

025 - Religious Confusion - Part 2 - Acts 8:5-25 GRBC 2012-06-10

Scripture Reading: 1 Kings 16:24-33 (next week 2 Kings 17:5-41)

Confession of Sin: Matthew 6:9-13

Sermon: Religious Confusion - Part 2 Acts 8:5-25

Benediction: Isaiah 61:7

Recall what we have learned so far about the Samaritan religious confusion:

-The origin of the Samaritans as a separate nation from the Jews was the time when most of the nation of Israel split off from the house of David when King Solomon died, and set up a new kingdom. The first king set up two places of worship, with golden calves to worship, and a new class of priests---all of this against God's commands of how He was to be worshiped.

-As the centuries went by, under wicked kings such as Omri and Ahab, the Samaritans provoked God to wrath by worshiping idols such as Baal

-By the time the Lord Jesus Christ came, the Samaritans had very confused ideas about religion. We learn from the account in John 4 of the Samaritan woman that:

-they misinterpreted the words of God, taking spiritual metaphor as literal

-they thought of their godly ancestors as a basis for righteousness

-they had interest in religion only for the temporal benefits

-they deflected matters of law and sin with religious questions and controversies

-they believed something about Christ without really knowing who He was

Now consider that into that confused religious situation walked Simon. (He has come to be called "Simon Magus" to differentiate him from the several other men in the bible named Simon, so I'll call him by that traditional name.) The people had no clear idea of religious truth, had no firm faith in God, and so were easy prey for a spiritual predator like Simon Magus.

But God is loving. God showed His great love for us in this: that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us! And God is merciful; He delights in rescuing sinners for whom Christ died out of their spiritual distress---even severe religious confusion, such as the Samaritans were in, and such as many are still in today!

Read the text: Acts 8:5-25

I. See the religious confusion of the Samaritans

In our study of John chapter 4, the religious confusion of the Samaritans was shown in several points of error. Here in Acts 8, the Samaritan confusion is presented in just one point: they were believing a false religious leader.

A. A person named Simon amazed people with magic (9a)

-He did some things that seemed to have supernatural power in them

B. He claimed he was someone great (9b)

C. The Samaritan people all listened to him (10a)

D. The people also ascribed divine power to him (10b)

Harry Houdini was a crusader against those magicians who claimed to have supernatural power at work in them

E. This situation persisted for a long time (11)

II. See the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ toward the Samaritans

Their long history and present condition of every kind of false worship deserved only the wrath of God upon them. But despite their religious confusion, the Lord Jesus

A. sent them a preacher of the Gospel (5)

1. what did he preach to them? Christ!

B. gave them ears to hear the message (6a)

C. showed them miraculous signs (6b-7)

1. unclean spirits came out of many who were possessed

2. many paralyzed and lame were healed

D. gave them great joy (8)

E. gave them faith in Christ (12)

III. See the reaction of Simon Magus to the coming of Christianity to the Samaritans

A. He professed faith in Christ, including being baptized (13a)

B. He was amazed at the miracles and signs which were done (13b)

C. He coveted the power of the apostles (18-19)

D. APPLICATION: The preaching of the gospel by a faithful preacher coupled with a profession of faith, including baptism, does not necessarily equal conversion to faith in Christ.

E. APPLICATION: The kind of person who will gain applause and make money by doing amazing tricks or in some other way putting on a show may be perfectly willing to do so within the context of the Christian faith.

F. APPLICATION: The idea of trying to buy power or position is common in politics, but is also present in religion.

1. in the most corrupt times of the Roman Catholic church, this was done directly; men would pay the pope to be appointed bishop or cardinal; this practice has come to be called "simony" after Simon of this story

2. but there are more subtle ways people try to do the same thing now; so let this light shine into you; do you have the idea in your mind that you will somehow use money to get religious power or leadership or influence?

IV. See the Rebuke of Simon's False Profession of Faith

A. They rejected the buying and selling of religious authority (20)

1. APPLICATION: may all of us do the same!

a. "you know, that person really shows signs of not being a true believer, but he puts a lot of money in the offering box, so let's just leave him be"
Oh no! Let such a person be told the will of the Lord and expected to obey!

b.

B. They rejected such a person as Simon as part of the church's ministry (21a)

1. a person like Simon Magus must not be part of the church's ministry

2. not because of his past character, but his present character

C. They saw Simon's real condition

1. his heart was not right in the sight of God (21b)

2. he was poisoned by bitterness (23a)

3. he was bound by iniquity (23b)

D. They commanded him to repent of his wickedness (22a)

APPLICATION: What do you think of a church leader rebuking someone who professes faith in Christ, but then acts in ways that are not Christian? I suppose

each of us is for that, unless it's us being rebuked!

E. They offered him the hope of forgiveness from God (22b)

1. there is not forgiveness of sins from God without repentance

2. APPLICATION: in repentance there is forgiveness; the one who repents of sin, trusting in Jesus Christ is surely forgiven! This is as true now as it always was; as true for us as for the Samaritans; as true for you as for Simon Magus

3. here a person who professes faith in Christ, but demonstrates by his conduct that he has not repented of sin, is commanded to repent, but told that God MIGHT forgive him his wickedness; why isn't forgiveness certain? how does that work?

see 2 Timothy 2:24-26

V. See Simon's Persistence in False Religion (24)

A. He was exposed as a fraud

B. He was commanded to repent and so be forgiven by the Lord

C. Instead he asked that some other religious thing be substituted, that he not suffer the consequences of his sin

D. The command of the Lord to the sinner is "Repent!" But the sinner who has not been granted repentance by the Lord is too prideful to repent. Instead, he seeks to substitute something else.

1. he is willing to say a prayer

a. "Our Father"

b. "Hail Mary"

c. "Dear God, I know I'm a sinner"

2. he is willing to burn candles or incense

3. he is willing to confess the wicked things he has done

4. he is willing to ask that someone else pray for him

a. you see how Simon asked for this

b. in corrupt Baptist practice, you see this as a pastor prays on behalf of a sinner, who is then to repeat the prayer or even just assent to it

c. in Roman Catholic practice, you see this as worshipers ask Elizabeth or Michael or Mary to pray on their behalf

5. but all of these substitute religious activities cannot take the place of repentance; if a person does not repent of his evil, all of the religion in the world will not save his soul from hell

E. Therefore, if you have been in a state of false profession, as Simon was, do not seek to substitute any other thing, but instead repent! If the Lord is pleased to grant you repentance, even your wicked pretending to Christianity will be forgiven you.

- He made a believable profession of faith, including baptism
- He attended closely to Philip
- He wanted the power of an apostle and offered to buy it
- He wanted to avoid the wrath of God without repenting of sin

“practiced sorcery”

“astonished the people” KJV bewitched

“claiming that he was someone great”

“to whom they all gave heed” v. 11

“This man is the great power of God”

“they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time”

“Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.”

People who had been this badly confused were saved from their confusion by God’s grace!

Carroll:

“It was demon-possessed, diseased and deluded by sorcery.”

Hodgins:

“A profession of faith without repentance is counterfeit.”