

Acts 8:9-25

Outward Church: Not For Sale

Jonathan M. Romig
CornerstoneWestford.com

(S1) Have you ever tried to buy something that's **not for sale**? When I was a teenager, I worked at a tourist shop in the mountains of Colorado called Indian Village. Occasionally **tourists** would try to buy the big **brass pots** we had in the back of the store, but they were a **decoration**. Not for sale. Occasionally tourists would try and buy this big beautiful **Navajo rug** we had hanging on our wall. But that rug also was not for sale. Sometimes tourists tried to buy the **little old lady, Charlotte**, who had fallen **asleep** behind the **counter**, my boss. The **legend** goes that one time she was so still that someone thought she was a **life-sized doll**. She was not for sale. In today's text one man has to learn the hard way...

(S2) The Holy Spirit is not for sale.

My **hope** and **prayer** is today's sermon will make us **more aware** of the **Holy Spirit's power** and how **we** sometimes attempt to **purchase** the **power** of the **Holy Spirit**. The Holy Spirit is not something we can purchase or buy, **not** with **money** or **good deeds**. The Holy Spirit is not like the big brass pots or Navajo rug. He's not a **thing**. The Holy Spirit is a **person**, more like Charlotte.

Maybe you're **wondering**, "Who would ever try to buy the Holy Spirit?" Well, I'm glad you asked because a **Sorcerer** named **Simon** would. This man lived in the town of Samaria, north of Jerusalem. **Samaria** is a land where the people are **Jewish but not Jewish**. They **share some beliefs** and **background** with their Jewish neighbors, but this has only caused religious and ethnic division. They know enough to get themselves in **trouble**, which is perhaps why Simon is someone who has so much power.

Acts 8:9-11 (NIV)

8 Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, 10 and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, "This man is rightly called the Great Power of God."

11 They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his sorcery.

Simon's sorcery is no *The Magician's Apprentice*. Micky Mouse isn't dancing around wearing a **big blue pointy hat** with **stars** on it and **waving** his **fingers** at a broom. It's **no fantasy**. It's real. It's demonic. It's witchcraft. He's arrogant, prideful, and claims to be **someone great**. The people of Samaria think he has divine powers— "**the Great Power of God**," like a mini **Hercules** or **Perseus, sons of Zeus**. Here is the **root of all idolatry**—thinking we can **handle God**, that we can control him with our religious deeds, our prayers, our words. *The Holy Spirit won't be bought*. He is far too powerful to be controlled by us.

(S3) The Holy Spirit is unstoppable.

When Philip, one of the leaders of the early church tasked with caring for the Greek-speaking widows, and other early believers are chased out of Jerusalem by **persecution**, he goes **north to Samaria** where he begins to preach the **gospel**—the good news about Jesus Christ. He does so with power and authority, full of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:3).

Acts 8:12-13 (NIV)

12 But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the

name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. 13 Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

Simon sees that the Holy Spirit is **unstoppable**. The Holy Spirit, through Philip, brings people to faith and repentance. Through the Spirit Philip performs **great signs** and **miracles**. If we as a church could experience even a **taste** of the **Spirit's power** like Philip did, it could change everything.

Francis Chan wrote **a children's book** called, "The Big Red Tractor and the Little Village." There's a **little village** where the people live off what they farm each year. Each year they pull out their big red tractor and use it to plow their field. They attach **ropes** to it. They get a group together. Some pull and others push and every day of plowing season they move the tractor a little further across the field. On a good day, they move that tractor ten feet. They feel blessed to have such a great tractor. They work hard all plowing season and they manage to get the whole field plowed just in time to plant before the rains come. The rains come and the harvest grows and the little village has just enough food to make it through till the following year. If only they had a way to plow that field more quickly. If only it was within their power to be more fruitful. But this is how things have always been done. They manage. It works.

In our story, Simon recognizes there is an unstoppable power and he wants it, with wrong motives. He wants the Spirit's power for himself, not for the church, or to know God himself. That's not how the Spirit relates.

(S4) The Holy Spirit comes freely by God's will.

Acts 8:14-17 (NIV)

14 When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. 15 When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, 16 because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Maybe you're wondering, "How could they believe in God without the Holy Spirit? Isn't it the Holy Spirit that **convicts** us of our sins and gives us the **faith necessary** to believe in Jesus?" I believe all those things are true, but...God had a **certain, intentional, official, empowering** way he wanted to give Samaria the Holy Spirit. Let me take you to some other New Testament passages.

In **Matthew 16**, Jesus asks his disciple Peter a question, "**Who** do you say I am?" (Matt 16:16) To which Peter replies, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God." (Matt 16:17) Jesus blesses Peter and **rewards** him in a special way.

(S5) Matthew 16:18-19 (NIV) 18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

The book of Acts is about the **building of God's church**. **Peter** is going to have a **special role** to play.

19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

Now many within Catholicism believe this passage makes Peter the **first** Pope, but I think the answer is much simpler and found in the text of Acts. Remember what Jesus said after his resurrection right before he ascended into heaven?

(S6) Acts 1:8 (NIV) But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Jesus willed to build his church **through Peter** bringing the **presence** of the **Holy Spirit** to the **Jews** in **Jerusalem** and **Judea**, the **Samaritans** in **Samaria**, and the **Gentiles** from the **ends of the earth**. In **Acts 2**, Peter preached at **Pentecost** after the Holy Spirit came as tongues of fire over the **Jewish believers**. Many Jews come to repentance and faith at **Peter's invitation**.

(S7) Acts 2:38 (NIV) Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Peter and John lead a prayer meeting in **Acts 4**, still with the Jews in **Jerusalem**, which is in the region of **Judea**. Again, the Holy Spirit shows up.

(S8) Acts 4:31 (NIV) After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

Then we read today's text in **Samaria** in **Acts 8** where Peter appears once again.

(S9) Acts 8:14, 17 (NIV) 14 When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria... (they pray they'll receive the Holy Spirit)
17 Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Peter is the **key** that **unlocks** the Spirit to the **Jews, Samaritans** and the **Gentiles (non-Jews)** too in **Acts 10**. **His arrival establishes** that the Gentiles are **formally members** of the **church**.

(S10) Acts 10:44-45 (NIV) 44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. 45 The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles.

It was always God's plan to **freely give** the Holy Spirit to the believers in Samaria, and those in Jerusalem and among the Gentiles. I believe Acts 8 shows us how **God through Peter officially poured out his Spirit** on the believers at Samaria, **signifying** them as **genuine, authentic, and empowered Christian believers**. *The Holy Spirit comes freely by God's will*. God always intended for his **church to run on the Holy Spirit**.

That winter one of the **farmers** in the **little village** is clearing out his **attic** when he discovers the **owner's manual** for the **big red tractor**. It explains how to own and operate the tractor. He is completely surprised to discover that if you put **fuel** in the **tractor, it will run itself**. It will **run freely** without anyone needing to push or pull the tractor. The tractor can actually plow an **entire field** in a **single day**. The owner is so amazed the next day he tells the town but none of the townspeople believe him. "The tractor can't do that!" they say. "We know how to operate a tractor. You need ropes and to push really hard!" None of the villagers believe.

Do we believe in the Holy Spirit's power? Do we as a church want to see the Holy Spirit move freely among us? Or do we feel we have to **earn his presence** at Cornerstone? We have to pull the tractor for things to happen. *The Holy Spirit comes freely by God's will*.

(S11) Trying to use the Holy Spirit as a tool leads to death.

We already saw how **Ananias and Sapphira's** sin against the Holy Spirit lead to death in **Acts 5**. Well, it's no different here

Acts 8:18-24 (NIV) 18 When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money 19 and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

Simon seems to think the Holy Spirit is a **force or ability** to be **manipulated**.

20 Peter answered: “May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! 21 You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God.

Peter **curse**s Simon, “**Damn you and your money to hell!**” That’s what happens when we think we can please God with our money. Like, if I just **give enough money to charity God will accept me**. That leads to **damnation**. Or on the **reverse end**. If I **give up a life of money** so that I can do **good works**, so that **God will let me into heaven**. That also leads to damnation. Simon was just more obvious about it. But even **in the curse**, there’s an **offer of grace**. Peter says:

22 Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. 23 For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin.”

A **heart full of bitterness** is **not right before God**. A bitter heart is **captive** to sin and **prevents** us from **fully embracing the Spirit**. Instead of dealing with the bitterness in his heart, he tries to **buy a solution**. This is why we need to deal with any bitterness in our hearts. It not only “**captivates us**,” our attention, our mind, our focus, but it prevents us from **fully experiencing the Holy Spirit’s power**. This is convicting because I have a **hard time letting go**. Maybe you do too. I don’t want bitterness to control my heart and I bet you don’t want that either. We **start to deal** with **bitterness** through **repentance**.

Peter gives Simon a **chance to repent**, to turn from his sin and **self-idolization** and worship the one true God. Verse 13 tells us Simon **believed** and was **baptized**. We don’t know if Simon’s faith is **genuine**, but we do know **Peter’s offer of forgiveness is**.

24 Then Simon answered, “Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me.”

Early church figures claim Simon went on to **oppose Christianity** and **teach false beliefs**—that he was the **first heretic**. We don’t know for sure. But what we do know is that Simon’s life serves as a **cautionary tale**. As believers, we must never try to purchase or use the Holy Spirit as a **tool to achieve success or fame or wealth**. We can always ask the Holy Spirit for **help**, but approaching him **humbly as God himself**.

As Christians today there are still **Simon-type people** and **movements out in our world today**—those who use the Holy Spirit as a **tool**. The “**prosperity gospel**” (or “**word of faith**”) movement teaches that if we **truly believe** something will happen, and **speak it in faith**, God will make it happen. If we need a **new job**, if we **believe hard enough** and **speak it**, God will give us a better job. Or if we are **sick**, all we need to believe and have enough faith, and God will **heal us**. Or if we want to **fall in love and get married**, believe and have faith and God will give us that **special someone**. If for some reason God **doesn’t give** us what we want, it’s **our fault** because **we didn’t have enough faith**. Followers are encouraged to “**sow a seed of faith**,” typically something like a **thousand dollars** with the promise that God will make them **rich**. If any of this sounds familiar, please watch this **documentary**, **(S12) *American Gospel: Christ Alone***. If you watch it and have questions, or know someone who believes it, please come talk to me. The prosperity gospel is **Simon’s way of doing business**, not God’s. *Trying to use the Holy Spirit as a tool leads to death.*

(S13) Freely receiving the Holy Spirit leads to life.

Acts 8:25 (NIV) After they had further proclaimed the word of the Lord and testified about Jesus, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

While we only hear about Simon in these verses, for the **one Simon** there were **hundreds if not thousands of Samaritans** who **came to Jesus, repented of their sins, and believed in him**. I don’t want to miss this opportunity either. I don’t want try to **purchase God** with my **good works** or **my money** because he already

offers himself to me **freely**, through **Jesus' sacrifice** on the **cross**. All we need to do to receive this gift is to **humble** ourselves, **repent**, and **believe in Jesus**. Let's **freely receive the Holy Spirit**.

There's also a **challenge** for us as a **church** in this passage. Will we try to **earn** the Holy Spirit by our **right beliefs** or **good deeds** or will we freely receive the Holy Spirit and ask him to **empower us** to **do his will**?

The **farmer** begins to **work** on **fixing** the big red tractor. He replaces those parts that are **broken** and **rusted**. He cleans the **filters**. He fills it with **oil** and **fuel**. Finally, right at the **beginning** of **plowing season**, late at night when he's done working on the tractor, he turns it on and it **roars to life**. He's so excited he plows the **whole field** that night. The next day the villagers wake up and can't believe their eyes. The entire field is plowed! They find the farmer sleeping on the tractor. "He was right!" The tractor really can do it all.

That year the villagers plow **more** fields and farm more food than they've ever farmed before. They bring in such a harvest they can **feed** other towns and villages. When they discover the big red tractor had a **power all its own**, it changes everything. Francis Chan explains that in his illustration the **big red tractor** is the **church empowered** by the **Holy Spirit**. When the Holy Spirit is **freely leading** and **guiding** and **energizing** the **church**, there's no field we can't plow, even in **Westford**. Why can't the Holy Spirit still perform **great signs** and **miracles**? Why can't **thousands come to faith** as they did in Acts? Maybe we're trying to **purchase** the Spirit's power by our **good works** or our **hard labor**. Maybe the Spirit would come if we **needed him**, if we took the time to **ask** him to **lead us**. God is **willing** to **pour out** his Holy Spirit on us as a **gift**. *Freely receiving the Holy Spirit leads to life.*

Jude 20-21 (NIV) But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

Exit Instructions

- Our ushers will dismiss row by row.
- The offering box is in the back on the way out.
- Please go all the way to the parking-lot before talking (i.e., please don't stop on the steps).
- If you're an Elder and need to come back in, let the Deacons know.

Pastor [Jonathan Romig](#) preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes endnotes and references, or share it through [Apple podcasts](#) or [Google Play Music](#). Read the [story of our church here](#).

Discussion Questions

1. What is the Holy Spirit? Who is the Holy Spirit?
2. What can the Holy Spirit do?
3. How is the Holy Spirit given?
4. Can we purchase or earn the Spirit's presence?
5. How are Peter and the Spirit connected?
6. What can we do if we realize we are treating the Holy Spirit as a tool?

7. What is the prosperity gospel or word of faith movement? Has it influenced you?
8. What does repentance and faith in Christ mean?