

CONVERSION STUDIES

CONVERSION OF THE SAMARITANS

Example three of thirteen

Some time after the church was established, Saul of Tarsus led a persecution against it. Philip was driven to Samaria. Being safe there he could speak freely. Philip found a ripe harvest in Samaria. "And the multitudes gave heed unto the things that were spoken by Philip, when they heard, and saw the signs which he did" (Acts 8:6). The Samaritans had part of the Old Testament, and believed in a coming Messiah. Christ had also visited Samaria and made many disciples. Unfortunately, in every fertile field, opposition comes. "But there was a certain man, Simon by name, who beforetime...used sorcery, and amazed the people...giving out that himself was some great one:... from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is that power of God which is called Great. And they gave heed to him..." (Acts 8:9-11). There are other examples of sorcery being used as a pretended parallel to the gospel: Bar-Jesus (Acts 13), and the sons of Sceva (Acts 19). Modern faith healing is parallel opposition to the gospel much like sorcery. It is a great show and deceives people into thinking the healers are great powers of God when they are not from God.

As many today are following false teachers, we see here some ways to determine if we are right. One cannot be sure he is right because the preacher claims to be speaking God's will (Acts 8:9). Simon's claim did not make what he said true. One cannot be sure he is right because the doctrine is popular or widely believed (Acts 8:10). One cannot be sure he is right because of the prominence of those believing a doctrine (Acts 8:10). You have to search the Scriptures (Acts 17:11).

Philip worked real miracles (Acts 8:7). These were not an end within themselves, but were designed to confirm that what was said by Philip was from God. "And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word by the signs that followed" (Mark 16:20). So obviously supernatural were Philip's miracles that Simon also believed (Acts 8:13). True miracles established Philip as the true preacher. It is sometimes argued that if Philip used miracles to prove his words were from God, shouldn't we be able to do the same? The

answer is, "No." We prove our message by the confirmed word of God, the New Testament.

Philip preached Christ (Acts 8:5). The miracles were secondary to this key work. Christ was the theme of every Spirit guided preacher in Acts. What does preaching Christ include? It surely includes His commands. How could anyone claim to preach Christ and not preach His commands? Preaching Christ includes preaching the kingdom (Acts 8:12). Those who obey Christ's gospel are placed in God's kingdom (Col. 1:13). Sometimes people claim we should just preach Christ and not concern ourselves with the church. Such is impossible. You cannot separate Christ and His church because the church is His body (Col. 1:18).

Whenever the gospel is preached, there will be fruit. God will not allow His word to return to Him void (Isa. 55:11). Not everyone will become obedient to Christ, but many will. In this case, even those deceived by a sorcerer and the sorcerer himself were converted. The people believed (Acts 8:12), and Simon also believed (Acts 8:13). This shows the power of the word (Rom. 10:17). But merely believing was not the end. They were baptized (Acts 8:12,13). Thus they were saved including Simon. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). There was joy in the city (Acts 8:8). Joy always follows the gospel. When people hear it, they rejoice to know that God loves them (John 3:16). Many who are conscious of sins feel that God could not possibly care. The gospel says He does care, and cares so much He sent His Son. The gospel is good news or glad tidings. How could it produce anything but joy to those who accept it?

Do you have the joy of being a Christian? Having heard of God's love shown in His Son, believe, repent, and be immersed!

(B. G. Echols)

CHURCH OF CHRIST
412 East King Street
Shippensburg, PA 17257