

## 1-17-21 Don't Try to Catfish God

### Acts 8:9-25

Ever been catfished?

Catfished: (Urban Dictionary)

- Being deceived over Facebook as the deceiver professed their romantic feelings to his/her victim but isn't who they say they are.
- Having a fake social media profile, images, and avatar to lure people to have romantic feelings. They are then catfished when the victim realizes the person, they have fallen for via social media is not who they APPEAR to be.

Have you noticed all the camera filters and computer software out there? People are selling a bill of goods that are false!

It seems we live in the days of fakeness. Where fantasy and reality get blurred. Social media leads everyone to believe everything is perfect. Perfect marriage, family, we are all beautiful and skinny!

There used to be a saying, "There is an app for that." Now the saying should be, "There is a filter for that."

I got in trouble, not too long ago I noticed I was in a picture on Facebook and I looked good. I mean no wrinkles, my eyes popped, perfect skin completion. What got me in trouble was I commented on the post that the filters applied made me look marvelous. The individual wasn't happy with me pointing out to others that the pictures were filtered. They were serious! I said, people know they are filtered. The skin on my face hasn't been that tight since I was born.

That left me with a couple of thoughts. First, there are people out there that really think people don't know they are presenting a false image of themselves. Second, this is where we are in society today, we are presenting a false narrative to make us feel better.

God's word is truth, there is no filters in it. It is a mirror that shows all our blemishes. God doesn't highlight our flaws to ridicule, reject or poke fun at us. He does it to show us we can be real, and that He loves and accepts us with all our blemishes. God isn't impressed, nor pays any attention to our filters.

**1 Samuel 16:7, "But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."**

In **Acts 8**, the church is scattered because of persecution, presenting the gospel in Judea and Samaria. In **verses 9-25**, God's word shows us an example of a faker, a catfisher; but God is never catfished, fooled. In **Acts 8:26-39**, God's word shows us an example of a real faith conversion.

We are going to look at Simon the sorcerer and his attempt to catfish God and His apostles.

Four things I want us to notice about his faith - any one of which could be reason that someone's faith is not for real. As we go through each of these, I want you to examine your own faith and ask yourself the question - "Are you being real with God or are you trying to catfish Him?"

Before looking at Simon's faith, I think we need to be reminded that the condition of one's heart will determine how it responds to the gospel.

### **Matthew 13**

Seeds that fell on the wayside (path) **verses 4, 19**, The gospel is heard but doesn't understand it, nor does the person try to understand. Satan comes along and tells the conviction in their heart not to pay attention.

Seeds that fell on the stony places (rocks) **verses 5-6, 20-21**, The gospel is heard, accepted joyfully (flash in a pan) but is abandoned when persecution and trouble come, the word never rooted in their lives.

Seeds that fell among the thorns, **verses 7, 22**, The gospel is heard and the individual falls away, gets choked out by the things of the world. They produce no fruit.

Seeds that fell on good ground, **verses 8, 23**, The gospel is heard, it falls on a heart that hears and understands, and puts God's word in action, which leads to the production of godly fruit being bore.

Only 1 of the four soils Jesus described represented legitimate faith. 75% were false conversions.

**Adrian Rodgers, "The faith that fizzles at the finish was flawed from the first."**

Catfishing faith leads to a flawed faith. Four areas where Simon the sorcerer catfishing showed flaws:

#### **I. Flawed view of SELF**

##### **• Read verse 9**

- His flawed view of self was the fact that he was egotistical, he was prideful, he was full of himself. This is a common reality that keeps many from a faith that saves. Egotism, pride – they think they're good, they think they're important, they think they're significant – that was Simon.
- And **verse 9** says that because of his skill and deception and trickery, the people of Samaria were in amazement. And because he held the people in amazement, what did he think of himself? The end of **verse 9**: **"claiming that he was someone great."**

##### **• Read verses 10-11**

- The people were so awestruck by Simon, this continued to build his ego. Pride in any form – not even as extreme as his – but pride in any form is a weed springing up in every heart that literally cuts off the growth of true faith.
- Pride is a robber. It robs the heart of the possibility of genuine brokenness, genuine repentance, humility, which is necessary for salvation.
- Because of his pride He had no sense of the fear of judgment. He had no sense of his own lowliness, his own sinfulness. That's what's so damning about pride - it prevents an honest self-appraisal. The problem is, it's so easy to see a prideful heart in others but difficult to see in ourselves.

Scripture warns of a prideful heart:

**Psalms 10:4, "The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts."**

**Psalms 12:3, "May the Lord cut off all flattering lips, And the tongue that speaks proud things,"**

**Proverbs 8:13, “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverse mouth I hate.”**

**Proverbs 16:5, “Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the Lord; be assured, he will not go unpunished.”**

**Proverbs 16:18, “Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall.”**

**James 4:6, “But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.”**

- Simon sees himself as someone great. Simon does all that he does to have people tell him how great he is; Simon is way too concerned with what others think of him; Simon spends way too much time in front of the mirror.
- Simon is one who loves to take selfie's, apply all kinds of filters, and post them on social media. This is a soul-damning self-perception. It was a fatal flaw that reveals he was not authentically born again.

## **II. Flaw view of SALVATION**

- **Read verse 12-13**
- How was his view of salvation flawed? He thought it was all about the externals. He viewed salvation as simply an external thing to do.
- God empowered his apostles and servants the ability to perform the miraculous signs for a specific purpose – at authenticate the truthfulness of the message. Signs and wonders are not the end, they are a means to an end, namely – authenticating the truth of the gospel.
- Illustration, parents remember when you children were babies and you tried showing them something? As you pointed at something to show them, the child was more fascinated with your finger than what you were trying to show them.
- That’s exactly what Simon is doing. The signs and wonders were intended to point to the true reality – which is Jesus. But Simon became enamored with the finger.

***We must be careful not to give into sensationalism.***

***World events are unfolding exactly as the Bible predicted thousands of years ago. In our attempt to understand world news and current events in light of Bible prophecy, we need to be careful. That we don’t give into sensationalism, where we try to make sense of everything, become date setters, make every earthquake, disaster, disease a sign of the times.***

***When considering signs of the times, we must make sure that we view current events in the light of the Bible and not the other way around. NEVER speculate about the time of the Lord’s coming or listen to others who do.***

***“The problem is that when everything becomes a sign, then nothing is a sign.” -Mark Hitchcock author of THE END***

- Simon was amazed at the miracles performed by Philip. Now Simon knows magic, he knows sleight of hand, trickery, and the art of illusion. He knows how to amaze people. But when he sees what Philip does, it moves him to amazement. He sees his counterfeit power in light of the authentic power.
- Simon saws his tricks in comparison to the power of God and he was amazed. He had a flawed view of salvation because he became fixated on the finger, not who the finger was pointing to.
- We must beware of false, flawed, catfishing salvation plans. Prosperity gospel is one of them.
- If churches present Jesus as someone who should be followed because he'll make life more enjoyable, more comfortable; and he'll build your esteem in the eyes of the world and then the opposite happens. Christ calls you to uncomfortable situations and instead of being more esteemed in the eyes of men you are less esteemed in their sight. What then do people do with the gospel when they have been sold a bill of goods like that? They take it off because it didn't accomplish for them what they thought it would.
- When you come to realize that all of us are lost and headed for an eternal destruction, but Christ provides salvation, he's not embarrassing or uncomfortable – he's precious to you! And instead of holding on loosely – you cling to Christ.

### III. A flawed view of The Holy Spirit

- **Read verses 14-19**
- The book of Acts is a transitional book. These Samaritans were really viewed with disdain as half-breeds by Jewish people. This is the first time there was a massive influx of Samaritan converts to Christ.
- Here's what God was doing in this transitional phase of the church: God was putting his seal of approval on them as being a part of the body of Christ. He's affirming by the sending of the Holy Spirit through miraculous manifestation that they are genuinely part of the church.
- There was so much prejudice that ran deep. And God was confirming to all the Jews that these Samaritans were in fact genuinely converted and born again as the Holy Spirit had come upon them in power and might.
- This same series of events happen in **chapter 10** when the gospel doesn't just cross over to the half-Jews, the Samaritans, but crosses all the way over to non-Jews, the Gentiles in Cornelius' house. Remember Jesus told Peter, you will be the rock that the church would be built on. God used Peter as an ambassador to sign off on the work of God.
- Simon wanted to buy the true Holy Spirit. What's going on today is that false teachers are trying to sell the false spirits.
- Because Simon had a flawed view of self – he was prideful and thought he was great; and because he had a flawed view of salvation – he was amazed at the miracles that pointed to God, but not with God; that led him to a flawed view of the Spirit. He thought he could buy the Spirit with money.

- Notice, **verse 16 says, “For as yet HE had fallen...”** The Holy Spirit is part of the trinity, God the Father, God the Son (Jesus), and God the Holy Spirit. Too many believers call the Holy Spirit, “it”. Like it’s something we can use. “It you were more filled with it, or used it, if it was more prevalent in your life.” The Holy Spirit is God, and He will choose how and what He does in the lives of believers. The only way to be filled with Him, is to be fully submitted and controlled by Him.
- Back to Simon. Why would he want to buy that power? This would no doubt get him back on top in the eyes of the Samaritans. If he could add this supernatural power to his collection of tricks and illusions, he’d be right back on top. At the end – it was all about him. Which really leads to the final flaw we see in Simon, he had...

#### IV. Flawed view of SIN

- **Read verses 20.**
- Simon had an extremely high view of himself and a very low view of God. He did not understand the glory of the Holy Spirit. He didn’t realize the truth that God doesn’t have anything for sale.
- All that God offers, He offers for free. But it can only be received by the broken, repentant, contrite heart, and those who genuinely believe in Christ. So, Simon has exposed his crooked heart, and Peter pounces.
- Peter’s ticked off here. This is righteous indignation. This is kind of salty, fishermen talk, by the way. In fact, the JB Phillips translation renders this verse: But Peter said to him, **“To hell with you and your money! How dare you think you could buy the gift of God!” Acts 8:20 (PHILLIPS)**
- He didn’t coddle that false faith, he shot him down fast and hard. **Read verses 21-23**
- What is Peter telling him? Pray for your forgiveness; repent; turn 180 degrees. Go the exact opposite direction; renounce your sin; turn to God. Lay down your pride, lay hold of Christ. **“You are poisoned by bitterness.”** “You are a slave to your sin. You must repent!”
- Look at Simon’s response in **verse 24**. The right view of sin is realizing, your personal sin has separated you from God. Instead of saying, “Ok, I’ll pray to the Lord and repent” he says, “You pray for me and I’ll just go with that.”
- Too much pride, too much arrogance, too full of himself to be humble before the Lord.

#### Conclusion

So, what does this mean for me, how do I apply this to my life?

Well, the “so what” life application is really the title of my sermon: “Don’t Try to Catfish God”

Is your faith the real thing? Is it authentic, is it genuine, is it legitimate? This is an altogether right and good and biblical question that each of us in this room...Cecil included, we should ask ourselves, “Are you for real? Or are we trying to catfish, be fake with God?”

Paul says in **2 Corinthians 13:5-6**, **“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified. 6 But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified.**

When we catfish people around us, it might not lead to any kind of punishment but catfishing ourselves in our relationship with God will lead to an eternal punishment.

Do you see some of the same flaws that Simon tripped up with in your life as well?

- Instead of having a flawed view of self, have an accurate view of self.

See yourself in light of the perfection and glory of God; see yourself in desperate need of rescue, see yourself in need of salvation; see yourself in need of the Spirit’s transforming power.

- Instead of having a flawed view of your sin, have an accurate view of sin.

See your own, personal sin as the soul-damning cancer it really is. Humble yourself before God and trust in Jesus! God has provided a way. Don’t look to the finger, the power and evidence of God’s salvation; look to Jesus, the author and perfecter of salvation.

Trust in his work, dying on the cross for your sin, rising from the dead to provide your life. Trust in Jesus today!

Last Thought: The same offer of salvation made to Simon is made to you: REPENT and pray to the Lord to be FORGIVEN.

Fellow brothers and sisters, are you attempting to catfish God? Are you really praying for the soul of others?

Are you really trying to build bridges with people whom God loves but you can’t stand?

Are you praising Him daily? Are you spending time alone in His word? Are you filling your joy bank up with thanksgiving memories that He has made?

Are you living sold out, submitted, and controlled by the Holy Spirit?

Is it time to take the filters off and allow Him to do what He started at your salvation?