

# ACTS | Simon the Sorcerer | Story 11

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### Introduction

I love the book of Acts because it outlines what goes on in the early church that models, a blueprint, a guideline for how God wants the church to operate today - there is an exponential, spirit-empowered explosion of discipleship and multiplication happening. It's a movement from the bottom up - there's very little structure, low control, high empowerment, and it's growing quickly.

In the beginning of chapter 8 is the burial of the first martyr, Stephen; Saul ravaging the church; the church experiencing severe persecution; and Philip bringing the gospel to Samaria. Throughout the rest of chapter 8 are two different responses to the gospel— how people respond to God and why they come to God in the first place. This week's video discussion is about Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch. It's a positive example of someone responding to God's invitation to salvation.

**Today**, we will learn about Simon the sorcerer, which is the negative example.

### Acts 8:9-24

But there was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that **he himself was somebody great**.<sup>10</sup> They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the power of God that is called Great."<sup>11</sup> And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had **amazed** them with his magic.<sup>12</sup> But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.<sup>13</sup> **Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.**

<sup>14</sup> Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John,<sup>15</sup> who 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 baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.**<sup>17</sup> **Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.**

<sup>18</sup> Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, **he offered them money**,<sup>19</sup> saying, "Give me this **power** also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."<sup>20</sup> But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!<sup>21</sup> You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your **heart is not right** before God.<sup>22</sup> **Repent**, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, **the intent of your heart may be forgiven you.**<sup>23</sup> For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity."<sup>24</sup> And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."

Scripture tells us about the wheat and tares, the faithful and the phony, the rocky ground and the good soil, the doers of the word and the hearers only — and we have some level of response from Simon the sorcerer. But it didn't produce any genuine change in his life.

**THE DECEPTIVE NATURE OF POWER**  
**THE REVEALING NATURE OF POWER**  
**THE SPIRIT'S SUBVERSION OF POWER**

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## The Deceptive Nature of Power

Simon amazed the people of Samaria by what he was able to do through magic. It's not talking about some card trick, sleight of hand. Scripture tells us that this man was able to exercise control over nature or people by means of demonic power and he was able to do this not just once or twice, but he was consistently operating in this power.

### Acts 8:10

<sup>10</sup> They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the power of God that is called Great." <sup>11</sup> And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had **amazed** them with his magic.

Simon had power for a long enough period of time for his reputation to spread beyond Samaria, and throughout the Roman Empire. He was famous and he was powerful.

Here comes Philip, preaching the gospel and the kingdom, a bunch of people believe, and are baptized, INCLUDING Simon the Sorcerer. ***Simon goes from pretending to have the power of God, to witnessing the actual power of God — and then tries to purchase the Holy Spirit from Peter and John.***

### Acts 8:20-21

<sup>20</sup> But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! <sup>21</sup> You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your **heart is not right** before God.

***What's happened?*** Simon believed. He was even obedient in baptism and yet— something was wrong with his motives.

### Acts 8:9

But there was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that **he himself was somebody great**.

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## Prideful and Self-Exalting

**Simon is enamored with his own greatness.** He is completely blind to the depth of his own brokenness and sin, there is no recognition or healthy fear of the consequence of sin. He's convinced a lot of people that he's great and is doing whatever he has to do in order to affirm that belief about himself. ***The deceptive nature of fame and power is that it can convince you that you really are as great as people say you are.***

The Pharisees were no different than Simon the Sorcerer, as evidenced in the way Jesus rebuked them.

- "Outwardly you appear attractive, but inwardly you are full of dead people's bones."
- "You think you're something great, but your greatness is just a mask hiding an enormous well of wickedness and self-indulgence."

Scripture is FULL of warnings targeted for the proud, the arrogant, and the person operating in the flesh.

**Pride cost mankind Eden.  
Pride cost angels heaven.  
Pride cost Nebuchadnezzar his reason.**

**Proverbs 8:13** “Pride and arrogance and the evil way do I hate.”

**Proverbs 16:5** “Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord.”

**James 4:6** “God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble.”

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## **The Revealing Nature of Power**

It’s been said that ‘absolute power corrupts absolutely...’ and that’s wrong.

*“Power doesn’t corrupt, it reveals.”<sup>1</sup>  
Erwin McManus*

The more elevated a person becomes, the more exposed they become. The more Simon was elevated, the more his faults, his misplaced motives were revealed, his weaknesses, brokenness, and patterns of sin were revealed.

**Why did Simon, continue on with the Apostles?** Because he was saved? Because he was being obedient?

**No. Because he wanted the real power.** He wanted the genuine, miracle-working power of the Holy Spirit. It wasn’t for the purpose of serving the crucified Savior, or for the benefit of others—but for the purpose of elevating himself and his own agenda.

Ultimately, what you see in Simon is there is no internal conversion of the heart. He’s continuing to live in self-deception — offering money for the Holy Spirit— money representing a form of power.

The warning for us—power is alluring. Maybe it’s to prove someone wrong, to quiet the demons inside, to convince ourselves that we’re greater than we actually are—or because we want control—we believe power brings convenience and comfort.

***These reasons are why we need people around us that will tell us the truth about ourselves.***

We need to give permission to people to tell us the truth about ourselves. At every point in our lives, we need what Proverbs calls...

**Proverbs 27:6**

Wounds from a friend can be trusted

**Do you know what Simon’s problem was?** He wasn’t in relationship with anyone that would tell him the truth about his own ego! His need for power and control over others! His drive for fame and notoriety!

This is what the disciples try to do for him...

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<sup>1</sup> McManus, Erwin Raphael. *Uprising: A Revolution of the Soul* (Thomas Nelson, August 27, 2006) p.78

## **Acts 8:20**

But Peter said to him, “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! <sup>21</sup> You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your **heart is not right** before God. <sup>22</sup> **Repent**, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, **the intent of your heart may be forgiven you**. <sup>23</sup> For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.”

*Simon, your heart is so filled with hatred, resentment, bitterness, and evil and you're blind to it. You can't see it...*

## **Acts 8:24**

<sup>24</sup> And Simon answered, “Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.”

They didn't say something was going to come upon him—they said something was currently true of him. “Simon, you are wicked right now and you are filled with all bitterness and evil.”

**Was he frightened?** Shaken at all? Trembling? Any ounce of repentance, or self-reflection?

**You see it in his response...** *“I'll tell you what, you talk to God for me about that...”* He's so dismissive and trite about his own sin. His own “greatness” has blinded him to his flaws and frailties.

***Simon wanted all the benefits of the relationship without the actual relationship. He wanted to add the Holy Spirit to the list of tools in his tool belt. He wasn't in submission to God, he wanted God to be in submission to him.***

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## **The Spirit's Subversion of Power**

### **Luke 18:9-14**

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt: “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ I tell you; this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Culturally, the Pharisees were the holy ones and the tax collectors were traitorous scum. The Jews were betrayed and exploited by their own people for their own financial gain from the Roman oppressors.

Jesus tells this story that would have been offensive to any Jewish person listening.

- One person thinks they are great, the other person knows they're not
- One person thinks they are justified by their moral performance, the other person knows that they are morally bankrupt before God
- One is proud, the other is humble
- One is in a position of power, the other is positionally weak
- One has status, the other does not
- One exalts himself, the other humbles himself
- One is an insider, the other is an outcast
- One is religious, the other is anything but religious

## James 4:6

“God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble.”

In the middle of Simon’s story, there are three verses sandwiched into the passage.

## Acts 8:14-17

Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, <sup>15</sup> who came down and prayed for them that **they might receive the Holy Spirit, <sup>16</sup> for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>17</sup> Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.**

We see God giving grace to the humble but resisting the proud. We see in this instance the humble, the meek, the repentant, the contrite, receiving POWER!

If you know with everything in your being that you could do nothing to earn the grace of God, and He gives it to you anyway, you’ll be gracious and kind, forgiving and patient with others. But if there is even an ounce of you that believes that you deserve the grace of God—you will inevitably use your power to abuse, control, rule over, and manipulate others for your own purposes.

**In the Kingdom of God,  
Humility is wisdom!  
Vulnerability is wisdom!  
Meekness and gentleness are Wisdom.**

We need to be careful not to ever make the mistake that meekness is weakness. That silence, or patience, or self-control is a form of weakness—often times what the world calls weakness—God calls strength!

It’s only when you understand the depth of your sin, and the overwhelming beauty of God’s grace that those qualities will be consistently present in you.

If you compare the character of Simon with that of the Holy Spirit...

**Simon affirms himself – the Spirit affirms others  
Simon is self-exalting – The Spirit is Christ-exalting  
Simon is self-serving – The Spirit serves others  
Simon draws to Himself – The Spirit points to Christ  
Simon wants the spotlight – The Spirit redirects the spotlight  
Simon takes power – The Spirit gives power**

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## Conclusion

Looking at Jesus’s example –

- The strong became weak so the weak could be made strong.
- The victorious became defeated, those who were defeated could become victorious.
- Jesus was put in shackles, so our shackles could be broken.
- Jesus became sin, so that we could become the righteousness of God.

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## Discussion Questions

1. Where are you trying use God?
2. When have you used the Holy Spirit as a tool in your toolbox that you utilize whenever you want?
3. Where are you demanding that God be in submission to you?
4. How are you in submission to God?
5. When have you realized that you were operating in pride vs the Spirt?

## NOTES