



— Simon The Sorcerer: An Image Problem —

Acts 8

Small Group Plan

The Japanese introduced a tree to the world called a “Bonsai Tree.” It is measured in inches instead of feet. This is because it is not allowed to reach its full growth potential, but instead is forced to grow in a stunted, miniature form. The reason it grows in such an inhibited and restricted way is that when it first emerges from the ground, the owner pulls it from the soil and ties off its main tap root and some of its feeder roots and then replants it. Thus growth is deliberately stunted by limiting the roots ability to spread out deep enough to take in the soils nutrients.

What the gardener does to the Bonsai tree is what Satan plans to do to every believer. By encouraging us to sink our roots into something else, something unholy, something that cannot feed our souls, he is tying off our taproot. When we seek fulfillment by showcasing our image we miss true spiritual nourishment.

OPEN IT / INTRODUCE IT ...

- How would you define “Spiritual Roots?”
- What, in a person’s life and character, tells you they have a strong spiritual foundation?
- What are the clues that someone’s faith is shallow and fragile?

LOOK AT IT / STUDY IT ...

— ACTS 8:9-11 —

⁹ 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.

- How would you describe the power of image?
- Why were the people attracted to Simon?
- Why was Simon attracted to himself?
- How would you describe someone who actually liked to be called “the great power?”

— ACTS 8:12-13 —

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.

- Why is it somewhat amazing that Simon himself would believe and make the decision to follow Jesus?
- If Simon's faith motivations were mixed, what was the mixture made of?

— ACTS 8:14-24 —

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

- "Your heart is not right ..." (v. 20)
Why is the internal so easily overcome by the external?
- "You are full of bitterness and captive to sin ..." (v. 23)
Why are image-driven people often blind to their own spiritual poverty?
- "You have no part or share in this ministry ..." (v. 21)
Why would it be a mistake for a "heart" like Simon's to be given a ministry role?
- "Pray to the Lord for me ..." (v. 24)
The end of the story is left open. How do you think it ends?

USE IT / APPLY IT ...

- How can we, like Simon, become over-impressed with "image" and "reputation?"
- What happens to faith when it becomes a "commodity" that is bought and sold?
- What spiritual habits would help a person like Simon to slowly transform?
- How can this group support you in prayer this week?