

1. What is Magic?

- a. Magic is the attempt to manipulate power by proper performance
 - i. Magic is the manipulation, control, or ‘channeling’ of power through means of special objects, words, or actions
 1. At its base meaning, it is manipulation: if I push button ‘x’ *exactly the right way*, then I get power ‘y’
 2. This manipulation of powers is not of God, even if it produces results
 - a. The ends do not justify the means
 - ii. Because magic is “practiced”, i.e. technique which can be learned and repeated in order to get repeated results with spiritual power, it is taught to others
 1. Often this is called “attunement” or “activating” or “unlocking”
 2. These are terms which mean a skill or technique is passed down from a teacher to a student
 - a. So, there are classes on unlocking one’s *chi*, or finding the right body locations of *chakras* in order to place crystals
 - b. Often, these are Christianized as “laying on of hands”, but it is really magic, learning *where* and *how* to ‘lay on hands’ in order to “unlock” or “activate” the “holy spirit”
 - iii. In the end, it is about controlling spiritual power through performance
- b. Manipulating power is mysterious and amazing
 - i. Simon “amazed” the people
 - ii. There are two kinds of manipulating magic:
 1. Illusory deception
 - a. Trickery, slight-of-hand, used to impress people by making them wonder how you did it
 - b. David Blaine, David Copperfield, etc.
 2. Spiritual empowerment
 - a. Demonic, spiritual authorities
 - b. The manipulation of such spirits or “energies”, via the means of crystals, incantations, or touching are often used as “means of good”
 - iii. Christianity does have mystery, but not by manipulation of power(s)
- c. Manipulating power leads to ‘greatness’ in the eyes of men
 - i. He thought very much of himself (identity) and his power (something)
 - ii. It appears he may have even given himself the title, “Megaz”
 1. Something akin to “Simon the Great” or the like
 - iii. The very idea that he could control spiritual powers was intoxicating to his ego
 1. This is still true today, even with those who desire to help people through magical means (healing, pain reduction, anxiety-reducing, etc.)
 2. This is because the entire system of magic is based upon control, which places the success of a practitioner squarely upon the ability of the magician to perform the ritual or technique well.
- d. Success in controlling powers makes a person influential
 - i. This Simon was well-known *because he was successful*
 1. In other words, his magic *worked*
 2. People believed that he had great power and were amazed (v11)
 - ii. There is no indication that the people were discontent with Simon at all, but rather that they trusted him “giving attention to” because he had helped them successfully
 1. The gospel, however, simply took over – people being freed from evil spirits and hearing and believing the gospel proclaimed by Philip

2. Manipulating Power Can Be Wrongly “Christianized”

- a. It is also apparent that he did his magic and manipulation in the name of God
 - i. That is, he was a so-called “religious healer”, who used magic to “work for God”

- ii. Even knowledge, if ‘attained’ by means other than God has delivered, i.e. through His Word from the apostles, is not necessarily from God
 - 1. Paul says people who ‘take their stand on visions they have seen’ are ‘puffed up without reason’
 - 2. "The appearance of an angel from heaven could add nothing to the certainty of the declarations he has already put into our hands." (John Newton)
- iii. So, he claimed to be able to manipulate nature and spirits *in the name of God* but with the means of technique.
 - 1. This is the nature of magic, whether in God’s name or not
 - 2. There are times when we may have treated God *magically*
 - a. “If I read my Bible and pray, then God *will work*.”
 - b. “If I just go to the right healing service, am touched by the right healer in the right way, then God will heal me.”
 - c. “If I give my wealth to the Church, then God *must* return it with interest.”
 - i. If none of these things happen, then it is assumed to be because of a deficiency somewhere, i.e. my faith, sin, etc.
 - 3. This is especially prevalent in the so-called “prosperity gospel”, which isn’t really a gospel at all, and the “word-faith” movement
 - a. These so-called Christians claim that God can be moved if you use the right oil, blow a shofar, say the right words, with the right feeling, with the right amount of faith
 - i. The sell “healing anointing oils” specifically for particular ailments of the body and soul
 - ii. “Now you can get the entire 25-oil batch for \$150”
 - b. They treat God as if He is a restrained force waiting to be “unleashed”
 - i. Thus, they will use words like “activating” the Spirit, “unleashing” God’s blessing, or “releasing” God’s will
 - ii. These are all words taken from New Age paganism, not the Scriptures, adopted by charlatans like Aimee Semple McPherson and her disciples today in the word-faith movement
 - iii. And such approach to God and His works are magical and anathema, condemned with Simon as a form of spiritual simony and seeking of power more than seeking of God
 - c. They constantly alter God’s Word to fit their practices:
 - i. Usually it is by lowering the standards for truth
 - “Because you give words that aren’t completely accurate, it doesn’t mean you’re a false prophet. It just means that you have prophetic words that need help...”
 - I can tell you that there are people who’ve been wrong for thirty years. I’m not saying they’re false prophets. I’m just saying they are bad ones...
 - There’s a difference between a false prophet and a bad prophet. A false prophet has an evil heart. A bad prophet just gets everything wrong.”
 - Kris Vallotton, senior minister and ‘prophet’ (false) at *Bethel Church* in Redding, CA, from his Youtube channel, episode: “false prophets”
 - 4. These Christianized methods eventually lead to more and more pagan practices, like “grave-soaking” done by Beni Johnson of Bethel Church
 - a. Where they practice laying on the graves of Christians who have passed away in order to magically “soak up” their gifts and abilities
 - b. The “slain in the Spirit” phenomena is eerily similar to the Hindu *Kundalini* “awakening” of an energy within, with feelings of euphoria, jerking bodily movements, laughing hysterically, etc.
 - i. All of which are abominations to God according to the Scripture, works consistent with false worship of false gods
- b. But the use of magic is explicitly prohibited by God, because God, the Holy Spirit, *cannot* be manipulated, thus does not need to be ‘released’, ‘channeled’, ‘awakened’, or ‘activated’ by any means of Man, even those with a so-called “anointing”

- i. **Deut 18:9-14** associates such magic with idols, making it a supernatural issue of worshipping false gods – a betrayal of God and mutinous attack on His honor
 - 1. Even if a power can rescue us from a certain danger, that does not make it acceptable to God
 - 2. “Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, and trust in horses, who rely on chariots because they are many and horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy One or consult the LORD” (Isaiah 31:1)
- ii. Even prayer does not ‘release’ God or His blessings in this way, as if God is waiting to be let loose to do something that He really wants to do, but can’t until His people ‘pray the right prayer’
 - 1. This is magical thinking, not biblical thinking
- c. Even if such manipulation of power or energy is done in the name of God and it works does not imply that God approves or that its practitioners belong to Christ
 - i. “and they were paying attention to him on account of that they had been amazed with his magic for a considerable time.”
 - ii. Beware of “Christian pragmatism”, the idea that “if it works, it must be from God”
 - 1. This is a lie, cf. **Matt 7:21-29**
 - iii. Success, even over a period of time, is not commensurate to what pleases God
 - 1. In fact, **Revelation 16:14** - demons do signs, too, which lead people astray
 - a. It is not signs which *are* truth, the *message* is the truth, the Word about Christ Jesus
 - iv. Even if a person has dreams which come true, or visions which are accurate, or perform signs and wonders, if their doctrine of God is in error, they are to be rejected
 - 1. **Deut 13:1-5**

"If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, 'Let us go after other gods,' which you have not known, 'and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and you shall serve him and hold fast to him.

But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has taught rebellion against the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you out of the house of slavery, to make you leave the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.

 - a. Simply because signs and wonders may happen in a Christian context does not mean that they are from God - consistency with God’s revealed Word alone matters
 - 2. Then why would God allow these signs and wonders to be accurate and come about, if they are not from Him?
 - a. “for the Lord your God is testing you, to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul”
 - b. Like a child whose mother left her father (the LORD) and shackled up with another man who gives her what she wants now – whom will she love?

3. The Gospel is God’s Power Without Manipulation

- a. Luke does this throughout his two books (Luke and Acts), showing how Jesus has supreme authority over all other authorities
 - i. Whether they be natural powers (illness, disease, death), social powers (kings, governors, religious leaders), or spiritual powers (demons, spirits, angels)
 - ii. This power simply overtook the Samaritans *without their performance*
 - 1. This needed to be so strongly emphasized to them that the gift of the Holy Spirit was distinctly separated from their water baptisms
- b. Simon is the one in awe of the power being expressed in the name of Jesus Christ, i.e. the authority and control of Jesus

- i. Simon knows spiritual powers, and even he is so bewildered by the power expressed through Philip's actions *and his message*, that he "believes" and is baptized and "clings to Philip" *in order to see how he does it*
 - ii. But what we see with Simon is that he is enamored with the "signs and great powers", and his "faith" and "conversion" expressed via baptism, is not really about submitting to Jesus at all, but about gaining power and control for himself
 - 1. Using Jesus as a means to anything (power) besides Jesus is idolatry.
 - 2. "A profession of faith doesn't justify anybody. It is the possession of faith which justifies." (A.W. Pink)
 - 3. He is looking to make much of himself, and much of Man, rather than to make much of God and much of Christ Jesus
 - c. There are many leaders and influencers in Christendom who are enamored with power, with strength, with military metaphors for the Church, but very little with justification, righteousness, admitting all control to God and God alone, or waiting on the Lord
 - i. They are looking for the techniques, the learning, the mantras and phrases, the keys for the locks, etc. *so that* God must move in power NOW
 - ii. They are Simons, charlatans and sons of the Devil (Acts 13:10), "springs without water, mists driven about by the storm, for whom the great darkness has been reserved" (2 Peter 2:17)
 - iii. They look like Christians, using the same language, making similar claims, but the substance of their gospel is magic and their hearts are bent on power devoid of carrying an old, rugged, cross and the gospelly pattern of suffering in hope of resurrection
- 4. Leaders Who Lean on Technique and Performance Have No Share in the Gospel
 - a. "and Simon, seeing that the Spirit was given through the placing of hands of the apostles, offered up wealth to them,"
 - b. The validation of the Spirit was evidenced by something which Simon saw
 - i. This shows us that these Samaritans also began prophesying and proclaiming the "great works of God", like the Jerusalem believers did at Pentecost (more next week)
 - ii. Most likely this included speaking in other languages, too, but it surely included prophesying in a demonstratively powerful boldness
 - c. Simon assumed that this ability (power) was due to the technique of the apostles' hands
 - i. He offered to purchase the technique so that he could also grant such power
 - ii. This is not a humble request, but the request of someone seeking power
 - 1. saying, "Give this **power to me**, too..."
 - 2. "Whenever religion is used to make its leaders seem great and powerful, and whenever religion becomes a commodity by serving the interests of those who have or want money, it has become corrupt." – R. Tannehill
- 5. Why? Because the Gospel and Magic are Polar Opposites Which Cannot be Mixed
 - a. and Peter said to him, "May your silver, with you, be ruined, because you supposed to acquire the gift of God through wealth!
 - i. This is curse language – Peter is announcing a curse upon Simon.
 - 1. Thus, this is not merely an admonition of a brother, but a curse upon an unbeliever
 - 2. You might expect that Peter would respect Simon's desire for the Holy Spirit to be given to people, but he's not
 - ii. One cannot "acquire" the Holy Spirit through any means but humble dependence (repentant faith) upon Jesus as the sovereign savior – it is a GIFT
 - b. neither a portion nor a share in this word is for you, because your heart is not straight into the presence of God."
 - i. This curse is further extrapolated by this phrase, indicating that Simon has no share in the gospel (the word) and that his heart is not right (straight/honest) before God
 - ii. In other words, he "believed" pretentiously, just like Ananias and Sapphira, pretending to believe, even to the point of baptism and "following", but his motivation was self-centered and self-seeking – *and God was opposed to him*

- c. Treating God like a force or power to be manipulated is something to reject and of which to repent
 - i. “and be begging of the Lord, if, accordingly (to your begging and his gift-giving), the thought of your heart will be forgiven to you.”
 - 1. Here is the root of it: Simon didn’t consider his begging to “work sufficiently”
 - 2. In fact, even in his response to this curse, he still doesn’t consider that his asking God for mercy is sufficient, so he asks the apostles to ask for him
 - a. Simon was unwilling to come undone and trust the mercy of God.
 - b. He still sees the Lord as someone to be manipulated by the “right buttons”, in this case, the apostles’ prayers
 - ii. “For, I see you are being into a gall of bitterness and a bond of unrighteousness.”
 - 1. The heart of manipulation is a bitter poison which leads to enslavement
 - a. Simon’s heart is full of bitter poison, this self-centered desire for power and strength and capability which leads to bitterness when God doesn’t do what you want
 - b. Like poison, this unrighteousness spreads to destroy and kill
 - c. This poison is a bondage, a bondage to unrighteousness
 - i. He is not approaching God in true humility (repentant faith)
 - ii. Thus, he remains crooked before God
- d. Some will tell me that I need to relax, that such a mixture is harmless
 - i. But will a few drops of poison in a cup of tea make the tea harmless to drink?
 - ii. Simon’s only hope is to repent and come to God with nothing but the need for mercy (Therefore, repent of this evil of yours!)
- e. The gospel is about giving up one’s power to control anything, not to gain power to control anything
 - i. It is coming before the Lord with no power, and assuming no power, but submitting wholeheartedly to a person, not a force
 - 1. Simon was treating the Holy Spirit like an impersonal force which could be contained, manipulated, controlled, and which must submit to him.
 - 2. Because of this, he was condemned by Peter.
 - ii. But here is the hope of the gospel
 - 1. Look at the Samaritans: to anyone who closes to Christ Jesus with no power, seeking no control, but rests in His provision and grace receives the Holy Spirit of God
 - 2. “The Spirit blows where He wishes” (John 3), so you cannot control Him, but you can trust the heart of the One who sent His Son to redeem you by His own power

Sometimes it feels like our culture is so hard, so dedicated to coopting the gospel and mixing it with other worldviews. Yet, look at the power of the gospel. Look at how the apostles rest in the sovereign control of God here: Peter, John, and Philip LEFT the Samaritans to continue preaching in the country.

Why? They knew that the gospel itself is the power of God. They trusted the Holy Spirit so much that they left the Samaritans without immediate leadership! They left them there with condemned Simon. We, too, can take such hope that we do not have to unleash God, or unlock His blessings, or somehow perform to a certain degree of perfection of faith or hope or love before God works. God’s Spirit is a gift which cannot be acquired by anything! It is simply given by God to those who trust Him, whom He has chosen. We simply proclaim the gospel, cry out to the Lord in prayer, and rest in His Word in His timing.

His sovereignty is our hope. His kindness has been proven at the cross of Christ. His faithfulness to His Word unmatched.