

THE EDIFIER

Volume 21

CHURCH OF GOD 7TH DAY

JUNE 2015

Simon the Sorcerer

Putting to death by the Spirit



Are you satisfied with your life? Are you happy with who you are, or do real joy and contentment seem hard to find? Are there negative things in your heart that just won't go away? Perhaps you question God asking "why God, after all of these years can't I overcome my lack of confidence, depression, sins, anger, guilt, bitterness, slackness, or my past. Why God can't I have the strength to do the things you want me to do?"

If any of these problems apply to you, real answers to your questions and yearnings can be found in considering the story of Simon the Sorcerer. Simon was a man, who manipulated others for money and power with his magic, but one day, after seeing the miracles performed through Philip and hearing Philip preach the gospel and the kingdom of God, he saw that the Philip had something more awesome to offer him in Christ.

Acts 8:13 says Simon believed, was baptized, and continued with Philip. Very soon after, however, Simon put his "foot in it" big time, so much so that most commentators doubt he was really converted and doubt he ever received the Holy Spirit. Simon demeaned the Holy Spirit by seeking to purchase the power to impart the Spirit to others. In considering Simon's story, we are forced to consider our own story. Were we instantly rid of our evil propensities and sinful thoughts, motivations, and behaviors upon receiving the Holy Spirit? Does our "old man" or "old woman" still rear his or her ugly head? Are we being harsh on Simon and indeed hypocritical if we condemn him and suggest he never received the Holy Spirit

because of the way he behaved immediately after his baptism?

Putting to death, by the Spirit, the things of the flesh was not something that Simon was able to do instantly. But notice that the apostle Peter had not given up on him. He urged him to repent (v. 22), and in response Simon asked for Peter's prayers so he would be forgiven and escape God's wrath. How about us? Are we putting to death by the Spirit the deeds of the flesh, and do any of our sinful traits we had prior to conversion still plague us?

Did Simon receive the Holy Spirit?

It's an interesting issue whether or not Simon received the Holy Spirit. On the one hand verse 13 says Simon believed and was baptized. Peter and John prayed for all those who had been baptized that they would receive the Holy Spirit, and verse 17 says that they laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

Since Simon was in this group, there's good reason to believe he had hands laid on him too and he received the Holy Spirit just as the others did.

On the other hand the verses don't specifically say Simon received the Holy Spirit, and the way he behaved immediately after baptism and laying on of hands might give us good reason to doubt he did. It did not seem like he had changed at all as he was still poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity (v. 23), and his heart was not right in the sight of God (v. 21). We may question

whether Simon's heart was right before he was baptized given that it was not right so soon after believing and being baptized. Would God give His Spirit to a baptism candidate whose heart was not right?

We should however be careful of jumping to firm conclusions about Simon's reception of the Holy Spirit based on Simon's post-baptism behavior and heart. What about our heart and our conduct post-baptism? What about our maturity after becoming a Christian. Was it always right in God's sight? Is it?

Something sadly missing

If Simon did receive the Holy Spirit it's very sad the changing power of the Spirit failed to make a great difference in his life and that he was so poisoned and bound. If we as a Christian are seriously struggling with sinful attitudes and behaviors, Romans 8:13-14 says an important thing might be missing in our lives. It suggests we may not be, by the Spirit, putting to death the deeds of the body. In other words, we may not be allowing the Holy Spirit to lead us away from sinful desires and actions. We may not be following the lead of the Spirit into spiritual things, but rather letting our own human nature rule us, rather than God's word.

In considering how, by the Spirit, we can put to death the deeds of the body, we can use Simon as a prime example of what *not* to do. What did he do that was so bad and why was it so bad?

Verses 18-19 show us what he did. To trade in the things of God, as Simon tried to do, devalues them because they are priceless and holy. To attempt to trade in the most

holy thing of all, the Holy Spirit of God, is demeaning God Himself. Simon showed a tremendous lack of understanding of the sacredness of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not something we can purchase with money, for the Holy Spirit is priceless (v.20). From Simon's action we have derived the word "simony" which involves trading in sacred things.

Character flaws

Why did Simon do what he did? We might also legitimately query whether Simon's stated motivation - namely, to share the Holy Spirit with others (Acts 8:19), was genuine or not. In trying to understand this it's important to consider what he was like before he believed and was baptized and what pre-existing character-flaw continued to plague him?

Simon did what he did because of his pre-existing character flaws which had not yet been dealt with in him. Verses 9-10 tell us what he was like before. He was proud and boastful. He was rich and powerful and thrived on others respecting and honoring him for his astonishing magic. He was power hungry and glory-seeking, and it seems that in Christianity he also wanted the fast-track in the Kingdom of God. He wasn't ready to sit and learn at the Apostle's feet. He wasn't willing to patiently wait until God exalted him. His natural inclination was to be a leader of people for his own gain, and now he was taking a wrong step by not allowing the Holy Spirit to put this to death in his life.

Overcoming

If Simon had received the Holy Spirit, we might ask ourselves whether it would be reasonable to expect he would overcome his life

-long sinful habits or pre-existing character flaws in an instant?

Of-course not. Did we? A new Christian is a babe in Christ. First, it takes milk to grow and later the meat. Overcoming character flaws and sins requires our continual reliance on the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit.

How can Simon's story help us to overcome the negative things in our heart or sinful behaviors that we've struggled with for so long without ultimate victory?



Perhaps, like Simon, we have let sinful parts of our old nature continue to flourish. Perhaps the root cause of our ongoing struggles with sin is that we have not properly dealt with the major character flaw we had before becoming a Christian. Such things might include pride, vanity, competitive spirit, overconfidence, pessimism etc. The list is endless. Let's take the time to meditate on these things and to remember our Lord's words.

If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

Matthew 5:29-30

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In Union with Christ

Is the hope for Jesus' return close to your heart and mind as much as it was on those first century disciples who also believed that Jesus would return in their lifetime?

Living in this world, however, we also recognise the power of distraction that can so easily take away our focus from Jesus. The devil would love for Jesus' followers to love Him less, to become lukewarm, to get distracted, or to get overly busy. After all, the devil is an expert in beguilement and deception. But, when we're close to God, in intimate covenant relationship with Jesus, when Jesus is the focus of our waking thoughts, prayers, all our actions (spontaneous or premeditated) then there's little threat for any serious distraction.

One of the hardest things for us to do is to openly proclaim our love for Jesus. It may have not been in our culture. It might not be in our "personality". Excuses in that area are often aplenty. And that, in some ways, is a sad reflection. Thankfully, a faithful few have responded to their calling and continued growing in Christ despite perhaps the "lots of head knowledge" and little "love of Jesus" in their

previous "non-church" experience. On that note we can be glad that the times are changing within our church fellowships and in our own personal lives; after all, Jesus is the good shepherd and we must not deny Him that honour. We can be glad that more people are coming to a knowledgeable faith in how Jesus works in our lives: that He knocks on the door of our world, but doesn't push in. It is for us to reach for the handle and only when we swing open the door, does Jesus intimately come into our lives. And that is important to understand. We are called into a responsive relationship with Jesus - a covenant relationship that is bound by both expectation and responsibility. We're



discussing a relationship that becomes a deep, intimate and accountable friendship.

So although God the Father calls us, and Jesus knocks on the door of our lives, Jesus will not push in where He's not invited. He did not perform any miracles in the towns where unbelief existed when He ministered in Judea some 2000 years ago. And so it is with us. God has given us freewill. We are to choose life. We are to bring our lives completely in surrender to Jesus, and only we

can volunteer this. We are not puppets. The detail of our life's journey is not completely foreordained. To Abraham, God said, "Now I know..." only after Abraham's faith was displayed by his actions, tested to the very last moment. The future is changed and mountains are moved only by the fervent, effective prayers of the righteous.

For all the mistakes we've made in our lives, we can never blame God for them. For if we believed that our entire lives were preordained and that we had no choice in anything, then we could also easily pass the blame onto God for our sins. Not so. Jesus paid for my sins and your sins. God has entitled us to free will, beginning with the very choices he gave in the Garden of Eden. It is liberating to understand that we do have choice - a grace that stems from a God-ordained freedom - from which we don't have to be clueless. We can ask for wisdom. Wisdom is something God eagerly awaits to grant to those who ask Him - so that we may be equipped to make better choices that reflect God's righteousness.

"A man's mind plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps", is a scripture that seems to indicate that while we may dream and have aspirations, it is only when we willingly submit to God that these dreams begin to have any substance to them. That's why we go to God in prayer multiple times each

day. We invite God into our lives, in every passing moment, and in every desired outcome.

Today, in this age, our lives are being "tested". God will never tempt anyone, but He will test us. This testing happens over a lifetime. The seed of the Holy Spirit is planted at baptism with the laying on of hands. As the years go by, the Holy Spirit grows and flows mightily, working with us and through us. When it comes to covenant relationship, baptism is the touchstone of all relationship standards, because it brings us into marriage communion with Jesus Christ Himself - sealed with the Holy Spirit. And to truly enter into the depths of that communion and covenantal relationship that will transcend and transform us into the very image of the Son of God, we, then, desire nothing that this world can offer, with our eyes exclusively fixed on Jesus and His Kingdom. Every other relationship, every other offer, and every temptation pales into insignificance. Even our immediate families, spouses, parents and children on this earth must come secondary to the relationship we have in Christ Jesus.

That is why as a collective community of believers, we have been given different gifts but the same Spirit. In union with Christ, in love with Jesus, His word, His faith, His Majesty, His righteousness, His will and purpose, His love and attention, His awe and Glory - to which nothing compares.

Thus, we find ourselves talking about Jesus all the time. He's the head of every table. He is the Lord of our hearts. We openly confess our love for Him. His wisdom and presence adorns every grey hair - which the Father numbers. He is in our inner thoughts. His word, and will, moulds our days and shapes our lives. We approach His throne of Grace in all areas of our lives and our family's lives, especially, for example, when it comes to matters of finding Godly spouses for our children, and praying for their spouses decades before they finally meet. We ask God for His help and guidance in all areas of our lives. Because of that covenantal relationship, we want Him from that moment onward to shape our destiny, and this is only achieved by willingly surrendering our will.

And each day, He wants us to innovatively look out and beyond to find ways that glorify Him. He wants us to be creative, to trust Him. He wants to bless the work of our hands. He wants us to live the surrendered life to Him. Many times God will answer our prayers when we're totally out of any other options, when we're "hemmed in by the Red Sea", or watching the "setting sun"



on some experience, or when we've struggled with a trial sometimes for decades - God wants us to confess our love for Him, our faith for Him, our trust in Him.

Those in the world who choose a different path become deluded and blinded, of course, by the god of this world. Those who have left the faith, who broke covenant with Jesus, made various choices - in a similar way perhaps to Judas. Did God cause them to leave the faith? No. God forbid! Their life's path was formed by lots of little choices, day by day, moment by moment. Freedom and consequence walk hand-in-hand. The hosts of heaven cheer when one sinner repents. In one sense, we are indeed the centre of the universe's attention, for what God is doing and how he is doing it - through us, inviting us into more than just a partnership, but inferring on us as joint heirs with Christ Jesus.

As the love of God grows in our lives, and we increasingly become the new creation, the new person in Christ, we become creatures of love. We'll then tell all those around us how much we love them. That's our testimony. Our actions will "speak" of love. Our children will "feel" loved as well as beloved. Our motives will be understood through the lens of love. Discipline will not be harsh, but loving, with kindly eye-to-eye contact. And people around us will feel and experience that love (and

ultimately attribute it to God's glory). We will truly be Jesus' disciples when we love each other. Love has to grow for it to thrive. It has to come from God's Holy Spirit. It has to be in everything we say. Even the truth must be spoken in love! And because of love we will listen intently to those in our families, our church and those in our communities. And those who oppose us, we will also kindly entreat them. We will also be wise to the devil's ruses, the attractive distractions that can if momentarily confuse us - should we, God forbid, take our eyes off from Jesus. The fruits of our love in Christ, when tested, will unite families, and always bring people together who are also in Christ.

May our focus at this time, perhaps more than ever before, be open and transparent before Christ firstly, and then to each other. May we be accounted worthy, worthy to stand before Jesus. May there be no straw or chaff in our lives, but only grain - good fruit. May we be people of the Book, and use it wisely. Too many have manipulated the scriptures to suit their choices. May we be people quick to bless, quick to forgive, easy to entreat, eager to please. May the righteousness of God in us speak louder than the "rights" of this world's life. May our lives, in every detail, reflect the union we have with and in Jesus Christ.

Written by John Klassek

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Conclusion

The wonderful changing power of the Holy Spirit is available to us, as it was to Simon. We must not let our old nature get the upper hand, as Simon's did. We must make conscious choices not to feed our old nature. We mustn't believe our old self when it tells us we are weak, stupid, useless, or ugly; or when it tells us we deserve center stage, or that we should sacrifice for that luxury sports car. Let's save our sacrifices for Christ and continually feed our new self on the spiritual things God has laid so abundantly at our table. There will be joy unspeakable in our lives.

Written by David Kidd

"I have set the Lord always before me; Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved." Psalm 16:8

TRUST
in the LORD
with all your heart
and lean **NOT**
on your own understanding;
in ALL your ways
ACKNOWLEDGE
him, and he
will make your paths
straight.
Proverbs 3:5-6

Answers 'Test Your Knowledge'

1. b,e,a,c,d 2. d 3. b 4. c 5. c



The First Day of the Week in the New Testament.

Much of Christendom attaches special significance to the first day of the week, commonly called Sunday. From early Sunday morning and into the evening, church bells around the world ring out the time for worship..... The validity of recognizing Sunday as a day of worship is something the average church goer never questions, assuming that Sunday has always been the day Christians go to church.

The eight passages in the New Testament that refer to the first day of week are examined in this booklet.

Please send for this free booklet

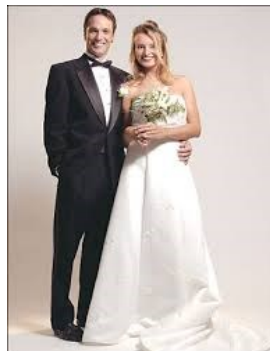
Marriage: A Divine Institution Under Attack

The sanctity of marriage is being attacked on many different fronts in our society today. It is not just gay right activists or human rights movements encouraging the change to the laws of marriage, but also some Christian leaders and churches who are now openly supporting the same-sex marriage movement and earnestly trying to persuade other Christians to follow their example.

A well-known Christian leader recently said, *“It has taken countless hours of prayer, study, conversation and emotional turmoil to bring me to the place where I am finally ready to call for the full acceptance of Christian gay couples into the Church.”* Quote taken from *The Gospel Herald*.

<http://www.gospelherald.com/articles/55992/20150610/tony-campolo-announces-support-for-same-sex-marriage-calls-for-full-inclusion-of-gay-couples-within-church.htm>

If marriage were of human origin, then I would agree that people would have the right to decide what kind of marital relationships they would prefer. But marriage was ordained by God, giving Him the right to tell us which principles should govern our marital relationships.



From the beginning of creation, God set the pattern for marriage.

So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Genesis 1:27

Then God saw it wasn't good for Adam to be alone and created Eve to keep Adam company.

And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him." Genesis 2:18

Then God created the institution of marriage.

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. Genesis 2:24

In the New Testament Jesus Christ affirms God's pattern of marriage by quoting from the Book of Genesis.

And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." Matthew 19:4-6

The Apostle Paul in Ephesians speaks on the subject of relationship and marriage, between a husband and wife, using the same verses from Genesis 2:24. *'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?* Ephesians

5:31. But he doesn't stop there, he goes on to reveal to the readers that this is a great mystery (revelation) concerning Christ and the church. Ephesians 5:32. Christ the Bridegroom (male) and the church being the bride. (female) Revelation 19:6-9

How can Christians even suggest that two of the same gender (couples) could be seen in the same light as the understanding of Christ and the church?

I recently read a quote which stated, *“An unchanging God in a changing world.”* This understanding of an unchanging God is confirmed in Malachi 3:6, *“For I am the Lord, I do not change.”* Has God's command, *“You shall not lie with a male as with a woman...”* (Leviticus 18:22) changed since it was written?

Our Heavenly Father's principles regarding marriage between a man and women still stands to this day, in spite of some of Christendom believing that they have found through much study and prayer, God's approval of gay couples and same-sex marriage. In reality they have made a mockery of God's divine institution of marriage.

Written by Phil Kordahi

Youth Vibe



*And what does the LORD require of you?
But to do justly, To love mercy,
And to walk humbly with your God?*

Micah 6:8

Both justice and mercy are foundational to God’s character. *“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; Mercy and truth go before Your face.”* Psalm 89:14

God expects His children to have the same character of justice, mercy and love He and His Son has. To deal with people fairly and honestly. To protect the innocent and show love toward our fellow man and to walk humbly before the Lord.

“The response of a godly heart is outward (do justice), inward (love mercy), and upward (walk humbly)”

Below are just a few inspiring verses on the issues of justice, mercy, and humility.

- Exodus 23:2
- Psalm 25:9
- Psalm 82:3
- Matthew 5:7
- James 2:13
- 1 Peter 5:5

Please read the scriptures and add your own comments.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Sort the following characters in chronological order:

a. Moses; b. Adam; c. David; d. Solomon; e. Abraham

2. Which of these is the name of a book in the Christian Scriptures (New Testament)

a. Judges; b. Malachi; c. Deuteronomy; d. Hebrews; e. Isaiah

3. According to the Bible, who of these was one of Jesus' 12 apostles?

a. Paul; b. Matthew; c. Luke; d. Timothy; e. Silas

4. How many temptations did Jesus endure in the wilderness?

a. one; b. two; c. three; d. four; e. five

5. In which book is the prayer "Create in me a clean heart, O God" found?

a. Proverbs; b. Ezekiel; c. Psalms; d. Deuteronomy; e. Luke

Light for Life

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Produced and Distributed by CHURCH OF GOD 7TH DAY (Australia)

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