close to one at lunchtime? It is simply because there is a high demand for 'the heart attack on a bun'.

The only reason Simon could have such a large following in Samaria was because of the dreadful spiritual state there. There was a famine in the land, not for food, but of the Word of the Lord. They needed a sweeping revival to reveal Satan's power – do you not think we need a sweeping revival to reveal Satan's power today?

2. THE PRIDE OF A COUNTERFEIT CHRISTIAN

'Now for some time a man named Simon had practised sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, "This man is the divine power known as the Great Power".'

Acts, 8:9-10, NIV

Simon was not God-centred, he was self-centred.

Everything that was happening in Samaria was fuelling his need to experience and enjoy the attention of all the people. He was enflamed with so much pride that he even began to boast that he was someone great. The hallmark of every Counterfeit Christian is pride.

The hallmark of any Satanic and false worship is pride.

‘How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, “I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High”.

Isaiah, 14:12-14, NIV

This is the origin, the genesis, of the devil.

The devil said, “I WILL... I WILL... I WILL... I WILL... I WILL...”. On five occasions, we read Satan declaring, “I WILL”. The devil is completely self-centred and full of pride. Notice how Satan said exactly the opposite to what the Son of God said. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus said, “NOT MY WILL, BUT YOURS BE DONE”. In heaven, Satan said, “NOT YOUR WILL, BUT MINE BE DONE”.

Satan’s own temptation was that he wanted to be like God.

When we read of him in the Garden of Eden, Satan tempted Eve with the temptation that caused him all the problem in the first instant – “YOU SHALL BE LIKE GOD”. Because he himself fell to his pride, he believed that mankind would fall into the same trap of pride – and he was right! The first temptation faced by mankind was a religious temptation. The serpent presented Eve with a temptation not to fall down, but to fall up! The truth was much, much different.

‘If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing.

1 Timothy, 6:3-4a, NIV

He is conceited – and he is proud.

It was pride that made the devil the devil and we have a generation of people today who are religious, but their religion rather than being God-centred is self-centred. There are many people sitting in churches who have never repented of their sin and been broken in the dust at the feet of the Lord Jesus. Many people are religious – but they have never dethroned their self and enthroned Jesus in their hearts.

Luke has before contrasted two different kinds of believers.

He contrasted the difference between Barnabas and Ananias & Sapphira. Barnabas was a GENUINE CHRISTIAN who lived out his faith from within his heart. He was passionate about his Saviour and was sincere in his service. Ananias and Sapphira were COUNTERFEIT CHRISTIANS who had an outward appearance of faithful and good Christians, but this was merely an illusion as their hearts were evil and far from God – yet Ananias and Sapphira were members of the Church. Remember the root of Ananias and Sapphira’s sin was pride!

3. THE PRETENCE OF A COUNTERFEIT CHRISTIAN

‘They followed Simon because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic. But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised, both men and women. Simon himself believed and was baptised. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.’

Acts, 8:11-13, NIV

What does it mean that ‘SIMON HIMSELF BELIEVED’?

We can best answer that question by asking another one: What was the basis of his faith? His faith was not in the Word of God, but in the miracles he saw Philip perform; and there is no indication that Simon repented of his sins. He certainly did not believe with all his heart. His faith was like that of the people of Jerusalem who witnessed our Lord’s miracles, or even like that of the demons. Simon continued with Philip, not to hear the Word of God and learn more about Jesus Christ, but to witness the miracles and perhaps learn how they were done.

In these verses, Luke describes two different kinds of believers.

Luke contrasts TRUE BELIEVERS with Simon, one of the FALSE BELIEVERS. Those who believed as Philip preached the Gospel were possessors, but Simon was a pretender. Those who believed in the name of Jesus Christ were saved because of their belief in the Master, whereas Simon believed in the miracles.

Simon was never saved; he was an unbelieving ‘believer’.

He was interested in power that he could obtain. He saw in the great signs and miracles that Philip performed a power that he could use. A man who had been practicing witchcraft and sorcery saw the extraordinary power the apostles had and greatly desired it. Therefore, he made efforts to buy that power.

‘Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money and said, “Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit”.

Acts, 8:17-19, NIV

I want to make it abundantly clear that I believe God still heals today.

Nonetheless, healing cannot and should not be the focus of any ministry. Imagine for a moment that I had the power to heal people. (I don’t have it, in case you are still wondering.) If I could bring someone down to the front who was in a wheelchair and laid hands upon him and he was healed instantly and miraculously, do you think you could get a seat here next Sunday? If the miracle was authentic, you could not fit everyone in the hall with a shoe horn next week. People would be crying out: “Touch me... Heal me... Touch me... Heal me”. What would happen if there was no healing, just preaching? People would want to see demonstrations of power, and miracles. They would not be necessarily interested in hearing about Jesus.

Real faith is authenticated by its object.

What is the object of real faith? Jesus Christ! Some people say, "JUST BELIEVE". But believe in what? Some people say, "HAVE FAITH". But have faith in what? Belief in belief or faith in faith is no more than positive thinking. Think about it – it is not really faith that moves mountains; it is God who moves the mountains. We are to put our faith in the Lord and he will do it.

Real faith is authenticated by its objective.

What is the objective of faith? What is the purpose of faith? Faith brings us into a true relationship with God. Faith is not something that uses God; faith is where God uses you. Faith should be 'for official use only'. It is for God to do what he wants in your life and on earth.

Many COUNTERFEIT CHRISTIANS are in for a shock on judgement day.

'Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord', will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'".'

Matthew, 7:21-23, NIV

4. THE POISON OF A COUNTERFEIT CHRISTIAN

'When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit". Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin".'

Acts, 8:18-23, NIV

The wickedness of Simon's heart was revealed by the ministry of the two apostles.

Simon not only wanted to perform miracles, but he also wanted the power to convey the gift of the Holy Spirit to others – and he was quite willing to pay for this power! It is this that gives us the word 'SIMONY', which means 'THE BUYING AND SELLING OF CHURCH OFFICES OR PRIVILEGES'.

"Everything has a price" seems to be true in our world of bribes, wealth, and materialism. Simon thought he could buy the Holy Spirit's power, but Peter harshly rebuked him. The only way to receive God's power is to do what Peter told Simon to do – turn from sin, ask God for forgiveness, and be filled with his Spirit. No amount of money can buy salvation, forgiveness of sin, or God's power. These are only gained by repentance and belief in Christ as Saviour.'

"LIFE APPLICATION BIBLE", Study Notes

Peter's response gives every indication that the sorcerer was not a converted man.

'MAY YOUR MONEY PERISH WITH YOU' is pretty strong language to use with a believer as it literally means 'MAY YOU AND YOUR MONEY GO TO HELL'. Simon had 'NO PART OR SHARE IN THIS MINISTRY BECAUSE [HIS] HEART WAS NOT RIGHT BEFORE GOD'.

PT Barnum believed that there was a sucker born every minute.

When Barnum heard that CH Spurgeon was preaching mightily and powerfully he thought there was an opportunity for both of them to make some money. Barnum thought that if he could persuade Spurgeon to travel from London to America, a great hall could be hired and people could be charged admission to hear one of the world's greatest ever preachers. Barnum wrote to Spurgeon outlining his ingenious plan, firmly believing that it would be accepted, especially with the proposition that this course would make Spurgeon a wealthy man. Spurgeon replied with a short telegram: 'ACTS, 8:20'.

The word 'THOUGHT' means 'PLOT OR SCHEME' and is used in a bad sense.

The fact that Simon was 'FULL OF BITTERNESS AND CAPTIVE TO SIN' would indicate that he had never truly been born again.

'Get rid of all bitterness.'

Ephesians, 4:31a, NIV

'Gently instruct them... in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.'

II Timothy, 2:25-26, NIV

Simon's response to these severe words of warning was not good.

He was more concerned with avoiding judgment than getting right with God. There is no evidence that he repented and sought forgiveness. A sinner who wants the prayers of others but who will not pray himself is never going to enter God's Kingdom.

All this shows how close a person can come to salvation and still not be converted.

Simon heard the Gospel, saw the miracles, gave a profession of faith in Christ, and was baptised; and yet he was never born again. He was one of Satan's clever counterfeits; and, had Peter not exposed the wickedness of his heart, Simon would have been accepted as a powerful member of the Samaritan congregation.

'Half our misery comes from trying to look, instead of trying to be, what one is not.'

George MacDonald

*From thee I would not hide my sin, because of fear
What men may think; I hate my pride, and as I am appear.*

Just as I am, O Lord, not what I'm thought to be,

Just as I am, a struggling soul for life and liberty.

Herbert Howard Booth, SASB 415:2

'ONLY LET US LIVE UP TO THAT WE HAVE ALREADY OBTAINED!'