

The Sin of Simon

Acts 8:4-25

By Stan Cox

One of the most interesting accounts of conversion during New Testament times is found in Acts, chapter 8. The account referred to is the conversion of the Samaritans by Philip, as recorded in verses 4-25 of the chapter. It is interesting as much for what it excludes from the conversion process as for what it includes.

As an example, one might note that Holy Spirit baptism is excluded from the conversion process. Verses 14-16 indicate that the Samaritans had been converted, and yet, "...He (the Holy Spirit) had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." In fact, it was not until the apostles sent Peter and John to lay hands on the new converts that they received the Holy Spirit. This obviously disproves any claim that "Holy Spirit Baptism" plays a part in the process of conversion.

The occasion of the apostles' visit and their laying on of hands brings to our attention another example of what conversion does NOT include. It does not include the unconditional safety of the convert. In other words, Acts 8 teaches that it is possible for a child of God to apostatize, and as such be lost eternally.

In verse 13 of the text, a sorcerer named Simon is mentioned as being converted by the preaching of Philip. His conversion cannot be successfully denied. We are told that he believed, and he was baptized. This brings to mind the clear teaching of Jesus in Mark 16:16, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." Notice the text is just as positive in stating his conversion as it is any of the others who were convinced by the preaching of Philip on that occasion.

Later on in the account we read of Simon committing a sin. He saw the apostles laying hands on the Christians there, and offered them money, saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit" (verse 19). As Peter pointed out very clearly in verse twenty, it was sinful to try and purchase a gift from God with money! We must not lose sight of the scenario here in this context. Simply, we have a Christian, guilty of sin.

Now, notice carefully the statement of Peter in its entirety, recorded in verses 20-23. "But Peter said to him, **Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have**

neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity."

We have already determined by the passage that Simon was a Christian. He had believed, and he had been baptized. Therefore, he was saved. And yet just as clear is the import of the above verses. Simon had sinned. As such he was in danger of "perishing". He was in need of prayer and repentance. He was bound by iniquity. The passage very clearly teaches that unless he repented and asked God's forgiveness, he would be lost for an eternity. We are happy to note his repentance, and his request for the apostles' prayer.

What we want to emphasize, however, is the possibility raised here of a child of God losing his soul. A very large contingent in Protestant denominations deny this possibility. The influence of John Calvin has so pervaded Protestantism that this issue presents itself quite often in Bible discussions. Calvin believed that salvation was in the realm of God, apart from any action of man. He reasoned that if God saved or condemned man according to His whim, then a man predestined to salvation could not endanger his safety by any activity, no matter how heinous it might be. In effect, "Once saved, always saved", a doctrine more formally known as the "Impossibility of Apostasy".

With due respect to Mr. Calvin, the text we have examined clearly teaches otherwise. And the example of disciple Simon does not stand unaccompanied by others. Many passages stating similar warnings can be cited.

For example, the book of Hebrews. In reality the entire epistle stands as a warning of the possibility of apostasy. The writer of that profound letter begins in chapter two by stating, "Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away." In chapter five he chastises his readers for being so immature. He states in verse 12, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food." After this admonition, he encourages his readers to "go on to perfection" (6:1), in other words to continue to develop and mature. The operative question here is why? Why the need to grow and mature if at our conversion we are safe for eternity? His answer is found in verse 4 of chapter 6. "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame." God says that we must continue to go forward, and that to remain

stagnant puts us in danger of being lost eternally. It is possible for one who was

enlightened, having tasted the heavenly gift (obviously referring to a Christian) to fall away, and for it to be impossible for them to be renewed again to repentance (obviously referring to an eternally lost condition). The Hebrew writer penned his entire letter to warn his readers of the very possibility most of the religious world denies exists. **A Christian who does not maintain his faithfulness and steadfastness CAN LOSE HIS SOUL!**

Other passages could be cited which clearly warn of the possibility of a child of God losing his soul. **The reader is encouraged to examine Romans 8:12-13; Revelation 3:1-5; II Peter 73 2:18-22; Hebrews 10:26-31; and Galatians 6:7-9.**

It must be understood that the process of conversion is properly viewed as a beginning. When a person is baptized, his sins are washed away. He is a new creature. As long as he maintains his faithfulness to God he is promised an eternity in heaven. He is, however, obligated to that faithfulness. As our Lord wrote to the saints in Smyrna in Revelation 2:10, "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."

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