

It is very difficult to tell who is a real Christian and who is fake.

in 2002 I was on a 2 month US tour with a heavy metal band. There was a lot diversity in our experiences - one night they would be playing in a giant hall to crowds of hundreds excited fans, the next night they could be playing in a basement to a few dozen people. One of the only constants was the travel to get from one venue to the next. We spent hours in the van every single day, and boredom was something that we had to fight. At a petrol station someone saw a realistic looking toy handgun, and bought it. thinking that it would be a fun way to pass the time. We were messing around with it, pointing it at each other, and brandishing it out the window - and a concerned citizen called the police in Oklahoma to report that there was a van full of young men, armed to the teeth.

Police officer pulls us over, and forces us to the ground, at gunpoint and shouting at us... he thought it was a hostage situation, held us there until backup arrived, once they pulled up they searched the van, and after a few moments a very angry cop came back holding a plastic revolver, as he figured out that the whole thing was just a stupid misunderstanding.

**Sometimes it is hard to tell the difference between something that is genuine and something that is a cheap imitation.**

In today's passage, we are going to look at two different conversions, the first of which is false, the second is the real deal.

Acts is about the Holy Spirit spreading the good news about Jesus throughout the world. The earliest section of the book focus on the Apostles as they preach in Jerusalem. Current section focuses on ordinary Christians in areas outside of Jerusalem.

This wasn't the result of carefully planned mission-trips, but due to the unforeseen violent persecution, led by Saul of Tarsus. "But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word." (Acts 8:3-4)

The city was no longer safe for Christians (their own version of Krystalnacht) and so the followers of Jesus flee - but as they go, they don't go quietly. They preach the Word wherever they go. v4

So the gospel spreads farther than it would have, if everyone remained comfortable and safe in Jerusalem, because of the violence and intimidation of Saul's persecution.

What man meant for evil, God used for good.

And *just like the crucifixion itself*, the cruelty of man is being hijacked to spread the goodness of God.

Philip goes to the city of Samaria (v5-8) and finds incredible success. The history of Jewish / Samaritan relations is tense to say the least.<sup>1</sup> They were looked at as an impure "Half-Blooded" race. Most Jewish people go out of their way to avoid contact with Samaritans, but Philip goes. Perhaps remembering the stories that he heard of Jesus' ascension; He told the Apostles "...**you shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.**" **And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.**" (Acts 1:8-9)

*Jesus ascended into heaven with the word "Samaria" on His lips.*

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Kings 17, John 4:9 "The Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans"

They were viewed as Gentiles (even though they were related ethnically to the Jews) "The division was sharp and bitter; a Jew would not even drink from a Samaritan cup. Indeed, only a very unconventional Jew would ask for water from a Samaritan woman and allow His lips to touch the edge of her cup." - Geoffrey Thomas

James and John wanted to call down fire upon a Samaritan village (Luke 9:52-55)

One Rabbinic saying taught: Do not eat the bread of the Samaritans, for he who eats their bread is as he who eats swine flesh.

Philip decides to take a step of faith and obey Him. Be His witness in Samaria. So that's what he does. and God validates his preaching with signs and wonders and many people turn to Jesus. The city is filled with much joy (v8)

In the midst of this revival there is a fly in the ointment. There are many people who are moved to genuine faith; but we see one man show us what *fraudulent faith* looks like. We see his outward appearance in v9-13 and we see his **heart** in v 18-24

The important details from the first section is that he was a magician - and we don't know if he was more like Houdini or more like Dumbledore. Like Darren Brown who uses mind-tricks and suggestion to fool you into believing a trick - or like Dr Strange who taps into unseen realms and does legitimate acts of power / magic.

The Bible teaches us that both exist. There are charlatans and deceivers who use trickery - and there are those who knowingly or unknowingly draw power from fallen angels to perform satanic miracles.

I seem to think that Simon falls into the former category, but the experts are divided.

What everyone can be sure of is that he was a prominent, famous man in the city. He was known as "somebody great" (The Great One - NLT) "**momentous**" JBP with God-like powers.

And also ; v13 he was amazed at the signs and miracles that were being performed, and that he believed and was baptised as well.

**if you can't beat'em, join'em**

That is the outward appearance - later on the Apostle Peter is going to reveal the true condition of his **heart**. But lets look back at the chapter to see what exactly brings Peter into the story.

14-17

News reaches the Apostles back in Jerusalem that the Gospel was advancing deep and wide among their Samaritan neighbours, and so Peter and John are sent to see this for themselves. Perhaps similar to when a new baby is born into your family you go visit in the hospital or the home, to see this new life, this new relative for yourself. to say "welcome to the family - I'm so glad you're here"

it's that, but its more than that. They "came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, *for He had not yet fallen on any of them*, but they had only been baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit." (Acts 8:15-17) - This is one of the most confusing verses in the book of Acts.

There doesn't seem to be any lack in Philip's teaching (they didn't believe in an incomplete gospel) or in their belief or response (they paid attention, believed and were baptised) but it seems for some reason that God withheld some experience of the Holy Spirit's indwelling until Peter and John arrived.

Does this mean that act of Salvation itself, or the Christian life as a whole, is a two tiered system?

Some of our Classical Pentecostal brothers and sisters would say so.

The moment of our salvation begins our christian walk - but believers should desire and seek another experience called the baptism of the Holy Spirit which launches you into the "Deeper Life" or the "Fullness of the Spirit"

It was presented to me as a new christian that once I got this experience that nothing would ever be the same again.

I want to be careful not to generalise; Pentecostalism is a dynamic and vast movement of Christians - i am only referring to 1st wave pentecostals who would make a clear distinction between those who "have the spirit" and those who "do not have the spirit"

Roman Catholics have their view on this:

At your confirmation ceremony a consecrated Bishop will impart to you the gift of the the Holy Spirit .

It seems that a biblical view is that all Christians are indwelt with the Holy Spirit , since He is the One who calls you, and enables you to begin the Christian life. He is so linked to our Christian lives, that Paul writes: *In fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.*" (Romans 8:9, ESV)

**Calvary Cork statement of faith: Article 16** : We believe that the gift of the Holy Spirit has been given to all Christians at conversion; the Holy Spirit in turn bestowed a variety of spiritual gifts to the Church for its edification and empowerment. 2 All believers have been baptised by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ and are empowered with different gifts in order to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ. <sup>3</sup>

A necessary addition to that is that as we grow in Christ we will experience the Holy Spirit in greater degrees at different moments, punctuated expressions of His presence or our further yielding to Him. Or, to put it another way, we believe that there is always "**Room for More**" of the Holy Spirit in the life of each Christian.

So - after all that - what's up with this weird event in Samaria? (how dare they contradict the Calvary Cork statement of faith!)

It seems like God, in an unusual, but necessary act, slowed down His ordinary means & methods of bringing unconverted people into His family.

This revival in Samaria is very important, not just for the individuals swept up in it, *but to the expanding mission* and kingdom of God. This is the first time the Christian message has gone outside of Judaism, or Jewish land. The gospel is going to foreigners for the first time - and the Apostles are there to validate this.

It is important for the Apostles

- to see it with their own eyes. John was the one in Luke 9 who wanted to call down fire from heaven to destroy a Samaritan town, now he moves among them, praying that the Holy Spirit would come upon them. Peter was the one given the keys to the kingdom, and now he is unlocking a formerly closed country and an unreached people group.

It is important for the whole church

- to see that what is happening in Samaria is not a fringe sect, out on their own, but part of the same family. Welcomed in by the Apostles themselves.

Anyway; So Peter is in Samaria, and through his prayers the Holy Spirit is coming upon believers in some sort of observable way... and **Simon** is watching.

in v18ff Simon reveals that he is a fraud because he really just wanted power.

"let me buy that from you"

**magicians would buy each other's secrets**

Simon had an interest in signs and wonders - since that was his profession. v13 he was *amazed* by them

Simon was used to power and renown. he wants to be famous in their organisation as well.

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John 14.16, Acts 2.38, 1 Cor 12.4,9, Heb 2.4

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor 12.13, Eph 4.7, 12,

Many times we want to ascend the ranks of church not because of a desire to serve God, but because we have a desire to be well known, well liked or well paid. (even though in my experience - more obscurity than fame, more scrutiny and criticism than adulation, and a living wage rather than riches) but Simon, and guys like Simon, imagine that the path to respect, notoriety, significance comes through the church and so they insist on prominence or position through whatever means are necessary.

you can glorify God as a butcher, baker or candlestick maker.  
You don't need to be an official office-holder in the church

Medieval European church gave us some pretty cool buildings and cathedrals, but that's about it. with all of its flaws gave us a new word, for a sin that was common in its day: "**Simony**" buying position in the church because it was a good investment. If you give enough money to the bishop, he would make you a deacon, or you get a cardinal's hat... then you have a cushy salary, access to the land, wealth and art - and its named after this guy!

Sadly, it brought unqualified men into positions of influence - who used the Church to advance themselves at the expense of the flock. The church wasn't governed by men of God, but men of means.

because of their love of money, money making practices were built into church teaching and life; **buy** an indulgence to secure forgiveness for you or a loved one.

Money can buy you everything except happiness - and it can take you everywhere expect heaven.

Simon is sternly rebuked because this. He wanted to force or demand the gift of God. He has no share in God's ministry because his motivation / heart is all wrong.

**PT Barnum** was building the circus circuit and he heard about Spurgeon, come preach at my circus. He wired him back "You will find my response in the Acts of the Apostles ch 8 v20 - Good Day."

he needs to repent and pray for mercy.  
instead of going to Christ, he looks to Peter to be a mediator between him and God.

**Holy Spirit can't be bought and He can't be sold.**

Holy Spirit can't be bought (that's bad news for money rich and power hungry men like Simon)

Holy Spirit can't be sold (that is good news for the poor in spirit - because "*the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!*") (Luke 11:13)

Simon wanted to acquire/ own / control the power of the Holy Spirit - and that is why he is a fraud.

you are not a christian because you believe that Christianity is true, undergo a ceremony, or attend church fellowship.

What does make you a christian? look at the rest of ch 8.

Luke includes this here so we can see the contrast.

Speaking of contrast - can you picture this:

He is sent away from the revival to the desert, for a 1-on-1 meeting.  
think of the scene, white hot rock, long road, and one cart is headed back down south.  
Philip is told "go" so he runs up to see what this appointment is going to be, and to his surprise its someone from Africa, returning from a pilgrimage.

we've seen Philip go from Jerusalem and Judea v1-4 to Samaria v5-25 and now the chapter ends with him speaking with a representative from "the ends of the earth!"

A high ranking official from Ethiopia is reading scripture on his way back home (evidently out-loud) and Philip strikes up a conversation with him.

Do you understand?

*"And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" (Acts 8:31, ESV)*

It is okay to say that you need to learn more about Christ. It can be hard for people (particularly educated or well-off people) to admit that they have questions or they don't get it. That's where this man found himself. Imagine if he proudly said that he's fine, and then Philip stops running, and the chariot continues back home to ethiopia and he remains confused about the suffering servant in Isaiah 53.

Don't despise an opportunity to learn the Bible and to learn about Jesus.

If you've found a place where that is happening, stick around for as long as you can.

v32 impromptu Bible study

who is this about? is it autobiographical? Is it a metaphor for the nation of Israel?

Good news about Jesus - taught by Isaiah

1. foretold 800 years beforehand
2. offered Himself to sinners with no complaint. He was willing to die for us.
3. suffered the penalty for our wickedness so that we can be delivered from the punishment that we deserve.

v35 starting there, and point out other things from that same scroll he explained who Jesus was and what He did to provide salvation for men like this eunuch.

He suggests baptism. 2nd mention in this passage, and it is worth explaining what it is.

It is a symbol re-enactment of the death and resurrection of Jesus, but it is us identifying with Him. Isaiah 53 tells us that in His death, He identified with us. He is the Good Shepherd, but like a sheep he was led to the slaughter. He died our death. So that we could share His life.

In baptism, we are symbolically buried under the water, and then, just as He raised from death on Easter Sunday, we are pulled out from the watery grave, to walk in a whole new life.

*"but Your mercy brought me life and in your lovingkindness raised me up with Christ, and made me righteous"*

This man is not looking for power, prestige, prominence. He just hears about what Jesus has done for him, and how Jesus identified with him in death, so he wants to identify with Jesus for the rest of his life, starting with his baptism.

Then Philip was moved by the Spirit elsewhere and the man, rejoicing goes back home.

Ethiopia has one of the oldest Christian heritages of all the world, and many point to this influential man, who came to visit a building, but instead encountered an ambassador of the dying and risen Lord Jesus, and then returned home with good news to tell.