

## **A Barrier To Belief**

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Since there are those in the church today that one, would like to see churches of Christ conform to the denominational world around us and two, do not even seem to know that some congregations have now cloned themselves into modern denominations, the premise that denominational churches stand as a strong and definite “barrier to belief” should be investigated. A case in point for the present discussion will look at a televised statement from the Senior Pastor of the Bellevue Baptist Church at Memphis. Sunday morning, November 18, 2007, Dr. Steve Gaines said in his sermon from Bellevue regarding Simon in Acts 8, “I don’t know whether or not Simon was a Christian, but he definitely had some discipleship problems.” What do you have here? You have a trained seminarian holding a doctor of divinity degree that, by his own admission, cannot read the book of Acts, the book of conversions in the New Testament, and tell who is a Christian and who is not.

The problem he is having clearly does not emanate from the New Testament itself because as one inspired writer of it stated, “When ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ” (Eph. 3:4). The reason Dr. Gaines does not know whether or not Simon was a Christian may correctly be attributed to the denominational doctrine he has espoused and to which, like his predecessor, he has committed his life. This is the “barrier to belief” we would like to expose. Let’s look at just two passages of scripture and see how straightforwardly Simon’s situation is presented. First, that which Bellevue Baptist Church publicly and adamantly has denied, a statement from our Lord Jesus Christ in Mark 16:16, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” According to Jesus himself, who is the one who will be saved? Answer, the one who has believed and been baptized. Second, a statement of Simon’s actions that, bear in mind, have come under the scrutiny of a threefold inspired investigation, that is, from Philip the evangelist, Luke the historian, and the Holy Spirit himself. What were Simon’s actions Dr. Gaines cannot decipher? The book of conversions concisely states, “Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done” (Acts 8:13). Now, what did Simon do? He number one, believed, and he number two, was baptized. The irresistible conclusion is that Simon was saved, that is, he became a Christian. Now, no one, and here we need not suppose that Dr. Gaines presents an exception, thinks the Samaritans failed to become Christians, yet of them it is said, “But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were

baptized, both men and women” (v. 12). Therefore, Simon did the exact same thing the Samaritans did; they believed and were baptized. The reason the Samaritans’ conversion is not questioned and Simon’s is relates to Simon’s subsequent “fall from grace” (cf. vv. 18-24). The Baptist people deny that a Christian can fall from grace by believing in their “once saved; always saved” error. Many of them do not even know that the Bible says, “Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace” (Gal. 5:4).

So, in conclusion, since Baptist doctrine holds Simon could not fall from grace, then his conversion to Christ must be denied for consistency to obtain. Dr. Gaines’ attempt to “straddle the fence” by saying he could not tell about Simon only establishes the fact that his denominational doctrines constitute an undeniable “barrier to belief” to what the Bible clearly and undeniably teaches. Simon need not expect an apology from Dr. Gaines.