

Simon the Samaritan Sorcerer

Joe Slater

Obedying the gospel doesn't make you immune from temptation. The case of Simon the Samaritan Sorcerer clearly illustrates the life-long tug-of-war between sin and righteousness, pride and humility, faithfulness and disloyalty.

All we know about Simon from Scripture comes from Acts 8:9-24. Before hearing the gospel from Philip, Simon practiced sorcery (literally "magic" – not cute tricks like pulling a rabbit out of a hat, but occult magic). Simon proudly claimed to be someone great, and the astonished people of Samaria proclaimed that he was "*the great power of God*" (8:10).

When Simon saw Philip performing real miracles, he grasped the difference between true miracles and the fraudulent ones he had used to deceive people. Having heard Philip preaching the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, Simon humbled himself enough to believe and submit to baptism (immersion) (Acts 8:13).

Satan wasn't finished with Simon, though. When the apostles Peter and John came, Simon saw them laying their hands on the new Christians to impart supernatural gifts. He offered the apostles money if they would enable him to give miraculous gifts through the laying on of his own hands (8:18-19). His prideful craving to be seen as someone great had returned!

Peter rebuked Simon, telling him to repent and pray for forgiveness (8:20-22). Note that he didn't tell him to be immersed for the remission of sins again; nor did he tell him that he had never been saved in the first place. Simon humbled himself and pleaded with Peter to pray for him (8:24).

We aren't immune from temptation. When we yield to it, then we, like Simon, must repent and pray.

Unexpected Surprises

I recently viewed a humorous birthday card that displayed three lobsters in a supermarket tank. As a hand reaches in to remove one, the chosen lobster says to the others with an excited look, "Did you hear that, guys? I get to go to a party in the hot tub!" (If only the lobster knew!). The card's inside caption reads, "May your birthday be full of only pleasant surprises." I liked the card so much that I bought every one of them!

Pleasant surprises resonate well. Who does not like receiving an unexpected check, hearing of good news, or attending a surprise party? Unfortunately, surprises are not always for the best. A year ago, millions assembled in Times Square to celebrate as the ball dropped and ushered in 2020. This year, as the hands of time moved into 2021, few assembled there. Why? The emergence of Coronavirus during the "bright new year" of 2020 brought an unwelcome "surprise" to all.

As a new year begins, no one knows what may happen. Many look forward with bated breath, expecting the worst, while others bask in optimism and pray for a return to normalcy. From a heavenly perspective, it could be when Lord Jesus returns to usher in eternity (2 Peter 3:10). It may also be when the hands of time stand still in our own lives. Regardless of what befalls, God's word admonishes believers to live "*upright and godly lives in the present age*" (Titus 2:12).

Think of the pleasant surprises that would transpire if more people did this!

--Kenny Westmoreland (Celina, TN)

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I don't wish, but I pray, because I don't have a genie, I have a God!

Common Sense

Common sense means that a person has sound, practical judgment. Synonyms include "good sense" and "horse sense." Sad to say, many people have found their way into highly important leadership positions, politically or otherwise, without a lick of sound, practical judgment. A higher educational achievement does not mean that one has common sense. A good education coupled with sound, practical common sense is a great asset. "Common sense is the knack of seeing things as they are, and doing things as they ought to be done" (C. E. Stowe).

On our currency in the USA the motto still is, "In God We Trust." Now that makes sense! It makes sense to believe in God and trust Him. The Bible is a book of common sense. No other so-called sacred book can stand on the same level with the Bible.

Common sense calls for and requires the existence of the one true God, our Creator. The New Testament book of Hebrews applies common sense to prove that God exists: "*For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God*" (Hebrews 3:4). "Now that makes sense. No house can build itself. Neither could the world have happened accidentally. To say that either could have created itself is monstrously unscientific and grossly nonsensical. Any created thing requires a creator. Every effect must have a cause. So science and sanity are on the side of God – the Creator, the First Cause" (Leroy Brownlow).

--Donald R. Fox (via *Voice of Truth International*)