

Acts 8:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.

Analysis

For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. Peter's discernment reveals Simon's true spiritual condition—enslaved to sin despite outward profession, characterized by internal corruption and bondage.

The metaphor gall of bitterness alludes to Deuteronomy 29:18, warning against idolatry producing poisonous root. Gall represents extreme bitterness, something toxic and deadly. Simon's heart contained poison, not new life—his faith was spurious, his profession merely external.

Bond of iniquity indicates slavery. Despite outward belief and baptism (Acts 8:13), Simon remained enslaved to sin. This sobering reality warns that external religious acts—baptism, church membership, even apparent belief—don't guarantee genuine conversion. True salvation liberates from sin's bondage; continued slavery reveals unconverted heart.

Peter's perception came through spiritual discernment, likely enabled by Holy Spirit. Reformed theology distinguishes between temporary faith and saving faith—some appear converted yet lack regeneration. Simon's subsequent request (Acts 8:24) seems more concerned with avoiding judgment than genuine repentance, suggesting his heart remained unchanged.

Historical Context

The phrase echoes Old Testament warnings about secret idolatry (Deuteronomy 29:18-20), where individuals participate in covenant community while harboring internal rebellion. Simon represents a recurring danger: people who join Christian communities for wrong reasons—seeking power, influence, or benefits rather than Christ.

Early church fathers debated Simon's ultimate fate. Some traditions claim he persisted in false teaching, becoming arch-heretic. Whether he truly repented remains uncertain, but his case established important precedent: external religious participation doesn't ensure internal transformation. This account dates to 35-37 CE, providing crucial early teaching on true versus false conversion.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How can external religious participation mask internal spiritual bondage?
2. What role does spiritual discernment play in identifying false profession versus genuine faith?
3. In what ways might someone be 'in the bond of iniquity' despite outward Christian practice?
4. How does this passage challenge easy believism that equates profession with genuine conversion?
5. What distinguishes temporary faith from saving faith in the believer's life?

Interlinear Text

εἰς	γὰρ	χολὴν	πικρίας	καὶ	σύνδεσμον	ἀδικίας	όρῶ
in	For	the gall	of bitterness	and	in the bond	of iniquity	I perceive
G1519	G1063	G5521	G4088	G2532	G4886	G93	G3708
 σε ὄντα							
that thou	art						
G4571	G5607						

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 58:6 (Parallel theme): Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?

Proverbs 5:22 (Sin): His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins.

Hebrews 12:15 (Parallel theme): Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;

John 8:34 (Sin): Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.