

Acts 8:9-25 (NIV) 9 Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, 10 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.” 11 They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic. 12 But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. 13 Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw. 14 When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. 15 When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, 16 because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. 18 When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money 19 and said, “Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.” 20 Peter answered: “May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! 21 You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. 22 Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. 23 For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin.” 24 Then Simon answered, “Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me.” 25 When they had testified and proclaimed the word of the Lord, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

44-08-04-Controlling or Controlled

prestige, magic, belief, bitterness, controlling, controlled, heart
Acts 8:9-25

True conversion surrenders a controlling heart to God's control.

INTRODUCTION: (text for Scripture Reading)

–During Phillip's evangelization in Samaria, we learn about *Simon the Magician*. His story, in our **text**, has much to teach us about the **title**. We all meet manipulative people—who attempt to *control* others. We ourselves may be more “*controlling*” than we realize.

–One “fruit of the Spirit” is “self-control.” *Personal self-control is a virtue; selfishly controlling others is a vice.* In the process of *salvation*, the Holy Spirit teaches us to abandon the vice and practice the virtue. But *our will* is involved. We must choose our response. **HOM.idea.**

–When we meet people, we discover only *facets* of their *personalities* and *characters*. [It's like the tip of an iceberg: *What you see* might be deceptively attractive; *what you don't see* might sink the ship.] It's tragic when Christian leaders rise to fame and power, then fall into moral disgrace. Their fall can damage the reputation of Christ's ongoing work. But usually there's more behind those tragedies than *meets the eye*, just as it was with Simon the Magician, who *started his personal career by...*

I. Controlling the Crowds— v.9-11, ...Simon had practiced 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**.

A. These words give us a psychological study of Simon the Magician.

1. He learned and practiced sorcery with a motive. (*Magical arts* had impressed him, so he knew if he learned them, he could impress others. It worked, because he “*amazed all the people of Samaria*.”
2. He craved the limelight, so he “*boasted*” of his greatness to gain everyone's “*attention*.” It worked, because the crowds thought he represented “*divine power*,” even naming him “*the Great Power*.”

B. But deep inside, Simon knew his boast was empty— “*They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic*.” [An Indonesian proverb says, “*The shallower the brook, the more it babbles*.”] (The one who brags the loudest has the least real self-confidence.)

TRANS: Finding *self-worth* is one of life's greatest quests: "Am I truly valuable?" A positive answer to that question comes only by answering another one: "Who *am I* in relationship to the Great 'I AM'?" Simon's magical skills gave him control of the crowd but brought no fulfillment. [Exploring the occult to gain magical control eventually leads to being controlled by the demonic realm.] Simon's boast of prestige brought no security, because when the true power of God showed up, he realized he was essentially...

II. Out of Control— v.12-13, But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

- A. Belief is not faith. (**Belief** can be merely an "I-think-so" opinion, while **faith** is a confident trust that is willing to surrender all.)
1. Simon's magic was impressive, but it offered no forgiveness for the past, no peace for the present, and no hope for the future.
 2. He not only lost crowd control because of Phillip's "good news of the kingdom of God" but he found the advantage of having divine power that reached beyond the prestige and prospects of sorcery.
- B. Baptism can be a confession of faith, but the ritual itself isn't faith.
1. Simon's baptism may have been a political move to plug into this new movement that came with so many signs and miracles.
 2. Rather than deciding to follow Christ— "he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw." (What was his focus? Was it the Person Whom Phillip was preaching, or the possibility of miracle-working connected with "the name of Jesus Christ.")

TRANS: Seeing the Holy Spirit outpoured gave Simon another chance to choose between continuing his old life of controlling others, or living out a new life of surrendering his controlling heart to God's control— v.14-19, 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 baptized 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." Simon's choice revealed a heart that was still set on gaining control, not in...

III. Surrendering Control— v.20-24, 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."

- A. The Holy Spirit searches the heart and sometimes exposes a "heart" that "is not right before God," as He did with Simon, through Peter.
1. The motive of Simon's Christian profession was evidently not salvation but an extension of his crowd control. Peter had severe words for this: "your money perish with you..."
 2. Peter, saw that Simon's statement of belief and submission to the rite of baptism had given him "no part or share in this ministry."
- B. The Holy Spirit exposed the roots of Simon's controlling attitude:
1. Peter said: "I see that you are full of bitterness" (Hurt causes bitterness. The desire to control others may come from painful rejection, mistreatment, injustice: "Someday I'll get back! I'll show them!")
 2. But seeking respect or prestige by being in control backfires! The controller becomes the controlled: "I see that you are ... captive to sin."
- C. Peter shows Simon the way out: "Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord." (He's calling for a true conversion, where:
1. God heals hurts and bitterness by accepting us into His Kingdom;
 2. And where we surrender our controlling heart to His control.
 3. Unfortunately, Simon avoided a direct, personal surrender of his heart to God, and instead asked Peter, "Pray to the Lord for me..."

CONCLUSION:

—Phillip, Peter and John gave Simon a clear example of a surrendered heart and life: their ministry under Holy Spirit empowerment was not to control but to bless the crowd—what they'd freely received themselves, they were freely sharing with others— v.25, When they had testified and proclaimed the word of the Lord, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

—[Dodinsky: "Happy people don't go through life collecting recognition. They go through life giving it away."] Exclusion, insecurity, low self-esteem—they're helped, not by gaining control of others, but by surrendering control to Christ. Jesus wants to give us Holy Spirit empowerment, so that we can see others blessed and filled with the same spiritual power to serve.