

## Freedom

**Luke 4:18 (NKJV)**

**<sup>18</sup>“The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed;**

- *In Luke, Chapter four, Christ introduced His ministry. He used five points to describe the purpose of His ministry and two of the five points deal with bringing liberty or freedom—liberty to those who are captives and liberty to those who are oppressed. So a very important aspect of Jesus Christ’s ministry is to bring freedom.*
- *The Gospel is about Freedom!*
- *Jesus emphasized the quality, reality, and endurance of the freedom that He provides for all who come to Him. “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.” (John 8:36).*
- *Just as there are many types of captivity, oppression, and bondage, the salvation that Jesus purchased for us provides freedom from each one of them.*
- *The very first and most essential freedom that Jesus provides for those who repent and put their faith in Him is freedom and deliverance from the penalty of sin—freedom from the condemnation that leads to eternal punishment in the Lake of Fire. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)*
- *Freedom from the penalty of sin is called justification and is complete the moment we receive Jesus. “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.” (John 5:24).*
- *Those who have received Jesus are now free from the fear of death and damnation! “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” (Hebrews 2:14–15).*
- *However, there is another type of freedom that Christ offers us once we have received Him as our Lord and Saviour—freedom from the power of sin which the Bible calls sanctification.*

- *Unlike justification, sanctification is an ongoing process in which we grow in freedom from sin as we grow in our relationship with Jesus Christ.*
- *Sin enslaves us. “Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.”” (John 8:34). Christ has come to set us free from the power and bondage of sin.*
- *Freedom from the penalty of sin resulted from a one-time choice to repent and put our faith in Christ, while freedom from the power of sin is a journey where we grow in freedom as we repent daily and continue to trust and obey Him.*
- *Another difference between justification, (freedom from the penalty of sin), and sanctification, (freedom from the power of sin), is that since justification is a one-time event it is permanent. Freedom from the power of sin is achieved as we walk through the process of sanctification, ridding ourselves of our old sinful habits. We maintain our sanctification by choosing not to deliberately walk back into sin which will lead us back to bondage. “It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.” (Galatians 5:1).*
- *Believers make many choices each day. Each right choice draws us closer to God while each sinful choice leads us toward bondage. We can either walk in a greater and greater degree of freedom and joy or we can be careless and find ourselves once again in bondage to the power of sin and in the grip of sinful habits. “For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.” (Romans 8:6).*
- *If we choose to be led by the Holy Spirit He will teach us how to walk in the way of freedom. “I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” (Galatians 5:16).*
- *With these two aspects of freedom that Jesus provides for us in mind we are going to explore a story in Acts, Chapter eight, that poses some challenging questions and offers some important answers.*

Acts 8:5–24 (NKJV)

<sup>5</sup>Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them.

<sup>6</sup>And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.

<sup>7</sup>For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed.

<sup>8</sup>And there was great joy in that city.

<sup>9</sup>But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great,

<sup>10</sup>to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is the great power of God.”

<sup>11</sup>And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time.

<sup>12</sup>But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.

<sup>13</sup>Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.

<sup>14</sup>Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them,

<sup>15</sup>who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

<sup>16</sup>For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

<sup>17</sup>Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

<sup>18</sup>And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money,

<sup>19</sup>saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

<sup>20</sup>But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!

<sup>21</sup>You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God.

<sup>22</sup>Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.

<sup>23</sup>For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity."

<sup>24</sup>Then Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me."

- *The story begins with Philip going down to the city of Samaria to preach the Gospel.*

<sup>5</sup>Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them.

<sup>6</sup>And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.

- *Here we can clearly see the importance of the work of the Holy Spirit in preparing the hearts of the people to receive the Gospel message. "And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did."*

<sup>7</sup>For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed.

<sup>8</sup>And there was great joy in that city.

- *The greatest proof of the truth of the Gospel is changed lives.*

- *The Gospel brings freedom to people. The oppressed were delivered, the sick were healed, the captives set free. People found freedom from the condemnation of their sins and were saved.*
- *The response of the people to the freedom they received through Jesus Christ was great joy. “And there was great joy in that city.”*

<sup>9</sup>But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great,  
<sup>10</sup>to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is the great power of God.”

<sup>11</sup>And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time.

- *As the story develops we see another component to the oppression that the people of Samaria had been under—sorcery! There was a man named Simon who, for a long time, had bewitched the people and deceived them into thinking he was the great power of God. His sorceries afforded him the adoration and fame of the people to such a degree that he held an important and affluent position in the city.*
- *Sorcery is witchcraft, performing supernatural feats empowered by Satan or evil spirits and is looked upon by God as an abomination. (Deuteronomy 18:10-12).*
- *Simon’s sorcery produced only bad fruit. People who are involved in the occult, horoscopes, and other fortune telling practices live under oppression, fear, and foreboding. However, once the people heard the Gospel and received Christ, their foreboding about the future was dispelled. It was replaced with inexpressible joy, hope, and anticipation of Heaven.*
- *The unbeliever’s future ends in death but the believer’s death ends in Heaven!*
- *Simon’s sorcery had provided no remedy for sin nor any hope for the future, only a dark foreboding of a spiritual realm that spoke of strange gods who were fickle and potentially malicious. On the other hand, Philip presented the Gospel which literally means “the Good News.” He spoke about the true and living God who is both loving and righteous and who came to redeem mankind by His own sacrificial death and glorious resurrection. What could be better news than that?!*
- *The reason that the people knew immediately that Simon’s power was counterfeit and Philip’s message was true is because of the effect the Gospel message had on them. Their oppression vanished and they were filled with peace, hope, and joy. “And there was great joy in that city.”*

<sup>12</sup>But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.

<sup>13</sup>Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.

- *The response of the Samaritans to Philip's message was tremendous. Many repented and put their faith in Christ and took water baptism. Even Simon himself, repented, left his sorcery, put his faith in Jesus Christ, and was water baptized!*
- *The genuineness of Simon's repentance can be seen in that he turned away from his occult practices along with the fame and prosperity it provided in order to follow Jesus.*
- *Not only did Simon repent of his sins but he showed an eagerness to grow in his new found faith and learn more about how to become a true disciple of Jesus because "he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done."*
- *There is no indication that Simon's repentance and faith in Jesus Christ was insincere.*

<sup>14</sup>Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them,

<sup>15</sup>who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

<sup>16</sup>For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

<sup>17</sup>Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

- *When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that revival had broken out in Samaria they sent Peter and John to establish the new believers and the new church. One of the functions of the apostolic ministry is to ensure that the church is built upon the solid foundation of Jesus Christ, correct doctrine, and the power of the Holy Spirit. "having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone." (Ephesians 2:20).*

<sup>18</sup>And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money,

<sup>19</sup>saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

- *Although Simon's repentance and faith in Christ appeared sincere, once he saw the power that was manifest through the apostles as they laid hands on the people and were filled with the Holy Spirit, selfish ambition and jealousy rose in*

*Simon's heart. The miracles and signs he witnessed awakened his former desire for power, fame, and recognition. In desperation "he offered them money, saying, "Give me this power also.""*

- *When someone receives Christ all their bad habits, selfishness, bondages and hang ups do not immediately disappear. Once we have received Christ we are immediately freed from the penalty of sin, however the sanctification that frees us from the power of sin is not instantaneous. Sanctification is a lifelong process.*
- *Salvation does not equal sanctification.*
- *In the following verses Peter spoke to Simon with such a sharp rebuke that one may question if he believed Simon's repentance and faith were genuine.*
- *This interchange between Peter and Simon actually poses a number of questions that may appear difficult to answer but cannot be ignored.*

<sup>20</sup>But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!

<sup>21</sup>You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God.

- *The sharpness of Peter's rebuke to Simon may seem even stranger considering that Peter had previously been guilty of denying Jesus three times, even pronouncing an oath and curse upon himself. "Then he began to curse and swear, "I do not know this Man of whom you speak!"" (Mark 14:71).*

<sup>22</sup>Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.

<sup>23</sup>For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity."

- *Then Peter seems to question whether Simon's sin can even be forgiven, "if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you." Could Simon's sin be even worse than Peter's sin of denying Jesus three times? Didn't Jesus die for all our sins?*

<sup>24</sup>Then Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me."

- *The final question involves Simon's response to Peter's rebuke. Was Simon's response appropriate? Did Simon find forgiveness or not? Was Simon's initial conversion genuine or was it feigned?*
- *To tackle these questions we must first establish the different aspects of forgiveness.*

- *When we first come to Christ and repent, we are not just faced with our sins but more importantly we are confronted with the fact that we are sinners in need of a Saviour. Therefore, for us to receive Christ we need to confess our sinful and lost state as sinners in order to be forgiven. It is at this point we are declared righteous and we have received justification and are freed from the penalty of sin. This is a one-time event.*
- *However, once we have received Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, we need to daily recognize individual sins, habits, and attitudes which try to control, enslave, and defile us. We need to immediately confess our sins so we can be forgiven, cleansed, and set free from each individual sin. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9). This is sanctification.*
- *Peter perceived by the Holy Spirit that Simon was poisoned by a deep root of bitterness and was a prisoner of envy and jealousy which caused him to become extremely selfish and seeking self-exaltation. “For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.”*
- *However, Peter’s words were not spoken to Simon in order to condemn him or out of frustration or disdain but from a deep concern for Simon knowing that if these attitudes and sins were not dealt with they would bring ruin to his life. Peter’s rebuke was harsh for he knew the consequence of Simon’s sins if he did not find freedom. “Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!*
- *If Simon did not find freedom from these deep rooted sins it would disqualify him from any type of fruitful ministry because everything he would try to do for God would be defiled by his deep root of bitterness. This would result in him being motivated by selfish ambition and competitiveness in order to build up “his own ministry” and not God’s. “You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God.”*
- *In a similar way Paul instructed Titus, as the pastor of the church in Crete, to rebuke sharply those who were refusing to deal with their deep rooted sins. This was not spoken from an attitude of frustration or anger but from a confidence that God’s grace was sufficient to set them free so they could live fruitful lives. “One of them, a prophet of their own, said, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.” This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith.” (Titus 1:12-13).*
- *The most challenging verse to understand in the story is verse 22, “Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.”*

- *Some have misunderstood this verse and wrongly interpreted it to say, “repent and pray if perhaps God may decide to forgive you of the wicked thoughts of your heart.” However, this is not at all what is being said or what is meant.*
- *If we come to Jesus with a humble and contrite heart we are assured of His forgiveness. “For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart- These, O God, You will not despise.” (Psalm 51:16-17).*
- *“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” (Psalm 51:10, ESV). Simon needed a pure heart and a right attitude toward God.*
- *We can’t win or earn God’s forgiveness but God generously forgives all who come to Him and confess their sins with a repentant and humble heart.*
- *The first key to understanding verse 22 properly is to remember that as believers we do not come to Christ daily and confess our sin and receive forgiveness in an effort to maintain our salvation but in order to be set free from the power and bondage of those sins which we have committed or are struggling with.*
- *Secondly, the Greek word ἀφίημι (aphiēmi) which in Acts 8:22 is translated as “forgiven” not only means to “to pardon, to forgive, to remove the guilt resulting from wrongdoing” but it also means to “release, let go, depart from, divorce, to send away.” Of the 146 times this Greek word is used in the New Testament it is only translated 49 times as “forgive or forgiven.” All the other times it is translated using the idea of “release, leave, forsake.”*
- *Two examples of the Greek word ἀφίημι (aphiēmi) being translated with the idea of “release, let go, depart from, send away” are found in Matthew 4:11 and Matthew 8:15.*

**Matthew 4:11 (NKJV)**

<sup>11</sup>Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.

**Matthew 8:15 (NKJV)**

<sup>15</sup>So He touched her hand, and the fever left her. And she arose and served them.

- *Thirdly, the verb “be forgiven” in Acts 8:22 is in the passive voice which means that the action of the verb is done to the subject of the sentence. In other words Peter was not questioning whether God was willing to forgive Simon, but whether “the thought of your heart may be forgiven you” or put another way, whether Simon would be able to find freedom and release from the bitter and envious thoughts that had plagued and controlled him for many years.*



- *Peter was not questioning if God was willing to forgive Simon but if Simon was willing to go through the process of repentance and sanctification where he would find complete forgiveness, freedom, release and deliverance from this bitterness, envy, and selfishness that plagued him. Peter was challenging Simon to turn to God for the strength and grace to overcome his sinful habits and ingrained ways of thinking.*
- *Peter was not saying that Simon needed to seek God's forgiveness. Simon needed to seek God's help so he could have this root of bitterness released so it would depart from him.*
- *Biblical repentance is defined as a change of mind and direction where we turn away from sin and turn toward God.*
- *Thus we could interpret, "Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you" as "Repent and turn away from your wickedness and turn to God in prayer and seek His help and grace so that you may be able to find freedom and release from all your bondages and sinful patterns of thinking."*
- *The word "perhaps" was not implying that God was unwilling but questioning if Simon was willing.*
- *Sometimes Christians who are struggling with deep-rooted sins such as bitterness, envy, or unforgiveness, are not willing to let go of them and turn to God and go through the journey of sanctification which will lead them to complete freedom. Instead, their lives are marred by cycles of failure where sin and addictions continue to stumble them because they only go so far in their journey of repentance before they turn back to their old patterns of thinking and living. They revert to their former behaviours, because they have never truly dealt with the root of their issues.*
- *However, there are other Christians who turn away from their sins and turn to God and co-operate with the Holy Spirit until they complete the journey and find total freedom from those deep-rooted sins. We need to take an axe to the root, not just prune off some troublesome branches. (Luke 3:9).*
- *The final verse in this story gives Simon's response to Peter's rebuke. "Then Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me.""*
- *Some have questioned Simon's motivation for responding as he did by asking Peter to pray for him that these terrible things would not happen to him. I believe Simon's motivation and response was totally appropriate for a number of reasons.*

1. *Simon did not try to ignore Peter's rebuke or deny that he was struggling with a deep root of bitterness, envy, and selfishness.*
  2. *Simon did not try to make excuses or blame others for his deep root of bitterness.*
  3. *Simon demonstrated a genuine fear of God by taking Peter's warning seriously.*
  4. *Simon humbly reached out for help from Peter realizing he could not do it alone, thus submitting to God and becoming accountable to Peter.*
  5. *As a new Christian and still unfamiliar with God, Simon was likely unaware of how to pray for his own freedom and enlisted Peter's help.*
- *The final question that people often ask is, "Did Simon at the end of the story find forgiveness or not?" The problem with the question is that it is framed assuming that Peter was addressing Simon's single sinful action. But Peter was referring to the deep root of bitterness that was poisoning his soul and the iniquity that was holding him captive which had caused Simon to act in a sinful way in the first place.*
  - *The real question is, "Did Simon find forgiveness in terms of freedom and deliverance from these deeply engrained behaviors and ways of thinking?" The reason that this Scripture doesn't directly answer this question is because sanctification and freedom from the power of sin is a journey that requires daily repentance and a desire to learn to walk in the grace of God.*
  - *"if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you." The "if perhaps" was questioning Simon's willingness to find complete forgiveness and freedom and was dependent on his continuing willingness to walk in repentance and be led by the Spirit. Therefore, the complete answer cannot be found at the end of the story but later on in Simon's life. However, Simon had made a very good start by humbling himself, acknowledging his sins, and seeking prayer and support from others.*