

BEWARE OF PHONIES, FAKES & FRAUDS ORIGINS SERIES PART 2 - GOING VIRAL Dan Burrell

Good morning Life Fellowship. It is a beautiful day to worship this morning. We have been singing such theologically rich songs this morning, and I hope that you remember always when we sing to listen to the words. You will always see verses of Scripture at the top of the songs and those are the basis for the songs. We want to always make sure that everything is rooted in Scripture.

Our Scripture this morning is in Acts Chapter 8. By the way I have met so many guests this morning and that is exciting. This is the time of year that school has let out, people are moving into the area and so forth, and it is always great to meet guests. If you are visiting today I do want to welcome you. We are honored to have you. You are coming in on a series that we actually began in January. But don't worry, you won't be lost because we take each section separately. We develop an independent thought about each section. But we are studying through the book of Acts, in a series called, 'Church As God Meant For It To Be.'

It tells about the very beginning of the church in Jerusalem. On the day of Pentecost the Lord sent His Holy Spirit down and founded the church. We took the first section for several weeks, then we took a little break for missions and Easter, and now we are in the middle of the second section and we are going to continue that through the month of June. And this section is called 'The Church Going Viral.' Now when we think of the term 'viral' we used to think of it as meaning 'contagious.' Today we think more about something hitting the Internet and everybody looking at it. But originally it meant being contagious, like someone getting a bug and then it spreads to everybody else around them. And that is kind of what happened to the gospel. Before we read our passage today, I want to kind of explain it.

When I was a kid I loved summertime. I used to go over to my grandfather's house, and he had a pond that the cattle didn't get in, so we could swim in it. It had a dock on the edge of it, and some of my friends would come with me to go to my grandfather's. Usually we would try to skip some rocks, and we would watch the rings go out to the edge of the pond. Then we would get a bigger rock and watch to see what happened. The next thing you know we would be hauling these big old rocks up to the edge and throwing them as far toward the middle as we could so we could watch the circles it would make.

And this is what is happening with the gospel. It started at Calvary and at the tomb. The gospel was completed there when Christ said, '*It is finished.*' The price had been paid and from there it went to the Upper Room where the apostles were meeting together. They were then 50, then 70, then 500 and then it spilled out into the streets of Jerusalem until the city could not contain it, and it continued out further and further.

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When it started in Jerusalem it was for the Jews. There were all different kinds of Jews there for the Passover when the crucifixion occurred. They had come to Jerusalem because that is where they observed the Passover, and it was the cultural center of their people. But there were also people there from all over Asia Minor, from the Middle East, and from the Roman and Greek areas including Hellenist Jews. They always came home to Jerusalem. And the gospel primarily started out being for the Jews. But then the gospel kept going out just like the circles did when we chunked that rock in the pond.

Now in Chapter 8 we are in Samaria and Samaria was an interesting country. We see it referenced throughout the ministry of Christ. For instance when Jesus was at the well in Samaria he met with a woman there and told her about the living water. There was also the parable of the Samaritan that was walking along a road and saw the person who had been beaten by bandits and left for death. The religious men kept walking on by, but the good Samaritan, of all people stopped to help him.

Maybe you are wondering why that would be significant that the Samaritan would stop and offer help. The reason it would have been unusual is the Samaritans were half breeds, meaning they were half Jews and half Gentiles. And the Jews hated the Gentiles and the Gentiles hated the Jews. And everybody hated the Samaritans because they were half breeds. Now we understand that half breed is kind of a vulgar term, but there was a wicked prejudice toward the Samaritans at that time.

And for the gospel to start in Jerusalem with the Jews and then to go to Samaria with the half breeds would be unusual. But we will see later on that the gospel continues to go on to the Gentiles. And this was part of the gospel message, this was part of going viral. This was part of what we need to learn here, that the gospel wasn't for just a select few, it was for everybody. It wasn't just for the Jews, it was for the half Jews, and it was for the Gentiles.

And as you see it spreading out you will also see the Lord in a supernatural way made sure that He validated it. And we will see that this gospel was not just for the Jews, and that the Messiah, Jesus, was not just the King of the Jews, that He was not just for the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant, but that He was to be the Savior of the entire world. ***“For God so loved the WORLD that He gave His only begotten Son.”***

And so we need to realize that when this is all taking place it is showing how the gospel went viral. It was contagious. Others were hearing it and the church was growing. But opposition was growing as well. And Satan wanted to stop this growth. He wanted to stop it. A couple of weeks ago we looked at the really overt forms of Satan trying to stop it. There was the murder of Stephen. And then Saul, who would later become Paul, would be throwing people in jail, and chasing others out of town. And

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there was a very, very aggressive type of opposition from the Jewish leaders to the church that was starting to go viral.

But beyond that we have to be aware that sometimes Satan uses more subtle methods to disrupt the gospel. He wants to disrupt the gospel in any way he can. If he has to do it by force - great. If he can do it in other ways he will do it that way as well. And we are going to see some of this starting to take place as we look at our passage today. Turn with me in Acts Chapter 8 and we will be beginning in verse 9.

“But there was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, ‘This man is the power of God that is called Great.’”

I want to pause here and let’s note the word ‘great,’ has a capital G. That is a word that is reserved for deity. This guy was passing himself off as being a god or godlike. So he is not just simply saying great as ‘*he is a great speaker, or he is a great magician,*’ but that he was Great. He was embracing the term fully.

“And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.”

Now look in verse 14. ***“Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for He had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.”***

“Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money, saying, ‘Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.’ But Peter said to him, ‘May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.” “And Simon answered, ‘Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.’ Now when they

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had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.”

Now we have something going on here that I think is really interesting. We have a story about this guy named Simon who was a magician. Let's stop and think about the term 'magician.' I don't know about you but I love magicians. How many of you have watched 'America's Got Talent?' Every year they have two or three magicians on there. I think it was last year that the guy picked as the winner was an incredible magician who did unbelievable card tricks. I would say to my wife, 'That's just spooky. How did he do that?' It just kind of creeped me out a little bit, but that is part of the power of magic, right?

But I think in our culture when we think of the word 'magic' we think illusionist, or someone who uses sleight of hand, or sometimes it can also be like a pejorative term, like they are into hocus pocus stuff. But in Bible times there was also a group of people called 'magi.' And when we think of the word 'magi' it kind of sounds familiar, because we know that part of the Christmas story was the magi that came to visit Jesus.

And the magi were interesting people. First of all, they came from what we know today as Iraq. It was Persia then and part of the Persian Empire. Now the Persians were a very sophisticated, very intellectual culture. For instance some of you who are mathematically oriented, which completely excludes me, you may have studied the different theorems and so forth in algebra and geometry. And much of the basis of the rules of math were uncovered and defined by the Persians during this time, and by specifically this sect of people called magi.

In fact that term 'magi' meant that they were experts in science and in mathematics, astronomy, astrology and the law. It was kind of like a term for the elite, the highly educated. In fact we get the term 'magistrate' from them. If we get a ticket for something we may have to appear before a magistrate who will make sure that what we did does not align with the law and a penalty for us will then be determined. So the word 'magistrate' is kind of a derivative of magi.

Maybe you are wondering why I am going into all of this etymology for this word 'magi.' And it is because I want you to understand that this Simon mentioned here in this passage was kind of an elite, but he was an unusual elite because he had made this his entire identity. It was his vocation. In fact he had become a celebrity because of it. He had become well known, he had a claim to fame because people all around were talking about him as 'Simon, the Great.' In fact it had become such a part of his identity that he began believing his own press. He began believing the adulation of others was deserved.

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That is one of the dangers of pride by the way. If you listen to praise enough it will always puff you up and make you think higher of yourself, and it can make you forget who you really are. And eventually it will come between you and God as you steal God's glory and claim it for yourself. This is exactly what happened to Simon. It can be a very subtle process that none of us are immune to. And we need to be really aware of that, particularly if you happen to be successful in your field, or if you are wealthy, or well educated, or you are famous.

We have to be careful of that because one of the ways that Satan separates us from God is to steal God's glory from Him and claim it for ourselves. And this is what Simon did. So here in this passage we see that Philip comes to the town where Simon lives. I want to stop here a minute and make a delineation. There is a Philip who is an apostle but that is not this man we are talking about here. This is Philip who was a deacon and he was also an evangelist. In fact we would call him today, Philip the Evangelist. We will see him again next week when Pastor Ben deals with the rest of this chapter.

So Philip was a deacon and he was doing the work of an evangelist. And Philip was so passionate about the gospel that wherever he went he was telling people about Jesus. He leaves Jerusalem and he goes through Samaria to teach and preach. And by the way good Jews didn't go to Samaria. Good Jews would go around Samaria. Good Jews didn't even want the dust of Samaria on their feet. There were sayings in literature during that time about not wanting the dust of the Samaritans on their feet, and not wanting Samaria dust to spoil their sandals. That is why the Jews would have thought it was very unusual for a Samaritan man to stop and help the wounded man in Jesus' parable, because the Samaritans were so hated.

So when Philip was taking the gospel to the Samaritans this would have been a big deal. He was going into uncharted territory and taking the gospel. He was telling them that the Messiah came, what had happened to Him, and how He could be their Savior. He was giving them the gospel message and people were listening to him. The Scripture says both men and women were responding to his message.

By the way I just want to point out that this was another issue. The Jewish culture was very patriarchal but the gospel was for men and for women. The women were being converted, and the fact that Scripture mentions this is a big deal. Remember Jesus was breaking down the Jewish laws. He didn't care if they were Jew or Gentile, He didn't care if they were slaves or free, He didn't care if they were male or female, He didn't care about the color of their skin or their language they spoke. He didn't care about any of that; He just knew that they all needed Him. That was the message of the gospel.

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And so men and women were being converted and they were being baptized. Now I want to make sure that we connect this dot as well. They were baptizing these people - why? It was because the public proclamation of Jesus Christ by baptism is an indication of whether or not it is really real. Last week we had people who came before the church who had trusted Christ as their Savior, they had repented of their sins, they trusted in Him for eternal life, and they were baptized. And baptism is a picture of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is a picture that the old man has died and the new man is raised again to walk in this new life that comes through Jesus Christ.

If you haven't been baptized, I want to urge you to do that. When should you be baptized - after salvation. Why? It is because this is your testimony of what Christ has done in your life. We will be baptizing again in a few weeks. I think next time we may be baptizing down at the Lake. Maybe you know you should be baptized and you want to know how to do that, because you are now a Christ follower and you want people to be aware of that. If that is you after the service come up to see me or go to the Next Step Station and we will get you all signed up for the next baptism. We have a little class we want you to take to make sure you understand everything, and then we will be baptizing again in just a few weeks.

So this was what was happening here. Revival was breaking out. The gospel was going viral. The church was expanding. New horizons were being met. It was a mission field everywhere Philip the evangelist was going. And all of a sudden Simon is thinking, '*Wow, I have to get in on this. I want to see what all of the hullabaloo is about.*' And he listens and the Scripture indicates that he repents and he trusts Christ.

Now a little parenthesis here, I am not trying to turn this into a theology class, but I think these are questions that I came up with, and I am sure you have some as well. Based on what we are seeing in this passage, what we have read here, was it really real with Simon? I studied for four different days, four different times on this. I would read some more books. I have a tall stack of books on my desk and I studied every nuance of the Greek and so forth in this passage. And after all that studying I came to this conclusion - and it is a deep conclusion --- I don't know. (*Laughter.*)

I just don't know. And I don't know if anybody else knows. There is a lot of indication that yes, Simon was sincere. And yet at the same time the story ends here and we don't know anything more about him. And we have all known people who for a variety of reasons will make a profession that they believe. Some of them even follow up and are baptized. We have known people like that. But remember the illustration that Jesus gave of the seeds. Some fell on soil and it comes up and then withers from the sun. I don't know everything about it, but I know this story is important because it raises an

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issue that the church today needs to be very, very cognizant of, very aware of, and very mindful of.

So what happens? Yes, Simon makes a profession of faith and he is baptized. And then he starts watching Philip as he preaches and he sees lives are being changed and people are being baptized. And then Philip sends word to the apostles that revival has broken out here and they need to come because the people need the Holy Spirit.

Now this raises another set of questions. Hang on, I thought the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost. If at that point forward at salvation we experience the Holy Spirit, why do the apostles need to come? And make no mistake, in our day today, when we trust Christ as our Savior we get the Holy Spirit. It is that supernatural incarnation that changes us from dead men walking to people who live forever spiritually. So why was this required here?

Again, I am not going to turn this into a theology class, but I just want to kind of give you an overview, and then you can study it some more on your own. There is a transitional period that was going on during the lives of the apostles. And during this time as new people groups were being introduced to the gospel, the apostles would come, lay their hands on them, and they would receive the Holy Spirit at that point.

Now why was this necessary? It was because the racism and the expectations and the culture were such that apart from that some might have rejected that it was really genuine. And so during this transitional period we have to remember that it started in Jerusalem with just the Jews. The Jews thought that the Gentiles were hell bound, hell bent and of Satan. And the Samaritans were just half breeds of the same ilk. So when the apostles came and said, *'These are now your brothers and sisters through the blood of Jesus Christ as the Holy Spirit falls upon them,'* they were validating that people group, that new culture, so to speak as the gospel was going viral.

And we will see this continue again further on but then it stops because they were finally getting the idea of world evangelism at some point. It had gone viral sufficiently so it was not needed anymore. That was also one of the purposes of the signs and gifts that the apostles were able to do. It was so that people would know that this was not just some weird fringe group, but that this was truly from God. It was supernaturally confirmed. And that was one of the important ministries of the apostles who had walked with Jesus and spent time with Him. And that is what was occurring here.

So when Simon saw this, he thought, *'I have to get me some of that. I mean when Peter lays his hands on someone they get the Holy Spirit. I have to be a part of that too. That beats anything I have ever been able to do and I want that. If they call me great*

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now, just wait till they see me doing that. This is going to be big time stuff.' So he goes to Peter and he says, *'Peter, I have some money jingling in my pockets and I want to work out a little deal with you on the side. If you give me some of that power so that happens when I lay my hands on people, I will give you some money, and I will be like one of you guys. We will be buds. We will be partners. And that will be really cool, right?'*

And what does Peter do? Peter does not accept this very graciously. In fact some translations of the Scripture put it this way. Peter looks at Simon and says, *'To hell with you and your silver.'* That is the most literal translation you can get out of it. *'To hell with you and your silver. Go there. Do not pass go. Do not collect two hundred pieces of silver. Get out of my face.'* Peter uses very strong terms.

Again, if you go back and study it in one form of Greek and then another form of Greek you try to establish if Simon was a believer or not, because Peter could have literally dammed him. But could this be more of a colloquialism he used? Now that is not a phrase that we use in our culture today. That would be offensive to us as it is a callous, coarse phrase condemning and damning people to hell in that way. But it is also illustrates just how strongly Peter felt about this. He said, *'If this is what you think the kingdom of God is, I want no part of you. I want no part of you and get away from me. And by the way, you have shown your heart and you need to repent. And you need to get back on track.'*

Why was Peter being so explosively clear about this? It was because there is a great danger when we dilute and attach things to the gospel that make it confusing, make it less than it really is, take away from the clarity, or undermine its authority. And so when Peter saw what Simon was up to, whether it was because he was a real live fake, phony or fraud, or whether it was because he was immature, still growing and just didn't know what an idiot he was being, either way Peter said, *'I am going to clear a little space here and make sure everybody understands the gospel is not for sale. It is not about the show, and it not about the money. And it is not about calling yourself great, it is not about how big a crowd you can draw, and it is not so that you can become famous, Simon, it is because Jesus paid it all for our redemption. End of story. And don't you dare mess it up with your money, your quest for power or your lust for celebrity status. Don't mess it up.'*

Peter makes it kind of clear there, doesn't he? In fact it was such a big deal that throughout history there is a term that is attached for people who go to leaders in spiritual places and offer them money in exchange for favor. It is called 'simony.' That is a real term and simony comes from the term Simon, and it is those who think you can buy

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spiritual power. And there have been many who have tried it, and have used money as some kind of tool, technique, or tribute to the gospel.

Can you get any sense at all of where I am heading here? I want you to understand that Jesus, in clarity, condemned those who would pollute the message of salvation as a gift from God through His grace. He walked into the temple and turned over the tables. He looked at the Pharisees and the Sadducees and He called them **“whited sepulchers,”** rotten on the inside and painted on the outside. He called them hypocrites, phonies and dogs. When it came to defending the purity of the gospel, He spared no wrath, and He minced no words.

And we need to take note of that, because there are those, even those who would call themselves Christians, who would call themselves pastors, who have written books that might be on *christianbooks.com* or in Lifeway book stores, who are polluting the purity of the gospel message with the notion that it is about money or power or prestige. And we need to beware of the message and beware of the messenger who would do that.

Now I don't like being controversial. I don't. Some people think I do. (*Laughter.*) Some days I do a little. But I don't want you to walk out of here thinking that just because someone gets a degree from a seminary, someone is called pastor, or evangelist, or reverend or bishop, just because they make the bestseller list, just because they have a big old church, just because they have their name on a sign, or just because they have a few degrees hanging on their wall that that makes them any more special to God, or any more connected to truth than anybody else on this planet who knows they are a sinner in need of a Savior and that Jesus paid it all. (*Amen.*)

And we have to make sure we keep the gospel pure. Let's be honest, there are a lot of Christians that really embarrass me. Do you know what I am saying? I saw an interview last week, somebody posted it on my Facebook wall, and it was with a very famous evangelist. I am not going to tell you his name, but his initials are Kenneth Copeland. (*Laughter.*) And this reporter had interviewed him in an ambush. It was ugly. He was getting into a very fancy car on his way to a jet that he had bought from I think Tyler Perry. And this reporter was playing 'got you.' But I have to tell you that my heart was broken because the answers would just turn anybody away from the gospel. He was saying things like, *'God wants you to be rich. God has made me rich. I won't apologize for my fame and my jet and my homes around the world and my fancy clothes. God made me this way. I'm rich. I'm powerful. I'm influential. Thousands and thousands of people come to hear me.'*

And I am thinking, *'Come on, Simon. Come on, Simon. Dial it back.'* I don't know whether Simon was a believer or not, I don't know if any of those guys on TV who

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do all that nonsense are believers or not, but I do know this - the gospel is not about making you or me rich on earth, but rich in Heaven. The gospel is not prosperity, it is sacrifice. The gospel is not to be exploited for personal gain, but to be shared with compassion and generosity, to seek and to save those who are lost. And Jesus doesn't care about what you bring to the plate, except yourself, that is what He cares about.

And He is not saving us so we can live our best life now. He is saving us so that we can live our best life in Heaven. And until then we can be faithful, and live a life that matters. And if you live all of your life and you die ignominiously on a cross or in a prison cell, or at the hands of someone who hates Jesus, then the victor's crown is yours in Heaven. And you are not a failure here if you live in a cardboard hut in Romania, if you live in a bamboo hut in China, if you live in a home in India with buffalo dung as the floor, if you live with palm fronds over your head as a roof in Africa, if you live in the ghetto in Chicago, or if you live in a trailer in Appalachia. Wherever you live, whether it is a mansion or a hut, the gospel message is still the same. We are sinners in need of a Savior. And Jesus saves. (*Applause.*)

On a couple occasions I have gone to foreign countries where these Americans will jet over there and draw huge crowds of people with the promises that they can have the best of Christianity. And I have seen these guys call people forward for healings, and they will take their coats off and wave them around and people will pass out. You can see that in Las Vegas too by the way only they snap their fingers there. It is hypnotism.

You didn't see the apostles doing that. We have some that call themselves pastors and evangelists, and I have literally seen where they will call people up and say, '*Get down on your hands and knees and bark like a dog and that will be from the Holy Spirit.*' They will hypnotize them, and they will bark, and they say, '*Look the Holy Spirit is at work.*' I could also take you to shows in Las Vegas where they can make you do the most stupid ridiculous things ever because they are hypnotized.

But you didn't see the apostles doing things like that. So what should we do? We should beware. Why is that important? It is important because it distracts and dilutes the gospel. The gospel is not so that we can perform magic tricks. The gospel is not so I can get rich. The gospel is not so I can become a celebrity. The gospel is not so that people respect me more than other people. There is a shame that comes with the cross. There is a poverty that comes from being fully devoted to Him above all else.

Now God does not call all of us to poverty. By the way the poorest person in this room is still richer than the majority of Christians on this planet. We are wealthy. But the amount of your wealth is not necessarily an indication of your walk with God. I have

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known some very, very godly wealthy people and I have known some very, very godly poor people. And I have known some very, very carnal wealthy people and I have known some very, very carnal poor people. There is no co-relation there. God does not promise you riches if you follow Him. God may give you riches; He gave Lydia riches in the Scriptures. He gives other people riches. Some of you are rich and I like that. Praise the Lord and pass the offering plate. *(Laughter.)*

It's not our money. There are no u-hauls in the cemetery so we all ought to invest our money. The widow did that with her two little mites. Why - because it is all God's anyway. Money and your walk with God are disconnected. Your walk with God and the color of your skin is disconnected. Your walk with God and your natural origin is disconnected. Your walk with God and whether you are male or female is disconnected. God loves you because you are you, you have a soul, He died for you, and He would die for you individually. So let's not let the gospel be diluted.

Here are some principles real quickly and I will be done. Number one - be careful not to confuse judgment with discernment. So many times we are silent in the face of error because we are afraid somebody is going to call us judgmental. Some of us are so afraid of being called judgmental we will just sit silent and let absolute apostasy break out around us and say, *'Well, I don't want to be a judge.'* I would rather be called a judge than to lead someone astray from the gospel, and there is a difference.

There are two verses of Scripture that people are famous for quoting. I bet you can quote them with me. Number one, ***"Judge not, lest you be judged."*** And the partner verse to that one is, ***"He who is without sin, cast the first stone."*** If I had a nickel for every time that I have heard those verses quoted at me by someone when I am trying to make a spiritual point, we would have a new educational building out here. *(Laughter.)*

The reality is this - God expects us to be discerning, that is why He gives us the truth. And when you see error it is not polite to let people walk in error, and to let error stand unchallenged. So we need to quit being afraid of being judgmental. Now I am not saying be ugly. Telling someone to take their money and go straight to hell is a little ugly. But Peter was very, very clear when it came to the gospel. This thing was going viral. Peter's best friend had been nailed to the cross and eventually Peter knew he would die as well. He knew what was at stake and he was willing to say, *'Look Simon, I like you. You are a nice guy. I am happy you trusted Christ, I am happy you got baptized, but I have to tell you that you are wrong with a capital W-R-O-N-G. And you need to get away and repent.'*

By the way do you understand this? Eventually Peter was going to have Paul say the same thing to him later on when he was trying to dilute the gospel by saying the men

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may need to be circumcised after they get saved. And Paul said, '*No, no, no, no, no. We have to have a counsel here.*' No one is above discernment. No one is above being called out for error, and that includes Dan Burrell, Ben Rudolph, the other pastors of this church, the elders, every Bible study teacher, and every pastor of any church anywhere. We have to be accountable to the word of God and part of discernment is listening carefully.

Number two - don't let your feelings override your facts. I have to tell you that my feelings are always leading me astray. Many of you know that I am a college professor and a doctoral mentor and this is the time of year that I am grading doctoral dissertations until I see them in my sleep. And one of my pet peeves is when someone will write a nice 200 page dissertation and they will say, '*I feel that.*' Because as soon as I see the word 'feel' I stop, because when you are doing doctoral work you depend on empirical evidence which means it is based on research.

So I get a red pen out and I circle it really big, and then I write this, even though I know it is very cold, and you can thank the Lord every day that you don't have me as your professor, but I write, '*I don't care about your feelings.*' I need them to get the point. '*We don't care about your feelings. We are dealing in facts here. This is a doctoral dissertation. You cannot tell me what you feel. I don't care. Tell me what you know and tell me how you know what you know.*'

And when it comes to something as important as the gospel we need to be very, very clear and your feelings and my feelings don't count. I have to be honest with you, there have been times in my life when I don't feel like I am a very good Christian right then, and sometimes I wonder why God would love me, or whether or not I am even a believer. But I am so glad that my feelings are not an indication of my status before God because some days I can feel pretty wretched.

I have been a bachelor this week because my wife is out of town and she has our daughter with her this weekend. And my youngest son just moved out. I promise he wasn't mad at me, he just thought it was time to be on his own. So last night I was all alone in my house for about the first time in 35 years, being a bachelor. It was time to eat and I needed to cook something and I starting thinking, '*Cook, cook, cook - Cookout.*' (*Laughter.*) You can look at me and tell I am not a particular eater.

My doctor tells me that Cookout will kill me, but surely not just this one time. So I drove to Walmart and I had to pass by Cookout. And you know they have manna there, because they have this Reese's Peanut Butter Cup milkshake. I take medications so that would cancel it out, right? My feelings were crying for a milkshake from Cookout last

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night. But I am pleased to tell you that I did not succumb, and I didn't do it last night; however today is still young. (*Laughter.*)

But my feelings will lead me astray every time. There are times when I feel angry, there are times when I feel depressed, there are times when I feel like I could conquer the world, there are times when I feel like doing things I know I shouldn't do, there are times I feel like charging hell with a wet handkerchief. But if all of my decisions are based on my feelings what will happen is I will run ramshackle over the facts of the gospel and what God is doing in my life.

Which brings me to the third thing - don't be overly impressed with signs, success or symbols because those are not necessarily indicative of truth. Be really, really careful about the signs, success and symbols. You may be thinking, '*Yeah, but it is big. It is influential. It is famous. They have nice buildings. He has a lot of books on the shelf with his name on the spines. He has many degrees on his wall. He is eloquent. He is humorous. He is serious.*'

None of those mean anything. Jesus enjoyed using fishermen, tax collectors, Hellenists, and even to some extent - hell raisers. These were people that were going their own way and living the reprobate life. And the gospel changed that. Jesus is interested in changing your life too. Maybe you think God wouldn't care for you because you are an addict, or because you are rich. Or may you think God wouldn't care for you because you are poor, or you didn't graduate from high school. Those things don't matter to God because He loves you and His Son died for you. Do you have Jesus? Do you know Him?

Maybe you would say but I have been married before, it doesn't matter. Maybe you have never been married, it doesn't matter. Maybe you are from another country, it doesn't matter, aren't we all? But what does matter is what have you done with the truth? What have you done with Jesus? I don't care if you are eight years old or eighty eight years old hearing this this morning, what have you done with Jesus? That is the important thing.

Don't follow me because I went to school too long. And don't follow me because I enjoy public speaking. Don't follow me because I have a doctorate, and please don't call me reverend. Follow me as I follow Jesus, follow me as I declare the Word, follow me as I point you to the one who can save you, because I have never saved anyone. And that is true of anyone - whether or not they are on television, or the pastor of the church down the street, or of some big church across the country. Listen for the words of Jesus. It is not about signs and it is not about success.

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I am not going to wow you. I don't have any special supernatural powers. Every bit of power that I have you can have as well. The question is how much of the power has you? How much of the Holy Spirit has you? And that is something I have to deal with every day, and that is giving the Holy Spirit more of me.

Number four - compare everything you hear and see with the standard of Scripture. I want to make sure you understand this. Whenever your toilet backs up, or your sink backs up, or whenever your water doesn't come out of your faucet, who do you call? You don't call Ghostbusters, you call a plumber. (*Laughter.*) Why do you call a plumber? It is because there are certain principles of plumbing such as the fact that water and other stuff doesn't run uphill. That is a principle of plumbing. It runs downhill. In order for the water to get into where it needs to go and for the stuff that is in your sink and other places needs to get where it goes, you have to make sure that it is going downhill. And in order to find out what is level and what is not level, you have to have a plumb line. A plumb line is sometimes called a 'canon.'

If you are a carpenter and you want to know how to nail something in a straight row or whatever you have to use a plumb line. Plumb line is kind of a construction term. And what is in the process of constructing us as to right and wrong, good and evil, hope and hopelessness, is a plumb line. It is sometimes called the 'canon' of Scripture. It is complete, that is why we call it a 'closed canon.' It is our plumb line.

You don't have to believe what I say, if what I say is invalidated in Scripture. If I am not teaching the Word of God then it is just my opinion. Always use this as your device. That is why I always urge you not to say, '*Well, my pastor says.*' No that is a bad answer. Say instead, '*The Word of God says.*' Maybe you are thinking you don't know where that is found in the Bible - well, look it up. So don't be lazy and say, '*Pastor Dan said this.*'

So Scripture is to be our plumb line for everything you hear and everything you see. That is what we need to use to discern. This is how we know whether it is level or a straight line. If you don't use Scripture what happens is you will drift into error, you will pragmatically start following signs, symbols and success. So at the core we have to know that there is due north and that is Scripture, that there is a straight to compare the crooked against.

Number five - don't buy into prosperity theology. Prosperity theology is this false teaching that is sweeping the world, and I see it everywhere I go, that says your relationship with God is so that you can get rich. I have seen this in churches in Vietnam, in Brazil, in France, in Albania, and in Kenya. I have seen it everywhere I go. There are buildings where they get poor people to come and give their money so that some people

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get rich, and they tell you if you just had more faith you would give more because God wants to give you money and success and power and influence. Tell that to eleven of the twelve disciples who eventually died in poverty because they preached the gospel.

It is just not consistent with Scripture. If you are going to believe Scripture you can't believe prosperity theology. It is just a lie. Maybe you think, '*But their books say this.*' I don't care - look at THE Book - the Bible. Be very leery of that. There are a bunch of them, and I don't need to list their names, but watch out when someone tells you that God's plan and will for you is attached to fame and fortune. Apart from the gospel there is a problem, and you need to watch out for that and avoid it.

Number six - study the message. Don't miss the message because of the show. Don't be distracted from the core issues being addressed. What is being said is the foundation for what should be done, not vice versa. I love the fact that there are beautiful church buildings, but having a beautiful building does not mean the gospel is being preached. I love the fact that there is wonderful worship music, but that does not mean the gospel is being preached just because a church has good music, or because they have a charismatic pastor, or because he has a bunch of degrees from a bunch of different seminaries. For every seminary you know I know a heretic who has graduated from that seminary, by the way. Because having a degree from a seminary does not mean you will always stay true to the training that you received. So be aware of that.

Number seven - be suspicious of those who promote themselves for gain. This is what Simon wanted to do. He wanted to promote himself for gain. He wanted people to admire him and to be famous. He wanted to be called 'the great.' We need to be careful and diligent in watching for those who would introduce false teaching into the gospel and the church so that you will find them popular or worthy. Remember this - when someone is making a profit off of the gospel, they are taking blood money. And if you or I had a son who died and someone swept in behind that tragedy and started selling tee shirts, and selling gimmicks and riding the tragedy of our son to fame and fortune, would you not be offended by that? Then how much more is God offended because we profit off of the death of He who did not need to die for us, but did so lovingly.

And the last thing is this - take the long view over the first impression. First impression of Simon was great because he came forward and he got baptized. But he needed to be discipled. Now we don't know what the end story is, we can only speculate, but I like to think that Simon eventually became a devout follower of Christ, and he abandoned anything that would have distracted him from the gospel. That he would have told people to quit calling him great. I would love to tell you the story that Simon became a humble servant who just faithfully discipled others in their growing faith

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and commitment to Jesus Christ. But I don't know if that happened. He may have decided to walk away from this and go back to his old ways where people are amazed by him and gave him money and called him great. But we don't know.

I do know that all of us have to give an account for where we go with our spiritual journey. And our journey needs to make us more like Jesus and less like this world every day that we live. And so we need to take the long view and not the short view. Let's pay the price of the shame of the Christ by diligently living in faith according to His Word. When we do that the impact we can have is like throwing a rock in the middle of the pond and those little waves keep growing and growing and they eventually hit shore and expand. There is someone in your life that needs to hear the gospel and you are the wave to take it to them. And the rock that was thrown into the world at Calvary is still sending ripples all the way around. Be aware of the fakes, the phonies and the frauds, let's be legitimate, spirit filled, truth focused servants of the Savior who loved us enough to die for us.

We are going to take just a moment and ask God what He wanted us to hear this morning. And I always wish there were things that I had said better or more eloquently, but understand this, always compare what I say to the Scripture. If you have a bunch of preachers you watch on TV and some of them are preaching this prosperity gospel, don't just react to that. Go back and study the Scripture. I am confident that the Holy Spirit will be able to say far more eloquently to you through His Word than I have ever been able to do on a Sunday morning.

But what I want to do is trigger the conversation between you and God that you would measure every word whether it is at Life Fellowship Church or on television, or wherever you may go. There are a lot of people out there right now who I believe are diluting and damaging and distracting from the gospel. They may not even be aware they are doing it, but anytime we separate ourselves from the purity of the gospel we introduce things that Satan can exploit to keep us from seeing Jesus for who He really was. Let's not be guilty of that ourselves.

So when we stand in a moment if you would like to pray and trust Christ and become a Christ follower, please just come down and talk to me. We have a lot of people going through things in our church right now and we just need to pray about them. Many of you know Pastor Brad Milks and his wife lost a baby this week and we need to pray for them and their family. We have several people who are going through some health issues. We have folks that are struggling with work issues. If you want someone to pray with you just step out of the auditorium and go to the right to the prayer room where there will be someone to pray with you. Or go to the Next Step Station and someone will pray

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with you. If you want to pray with me, I will be right down here as well as some of the elders and staff who would be glad to pray with you. Or you can pray at one of the crosses. This is a safe place for us to pour our hearts out to the Lord.

If you need more resources that you need to study just send us an email and we will be glad to get them for you. Whatever you do before you leave here let's ask God what He wanted you to hear this morning. Let's stand as we pray.

Father, we love you. Thank you for your Word. Help us, Father, to live it with faithfulness, with diligence, with purity. Father, help none of us to be guilty of ever distracting or diluting the gospel. Father, may people always see the real Jesus in us. For it is Christ's name I pray, Amen.

The preceding transcript was completed using raw audio recordings. As much as possible, it includes the actual words of the message with minor grammatical changes and editorial clarifications to provide context. Hebrew and Greek words are spelled using Google Translator and the actual spelling may be different in some cases.