

## Self-Imprisonment in the Bondage of Iniquity

Acts 8 contains a fascinating account of the *conversion* of a magician in the city Samaria named Simon. For a long time, Simon had *astonished* the people with his seemingly supernatural abilities in the art of trickery. So great was his prowess that the people hailed him as *“the Great Power of God,”* vv.9-11. However, when the people saw the true miracles Philip was performing, and heard his gospel message of salvation through Jesus Christ, they *believed* and were *baptized*- doing exactly what Jesus had specified was necessary for salvation in the Great Commission (cf. Mark 16:15-16). Even Simon, the magician, when he witnessed these true miracles, was convinced, convicted, and converted to Christ, vv.12-13. The biblical record is clear: Simon *believed* and was *baptized*, just like the other Samaritans. Thus, he was saved not by the miracles he witnessed, but because he believed the gospel, and obeyed it by being baptized. Next, the story takes an interesting and important turn.

When Simon saw that the apostles (Peter and John who had come down from Jerusalem to assist Philip, vv.14-16) could *impart* the miraculous abilities provided by the Holy Spirit to others, Simon requested to *buy into the franchise*, vv.17-19! He wanted to the ability to bestow miraculous abilities upon others, and offered to pay the apostles for it. Apparently his motives were not pure in this regard. Note the response from Peter, *“May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!”* v.20. But Peter wasn’t finished with his rebuke. Carefully consider the rest of what the inspired apostle said to this *believing, baptized Christian*.

***“You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God,”*** v.21. This *believing, baptized*, and thus “saved” Christian had a heart that was not right before God. But does this mean that he became “lost” after having been previously “saved”? Let’s keep reading.

***“Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you,”*** v.22. What Simon thought in his *heart*, and *intended to do* in practice, was called “wickedness.” Does that sound like he was still in a “saved” condition? If so, why was he also commanded to “repent” (a change of *mind* that produces a change in *activity*) in order to be “forgiven”? If Simon was, as many believe, “once saved, always saved,” what need was there for *repentance* and *forgiveness*?

***“For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity,”*** v.23. This statement by an inspired apostle of Jesus Christ should remove all doubt with regard to Simon’s spiritual condition. Though he had been previously *released* from the *bonds of sin* by belief and baptism in Jesus Christ, by this sin he had once again *imprisoned himself* in the “bondage of iniquity.” Given the inspired record of Luke (who wrote *Acts*) of the inspired apostle Peter’s assessment of Simon’s *condition*, as well as the course of action *prescribed*, there is just no way around it. Though Simon had been previously *saved* by obedience to the gospel, he then became *lost* by sinful thoughts and intentions! This conclusion is supported by a myriad of other N.T. passages- though for the sake of space, here are just a few, Romans 11:20-22; Galatians 5:1-4.13; 6:-12; Hebrews 3:12; James 5:19-20; 2Peter 2:20-21; Revelation 2:4-7.

Does this mean that there is no security for the child of God? Of course not, but the security offered is dependent upon continued dedication of heart (emotion, thought, and will) and body (activity) to God. Note 2Peter 1:4-9 in this regard. ***If we add these “graces” to our faith, and continue to grow it, then we are being “diligent to make certain His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you,”*** 2Peter 1:10-11!

No one or no thing can separate us from *“the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord,”* Romans 8:31-39. However, we must also realize that it is our responsibility to stay ***“in Christ Jesus our Lord,”*** and to ***“keep yourselves in the love of God,”*** Jude 20-21. Simon failed in this regard, and ***re-imprisoned himself in the bondage of iniquity***. The good news is that by *confession, repentance*, and *prayer for forgiveness*, he didn’t stay there, cf. Acts 8:24! Please understand that though we become “saved” by belief and obedience to the gospel, we can *“fall from your own steadfastness”* (2Peter 3:17) and self-imprison ourselves in the bondage of iniquity all over again, just like Simon. (Philip