

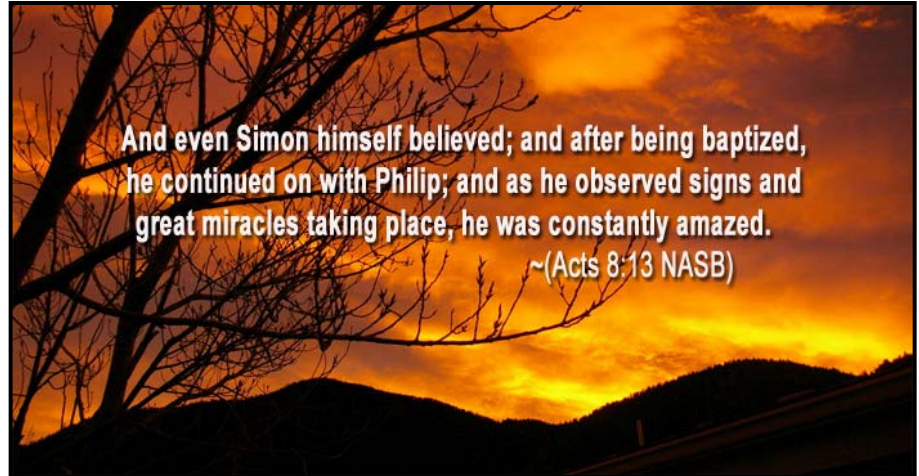
Simon...Believed!

[Acts 8:9-13](#); [18-24](#)



In our last study of Acts we saw the salvation of the [Samaritans](#). The Gospel was now going beyond Jerusalem and the Samaritans were becoming part of the body of Christ.

What is the significance of the [Samaritan's salvation](#)? Philip's trip to Samaria carrying the Gospel is God's plan being fulfilled. God had promised that He would bring back the 10 tribes of Israel, and that he would reunite the 12 tribes. In our text in [Acts 8](#) we see both houses united under Messiah. As we have repeatedly said the book of Acts is about the redemption of Israel. God is fulfilling His promises to Israel.



In the previous section, Philip's overall ministry was summarized, and a general overview of its results was given. Now, in [verses 9-13](#), one man is in view, a magician by the name of Simon.

Now there was a certain man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city, and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great; (Acts 8:9 NASB)

The Greek word, [mageuo](#), signifies *practicing the rites or science of the Magi*. It is only used here in the New Testament. Whether he had satanic power to perform miracles, or whether he was a master magician who used trickery to amaze the masses, we can't say for certain. Whatever his means it is clear that he was "*astonishing*" the people of Samaria.

The word "*astonishing*" is from the Greek word [existemi](#), [ex-is'-tay-mee] which means: "*to throw out of position, displace, to astonish, throw into wonderment, to be out of one's mind, besides one's self, insane.*"

and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, "This man is what is called the Great Power of God." ¹¹ And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts. (Acts 8:10-11 NASB)

Living among the Samaritans was a man named Simon who's powers were such that he had mesmerized the people into following him.

Adam Clark writes, "*There is a remarkable reading here in several MSS. which should not pass unnoticed. In ABCDE, several others, together with the Aethiopic, Armenian, later Syriac, Vulgate, Itala, Origen, and Irenaeus, the passage reads, This person is that power of God which is CALLED the GREAT. This appears to be the true reading; but what the Samaritans meant by that power of God which they termed the Great, we know not. Simon endeavored to persuade the people that he was a very great personage, and he succeeded.*"

They believed that Simon was an impersonated power of God, which, as the highest of powers, they designated as the great. But he had clearly been unable to do anything like Philip did. Note that it is repeated twice that he "*astonished*" the people and that they "*gave him attention*". His grip was strong. But it was not sufficient to prevent them from turning to the Messiah Whom Philip proclaimed. For here they recognized was a much greater power.

But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike. (Acts 8:12 NASB)

No matter where Simon's power came from, be it demonic or just trickery, it was no match for the power of the gospel. When Philip arrived in Samaria, Simon's magic practice came to a screeching halt. This is a Samaritan revival. The Gospel moves out of Jerusalem and the Samaritans gladly receive it. Now watch the next verse:



And even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip; and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed. (Acts 8:13 NASB)

Notice what the text says, ***“Simon himself believed.”*** This sounds like Simon became a Christian. But the commentators nearly all agree that Simon's faith was not real. Why when the Bible says he believed do so many men say he did not? They say he was not a believe because of what Peter says to Simon:

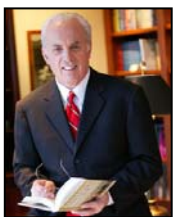
But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! ²¹ "You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. ²²

"Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³ "For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity." (Acts 8:20-23 NASB)

This is strong language and because of this many say that Simon was not a believer.

One writer states, ***“From Luke’s words (even Simon himself believed, verse 13) we would conclude that he was saved, but from the words and actions of Simon himself, and from the severe warning of Peter, one would surely have some second thoughts on the matter.”***

Another writer states, ***“But when Peter says, You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God (Acts 8:21), it is a pretty clear indication that Simon's belief was superficial and his baptism just a ceremony.”***



Referring to our text John MacArthur writes, ***“If that passage teaches anything...if it teaches anything at all...it surely teaches that there is such a thing as non-saving faith. Faith that does not save.”*** If this is true how do we know if our faith is real?

John Piper writes, ***“First, there is a ‘faith,’ there is a ‘believing,’ that does not save, even though it rises in the presence of true preaching and true miracles. And yet Luke says in verse 13a, “Even Simon himself believed.” The point I draw out of this is that there is a “faith” or a “believing” that does not save.”***



Ray Steadman writes, ***“If this were the only statement about Simon in the Scriptures we would have to conclude that he had become a Christian, because the language used to describe him is the same as that used for genuine believers. “Simon himself believed, and was baptized.” He took upon himself the symbol of identification with Jesus Christ and thus openly joined this company who said they belonged to Jesus. But the rest of the account makes crystal clear that this man was not a believer.”***



Another writer states, ***“When Luke reports that Simon believed, he is describing what Simon professed, not how God viewed matters. Just because a person claims to believe in Christ and gets baptized does not mean that he is truly saved.”***

Another commentator writes, *“Obviously, Simon did not even realize that he was a false believer instead of true one!”*

Why when the text of Scripture says that *“Simon believed”* do so many men say that he didn't? They do so based upon their pre-supposition; they hold to a view called “Lordship theology” which teaches that if a person is truly a Christian, they MUST live a righteous obedient life. Without this practical righteousness, there is no reason for a person to think that they are a Christian. No fruit, no root, would be their mantra.

So those who hold to the Lordship view would say that true Christians live a life characterized by obedience to all that the Father has commanded. And if a person's life is not characterized by obedience then there is no salvation.

Please get this: Jesus Christ is the only person who ever lived in complete obedience to the Father. All other men have sinned and continue to sin. The only reason that any person can get into heaven is because Jesus Christ's obedience is imputed to their account by faith:

For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:19 NASB)

I am righteous because of Christ's obedience that becomes mine by faith!

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5:21 NASB)

Positionally, in my standing before God, I am completely righteous and totally obedient, because I am in Christ! Christ's obedience and righteousness has been imputed to my account. That is my position or standing. But when men talk about obedience being necessary to enter heaven, they are referring to practical obedience.

Does a person need to live an obedient life in order to be saved?

And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost. (Revelation 22:17 NASB)

Does that sound like a call to obedience to you? If obedience is involved, how much is needed? How obedient do we have to be? How much do we have to sacrifice? Is 80% good enough? Is it 90%? Or maybe 95% obedience? We know that it's not 100% obedience, because nobody does that, nobody.

How much obedience is enough? Nobody can answer that question, which means we never know if we are doing enough, which means we never know if we are going to make it to heaven if getting to heaven is based upon our obedience.

If complete obedience to the will of God is necessary, then I think we are all in trouble. Notice what Paul said:

in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (1 Thessalonians 5:18 NASB)

What is God's will here? It is that we be thankful *“in everything”*! Are you? Is a person who is not thankful in everything under God's wrath? They are not doing the will of God! Do you see how complicated it gets when you require obedience as a necessary element of salvation?

The Lordship view has become very wide spread in the church today, but is it biblical? The main issue in the Lordship debate is: The Nature of faith. In other words, the debate centers around the critical question: What must a

person do to be saved?

What exactly is saving faith? Saving faith is: *Understanding and assent to the propositions of the gospel*. It is not some special kind of faith in the sense that its quality or essence is different than other kinds of faith. There are not different kinds of faith—there are just different objects of faith.

We all know what faith is, for example: If I said, "He told me the check is in the mail, and I believed him." Are you going to ask me if I believed with my head or my heart? Of course not! You understand what I mean when I say that I believed him. But when it comes to Christianity, we look for some other understanding of faith. Saving faith is taking God at His Word. It is believing what God has said:

yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God,²¹ and being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform.
(Romans 4:20-21 NASB)

God made Abraham a promise, and Abraham believed Him that is faith. He believed that God would do what he said he would.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. (John 3:16 NASB)

If I believe God's testimony about His son, I receive God's righteousness and have everlasting life. I'm not saying that everyone who says they are a Christian is one. It seems like everybody in this country thinks they're a Christian. I was talking to a man a while ago who told me that he was a Christian. I asked him, "If you were to die right now and stand before God and He asked you 'Why should I let you into heaven?' what would you tell Him. He said, *"I'm not sure, I haven't been to confession lately."* This man, though he said he was a Christian, had no clue of what the Bible taught about salvation. I proceeded to share the gospel with him.

The Lordship view has redefined saving faith, so it's more than just taking God at His word. To them, saving faith involves surrender, commitment, submission, repentance, and sacrifice. These additions are both linguistically invalid and biblically invalid. *Faith is simply believing:*

"He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." (John 3:36 NASB)

The words translated *"he who does not obey"* in the NASV and *"he who does not believe"* in the KJV and the NKJV is the verb [apeitheo](#). The leading Greek Lexicon of the New Testament, by Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker, makes a very insightful comment about [apeitheo](#), which sheds light on John 3:36:

"Since in the view of the early Christians, the supreme disobedience was a refusal to believe their gospel, [apeitheo](#) may be restricted in some passages to the meaning disbelieve, be an unbeliever (BAGD, p.82)."

A person who trusts in Christ alone, obeys completely the will of the Father to believe in Jesus Christ alone for eternal salvation. *Saving faith is accepting the testimony of God*. Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ? If you do, then on the testimony of scripture, you are saved, you possess everlasting life.

John Robbins, in the foreword of Gordon Clarks's book, Faith and Saving Faith, writes, *"Belief of the truth, nothing more and nothing less, is what separates the saved from the damned. Those who maintain that there is something more than belief, are, quite literally, beyond belief."*

This view that Simon was not a Christian most likely gained supported from Church history. Church history speaks a great deal about a [Simon Magus](#) who was a great heretic and was supposed to have founded a Gnostic sect, but there is no certainty that it was this Simon. Simon Magus' name first occurs in the writings of [Justin Martyr](#), who was

himself a Samaritan. But Justin does not make any identification with Acts. His name then occurs in Irenaeus, Hippolytus, the Acts of Peter with Simon, and other fictional works. Many things are said of his subsequent career, in ancient and modern commentaries, but nothing that is sufficiently authenticated to deserve our serious attention. At best, we can only speculate about him, so we are best served by confining our understanding of him to our text.



Speaking of the text, let me ask you a very important question, Are we to see Luke's words "*Simon himself believed*" as verbally inspired Scriptural truth?

I'd like to take some time here to talk about **Biblical inspiration**. Biblical inspiration may be defined as God's superintending of the human authors so that, using their own individual personalities (and even their writing styles), they composed and recorded without error His revelation to man in the words of the original autographs. Inspiration means that the Holy Spirit of God superintended the human writers in the production of Scripture so that what they wrote was precisely what God wanted written.

for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (2 Peter 1:21 NASB)

The word "*moved*" in this verse literally means: "*to be borne along*" or "*carried along.*" Peter says that men were carried along, much as a wind fills the sails of a ship and moves it forward, by the Holy Spirit. The personality of the authors can be seen in their works, but, ultimately, it is a book supremely correct in what it affirms, and without error because God is the superintending author. It is the very revelation of God himself.

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17 NASB)

"All scripture is inspired by God." The word translated inspired here is the Greek word *theopneustos*. It means: "*God breathed*". What this is saying is God breathed out Scripture. God spoke it. It is the very breath of God.

The essential point here is that when men wrote the Scriptures, their statements did not originate in their own thinking, but were put into their minds by the direct action of the Holy Spirit. They wrote the word of God in the sense that they wrote words that came directly from God. This is what the [Westminster Confession](#) means when it says that the original text of the Bible was "*immediately inspired by God*" (1.8).

Paul tells us that "*all Scripture is God-breathed*" and there is a sense in which all Scripture is "true". But we must distinguish between Scriptures where the very words are themselves teaching divine truth, and Scriptures where the words are correctly recorded and are a true record of what was said, but are not themselves to be seen as expressing divine truth.

Let me illustrate what I mean by this. In the book of Job we have words spoken by Job and his four friends, and it is necessary for us to consider which of their words are divine truth, and which are simply an accurate record of false ideas being put forward by his friends. The words accurately present what was said, but without necessarily themselves expressing divine truth.

Job's so called friend, Eliphaz, says to him:

"Remember now, who ever perished being innocent? Or where were the upright destroyed? (Job 4:7 NASB)

Eliphaz is here basically telling Job that the innocent do not suffer. Job you must be guilty of something. Eliphaz is basically teaching the health/wealth gospel. As long as you live right you will have no problems, you will be healthy and wealthy. Eliphaz continues this thought in:

"Is it because of your reverence that He reproveth you, That He enters into judgment against you?"⁵ "Is not your wickedness great, And your iniquities without end?"⁶ "For you have taken pledges of your brothers without cause, And stripped men naked."⁷ "To the weary you have given no water to drink, And from the hungry you have withheld bread."⁸ "But the earth belongs to the mighty man, And the honorable man dwells in it."⁹ "You have sent widows away empty, And the strength of the orphans has been crushed."¹⁰ "Therefore snares surround you, And sudden dread terrifies you, (Job 22:4-10 NASB)

He is basically saying, Job if you are suffering you must have done something wrong. If you were a good man you would not be in this situation. Is what Eliphaz saying divine truth? No, notice what God says of Job:

There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job, and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God, and turning away from evil. (Job 1:1 NASB)

This is God's evaluation of Job. Job's problems were not a result of his sin but were a trial from the Almighty. Notice what God says in:

And it came about after the LORD had spoken these words to Job, that the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has. (Job 42:7 NASB)

That tells us that we are not to see their words as conveying divine truth, even though they are in the Scriptures and are to be seen as presenting a true record of what they had said. Thus if we base our doctrine on what they taught we will go sadly astray. This makes it clear that we have to be discerning when we use Scripture. We have to distinguish when the Scriptures are putting forward "revealed truth", and when they are telling us what people said without necessarily indicating that it was divine truth.

As another example, notice what Satan told Eve:

And the serpent said to the woman, "You surely shall not die!" (Genesis 3:4 NASB)

The serpent's words are certainly Scripture (that is, they are recorded in Scripture as indicating what he said, and can be relied as an accurate representation of what was truly said), but they were not conveying divine truth, they were a lie. So when considering divine truth we must ask, "Who said it?" and "Under what circumstances?"

With this in mind when we come to Acts chapter 8 and the text says, "***Simon himself believed***" who said this? Is this text telling us what Simon said, or what others said about Simon? No, these are God breathed words recorded by Luke, this is divine truth! This is God's view of Simon.

If there had been any hint when Luke wrote this, subsequent to all the developments in the case, that his conversion was not genuine, Luke would surely have worded it differently. Luke speaks from his own stand-point; he had all the facts before him which we have before us. His statement, therefore, should control our judgment, and he says, not that Simon pretended to believe, or that Simon said he believed, but that he believed. I think we should conclude, then, that he did, in the true and proper sense of the word, believe.

Luke, the historian, makes no distinction between what Simon believed, and what was believed by the Samaritans. They "***believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ***" and Luke adds, without qualification, that "***Simon himself believed.***" He believed, then, what Philip preached; be

believed the gospel. This conclusion is based upon statements too positive and unambiguous to be set aside because of any difficulty in reconciling them with facts subsequently developed.

But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.¹³ And even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip; and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed. (Acts 8:12-13 NASB)

The words "believe and believed" are used 37 times in Acts, and they clearly refer to those who have trusted Christ and are saved:

"Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins." (Acts 10:43 NASB)

and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses. (Acts 13:39 NASB)

The Word of God says that Simon believed; to say that he didn't is to question inspiration. Because of Simon's actions, many say that he was not a Christian, but the Bible says, "He believed." The Lordship view says: He can't be saved because there's no commitment, no sacrifice, no good works. But the Scripture says, "He believed." Now, who are you going to believe—The Bible or men?

And even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip; and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed. (Acts 8:13 NASB)

Notice that Simon was constantly amazed by Philip. There is a deliberate comparison here with verses 9-11, which stresses how superior Philip was to Simon. The amazer was amazed. He was as much astonished and confounded at the miracles of Philip as the people of Samaria had been of him.

In verses 14-17 the apostles come down and lay hands on the Samaritans so that they receive the Holy Spirit. This was for the purpose of identifying the Samaritans with the Jerusalem church. This laying on of hands was uniquely important here for it established the oneness between the new Samaritan church and the church in Jerusalem. So these hated Samaritans are now joined to Christ and spiritually share all the Jewish believers share. They are united, Jews and Samaritans in one body.

Then beginning in verse 18 here's what happened:

Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money,¹⁹ saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." (Acts 8:18-19 NASB)

At this point something happened which Simon saw. Evidently the coming of the Spirit was accompanied by some type of physical manifestation.

Simon offers Peter and John money for the ability to bestow the Holy Spirit. This is not really that surprising. After all, Simon would have paid to learn his magic arts. No one would be inclined to pass along such valuable knowledge without compensation. Learning to practice magic would be something like buying a franchise. Simon was used to thinking in terms of the buying and selling of abilities. He simply continued to operate as he always had—as a magician.

When Simon saw that the Apostles were able to give the Holy Spirit simply by the laying on of hands, a gift which manifested itself in the exalting of men's hearts to God, he naturally assumed that their ability could be bought and

paid for. He therefore offered them money. To his mind this was something worth having. He would not think that he was acting against God. Can you blame him? Wouldn't you like to have the ability to lay hands on people and have them receive the Holy Spirit?

But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!" (Acts 8:20 NASB)

What Peter says here is a recognized form of curse. Similar curse formulas have been found among pagan magical papyri. This could literally be translated, ***"may your silver be for destruction along with you."*** Peter places both Simon and his money under a ban. J. B. Phillips translates this; "To hell with you and your money" (Acts 8:20).

The problem is that when we hear strong words like this we often assume that this can't be said to a true believer. But remember the inspired text said Simon believed.

Peter, himself, heard some very strong words of correction from Jesus Himself:

But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." (Matthew 16:23 NASB)

Just as Peter was called "Satan" by his Lord for expressing his thoughts and desires, so Simon was addressed as a heathen, for he was acting like one at the time.

When Simon tried to purchase the ability to bestow the Holy Spirit on others, he based his actions on the assumption that the gift of God could be bought and sold.

Before you are to harsh on Simon for using his money to try to buy something from God, think about how many Christians are using their good works or their acts of service or their great sacrifices, all with an attempt to earn God's favor. Trying to buy God off has been going on for centuries.

True Christians can do and have done everything that Simon said and did. His background, possibly fresh out of demonism, makes his conduct easier to understand.

"You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God." (Acts 8:21 NASB)

As I understand the words of verses 21 and 22, Peter is not speaking so much about Simon's sinfulness in general, but rather in terms of this specific sin, the sin of trying to purchase God's gift.

Does the fact that Peter says, ***"Your heart is not right before God"*** indicate that Simon is a non-believer? Does Scripture contradict Scripture? No, and the Scripture has already told us that Simon believed. Notice the strong language that Mark uses about the Apostles:

for they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened. (Mark 6:52 NASB)

"Their heart was hardened" — hardened is the Greek word *poroo*, metaphorically it means: ***"to make the heart dull; to grow hard, callous, become dull, lose the power of understanding."*** This is a very strong word. It is used 5 times in the New Testament and 3 of them are referring to non-believers. And remember he is saying this of His Apostles. Does this mean that they were not saved? No! It does not!

"Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you." ²³ "For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity." (Acts 8:22-23 NASB)

If conversion involves such a complete renovation, that old mental habits are entirely eradicated, never to exert their influence again, then Simon was not a genuine believer. Both Scripture and experience teach the turning of a sinner to God, transforms their identity from Adam to Christ. But that saved man must still deal with sin or it will overtake him in his daily walk. Old habits must be put away—our thought process must be transformed by the Word of God. Simon was a new believer who had a lot to learn.

But Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me." (Acts 8:24 NASB)

Adam Clark writes, ***"If the reading of the Codex Bezae, and the margin of the later Syriac may be relied on: Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none OF ALL THOSE EVILS which ye have spoken TO ME, may come upon me: WHO WEPT GREATLY, and DID NOT CEASE. That is, he was an incessant penitent."***

Nothing is further said about the incident. This leaving an incident in mid-air is typical of the Bible elsewhere. When Scripture leaves something in the air like this it usually signifies that what was spoken of followed. Thus we have the right here to assume that Peter did pray for him, and that he was forgiven. He was after all new in the faith and had needed his thinking sorting out, and deliverance from what had previously gripped him.

Believers, none of us is perfect in our obedience to the Lord, none of us are 100% sold out to God, so let's cut each other a little slack. When we see another believer doing something that we think is incompatible with a believer let's pray for them, lovingly confront them and try to help them walk in holiness but let's not judge and condemn them as unsaved. Our salvation is not about our performance it's about our trusting the Lord Jesus Christ and Him alone. His obedience has been imputed to me and I stand obedient in Him.

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