

Money, Fame, and Pastoral Ministry in Acts 8: 18–24: Implications for Ghanaian Pastors

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Abstract

The Theology of Wealth has gained prominence in pastoral ministry in Ghana, with a strong emphasis on money and fame. This article explores the connection between money, fame, and the role of pastors in Ghana, seeking to establish a theological balance within this context. Using a critical analysis of Acts 8:18-24 and drawing on Vernon Robbins's oral scribal intertexture of text, this study extracts valuable lessons that can guide Ghanaian pastors in maintaining a proper theological perspective on money, fame, and pastoral ministry. The article argues that Ghanaian pastors should ensure their motivations for entering pastoral ministry are free from an excessive desire for wealth and recognition, emphasizing the importance of self-examination. This practice should also be extended to congregants, fostering a reflective and balanced approach to money and fame within the Church.

Keywords: Fame, Money, Pastoral Ministry, Prosperity Preachers

Introduction

In recent times, the pursuit of fame has taken on a significant role in determining ministerial progression in Ghana, often fueled by

the Theology of Wealth.¹ Within this context, money and fame are viewed as indicators of God's blessings upon His followers. Some pastors showcase a lifestyle of affluence to their congregations, presenting a financial image of a blessed life.² Some pastors sell holy water, anointing oil, wristbands, handkerchiefs, soaps, and car stickers to their congregants to ward off evil spirits. Sometimes worshippers must pay consultative fees and other donations to bring deliverance and God's blessings.³ Individuals, who feel politically marginalized and unsecured, as well as those with fertility problems, the unemployed, and applicants for visas, often seek spiritual assistance from some Ghanaian pastors.⁴ Francis Benya calls this practice the "commodification of the gospel."⁵ This emphasis on money and fame within pastoral ministry often diverts attention from modest living to an overt focus on acquiring wealth and recognition.⁶

The growing influence of the Theology of Wealth in Ghanaian Christian religious circles raises concerns about the potential undermining of genuine faith in God. There is a risk of commodifying the Gospel and commercializing Christian religious items, thereby placing spiritual value on money and fame as the ultimate criteria for determining one's relationship with God.⁷ While material prosperity can coexist with faith in God, an obsession with wealth and recognition may weaken one's faith. Thus, a theological balance

¹ Lechion Peter Kimilike, "Using African Proverbial Folklore to Understand the Holistic Poverty Eradication Framework in the Book of Proverbs," *Old Testament Essays* 19 (2006): 405.

² M. L. Petty, *God's Church, God's Money, False Profits: How to Know the Truth about Your Church and Pastor According to the Word of God* (Bloomington: Author house, 2011), 99.

³ Francis Benya, "Commodification of the Gospel and the Socio-Economic of Neo-Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity in Ghana," *Legon Journal of Humanities* 29, no. 2 (2018): 116, 145.

⁴ Cezula Ntozakhe, "Reading the Bible in African Context: Assessing Africa's Love Affair with Prosperity Gospel," *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 1, no. 2 (2015): 13–153.

⁵ Benya, "Commodification of the Gospel," 116.

⁶ Daniel Dei & Robert Osei-Bonsu, "The Nature, Philosophy, and Sustaining Factors of the Theology of Wealth in Africa: Theological Reflections," *Philosophy Study* 4, no. 6 (2014): 392.

⁷ Benya, "Commodification of the Gospel," 116, 145.

between money, fame, and pastoral ministry becomes crucial to maintaining a proper perspective on both material and spiritual prosperity.

This present article explores the relationship between money, fame, and pastors in Ghanaian ministry to establish a necessary theological balance. To achieve this, the article employs Vernon Robbins's oral-scribal intertexture theory, which analyzes the language of a text in relation to its usage in other texts. According to this theory, no text exists in isolation; each text is intricately woven with references, allusions, and quotations from preceding material, whether in oral or written form. By utilizing recontextualization and reconfiguration, this study aims to analyze Acts 8:18–24 within the Ghanaian Christian religious context, examining existing texts and traditions that may have influenced this passage.

The theoretical framework of oral-scribal intertexture comprises two key components: recontextualization and reconfiguration.⁸ Recontextualization occurs when an author employs existing material without explicitly indicating its reference or allusion.⁹ In contrast, reconfiguration creates something new out of existing texts.¹⁰ In this article, both recontextualization and reconfiguration are utilized to interactively analyze and establish the impact of existing material and traditions in applying Acts 8:18–24 to the Ghanaian Christian religious context.

The biblical perspective on the terms, “money” and “fame” is explored, followed by a systematic analysis of Acts 8:18–24, divided into sections encompassing background, body, and closing. The analysis serves as the foundation for applying the passage to the Ghanaian Christian religious space. By examining the relationship between money, fame, and pastoral ministry, and applying the insights from Acts 8:18–24 within the Ghanaian context, this article seeks to guide pastors in maintaining a proper theological perspective on material and spiritual prosperity. It is essential for pastors to

⁸ Vernon K Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society, and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1996), 40, 58.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 41-53.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

navigate the delicate balance between financial success and spiritual integrity, ensuring that their pursuit of material wealth does not overshadow the genuine transformation of their congregations.

Through this examination of biblical teachings and the application of relevant theoretical frameworks, pastors can gain valuable insights to lead their congregations toward a faith that is centered on God rather than material gain. The article applies biblical teachings on money and fame to the cultural dynamics of pastoral ministry in Ghana to offer perspectives and practical suggestions for maintaining a theological balance in the context of Ghana.

Biblical Teachings on Money

The Hebrew “*kesaph*” and “*shekel*” (meaning, silver) were the primary terms for referring to the main currency in ancient Israel.¹¹ The shekel became the established unit of measurement for weighing silver in trade, indicating the significance of money in economic transactions during that time. In the New Testament, the Greek word “*mamōnas*,” derived from the Aramaic root “*māmōnūn*,” conveyed the idea of wealth--riches, money, possessions, and property.¹² It highlighted the continued relevance of money and its role in society during the New Testament era.¹³

The Bible does not inherently condemn wealth. Rather, it provides guidance on its acquisition and management. Deuteronomy 8:18 acknowledges that it is God who grants the ability to acquire wealth and emphasizes the importance of using it in a way that honors God. This passage underscores the notion that wealth is a resource entrusted to individuals and should be stewarded wisely.

However, the Bible also cautions against placing excessive

¹¹ Oswald Ashton Wentworth Dilke, *Mathematics and Measurement* (California: University of California Press, 1987), 46; P. B. Dirksen and M. J. Mulder, eds., *The Peshitta: Its Early Text and History* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 231.

¹² Friedrich Hauck, “Mamōnas,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 4:387-389.

¹³ Abraham Tal, *A Dictionary of Samaritan Aramaic* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 474.

value on material possessions. Various passages emphasize the transient nature of wealth and the potential dangers associated with an unhealthy attachment to it. For example, Matthew 6:19 advises against storing up treasures on earth, highlighting the vulnerability of earthly possessions to destruction or theft. Jesus further emphasizes the incompatibility between an obsession with money and true Christian values, stating that one cannot serve both God and wealth (Matthew 6:24). Accordingly, He encouraged His disciples to trust God's providence, thereby reassuring them that God will meet all their needs (Matthew 6:25–34).

Jesus also provided specific instructions to His disciples regarding their engagement in Gospel ministry. Both Mark 6:8 and Luke 9:3 emphasize the importance of relying on God's provision rather than pursuing financial gain. This highlights the need for ministers to prioritize their mission and not be motivated primarily by money.

The Apostle Paul addresses the risks associated with an unhealthy attachment to money in his writings. He warns against the love of money, which can lead to discontentment and distract individuals from spiritual matters (1 Timothy 6:10). Instead, Paul emphasizes the significance of being rich in good deeds and generosity, promoting a perspective that values spiritual wealth and the blessing of helping others (1 Timothy 6:17–19).

These biblical teachings and references establish a strong foundation for analyzing the relationship between money, fame, and pastors in Ghanaian ministry. By incorporating these insights, pastors can gain a comprehensive understanding of the biblical perspective on wealth, its potential pitfalls, and the appropriate ways to approach financial matters within their ministry. This understanding will contribute to the development of a theological balance that aligns with the teachings of Scripture and guides pastors in maintaining a proper perspective on material and spiritual prosperity.

Biblical Teachings on Fame

The concept of fame is conveyed through various Hebrew and Greek words in the Bible, providing insights into its significance and implications. The Hebrew term, “Shem” (meaning, “name” and “reputation”), described the link between one’s name and their social standing (Genesis 12:2; 5:32; 2 Samuel 7:9).¹⁴ “*Shoma*” conveys the idea of “fame” or “making oneself a name,” highlighting the desire for recognition and to be renowned (Joshua 6:27; 9:9; Jeremiah 6:24; Esther 9:4).¹⁵ “*Shemuah*” refers to “report” or “news,” emphasizing the spread of information related to a person’s reputation (1 Samuel 2:24; 1 Kings 2:28; Jeremiah 51:46).¹⁶ In the New Testament, the Greek word “*kleos*” signifies “glory, fame, praise, report, or credit,” highlighting the broader understanding of fame and its implications (1 Peter 2:20).¹⁷ Additionally, “*Pheme*” denotes “report, fame, or saying,” further contributing to the understanding of fame in biblical contexts (Matthew 9:26; Luke 4:14).¹⁸ The Greek word “*Onoma*” encompasses “name, character, fame, or reputation,” emphasizing the multifaceted nature of fame (Matthew 1:21, 23, 25).¹⁹

In the Bible, God’s honor from human honor was differentiated by the term “glory.” The English term “glory,” with its roots in the Hebrew terms, “*hod*” and “*kabod*,” and the Greek word “*doxa*,”

¹⁴ “šēm.” Blue Letter Bible, accessed May 30, 2023, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h8035/kjv/wlc/0-1/>.

¹⁵ “Shoma.” Bible Tools, accessed May 30, 2023, <https://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Lexicon.show/ID/H8089/shoma%60.htm>.

¹⁶ “Shemuah.” Lexicon Concordance, accessed May 30, 2023, <http://lexiconconcordance.com/hebrew/8052.html>.

¹⁷ “Kleos.” Bible Tools, accessed May 30, 2023, <https://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Lexicon.show/ID/G2811/kleos.htm>.

¹⁸ “Pheme.” Bible Tools, accessed May 30, 2023, <https://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Lexicon.show/ID/G5345/pheme.htm>.

¹⁹ “Onoma.” Bible Tools, accessed May 30, 2023, <https://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Lexicon.show/ID/G3686/onoma.htm>.

conveyed “majesty, splendor, and vigor, honor, glory, and credit.”²⁰ The Latin term “Gloria” encompasses God’s matchless greatness, might, and worth.²¹

While God’s glory naturally leads to praise and worship (Luke 2:14), Jesus exemplified humility in His earthly ministry. In His prayer to God, Jesus desired that all believers share in His glory (John 17:22). However, He also taught His disciples the importance of living humbly. In the Book of Acts, Luke emphasizes the Gospel while the individuals conveying it often remain in the shadows or background (Acts 19:15–20). Similarly, John the Baptist’s statement, “He must increase, but I must decrease” expressed humility in the context of the gospel (John 3:30). Jesus demonstrated genuine care for the needy and prioritized serving them, performing miracles out of compassion rather than a pursuit of fame (Matthew 9:36; Mark 6:34). His modest lifestyle serves as a powerful example, highlighting that a ministry focused on fame blurs the distinction between God-given honor and personal reputation.

These biblical insights demonstrate the importance of humility, prioritizing the proclamation of the Gospel, and distinguishing between God’s glory and to be personally renown. Understanding the biblical teachings on fame and reputation will guide pastors in maintaining a proper theological perspective on these matters and help them lead their congregations with integrity and humility.

²⁰ Donald E. Gowan, *The Westminster Theological Wordbook of the Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 163; “Hod.” Bible Tools, accessed May 30, 2023, <https://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Lexicon.show/ID/G3594/hodegeo.htm>; “Kabod.” Bible Tools, accessed May 30, 2023, <https://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/lexicon.show/ID/h3519/page/2>; “Doxa.” Bible Tools, accessed May 30, 2023, <https://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Lexicon.show/ID/G1391/doxa.htm>.

²¹ “Gloria.” Latin Dictionary, accessed May 30, 2023, <https://latin-dictionary.net/definition/21539/gloria-gloriae>.

Analysis of Acts 8: 18–24

Background

Acts 8:18-24, the passage under study, falls under the larger pericope of Acts 8: 4–11: 18. The central theme appears to be conversion. It starts with the conversion of the Samaritans and some foreign officials like the Ethiopian Eunuch, to the conversion of Saul, then the household of Cornelius, and gradually to other Gentile towns. The pericope of Acts 8:18-24 may be divided into three subsections—Philip’s Preaching in Samaria (4–8), Simon’s Encounter with Early Christians (9–17), and Simon’s Conversation with Peter and John (18–25). This article focuses on the last subsection.

I. Howard Marshall proposes that the inclusion of Samaria in Christian mission activities recalls the restoration of Israel theme alluded to in Isaiah.²² On the other hand, Charles K. Barrett calls this subsection Peter’s rebuke of Simon.²³ Hans Conzelmann suggests that the passage is Luke’s first significant attempt to distinguish miracles from magic.²⁴ Luke Timothy Johnson notes that the passage explains apostolic involvement in the general geographical expansion of the Church and how the rule of God conquers the forces of evil.²⁵ Robert F. Hands O’Tool suggests that the passage portrays Jerusalem as the mother Church and recognizes Philip’s evangelistic efforts.²⁶ Thus, the importance of this passage in the description of the mission of the early Church cannot be overstated. The passage (Acts 8: 18–24) is discussed in three sub-parts: Simon’s offer and request (vv. 18, 19), Peter’s rebuke (vv. 20–23), and Simon’s remorse (v. 24).

²² I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 572.

²³ Charles K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Acts of the Apostles* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 394.

²⁴ Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles, Hermeneia— A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 65-66.

²⁵ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles, Sacra Pagina*, vol. 5, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992), 151-153.

²⁶ Robert F. Hands O’Toole, “Laying on of (NT),” *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:42.

Simon's Offer and Request (vv. 18, 19)

Verse 18 begins with *idōn de ho Simon hoti dia tēs epitheseōs tōn cheirōn tōn apostolōn didotai to pneuma* (“Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles’ hand”). The conjunction *de* signals the beginning of the subsection and links the previous verse and the present one. The common theme is the laying on of hands. Apart from the biblical account in Acts 8: 9–24, there is no reference to Simon Magus again in the New Testament canon. Accordingly, Simon Magus is a minor figure in the New Testament. Additional information about Simon Magus exists in the writings of apostolic fathers, Church fathers, and some Apocrypha books.²⁷ For example, the *Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions and Homilies* indicate that Simon was from Gitta (Getta) and born to Antonius and Rachel.²⁸ Orthodox Christian tradition indicates that Simon Magus was introduced to Greek literature in Alexandria.²⁹ Later, obsession for recognition manifested in his desire to be equal with the messiah.³⁰

Extant literature on Simon Magus presents him either as an antinomian or the father of all heresies.³¹ For example, Josephus describes him as one who facilitated an incestuous marital union between the procurator Felix and Drusilla, the sister of the procurator.³² Justin Martyr claims Simon settled in Rome, where he joined the cult of Helen.³³ Simon Magus considered himself the embodiment of the Godhead, causing him to appear as the Father,

²⁷ Alberto Ferreiro, *Simon Magus in Patristic, Medieval and Early Modern Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 3, 4.

²⁸ Ralph Ellis, *King Jesus: King of Judaea and Prince of Rome* (Cheshire: Edfu, 2008), 129; G. R. S. Mead, *Simon Magus: His Philosophy and Teachings* (Oakland, CA: The Book Tree, 2003), 3, 9.

²⁹ Ellis, *King Jesus*, 129.

³⁰ Ferreiro, *Simon Magus in Patristic*, 3, 4.

³¹ *Ibid.*; Mead, *Simon Magus: His Philosophy and Teachings*, 1.

³² Robert Eisenman, *The New Testament Code: The Cup of the Lord, the Damascus Covenant, and the Blood of Christ* (Nashville: Grave Distractions, 2016), 585.

³³ Robert W. Fuller, *Demythologizing Jesus of Nazareth: Was Jesus a Historical or Mythical Person?* (Maitland: Xulon, 2012), 229; Stephen Haar, *Simon Magus: The First Gnostic?* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 125.

Son, and Holy Spirit at various times and in various places.³⁴ He was honored by an image dedicated to him on the Island of Tiber, with the inscription *Simoni Deo Sancto* (meaning, “To Simon the Holy God”).³⁵ Hippolytus portrays Simon as the author of many heretic books and the founder of the heretic group named after him, *Simonians*.³⁶

Epiphanius claims that Simon distorted the meaning of Ephesians 6: 14–16 by applying it to *Athena*.³⁷ This distortion portrays Simon as the nurturer of Gnosticism.³⁸ Some Apocrypha books, such as *Acts of Peter* and *Acts of Peter and Paul*, provide further information supporting the connection between Simon Magus and the *Simonians* and the Gnostics.³⁹ Simon Magus is a traditional figure in the passage.

Tēs epitheseōs tōn cheirōn (“the laying on of hands”) is a familiar biblical gesture in both sacrificial and non-sacrificial contexts. It is used in attributive and substitutional situations where the offerer lays hands on the animal that serves as the offerer’s substitute. When used in non-sacrificial contexts, it may set one apart in consecration (Lev 16: 2; Num 27: 18) or designate the object as the recipient of blessings or authority (Num 9: 22).

In the New Testament, the gesture appears in the context of prayer to imply healing, assignment to a given task, blessings, baptism, and the impartation of the Holy Spirit. For example, Jesus healed and blessed children by laying on of hands (Mark 5: 23; 6: 5; 7: 32; 8: 22–26, Mark 10: 13,16; Luke 4: 40; 13: 13). Members of the early Church were empowered to lay hands on others (Mark 16: 18), and they did practice the gesture (Acts 9: 12,17). Paul also used the gesture in his ministry (Acts 28: 8). In Acts, the gesture is associated with the reception of the Holy Spirit and Baptism (19:

³⁴ G. R. H. Wright, *As on the First Day: Essays in Religious Constants* (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 94.

³⁵ S. Acharya, *Suns of God: Krishna, Buddha, and Christ Unveiled* (Kempton: Adventures Unlimited, 2004), 327.

³⁶ Mead, *Simon Magus*, 41.

³⁷ Haar, *Simon Magus*, 104.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁹ Ferreiro, *Simon Magus in Patristic*, 55.

5–6), which appears to have the same context as Pentecost (Acts 2). Paul regained his sight and became filled with the Holy Spirit when Ananias laid his hands on him (Acts 9: 17). The Samaritans received the Holy Spirit by the same gesture.

When Simon Magus saw these signs, he *prosēneken autois chrēmata* (he offered them money). The word, *prosēneken* is also used in offering sacrifice; thus, the word *eneykas*, the aorist participle form of *phero*, means “bring or carry” (see Acts 4: 37; 5: 2). Simon’s action sets the tone and prepares the audience for the main encounter between Simon Magus and the two Apostles.

Simon Magus’ observation of the gesture of the laying on of hands could have been the basis for his impious request. Nevertheless, what he actually “saw” is contestable. A study of this text suggests that Peter and John’s hands laying on the Samaritan converts produced in them instantaneous speaking in tongues that stimulated within Simon a gratuitous hankering for the Holy Spirit, the source of these vocal expressions.⁴⁰

However, the silence of the scriptural passage on such vocal expressions makes such conclusions doubtful. The expression ἰδὼν δὲ ὁ, *having seen moreover* (v. 18), appears to emphasize the event of hands-laying by the two apostles. As per Simon’s perception of the Holy Spirit during his association with Philip after his conversion (v. 13), it appears plausible to conclude that Simon’s craving for the ability to confer the Holy Spirit was heightened by the immediate act of hands-laying and not what the gesture produced. He had already seen the results of such ability.

Consequently, his knowledge of what the Holy Spirit can accomplish sparked in him a desire for the Holy Spirit, howbeit, the wrong way. Perhaps he thought he could acquire the Holy Spirit as he had previously acquired his magical powers before converting to Christianity.

⁴⁰ Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 308; John Rea, *Bible Handbook on the Holy Spirit* (Orlando: Creation House, 1998), 176.

Verse 19 begins with *legōn dote kamoi tēn exousian tautēn* (“saying give me also this power /authority”). Robert W. Wall suggests that *exousia* denotes the authority Jesus has given to his successors.⁴¹ Simon has offered money to purchase the rights and privileges given to those appointed to lead the Church. The offering of money indicates his misunderstanding of the nature of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps, Simon considered the Holy Spirit’s activities as one of the techniques of the magicians.

Readers would wonder about Simon’s reason for desiring this power. Perhaps Simon desired the Holy Spirit as a stepping stone into affluence or the power to work miracles for fame.⁴² Through such commercialization, Simon had hoped to control both the source and distributor of the spiritual gifts—the Holy Spirit.⁴³ Were such sacred commercialization possible, the floodgates would have opened to sell and purchase Christian religious items (simony).

Again, Simon Magus’ request either reduced the essence of the Holy Spirit to a temporary realm where it could be purchased with perishable currency or elevated money to the venerable estate of the Holy Spirit. Thus Simon’s request blurred the distinction between financial value and sacred value. His request attacked the very core of the Christian faith—salvation and the Holy Spirit given to humanity through God’s grace. Simon’s request to offer money for spiritual power is the reason for simony—the acquisition of ecclesiastical benefices.⁴⁴

Peter’s Rebuke (vv. 20-23)

Peter responds to Simon Magus: *to argyrion sou sun soi eiē eis aoōleian* (“May your silver perish with you”). Conzelmann argues that Peter’s apostolic curse is as severe as in Daniel 2: 5 and 3:

⁴¹ Robert W. Wall, “The Acts of the Apostles,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 10:139.

⁴² Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 413.

⁴³ Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 308; John Rea, *Bible Handbook on the Holy Spirit*, 304; R.C.H. Lenski, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), 330.

⁴⁴ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Anchor Bible 31 (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 406.

9–16.⁴⁵ It is a kind of punishment that seems divinely sanctioned.⁴⁶ The severity of the punishment draws attention to the Holy Spirit as God’s gracious gift—while magic involves human manipulation, the Holy Spirit is given by God to whom he chooses. The apostolic invocation is a humble appeal to God to give the Holy Spirit. Johnson points out that *apoleia* combines destruction with ‘hades’ to connote the sense of final destruction (Prov 27: 20).⁴⁷ In this vein, Peter’s pronouncement is similar to that pronounced on Ananias and Saphira (Acts 5: 1–11).

Peter indicated that Simon Magus had no *meris*, ‘part,’ and *klēros*, ‘share or lot’ in the Gospel (v. 21). *Meris* and *klēros* are almost synonymous, and they are primarily used together for emphasis (see Neh 2: 20; Deut 12: 12; 14: 27,29). Simon has no right or portion in the sense of sharing in the Spirit as the foundation for Christian existence. The reason was *the gar kardia sou ouk estin eutheis enanti tou theou* (for your heart is not right with God). Simon’s fault is stated in his relation to God (Acts 8:21). The Greek word *Eutheia* in Acts 8:21 means straight, direct, or upright. Metaphorically, it describes an attempt to obtain God’s favor through crookedness.⁴⁸ *Eutheia*, therefore, portrays Simon as a religious crook whose priority for spiritual power violates the purpose of God and his mission.

Peter assumes that Simon is already condemned once he engages in simony. As such, Peter only informs him that his money will undoubtedly go down with him. Peter suggests that Simon has no part in the Holy Spirit–led ministry because of the latter’s willingness to engage in simony. Simon neither knows the Holy Spirit nor understands how He works. All who will be partakers of the Holy Spirit–led ministry ought to have genuine knowledge of the Holy Spirit and how He works. Peter’s rebuke resonates with Scripture on the free bestowal of God’s grace, mercies, salvation, and Holy Spirit (2 Kgs 5: 16; Isa 55: 1; Dan 5: 17; Matt 10: 8; Acts 2: 38).

⁴⁵ Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, 66.

⁴⁶ Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 413, 414.

⁴⁷ Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 149.

⁴⁸ Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 415.

Peter urges Simon Magus to repent (vv. 22–23). Peter uses the same vocabulary as he did at Pentecost (Acts 2: 38), only that the offer is conditional here. He uses the term *cholēn*, ‘gall, bitter,’ to describe God’s ‘bitter anger’ against Simon. In his present state of mind, Simon is in bondage to unrighteousness. His proposal manifests a false understanding of the proclamation of the Apostles. The sentence may mean that only repentance can cure Simon’s bitter poison of unrighteousness. The call for repentance would prepare Simon to receive the Holy Spirit. According to Peter, Simon must repent of his gratuitous motive, confess his willingness to engage in simony to the Lord and forsake his cravings for money and fame. Unless Simon acquired this godly attitude, he would have no part in the Holy Spirit–led ministry.

Simon’s Remorse (v. 24)

Simon Magus requests prayer from Peter (v. 24). Whether he repented or not may not have been the author’s primary concern. Not all scholars agree that Simon repented. However, his response to Peter’s rebuke is remarkable. Simon’s response indicates he may have understood the matters at stake. His response shows his willingness to grow in the Christian faith.⁴⁹ From a past of sorcery to Christ, Simon’s response shows a possible progression from a penitent sinner to a saint.⁵⁰ Given the whole thrust of the Acts of the Apostles, the story of Simon portrays how Gentiles accepted the Gospel and dedicated their lives wholly to Christ.

The theories of recontextualization and reconfiguration have identified several existing texts and traditions in Acts 8: 18–24—Simon Magus is a traditional figure linked to several heresies in Christian history. Laying on hands is also a traditional ritual critical in Christian practices. Furthermore, the buying of ecclesiastical benefits is condemned in the passage, and Peter’s rebuke aligns with the apostolic curses present in the Bible. These existing materials

⁴⁹ R.C.H. Lenski, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 333.

⁵⁰ Helene E. Roberts, *Encyclopedia of Comparative Iconography: Themes Depicted in Works of Art* (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1998), 951.

and traditions point out that God frowns at commercializing or commodifying religious services and benefits.

Acts 8:18-24 offers valuable insights and connections to the phenomenon of prosperity preachers in Ghana. Through its themes of conversion, the misuse of spiritual gifts, and the dangers of commercializing religious services with its focus on spiritual well-being, authentic penitence, and the proper use of spiritual gifts, the passage provides a biblical framework for evaluating and critiquing prosperity theology. By applying the lessons from this passage, individuals can navigate the complexities of prosperity theology and cultivate a more authentic and grounded faith.

Simon Magus's initial awe at the miracles and manifestations of the Holy Spirit demonstrates a shallow understanding of spirituality, similar to the emphasis on external signs of success promoted by prosperity preachers in Ghana. Acts 8:18-24 is a cautionary reminder that genuine conversion involves a sincere heart transformation: a turning away from selfish intentions – but not a pursuit of material wealth.

In addition, the encounter between Simon Magus and the apostles exposes the dangers of misusing spiritual gifts for personal gain. Simon's attempt to buy the power of the Holy Spirit reflects a desire to manipulate and control the spiritual realm for his own benefit, paralleling the practices of prosperity preachers who claim to possess special powers to bring financial prosperity to their followers in exchange for monetary donations. The rebuke from Peter underscores the divine origin and purpose of spiritual gifts, reminding us that they are not commodities to be bought or sold but are freely given by God for the edification of the Church.

Furthermore, the passage condemns the commercialization of religious services and the exploitation of spiritual matters. Simon Magus's attempt to purchase the authority and privileges of the apostles distorts the true purpose of ministry and disregards God's grace. This critique resonates with concerns about prosperity preachers who promote a prosperity gospel that focuses on material wealth and financial gain, leading to the commodification of religious

services and the exploitation of vulnerable individuals seeking hope and divine blessings.

Given the significant influence of prosperity theology in Ghana, Acts 8:18-24 provides a biblical foundation to assess the teachings, motives, and practices of prosperity preachers. It also enjoins congregants to put priority on personal spiritual growth, genuine repentance, and a holistic understanding of the Gospel that transcends material wealth. By staying grounded in biblical teachings and discerning false teachings, individuals can foster a sincere and transformative relationship with God, characterized by faith, humility, and obedience.

Implications and Conclusion

The account of Simon Magus in Acts 8:18-24 offers valuable insights and lessons for Ghanaian pastors grappling with the rise of prosperity preachers and the emphasis on money and fame within the pastoral ministry. It is crucial for pastors to maintain a proper theological perspective on the material and spiritual prosperity, ensuring their motivations for ministry are rooted in a genuine desire to serve God and His people. By practicing self-examination, prioritizing spiritual values over material wealth, and guarding against the commercialization of the Gospel, Ghanaian pastors can uphold the integrity of their ministry and effectively lead their congregations.

Moreover, Ghanaian pastors should cultivate a deep understanding of the Scriptures and a robust theology that safeguards against the distortion of biblical teachings for personal gain. Sound biblical knowledge and theological grounding equip pastors to discern false teachings and correct any misconceptions within their congregations. It is essential to prioritize the study of God's Word and rely on the guidance of the Holy Spirit in interpreting and communicating its truths accurately.

Additionally, Ghanaian pastors should foster a culture of transparency, accountability, and financial stewardship within their churches. Openly communicating and responsibly managing Church

finances help build trust and ensure that monetary resources are used for the benefit of the congregation and the advancement of God's kingdom. Pastors should lead by example, exhibiting integrity in their financial practices and demonstrating a commitment to using resources wisely.

Lastly, Ghanaian pastors should emphasize the true purpose of ministry, which is to proclaim the Gospel, disciple believers, and promote the transformation of lives through the power of the Holy Spirit. Pastors can guide their congregations toward a holistic understanding of Christianity that transcends material prosperity through personal spiritual growth, and genuine love for God and His people. Also, they could empower believers to live out their faith in all areas of life.

In conclusion, the account of Simon Magus in Acts 8 serves as a cautionary tale for Ghanaian pastors facing the challenges of prosperity preaching and the allure of wealth and fame in ministry. By examining this biblical narrative and its implications, pastors can navigate these challenges with wisdom and discernment. They can uphold the integrity of their ministry, prioritize spiritual values, foster openness and accountability, emphasize the true purpose of ministry, and lead their congregants toward a deep and authentic faith that brings glory to God and transforms lives.

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