

CONVERSION STUDIES

CONVERSION OF SIMON THE SORCERER

Example four of thirteen

No conversion has been more abused than that of Simon. Thus it merits a separate study. The questions about Simon arose over the genuineness of his conversion in view of his later falling away. There are some who maintain that a Christian cannot so sin as to be lost. The case of Simon is so obviously contradictory to this doctrine that something had to be done. The scriptural thing would be to drop the idea of "once saved, always saved." Men, however, wedded to their own ideas find that all but impossible. Thus the answer, they say, is that Simon was never saved in the first place. Let's see what the scriptures say.

Philip took the gospel to Samaria. Many believed and were baptized. "But when they believed Philip preaching good tidings concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:12). This was as the Lord taught (Mark 16:16). Simon was foremost among sorcerers, and had gained complete mastery over the Samaritans. Yet the signs and miracles of Philip so completely eclipsed what Simon did that he became a believer in the Lord Who gave Philip this power. Knowing all the tricks of the trade, he knew that Philip was no deceiver. He knew that God was working in Philip. Thus he went with Philip as an adherent; a baptized, believing man.

Notice, it says that Simon also believed (Acts 8:13). Simon likewise believed just as the Samaritans did. If they believed, Simon believed. There is no difference in his faith and theirs. Any doubt of Simon's faith must also be held about the Samaritans. Luke doesn't say that Simon was not serious. Instead, he said Simon believed. Either Simon did the same thing the Samaritans did, or Luke was not guided by the Spirit. Remember, Luke is writing this many years later under the guidance of the Spirit. All that Simon did would be known. There is no doubt of Simon's faith.

Simon was also baptized. What did the Lord say? "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mk. 16:16). Did Simon do this? There was no difference between Simon's baptism and that of the

Samaritans, any more than there was a difference in his faith and theirs. Was he saved? If not, why not? If Simon was not saved, the language means nothing. If he was not sincere, as some want us to believe, then Philip, guided by the Spirit and enabled to perform miracles, was either deceived, or else, knowing that Simon was insincere, baptized him anyway. Who can believe it?

If this were all we had received about Simon, there is not a person on earth who could read this and deny that Simon was saved. If the record stopped at verse 13, everyone would agree that Simon was converted and that this was a great triumph of the gospel. It is the subsequent falling of Simon and the desire of men to maintain their false ideas that cause some to deny Simon's salvation.

Later Peter and John came down from Jerusalem to lay their hands on some to convey the gifts of the Spirit. "Now when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay my hands, he may receive the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8:18,19). There must be a reason why the Lord recorded this account which is unique in Acts. One lesson to learn is that a saved person can become a lost person. This can also be learned from many other verses (Luke 8:13; Gal. 5:4; II Peter 2:20-22).

Another purpose of this story is to make clear to us the plan of salvation that applies to baptized believers who have fallen back into sin. This is significant because it is sometimes argued: "If I have to be baptized to be forgiven; then don't I have to be baptized again every time I sin?" This story answers, "No." It shows that what you must do when you sin after baptism. Surely baptism is for remission of sins, but once a person is scripturally immersed, a new plan applies to him and his sins. Peter does not extenuate Simon's guilt. He identifies it to Simon as "thy wickedness" (Acts 8:22). Thus Simon must repent and pray.

Simon's miserable condition is not proof that he was a hypocrite from the beginning. Instead, both scripture and experience teach that turning to God leaves many passions in latent state ready to spring to life when temptations come. Simon was yet a babe in Christ and still weak from the moral nature prior to his conversion. Peter does not tell him to repent and be baptized as one still in the world (Acts 2:38). Simon was told to repent and pray (Acts 8:22). This is still God's plan for the fallen believer (I John 1:9). Repentance is the changing of our mind or will about our way of living. Simon was still forgiveable, still reconcilable, if he would repent and pray.

Those who believe in "once saved, always saved," also believe that man is saved by "faith only." If that be true, and Simon was never saved, Peter should have told him to believe on the Lord. He was not told to believe because he already believed. He had to repent. Simon's response seems to indicate he saw fully the error of his way and turned from it.

We see in this account God's two plans of salvation. One is for the alien, and one for the fallen child of God. The first requires faith, repentance, and immersion; the second requires faith, repentance, and prayer. Being a book of conversions, Acts supplies us not only with examples of aliens being saved, but the clear example of a fallen child being saved.

(B. G. ECHOLS)

CHURCH OF CHRIST

412 East King Street
Shippensburg, Pa. 17257