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The New Simonists

Pastor Gene Giguere, September 6, 2026

Introduction: The Story So Far ...

- 1) The last time I was here we came to a conclusion in the debate that churchmen and theologians, scholars and preachers have debated for (literally) millennia! The question is, *Was the so-called Simon Magus, Simon the Sorcerer, saved?*

Although many well-respected Bible teachers – ancient and modern – would say ‘No’, we believe he was. Preachers like Dr. John MacArthur look at **Acts 8** and say, ‘No, Simon’s faith was false. It was superficial. He was the first false convert.’ But I showed you last time that I believe Dr. MacArthur was forced into that position by his own theological presuppositions – primarily, his view on Lordship Salvation. He says plainly: “The study of Simon the Sorcerer illustrates faith that does not save.”¹

Dr. MacArthur was beholden to the theological concept of *Lordship Salvation* – a false understanding of the Gospel that makes no real distinction between salvation and discipleship. In his book, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, MacArthur argues that Jesus cannot be accepted merely as a “Savior” from hell without also making Him the “Lord” of one’s life.²

But we believe that *the Bible makes a sharp distinction between salvation and discipleship*. We’re saved – honestly and truly – the moment we believe that Jesus died for our sins. Then, as we grow under the Holy Spirit’s mentorship, we become disciples – disciplined students and followers of Jesus Christ bearing good fruit consistent with our salvation.

¹ MacArthur, John, Sermon: ‘The Faith That DOES NOT Save,’ January 14, 1973; <https://www.gty.org/sermons/1726/the-faith-that-does-not-save>

² Woodyard, Jonathon, ‘Does Dead Faith Save? John MacArthur responds to that question with lucid brevity,’ August 4, 2025; <https://theologyalongtheway.org/2025/08/04/does-dead-faith-save-john-macarthur-responds-to-that-question-with-lucid-brevity/>

But believers can (and do!) backslide – lose their way, so to speak. And when they do, we have contrition, confession and repentance to help us to recover from our folly. If we’re so unwise as to reject this divinely-prescribed means for restoration, there comes divine discipline or deserved suffering.

I don’t know if you’ve ever noticed that ‘discipline’ has the word ‘disciple’ in it! God uses divine discipline as a good Father to make *disciples*, not *believers*!

- 2) But we also saw that Macarthur is not alone! In fact, he’s in VERY good company! The early Church Fathers presented numerous legends which painted Simon as nothing short of a super villain on par with Lex Luther or the Joker! If we stop reading the Bible and step into the world of these writers, we find that a virtually unanimous, fiercely negative view of Simon presents itself.

They did not see a carnal brother; they saw an occult fraud and the literal “fountainhead of all Christian heresies.” These Fathers include the great Justin Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyons, Arnobius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Hippolytus of Rome, Augustine and apocryphal documents like the *Apocryphal Acts of Peter*.

Well, modern biblical scholars and historians have looked closely at these dramatic accounts of the Church Fathers and they’ve come to view them all with what we might generously call extreme skepticism. Modern critical scholarship widely considers these patristic writers to have used Simon’s sin as a polemical tool, warning early Christians against the dangers of dabbling in the occult, or of allowing pride or envy to obfuscate our walk with Jesus.

- 3) But we have come to see that Simon was indeed our brother in Christ for one simple reason: we take the Bible at its literal Word. I want to finish up this piece and move on to deserved suffering this morning.

Luke tells us three things important things about Simon. He writes in verse 13: “Even (1) Simon himself believed, and after (2) being baptized he (3) continued with Philip.”

First, Simon “believed.” The word he uses is the aorist active indicative of πιστεύω – the simple verb to *believe*.

✠ This is the same word found in **John 3:16b**: “whoever believes (πιστεύω) in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

✠ And in **John 11:25-26**, where Jesus said: “Whoever believes (πιστεύω) in me, though he die, yet shall he live,²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes (πιστεύω) in me shall never die.”

✠ And **John 6:40**, where Jesus said: “For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes (πιστεύω) in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

Furthermore, the word Luke uses in verse **13** of Simon is *the exact same word and grammatical construction of the word he used of the Samaritans believing in verse 12* (aorist active indicative of πιστεύω). So, if we’re to be consistent, if Simon wasn’t saved, *none of the Samaritans were* – and the Holy Spirit (in verse **17**) apparently fell upon unbelievers!

Second, he was “baptized.” Now, we all know that being baptized is not being saved; it’s publicly proclaiming our faith. But please understand, that to be baptized in the days of the early Church was to expose one’s self to the very real possibility of danger. It marked someone as an enemy of the Roman Empire, one who would not bow before the Roman Gods, among whom was the emperor himself! That doesn’t sound like something an unbeliever would be interested in! But Simon was baptized.

And third, he didn’t get baptized and go home, he “continued with Philip.” He latched on to this great evangelist and miracle-worker, right up until the time the Apostles John and Peter arrived. And Philip was doing VERY public evangelistic work!

Then, when Peter severely rebuked his attempt to offer money for apostolic authority, he seems to have repented. He said to Simon, “Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me” (**Acts 8:24**). As I’ve said, that’s kind of a weird thing for an *unbeliever* to ask. He seems to respectfully recognize Peter’s apostolic authority.

- 4) And that’s why so many preeminent scholars – many of whom are among my favorites – argue that if the *Samaritans* were saved, *Simon* was saved as well.

- ✠ Zane Hodges (of *Dallas Theological Seminary*) argued that to deny Simon's salvation forces an arbitrary, inconsistent reading of the Text.^{3 4}
- ✠ Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, the founding president of *Dallas Theological Seminary*, classified Simon as a justified, but carnal believer, reminding us that entering salvation requires faith alone (**Ephesians 2:8–9, Romans 5:1**), while Christian growth takes time.⁵
- ✠ Charles Ryrie warned that denying Simon's salvation sets a dangerous precedent where readers can question *anyone's* salvation based on later bad behavior. He noted that a believer's mind is not instantly transformed at salvation, but must be progressively transformed *after* salvation (**Romans 12:2**).⁶
- ✠ Dr. Michael Heiser concluded that Simon was a true believer who fell into immediate, deep sin.⁷
- ✠ G. Campbell Morgan, the great British preacher, maintained that Simon entered the church as a true, though uninstructed, convert who “believed the facts” of the gospel, much like Apollos, who possessed genuine faith but initially had an incomplete understanding of the faith (**Acts 18:24–26**).⁸
- ✠ Dr. Thomas Constable and Joseph Dillow framed Simon as the ultimate biblical example of a carnal Christian—someone who has received eternal life by faith but still acts out of their old, unrenewed mind.⁹
- ✠ Robert N. Wilkin, the founder of the *Grace Evangelical Society* (GES), has written extensively on this topic, defending Simon's salvation.¹⁰ He argues that when Peter called him to “repent” in **Acts 8:22**, he was calling Simon (as a *believer*) to change his mind about his wicked thinking and be restored to

³ Hodges, Zane, *Absolutely Free: A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (2nd Edition), pp. 219–222.

⁴ See Wilkin, Bob, ‘Beware of Interpreting Backwards,’ *Grace Evangelical Society*, March 19, 2018; <https://faithalone.org/blog/beware-of-interpreting-backwards/>

⁵ Chafer, L.S., *Systematic Theology* (Dallas, TX: Dallas Seminary Press 1948), 3: 372–78.

⁶ Ryrie, Charles Ryrie, *So Great Salvation: What it Means to Believe in Jesus Christ* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989), pp. 61–62.

⁷ Heiser’s view is discussed in Wilkin, Bob, ‘Simon the Magician Was Born Again — Acts 8:4-25,’ *Grace Evangelical Society*, September 4, 2018; <https://faithalone.org/blog/simon-the-magician-was-born-again/>

⁸ Morgan, G. Campbell, *Acts of the Apostles* (Fleming H Revell Co, 1960), *ad loc.*

⁹ Constable, Thomas, *Constable's Notes*, on Acts 8.

¹⁰ Wilkin, Robert N., *The Ten Most Misunderstood Words in the Bible*, pp. 85–88.

fellowship with God. MacArthur and the other proponents of the ‘Simon-was-not-saved’ view claim that Peter was calling Simon to ‘salvific’ repentance.

✠ James Inglis¹¹ aggressively defended Simon’s justification, noting that newly saved individuals coming out of the occult do not instantly shed decades of dark spiritual paradigms.¹²

✠ Even historic Arminian and Wesleyan commentators completely agree that Simon *must* have been genuinely saved in verse 13 because they respect the literal wording of Scripture, though they would argue that he subsequently fell from grace. These commentators include John Wesley,¹³ Adam Clarke¹⁴ and Windell Gann.¹⁵

5) I believe that the clear testimony of Scripture is that Simon was justified by faith alone in Christ alone and was saved. Therefore, he was eternally secure in Jesus.

Luke tells us that he believed, and Jesus promised: “whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” (**John 5:24**). Furthermore, he was obedient to enter the waters of baptism (**Matthew 28:19**) at a time when it was dangerous to do so. And beyond that, he apparently became a faithful student of Philip by ‘continuing’ with him (ἦν προσκατερών τῷ Φιλίππῳ) – language which is indicative of a dedicated disciple. The word προσκατερέω means ‘to attach one’s self to someone or something.’¹⁶

¹¹ Inglis, James, ‘Simon Magus,’ *Waymarks in the Wilderness* 5 (1867): 35-50; reprinted in the *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 2 (Spring 1989): 45-54. Inglis originally argues that dismissing Simon as a hypocrite ignores the plain grammatical meaning of Luke’s account.

¹² Bing has defended the genuine salvation and justification of Simon Magus in many Free Grace theological publications, including the study notes provided by the GraceLife Organization (<https://www.gracelife.org/resources/gracenotes/?id=70&lang=eng>). He argues that Acts 8:13 flatly states, “Simon himself also believed,” thus Scripture describes his faith in the exact same terms as the other Samaritans who trusted in Philip’s message. This is a common defense for Free Grace theologians. They routinely use Simon Magus as a case study to argue that even a true believer can fall into severe carnality, greed, or error (like trying to buy spiritual power) without losing their initial justification or eternal life. See Dr. Fred Chay’s article, ‘Grace, Salvation & Discipleship,’ *Grace Evangelical Society*, Sep 21, 2020; <https://gracetheology.org/blog/grace-salvation-discipleship.html/>.

¹³ Wesley, John, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, on Acts 8:13.

¹⁴ Clarke, Adam, *The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: Volume V – The Acts of the Apostles* (New York: J. Emory and B. Waugh, 1831), on Acts 8:13, 21–23.

¹⁵ Gann, Windell, *Gann’s Commentary on the Bible: Acts* (StudyLight Publishing, 2021), on Acts 8:13, 23. Gann clearly outlines the structural Wesleyan view: “In the state of this kind of thinking and sin, he was lost even after having become a believer and being baptized Acts 8:13.” This frames Simon’s state not as a lifelong sham, but as a genuine believer who became captivated by greed and power, thereby forfeiting his standing.

¹⁶ Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 881.

Simon was saved, but he was also a spiritual infant – and we have all been there. We see this because his eyes were still locked onto the *mechanics of supernatural power* rather than the beauty of transforming grace. He was a baby in the same way that all believers who seek after signs, wonders and miracles are babies.

A Terrifying Conclusion

- 1) So, I hope I've proven to you from the testimony of Scripture alone that Simon was a believer. And this conclusion will have great significance for the themes we'll be diving into over the next few weeks.

Because Simon was a believer indeed, and yet, he was deeply carnal. His old way of thinking was still very new in him.

- 2) And so, Simon Magus does not stand as the epitome of someone who approached Jesus with a faith that *does not* save; Simon stands as something far more terrifying – and relevant to each and every believer within the hearing of my voice. *He stands as the epitome of grieving and quenching the Holy Spirit.* Two concepts we'll consider in detail beginning next week.

An Urgent Warning to the Church Today

- 1) But, Church, I cannot move off of Simon without making an important application with regard to modern-day Simonists. These false teachers don't ply their deceptions on the dusty streets of Samaria; they do so from multi-million-dollar television studios paid for by the exploited gullible masses.

Some of the dangers raised by Simon's story are legion in the Church today. It's as if we've failed to heed Peter's stern warning. An excellent article in the *Phoenix Preacher* which appeared in 2014 brought up a number of these which I'd like to share with you by way of caution.¹⁷

- 2) Now, I've called out the treachery of the modern Christian church many times from this pulpit. I believe that we're witnessing an ominous, darkening sky

¹⁷ Michael, 'The New Simonists,' *The Phoenix Preacher*, April 9, 2014; <https://www.phoenixpreacher.com/the-new-simonists/>

spreading over Christ's Body today. If you live in Oklahoma and see the sky begin to darken, you immediately start looking around for a tornado shelter!

And, as Peter promised, "It is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:17)

Obviously, the "judgement" which will "begin at the household of God" – "with us" – is not the same as the judgement of the wicked who have rejected Jesus' sacrifice for their sins. In the context of 1 Peter 4, Peter is encouraging the Church – the very "household of God" – to remain faithful in the persecution they were facing. To persevere under trial.

In verses 1-4, some of these believers were still struggling with sins from their former life. Peter puts these sins in perspective by reminding these brothers and sisters that the wicked will suffer the judgment of God for those very sins. With respect to this," Peter says, "they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; ⁵but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead" (1 Peter 4:4-5).

He goes on to tell them that God has a purpose in permitting these trials. He offers a very unique perspective on undeserved Christian suffering that we've studied recently:

"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. ¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. ¹⁶ Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name" (1 Peter 4:12-16).

Then he says,

"For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:17)

God was using these ‘fiery trials’ to refine these believers like gold. It will be a different story, however, for unbelievers. It is, as we’ve seen, a privilege to suffer for the name of Christ. As Paul put it, and please hear it carefully (!):

“The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,
¹⁷and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ,
provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him”
(**Romans 8:16-17**).

Whenever we are persecuted for the cause of Christ, we share in His sufferings (**1 Peter 4:13–14**). But the “judgment” which begins “at the household of God” is divine discipline – the discipline of a Father to a child who’s going astray, who’s walking headlong into danger (**Hebrews 12:4–11**). I think that’s where the Church is today, and has been for some time.

This kind of “judgment” is designed to refocus our eyes upon Jesus (**Hebrews 12:2**) and away from ourselves. That we would “lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely” (**12:1b**). That we would “run with endurance the race that is set before us” (**12:1c**). That we would be “looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (**12:2**). That we would, above all things, “consider HIM who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself, so that [we might] not grow weary or fainthearted” (**12:3**).

The true Church – the true – “household of God” – is ripe for God’s discipline because she has in large part lost her way.

Three Areas of Apostasy in the Modern-Day Church

I identify at least three major areas where the Church has wandered into apostasy in our day – each of them in some way remind me of Simon’s sin.

- 1) The first what I call CHRINO Churches (Christian in Name Only). These are not true churches; they are filled with unsaved, deceived people who use the title ‘church’ to justify sin, rather than denounce it.

They constitute a major part of the Devil's great deception of these last days. He has used the LGBTQ movement to present this false alternative-church to the masses as though it were legitimate and that God has some part in it. He does not.

And these 'churches' have progressed from evil to evil and piled blasphemy upon blasphemy until we've arrived where we are today: where even the Lord's Table is desecrated. Here is their latest blasphemy: 'rainbow' communion bread. From July 16th of this year:

"Imagine walking into church on Sunday morning. The pastor lifts the communion bread, and instead of the familiar loaf symbolizing Christ's broken body, it has been dyed in the colors of the rainbow. Before a word is preached, one of Christianity's most sacred ordinances has already become a cultural statement.

That wasn't a hypothetical. Christ Episcopal Church in Dayton [Ohio] recently used rainbow-colored communion bread during a Pride celebration, explaining that the colorful bread was intended to celebrate and include its LGBTQ members ...

For nearly 2,000 years, Communion has occupied a unique place in Christian worship. On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus took ordinary bread, broke it, and gave it extraordinary meaning. "This is My body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me."

From that moment forward, the bread pointed in only one direction—to the cross. Its purpose has never been to celebrate our identity, affirm our causes, or reflect the values of the surrounding culture. It exists to proclaim the sacrifice of Jesus Christ until He comes again."¹⁸

And the unsaved Laodicean Church has come to mock Jesus in corporate confessions of faith like this:

"So church, in honor of God's community gathered here in honor of the creation that God has called good, us, join me in this affirmation of queer holiness, divinely queer holiness, written by my fellow queer pastor and colleague, friend, Reverend Laura Growan.

¹⁸ Prophecy News Watch Staff, 'The Woke Church's Latest Blasphemy: Rainbow Communion Bread,' *Prophecy News Watch*, July 16, 2026; https://www.prophecynewswatch.com/article.cfm?recent_news_id=10252.

Our lives are holy. Our dancing is holy. Our protest is holy. Our grief is holy. Our rage is holy. Our community is holy. Our gender presentations are holy. Our bodies are holy. Our sex is holy. Our love is holy. You are holy. We are holy.

Y'all, the first time I heard this affirmation in a church, the first time another pastor told me that my gay sex was holy, I cried.”¹⁹

So did God when he heard this awful perversion of His Word. Here’s what *God* says about holiness in both Testaments,

✠ **Leviticus 20:7-8:** “Consecrate yourselves, therefore, and be holy, for I am the Lord your God. ⁸ Keep my statutes and do them; I am the Lord who sanctifies you.”

✠ **Leviticus 20:26:** “You shall be holy to me, for I the Lord am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.”

✠ **1 Peter 1:14-17:** “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, ¹⁵ but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶ since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” ¹⁷ And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile ...”

✠ **1 Thessalonians 4:3-8:** “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴ that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, ⁵ not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; ⁶ that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. ⁷ For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. ⁸ Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.”

✠ **1 Corinthians 6:18-20:** “Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins

¹⁹ ‘Lesbian Pastor: “The first time another pastor told me that my gay sex was holy, I cried”’ – ‘Pastor’ at Zion Lutheran Church (ELCA) recites a poem that affirmed to her that her LGBTQ love and lesbian sex is “holy”; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=obQaU8YtBw8>.

against his own body. ¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So, glorify God in your body.”

It's not that your ‘gay sex is holy’; it’s that your Creator – who is coming to judge the living and the dead (**1 Peter 4:5**) – is holy – and He has commanded His people to pursue holiness in their bodies, in their minds and in their spirits.

It is our inner desire to *pursue holiness* – not our desire to justify the lusts of our hearts – that reveals that our saving faith is genuine, that we truly belong to Jesus. **Hebrews 12:14** tells us to “strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.”

Our calling is not to affirm the lusts of our flesh, but to agree with God that they are wicked. So, there’s the false, Laodicean, unsaved ‘church’ – “their condemnation ... is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep” (**2 Peter 2:3**).

- 2) The second area where apostasy has crept into the Church today is in the structure of the modern mega-church movement. This too is related to Simon’s sin in that it seeks spiritual authority, but without the accountability necessary for that to honor God.

The article I mentioned from the *Pheonix Preacher*, called The New Simonists,’ discusses how the structure of the mega-church movement is rife with opportunities to embrace the very motives that led Simon to his great sin. This is because of the frequent absence of an accountability structure, and of the pastor being exalted to celebrity status – and often thought to be beyond questioning.

[Remember: Simon wanted apostolic authority so that he might be a celebrity.]

Quoting from *The New Simonists*:

“The practice of simony is alive in today’s church, particularly among independent, non-denominational churches with minimal accountability structures. Media is filled with various reports of abuse, control tactics and in some circumstances, misuse of church funds to further the platform and influence of the senior pastor.”²⁰

²⁰ Tracy, Kate, ‘Mars Hill Defends How Mark Driscoll’s *Real Marriage* Became a Bestseller,’ March 7, 2014; <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2014/03/did-mark-driscoll-real-marriage-earn-nyt-bestseller-status/>

We have mistakenly given great authority to [‘anointed pastors’] regardless of character, resulting in church leadership practices that I refer to as the New Simony.

R. Kent Hughes correctly described Simony as “spiritual power in order to promote himself, preaching to gain recognition or status, or serving with an eye to advancement in the church’s power structure.”²¹ Today’s trend to develop large mega churches, meeting in several locations, even in different states, looks suspiciously familiar to Hughes’ description. ...

“In the circle of pastors, it is rather unpopular to question the motives and ethics of our colleagues, particularly pastors whose ministries are widely known.

We live in an ecclesiastical culture that equates size with success ... They have large crowds for some valid reasons. Pastors of large churches are frequently given the opportunity to further expand their platform through various speaking engagements at other churches and conferences. Their vast exposure creates credibility which attracts publishers who are eager to tap into their marketability ...

Compounding the issue is that many megachurch pastors operate within an independent, autonomous, monarchical ecclesiastical structure. It is a short distance from a monarchy who seeks the good of the people, to ... self-serving ... tyranny. What begins as a desire for the common good, can deviate into becoming a means for one’s private advantage.²²

There is the understanding in these churches that the pastor is the one whom God speaks to regarding the direction and “vision” of the church ... [The danger is that, rather than following the] leading of the Holy Spirit ... [they might be] “carried away by the pleasure”²³ of fulfilling their own dreams and self-promotion ...

[Remember, Church: this was the desire behind Simon’s request for apostolic authority.]

²¹ Hughes, R. K., *Acts: The Church Afire* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1996), p.114.

²² Aristotle, *The Politics*, III, vii.

²³ Aristotle, *Ethics*, VII, vii.

At what point is this no longer about the gospel and reaching people but rather an expression of greed? The church develops an unhealthy environment when the pastor is exalted by those around him ...

When this atmosphere has taken hold, people respond to the pastor in ways that are unhealthy ... The modern day Simonist is attracted to such magnitude, but only as a means to express his own self-indulgence ...

[T]here is a danger to the soul of one who pastors such large flocks. The tyrant inadvertently builds a false world where he is flattered and appeased, rather than engage in honest communication. He loses his sense of reality and resides in a world of isolation. This produces a myopic perspective that is prone to spiritually abusing [those around him] ...

In final analysis, the question becomes about *who is able to rule?*²⁴ Not all opportunities that present themselves are doors opened by God. God leads us along the path of ... godly living, any deviation from that is not of Him ...

[And so,] accountability structures are needed, particularly in large churches ... These are imperative in safeguarding the heart of a pastor so that he can walk ethically and in godly virtue, and thereby fulfill his ministry well.”²⁵

And, you know what? The number of high-profile pastors who have fallen – and *how* they’ve fallen – is shocking. What I would call the “judgement” which Peter promised would “begin at the household of God” (**1 Peter 4:17a**) began in earnest in the 1980s.

✚ In 1987, Jim Bakker, founder of the *PTL Club* and *Heritage USA* theme park, was removed following a sex scandal with church secretary Jessica Hahn and was subsequently imprisoned for fraud. His downfall was one of the first major televangelist collapses of the modern era.

✚ Jimmy Swaggart, one of the most influential televangelists of the 1980s, was defrocked by the Assemblies of God in 1988 after being caught with a prostitute, delivering his famous “I have sinned” televised confession. He left

²⁴ Aristotle, *The Politics*, III, xiii.

²⁵ Michael, ‘The New Simonists,’ *The Phoenix Preacher*, April 9, 2014; <https://www.phoenixpreacher.com/the-new-simonists/>, all brackets mine.

the AoG and re-established his ministry as an independent Church. Only to be implicated in a second prostitution scandal in 1991.

Then the floodgates seem to have opened! These are just a few of the *major* scandals within the Church:

- ✚ Ted Haggard, former president of the *National Association of Evangelicals* and pastor of *New Life Church* in Colorado Springs, resigned in 2006 after admitting to sexual immorality with a male escort and purchasing methamphetamine.
- ✚ Jack Schaap was the son-in-law of Pastor Jack Hyles of First Baptist Church of Hammond, Indiana. When Dr. Hyles died, Schaap became its pastor. In 2012, Schaap pleaded guilty to transporting a 16-year-old girl across state lines for immoral purposes. He was sentenced to 12 years in prison to be followed by five years of supervised release. He was released and is currently serving the remainder of his sentence under supervision; he is required to register as a sex offender.
- ✚ In 2014, Bob Coy, a prominent Florida megachurch pastor, fell from grace following admissions of multiple affairs and a pornography addiction.
- ✚ Also in 2014, Mark Driscoll resigned as the pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle after allegations of abusive leadership, control, and harsh governance emerged. His dramatic departure led to the complete dissolution of the megachurch network. All of this is documented in an exhaustive podcast called, *The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill*.²⁶ If any of the Church's elders challenged him, he simply fired them. Done.

Furthermore, he deceptively used church funds to manipulate the bestseller list rankings for his books. He used roughly \$210,000 to \$217,000 in church funds to artificially inflate his book sales in order to land them on the New York Times bestseller list in 2012.²⁷ What's he doing today? Pastoring another megachurch (The Trinity Church) in Scottsdale, Arizona.

²⁶ Listen at: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-rise-and-fall-of-mars-hill/id1569401963>

²⁷ Walker, Ken, 'Is Buying Your Way Onto the Bestseller List Wrong?,' *Christianity Today*, January/February 2015 Issue; <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2015/01/buying-best-sellers-results-source/>.

- ✚ Bill Hybels, founding pastor of *Willow Creek Community Church* near Chicago, resigned in 2018 following multiple allegations of sexual misconduct spanning decades. An independent investigation substantiated claims that he engaged in inappropriate behavior with several women, leading to a mass exodus of staff and congregants.
- ✚ Mark Darling, a founding pastor of *Evergreen Church* in the Twin Cities, resigned in 2018 after an investigation confirmed he'd engaged in "inappropriate conduct" with female church members.
- ✚ James MacDonald, founding pastor of *Harvest Bible Chapel* near Chicago, went on an indefinite sabbatical in 2019 amid allegations of staff and member abuse over a 12-year period.
- ✚ In 2020, Jerry Falwell Jr. resigned as the president of Liberty University after a sex scandal involving his wife, himself and their 29-year-old former pool attendant came to light. While he initially walked away with a \$10.5 million contractual separation package upon his resignation, subsequent legal battles resulted in an additional multimillion-dollar payout to Falwell.
- ✚ Ravi Zacharias, founder of *Ravi Zacharias International Ministries* (RZIM), was posthumously found guilty in a 2021 investigation of sexual misconduct, including rape, sexting, and the spiritual abuse of multiple women over many years. The investigation uncovered over 200 explicit photos of women on his devices and evidence of ministry funds which were used to silence victims.
- ✚ Carl Lentz, former lead pastor of *Hillsong NYC*, was fired in 2020 for "moral failures" including infidelity. In 2021, a former nanny and staff member accused him of sexual abuse, bullying, and manipulation over a seven year period.
- ✚ In 2024, Josiah Anthony resigned from *Cross Timbers Church* in North Texas for "inappropriate and hurtful" conduct.
- ✚ Tony Evans, senior pastor of *Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship* in Dallas, stepped down in June 2024 after nearly 50 years of ministry due to an unnamed "sin."
- ✚ In 2024 alone, at least *14 North Texas pastors* resigned or were removed due to sexual abuse accusations or "moral failures."

- ✚ Tony Cammarota was fired from *Stonebriar Community Church* in July 2024 for “moral failure.”
- ✚ Steven J. Lawson, a prominent Reformed theologian and pastor at *Trinity Bible Church* in Dallas, was fired in September 2024 following allegations of inappropriate conduct. His removal sent shockwaves through the conservative evangelical community.
- ✚ Terren Dames, former senior pastor of *North Dallas Community Bible Fellowship*, was arrested in May 2024 and charged with solicitation of prostitution.
- ✚ Ronnie Goines, founding pastor of *Koinonia Christian Church* in Arlington, was charged in July 2024 with sexual assault and indecent assault.
- ✚ Robert Morris, founder of *Gateway Church* in Southlake, Texas, pleaded guilty last year (October 2025) to child abuse charges involving a 12-year-old girl and was sentenced to six months in jail.

Each of these scandals involved highly-influential celebrity pastors of megachurches and each lacked biblical accountability. These men were beyond questioning; they were too important, too big to fail. They were treated like ‘small-g gods’ by their followers and they all learned an important lesson. *God did not create men to be treated like gods!*

Using an ecclesiastical office for the purpose of self-promotion and self-aggrandizement is simony, plain and simple – and it always ends in disaster for the leader as well as the multitudes who leave Christianity with a ship-wrecked faith because of him.

Here’s the thing: God is more concerned with our holiness even than he is with the Church’s reputation! In Jeremiah, the Lord promises: “I myself will lift up your skirts over your face, and your shame will be seen” (**Jeremiah 13:26**). God will expose our sin even at the expense of a Church’s testimony. **Numbers 32:23**, mark it down: “Be sure your sin will find you out.”

Do you know what I think? I think Peter was right! “It *is* time for judgment to begin at the household of God” (**1 Peter 4:17a**) – and I think we’ve been seeing this judgement on steroids since the 1980s.

As the cult of personality flourishes with a megachurch, eventually the Church becomes less concerned about the content of the pastor's teaching and more about his (or her!) effervescent, or even 'rogue-like,' personality. These teachers influence thousands upon thousands of people in the so-called 'Church' each and every week. They include names like: Joel Osteen, Jesse Duplantis, Joyce Meyer, Paul Yonggi Cho, Paula White, Steven Furtick, T.D. Jakes, Todd White, Bill Johnson (of Bethel Church), and Mike Bickel. Each of these men and women teach nonsense in the name of Christian truth.

Furthermore, rather than emphasizing growth through evangelism – *the Bible's* ministerial philosophy – growth in the mega-church movement often comes from what we call 'transfer growth' – believers who leave their smaller, healthier Church to latch onto a charismatic leader – or 'get in on' some exciting new thing.

Again, from *The New Simonists*:²⁸

“What drives the desire for such massive expansion under a single church's supervision? Are these churches growing through evangelism, or by means of transfer growth from other churches? ...

Ed Stetzer, an advocate and defender of mega churches, cited that “about 44% of new members at mega-churches are from other local churches,”²⁹ a number that he admitted is too high. Considering that these churches have thousands in attendance, that is a considerable amount of people who have transferred.

In sharp contrast, the *National Congregations Study* (2006-2007) found that the median church attendance is 75 people.³⁰ Based on these statistics, each 1,000 attendees at a mega church can conceivably empty out six churches of medium attendance.

Like a huge forest fire that creates its own weather patterns, the prolific nature of megachurches creates various possibilities of temptation due to an ethos of expansion, even at the expense of other churches ...”

²⁸ Michael, 'The New Simonists,' *The Phoenix Preacher*, April 9, 2014; <https://www.phoenixpreacher.com/the-new-simonists/>

²⁹ Stetzer, Ed, 'Debunking Megachurch Myths: Especially the One About Sheep Swapping,' *Christianity Today*, February 22, 2013.

³⁰ Duke University, *National Congregations Study*; <https://www.nationalcongregationsstudy.org/>

- 3) And finally, the third area of apostasy in the modern Church which speaks to Simon's sin is the Word-Faith, Name-it/Claim-it, Blab-it/Grab-it movement.

Dante's condemnation of Pope Nicholas III in his, *Inferno*, could well be said of this entire heretical movement: they possess an "avarice that brings grief upon the world, crushing the good, and exalting the depraved."³¹

✠ Actually, the modern-day prosperity preachers practice a kind of *reverse-simony*. Simon thought money could buy and unlock spiritual power.

Modern prosperity preachers preach a twisted mirror-image of this heresy: they tell their audiences that if they sow a financial 'seed of money,' God will be legally obligated to release a spiritual anointing, a physical healing, or a supernatural breakthrough.

They reduce the sovereign, unmerited grace of the Holy Spirit—the priceless "*gift of God*"—into a vending machine product that can be purchased.

✠ Like Simon in his sin, they seek to exalt themselves. Simon cried out, "Give me this *power* also" (**Acts 8:19**).

Modern prosperity preachers are completely addicted to the stage, their personal 'brand,' and the megachurch empire. They parade "the anointing" of the Spirit across stages to project an aura of elite spiritual clout, using the genuine presence of God as a vehicle to prove that *they* are "somebody great" and the "power of God that is called Great" (**Acts 8:9-10**).

✠ Furthermore, they cultivate the 'poison of bitterness' by preaching that money can buy spiritual blessing, or healing, or greater wealth. This kind of thinking is clearly an appeal to the carnal nature of man.

In fact, Paul condemns this very thing in **1 Timothy 6:5**, where he exposes false teachers as "*depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.*"

These charlatans are satanically-led blights upon the Body of Christ – and they will answer for their deceptions. They stoke the embers and fan the flames of

³¹ Dante, *The Divine Comedy, Volume I: Inferno*, IXX:103-105.

greed, material envy, and worldly status among people – either the unsaved goats, or the saved, but naïve, babes in the faith.

This is precisely the “poison [gall] of bitterness” and the “bond of iniquity” Peter commanded Simon to repent of. Some even promise long-life as reward for giving to their ministry.

✚ Case-in-point, arch-liar Kenneth Copeland – the *mega-rich* arch-liar Kenneth Copeland – ‘prophesied that he’s live to 120 years and even told us the exact date God gave him. “I have made and entered [into a] covenant with God and on December 6, 2056, I’ll see you all later. I’m out of here, 120 years old,” Copeland claimed.³²

Well, Copeland – the devil’s own apostle – is not well and he’s not getting better. This has caused a major crisis of faith for his own granddaughter, who bought into his cosmic nonsense. Of course, God blesses obedience, but He does not bless anyone who gives to get. He’s the creator-God, not the creator-genie!

✚ Then there’s the self-proclaimed ‘apostle’ Kathryn Krick. Krick is a supposed faith healer and is the leader of the Five-Fold Church. She faces strong criticism for encouraging followers to give money, usually called “sowing a seed,” in her healing and deliverance services.³³ She asks for money in exchange for spiritual breakthroughs, healings and deliverance from demons.³⁴

Obviously, this heavy solicitation of funds for prayers and miracles contradicts biblical teachings to give *freely*. Jesus sent out the Twelve in **Matthew 10:8-9** saying, “Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay. ⁹ Acquire no gold or silver or copper for your belts ...”

³² Blair, Leonardo, Senior Reporter, ‘Televangelist Kenneth Copeland reveals hospitalization, predicts when he will die,’ *Christian Post*, December 23, 2024; <https://www.christianpost.com/news/televangelist-kenneth-copeland-predicts-when-he-will-die.html>

“I have made and entered [into a] covenant with God and on December 6, 2056, I’ll see you all later. I’m out of here, 120 years old,” Copeland claimed, predicting the date of his death.

³³ Martin, Stephanie, ‘Who Is Apostle Kathryn Krick, and Why Are People Raising Alarms?’ *Church Leaders*, July 17, 2026; <https://churchleaders.com/news/2220220-apostle-kathryn-krick-raising-alarms.html>.

³⁴ Webb, Katelyn, ‘6 things to know about Kathryn Krick, self-proclaimed ‘apostle’ and faith healer,’ *Christian Post*, May 16, 2025; <https://www.christianpost.com/news/6-things-to-know-about-kathryn-krick-self-proclaimed-apostle.html?page=4>.

And, like all these prosperity Gospel fakes, Krick's events are structured heavily around making financial requests from vulnerable people.³⁵ There is a video of a mother who comes to Krich wanting her young son to be delivered from a demon. (Both the mother and son are probably plants.) Krick instructs her to donate money on her phone, right there on the spot for the deliverance – and the amount has to be *above the tithe*.³⁶

- 4) Hear this and here it well, you prosperity teachers who pervert the truth for personal gain: the wealth you've acquired by manipulating and commercializing the spiritual gifts of God will result in a divine sentence of catastrophic ruin!

Unless you repent and come to Jesus for the salvation that cannot be purchased at any price, you shall 'perish with your silver!' (**Acts 8:20**). Your condemnation has long been hanging over you, and your destruction will not sleep. In **2 Peter 2:1-3**, the same Peter who warned Simon warns us!

"False prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. ² And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. ³ And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep."

No, their destruction is *not* asleep but ready to be revealed!

- 5) And so, Church, Simon Magus leaves us with a haunting legacy. If Simon was an *unbeliever*, his story would be easy for us to dismiss – just a story about a pagan magician acting like a pagan magician. But that's not what we have here!

Rather, we have the story of a man that was a genuine, baptized, eternally-secure believer. And so, his story is *our* story! And thus, this episode in his life serves as a terrifying, momentous warning.

It means that it is entirely possible to be truly saved by grace, baptized in water, a companion of great ministries, and yet live an unrenewed life that profoundly

³⁵ *Ibid.*, Webb, Katelyn, '6 things to know about Kathryn Krick.'

³⁶ Watch the whole horrible affair here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xq0bYGvKwXs>

breaks the heart of the Holy Spirit and could ultimately completely extinguish His supernatural power in our life.

So, we need to think carefully about the path that we're walking. I need to ask myself:

‘Am I treating my relationship with God like a transaction?’

‘Am I trying to leverage my good deeds, my prayers, or my money to force God's hand?’

‘Am I harboring some poison of bitterness, desiring to be thought of as *somebody great*?’

Or ‘will I lay my old mindset on the altar and submit to the pure, unmeritable, sovereign grace of the Holy Spirit?’

Paul promised in **Galatians 5:16-17**, that if I'll “walk by the Spirit” I “will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.”

So, let's be honest and repent of any inordinate, calculated scheme that may pervade our heart. Let's put away any of the twisted heart-motives that are the remnants of our old man. And let's cry out to the Lord for forgiveness, so that the beautiful, unquenched, ungrieved fire of His Spirit can truly burn in our midst.

Amen?