

# Counterfeit Christianity

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**Main Scripture Text: Acts 8**

*“But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one.”*

ACTS 8:9

## Outline

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## Introduction

Be finding the book of Acts chapter 8. We've been going through the book of Acts—Living Supernaturally. But we know also that, when God works, Satan works also. Here's a question: true or false—Satan is against religion? Don't answer it out loud. Some say true; some say false. Of course, the answer is false. Satan is not against religion.

You're going to find out that Satan uses religion; it is one of his chief tools in his bag of tricks. As a matter of fact, if you've studied the Bible, you're to find out that the very first temptation in the Garden of Eden was a religious temptation; it was a temptation, not to be ungodly, but a temptation—will you believe it?—to be godly. He said, Look, Eve. If you do this, you'll be like God. It wasn't a temptation to fall down; it was a temptation to climb up, to be as God. But do it my way. The devil, you see, is into religion up to his ears.

Now, there was a revival in Samaria. Let's read about it. Look in verse 5: “Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ unto them, and the people with one accord gave heed to those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did, for unclean spirits crying with loud voice came out of many that were possessed with them, and many taken with palsies that were lame were healed. And there was great joy in that city.”

There's always joy when Jesus is present. There's always joy when there is real

revival, joy unspeakable and full of glory. But notice, in verse 9, how the subject changes: “But...”—just underscore the word but. You know, when God opens the windows of heavens to bless us, the devil opens the doors of hell to blast us. And, whenever there is revival, you can expect Satanic opposition—“But there was a certain man called Simon which beforehand in the same city used sorcery and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man”—talking about Simon—“is the great power of God. Unto him they had regard, because that of a long time he had bewitched them with sorcery. 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. Then Simon...”—now, this is Simon the sorcerer—“Then Simon himself believed also, and when he was baptized he continued with Philip and wondered, beholding the miracles and the signs which were done.”

Now, I’m going to stop right there. We’re going to pick up the reading in just a moment, and, actually, we’re going to go right on down this morning, I hope, right on through verse 25 of this chapter. But I want to talk to you about Counterfeit Christianity.

Now, last week, we talked about superficial Christianity, and that is dangerous, and there’s something just as dangerous, if not more dangerous, and it is counterfeit Christianity. When God moves, the devil also moves. As we’ve said before, Satan tried to close the church from the outside, and that didn’t work—it just drove the church to her knees—so now he’s going to try to close the church from the inside. And he does it, first of all, with superficial saints, Ananias and Sapphira. But now he also does it with counterfeit religion.

And the devil is a counterfeiter, and what he does, rather than to deny the faith, he counterfeits the faith, and that is doubly dangerous. Now, I’m going to tell you something: if you live for God, you’re going to have opposition, whether you are an individual or a church. I’ve often said, if you’ve never met the devil, it’s because you and the devil have been going in the same direction. You turn around, and, rather than being in collusion with the devil, you’re going to find yourself in collision with the devil.

Now, there’s great joy in that city, but Satan now begins to work. There are three things I want to lay on your heart as we think this morning about Counterfeit Christianity. And believe you me, these things are very real, and if there were ever a generation that needs to hear what I have to say, this is the generation that needs to hear of the dangers of counterfeit Christianity. Three things I want to warn you about.

## **I. Don’t Be Dazzled by the Satanic Force of False Religion**

Number one: don’t be dazzled by the satanic force of false religion. Now, I chose the word dazzled carefully. Don’t be dazzled by the satanic force of false religion. False

religion has great force. Look in verse 10. It speaks of this sorcerer, and the Bible says, “to whom they all gave heed from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.”

There was force in what this man was doing, and they were all dazzled by it. Notice verses 9 and 10: “There was a certain man called Simon which before time in the same city used sorcery and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.”

Now, here was a man who was using sorcery. Sorcery’s just another word for witchcraft. And, by the way, witchcraft is alive and well in the world today. Witchcraft is alive and well in America today. Witchcraft is alive and well in Memphis today. Witchcraft is alive and well in many churches. You say, Oh, no. Yes. And many people are dazzled by this. And they fail to understand that there is supernatural power.

What Simon was doing was not just a bag of cheap tricks. It’s not just that he was an illusionist—he was in league with the devil. Adrian, do you believe that there’s anything to witchcraft? Absolutely. Do you believe that some of these people have supernatural powers? Beyond the shadow of any doubt.

As a matter of fact, the world is getting ready for Satan’s superman, 6-6-6, who’s soon going to come on the scene, and one of his chief tools is going to be sorcery and witchcraft. And put in your margin 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, verse 9. It speaks of the coming Antichrist, the man of sin, and it says, “Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan,”—listen to this now—“with all power and signs and lying wonders.” All power, signs, and lying wonders. What does that mean—lying wonders? It means miracles that will deceive. You know, sometimes people will get into sorcery, witchcraft, whatever, and they say, Well, there’s really something to it, Pastor, as if that exonerates it, as if that somehow indemnifies it, as if somehow that substantiates it. There is something to it, but, friend, what there is to it is devilish.

Now, again, during the Great Tribulation, demonic forces are going to be loosed on the earth, and leading the nations of the world toward Armageddon. Put this verse down—Revelation chapter 16, verse 14. The Bible describes some unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the beast, the dragon, the false prophet; and here’s how the Bible describes these in verse 14: “For these are the spirits of devils,”—now, listen—“working miracles which go forth unto the kings of the earth and to the whole world, to gather them to the battle of the great day of God Almighty.”

Demonic spirits leading the kings, the rulers, the potentates of this world, bringing them to Armageddon. The key verse is “the spirit of demons working miracles.” We’ve already seen that Samaria was a place where people were demon-possessed. And, when Philip came to the revival, many unclean spirits or demons came out of people.

There is a deadly demonic force in the world today.

Some years ago, we had a missionary in our church—not this church, the church I pastored in Florida. That missionary told one of the most remarkable stories I've ever heard. The man was a godly man. He was not a liar, not an exaggerator, but from my judgment one of the most self-sacrificing godly missionaries I've ever met. He told about in Africa going back into the bush, and he told about a witch doctor there that had come to faith in Jesus Christ, and this witch doctor who had been practicing sorcery and magic, and had been in league with Satan, now had given his heart to Christ, and was saved. And the missionary and a native went to visit this man to confirm him in the faith. They had a wonderful visit. They fellowshiped in the Lord, and afterward, the missionary was going back, and he noticed there was a fire, and this witch doctor had some of his religious magic paraphernalia, there and was going to burn it in the fire. Of the things that he had, he had some gourds—do you know what a gourd is? It's a hardened pod that grows on vines, and people use them for different artifacts.

He had some gourds, had some feathers and things tied to them. The man was getting ready to throw them in the fire. The missionary said, What are those? Well, he said, these are things that I do witchcraft with. I'm going to burn them. The missionary said, You're just going to burn them? He said, Yes. He said, I'll tell you what. The people back where I live, they don't understand these things; they've never seen these kind of things. Would you give them to me? I want to take them back and show the people. The witch doctor said, No, you don't want them. He said, Why not? He said, They have power in them. He said, I don't believe in that, but, he said, I would like to have them so to take them back to show the people the superstitions. The witch doctor deferred to the American who was supposed to know everything, the spiritual leader. He said, Well, all right, take them.

This missionary said to me, We took those gourds, and on our way back, we had to stop and camp. We pitched our tent, and, in the middle of the night, I heard a noise, something in the tent. He said, I looked down, and those gourds I had laid between our cots—my companion's and mine—and he said, Those gourds were quivering and vibrating. He said, I realized what a fool I had been. I got up that night, built a fire, and burned them. Not mere superstition—there is devilish demonic, magical power in the world today.

Now, don't be deceived—don't be deceived. Don't be dazzled, friend, by the power of false religion. It is real. Pharaoh's magicians performed miracles when Moses performed miracles of God. So, as we think about counterfeit Christianity, the first thing I want to write on your heart is this: don't be dazzled by that. If some magician, some soothsayer, some astrologer, some necromancer, some fortune-teller, comes and does things that you cannot understand, don't go trailing after him, because you say, Well, I

know it's real! That is the point. It is real. That doesn't mean to follow after it; it means to flee from it.

## **II. Don't Be Deceived by the Superficial Faith of False Religion**

Now, here's the second point. First of all, don't be dazzled by the satanic power of false religion. Number two: don't be deceived by the superficial faith of false religion. Not all false religion is in the occult. Sometimes it moves right into the church. Now, I begin to read in verse 13. Now, remember Simon, now, has been a sorcerer; he's been practicing witchcraft. But now, notice verse 13: "Then Simon himself believed also." Well, Philip has been preaching Jesus, and now here is this sorcerer, this man full of demons, who's been practicing witchcraft, and the Bible says he believed also. "And when he was baptized, he continued with Philip and wondered,"—underscore this next phrase now, if you don't mind writing in your Bible—"beholding the miracles and the signs which were done. Now, when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John who, when they were come down, prayed for them that they might receive for them the Holy Ghost, for as yet he was fallen upon none of them, for they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." This is the progression—progression—of Pentecost.

Now, these people in Samara are receiving the Holy Spirit as they did at Jerusalem. Now, notice in verse 17: "Then laid they their hands on them and they received the Holy Ghost." Now, watch verse 18: "And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay my hands he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God might be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter, for thy heart is not right in the sight of God."

Now, I'm going to stop reading there just simply to say this: that Simon—quote—believed—end of quote—but he was an unbelieving believer. He was not a true Christian. His faith was superficial, not real faith. He is believing, not in the master; he's believing in the miracles. He sees the power being manifest there by that New Testament church, and so he wants to be a part of it, but he never has met the Lord Jesus Christ. You say, Pastor, it says he believes. Wasn't he saved? Read verse 21 again, and look at it: "Thou has neither part nor lot in this matter, for thy heart is not right with God."

Now, I wrote a book, the title of the book, Believe in Miracles, but Trust in Jesus. Trust in Jesus. God works miracles. Satan counterfeits miracles, and works devilish miracles. Never put your faith in miracles; put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Simon never did really truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Not all belief is saving belief. You

may be a member of this church, you may give mental assent unto the facts of the gospel, but you have never met Jesus Christ.

Now, I want you to put in your margin John chapter 2, and I want to begin reading in verse 23—John 2, verse 23. Let me give you the background of this passage of Scripture. Jesus had done some miracles in Jerusalem, and in Cana of Galilee, and other places, and people saw it. And when people saw the miracles that Jesus did, they began to follow Him. Not because they wanted Jesus, not because they repented of their sins, but they just saw the miracles, and they followed Him for the miracles' sake. They were what I call miracle mongers.

Now, listen to this—John 2, verse 23: “Now, when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover in the feast day, many believed on him...”—there's our word again—“believed on him when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus”—now, listen—“did not commit himself unto them.” Now, you don't see it in the English, but in the Greek, the word believe and the word commit is the same word, just translated differently. You could say, many committed themselves to Him, but He did not commit himself to them. Or, many believed in Him, but He did not believe in them. They—quote—believed in Him like Simon the sorcerer, but He did not believe in them. Now, listen to it; let me read it again: “And many believed in his name when they saw the miracles which he did, but Jesus did not commit himself unto them, for he knew all men and needed not that any should testify of man, for he knew what was in man.” Jesus knew these were not true believers.

There are many of you in this building—it breaks my heart to say it, but I believe it, and many who are listening through television—you say, I'm a believer. But you're not saved. You know the plan, but you don't know the man. You've seen what God has done, but there has never been a change of heart. You say, Well, doesn't the Bible say, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved?” Yes, it does. The Bible also says, the devil believes and trembles. You see, there's a superficial faith. There's a kind of faith that never really comes and bows the knee to Jesus Christ, never makes Jesus Christ Lord. It is the superficial faith of false religion.

Let me read to you something that came from the Commercial Appeal just a few days ago, actually last January. I tore it out. Here's what it says: Spirituality gaining over doctrine. So, here's a battle now—spirituality, doctrine—and the word doctrine here means truth. And let me read this to you. Journalists rarely get to use terms such as White House, New Age, and séance in the same story, but they did in 1996 when the news broke that Hillary Rodham Clinton and her sacred psychologist, Jean Houston, were using meditation and visualization techniques in order to chat—listen to this—with Eleanor Roosevelt. Commentators smirked, and said this behavior was wacky, if not cult-like.

Now, here is the First Lady, in the White House, practicing a séance, contacting the dead in the White House. Now, listen to this. This is in your newspaper not too long ago. And, it says, commentators smirked, and said this behavior was wacky, if not cult-like. But the article goes on to say, the big news was that most—quote—born-again evangelicals were taking the news in stride. It's crucial to understand that what unites most of the people who call themselves born-again Christians is their claim to have had a highly personal experience that has changed their lives.

You are born again because of certain feelings and emotions and experiences, not because you believe any particular set of doctrine, or because you share certain beliefs about moral issues. Born-again Christians are increasingly becoming part of the American mainstream. A third of America's 77 million baby boomers call themselves born-again Christians. Many born-again boomers believe they have made a spiritual decision that is right for them but not necessarily for everyone. Half affirm that the various religions of the world are equally good and true, and the younger the born-again Christian, the more likely he or she was to say this. A third of the born-again believers said they believe in reincarnation and astrology.

Now, what is this article saying? These are people that say, Oh, yes, I'm a believer, but they don't believe necessarily the doctrines of the Bible. They don't necessarily believe that Jesus is the only way to heaven. They believe in astrology. They believe in reincarnation. All of these things are emphatically taught against in the Word of God. Now, we have today a generation of people who are—quote—very spiritual, but they do not believe the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

Now, God has sent me here to tell you that you'd better get a bulldog grip on God's Word and God's truth. Thousands of church rolls are padded with moral worldlings who had spiritual experiences, who have never been born again. Simon the sorcerer said he believed. Philip said, You have no part nor lot with this; your heart is not right with God.

Now, have you had some experience, some something, that you call being born again? Suppose you come to the end of your life. Suppose you stand before God, and God says to you, Why should I let you into my heaven? You would say, Well, when I was on earth, I had a great experience. An angel, a heavenly being, came into my bedroom, and told me that I was heaven-bound, that I am ready for heaven; an angel appeared unto me. Satan could be there and sneer, and say, You fool; I was that angel. You say, Pastor, is that possible? Put in your margin 2 Corinthians chapter 11 and verse 14: "And no marvel, for Satan himself is transformed as an angel of light." If you have an encounter with an angel, how do you know you're not having an encounter with the devil himself? Satan himself is transformed as an angel of light.

Oh, you say, Lord, I'm fit for heaven because I had a vision. I saw the heavens ablaze from pole to pole. I was engulfed in light. I know that I'm ready for heaven.

Again, I reference you to Revelation chapter 13, verse 13 and following, speaking of the dragon: “And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on earth in the sight of men and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast.” The devil—the devil—can make fire fall from heaven.

You say, Well, an angel spoke to me. I had a vision. I was engulfed in light. I tell you, it'd be a whole lot better if you were to stand before the Lord, and the Lord said, Why should I let you into my heaven? and you were to say, in John chapter 5, verse 24, because Jesus said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye that heareth my word and believeth on him that sent me hath everlasting life and shall not come into condemnation but is passed from death unto life,” and on the basis of your Word, and on the basis of the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, and my faith in Him, I seek entrance into heaven. And heaven's gates will swing wide, and he'll say, Enter into the joy of your Lord. Listen, friend. You had better beware of the superficial faith of false religion. This man, Simon, was a “believer,” but he wasn't saved.

### **III. Don't Be Destroyed by the Selfish Focus of False Religion**

Now, here's the third and final thing. We're talking about counterfeit Christianity today. Remember the force of false religion, the satanic force. Remember the superficial faith of false religion. Here's the third thing. Don't be destroyed by the selfish focus—the selfish focus—of false religion. Do you know what the fuel that empowers false religion is? It is selfishness. Now, you don't have to think too hard as you read this story to see that Simon is full of himself. He is focused on himself.

Read verses 9 and 10: “There was a certain man called Simon which before in the same city used sorcery and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out”—now, underscore this—“that himself was some great one.” And then, skip on down to verse 14: “Now, when the apostles that were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John, who when they were come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Ghost,” and so forth. Now, notice verse 18: “Then when Simon saw that through the laying of, on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay my hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.” Here was a man who was so full of himself.

Listen. What is self-centeredness? Let me give you a synonym for it: it is pride. Do you know what made the devil the devil? Self-centeredness. What made the devil the devil is pride. Isaiah chapter 14, verses 12 through 14—put in your margin. Isaiah is speaking to Lucifer, the devil, and here's what he says: “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning. Thou art cut down to the ground which didst



weaken the nations.” And now he describes the process that made the devil the devil. “For thou has said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God, I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation in the sides of the north, I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will be like the Most High.” Five times: I will, I will, I will, I will, I will. What did Jesus teach us to pray? Not my will; thine be done. What did Satan say? Not thy will, mine be done. All false religion is self-centered. It focuses on self.

How do you think that Satan got Eve to take of the forbidden fruit? He appealed to her pride. He said, you’ll be like God; you can be like God. All religion that is false religion—put it down big, plain, and straight—the focus is selfishness. First Timothy chapter 6, beginning in verse 3—Paul was talking to Timothy about truth and wholesome doctrine, but then here’s what he says: “If any man teach otherwise and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud.”

What drives liberalism in seminaries? Pride. What causes unbelief in the Word of God? Pride. What made the devil the devil? Pride. What is the root, the fuel, the source of all false religion? It is the focus on self; it is selfishness; it is pride, beyond the shadow of any doubt. Therefore, if you want that which is real, you go to the Word of God, you lay your intellectual pride in the dust, and you cry out to Jesus for mercy.

It’s obvious that Simon was in this thing, not for what he could give, but for what he could get. Look in verses 19 and 20. He said, “Give me this power, that on whomsoever I lay my hands he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God might be purchased with money.”

False religion and self-centered religion brings two things. Let me tell you. The root is pride. Let me tell you the fruit. You want to know what the fruit of all false religion is? Well, I want to show you right here. Peter says to him, in verse 23, “For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity.” That’s a good verse. Learn this about false religion. The fruit is bitterness and bondage. The very word gall means poison. False religion is a poison. Peter said, Look, Simon. I’m going to diagnose your heart. You are bitter, and you’re in bondage. I perceive that there is in you this bitterness and this bondage because your heart is not right in the sight of God. Bitterness and bondage, verse 23. That is so true.

Did you know why so many churches have trouble? Because there are people who are bitter and who are in bondage. They have met religion, but they’ve never met Jesus. They’ve never been broken at the foot of the cross. They’ve never laid their pride in the dust. They have come into a church, not for what they can give, but for what they can get. They’ve never met Jesus. The Spirit of God is not in these people, and they are

troublemakers everywhere they go, because their religion has never satisfied them, and it never can. They are disillusioned, and they have unfulfilled desires, and they got in for the wrong reason, and they never, never, never, never, never have satisfaction. Everywhere they go, they're like Simon, full of bitterness, full of bondage. They're troublemakers in church—in churches.

Now, even in his repentance—so-called repentance—this man is full of self. Notice Peter says, Look, you are in the bond of iniquity. And notice what Simon said in verse 24: “Then answered Simon and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me.” Now, why didn't he pray? Why didn't he pray? Because he didn't know the Lord. “Pray he to the Lord for me, that none of these things which you have spoken come upon me.” He didn't say, Pray for me that I'll get my heart right with God. No! All he is doing is wanting to escape trouble, difficulty. There's no change in this man's heart; there's no change in this man's life. It is self-centered, even, repentance.

Do you know the difference between a true child of God, when he sins, and an unsaved person? The unsaved person fears the consequences of his sin. The saved person is broken-hearted because he's broken the heart of God. Not only have I broken God's law; I've broken God's heart, and it grieves me. But the unsaved person says, Man, I'm in trouble. He'll go to some psychologist, some counselor, somebody else, say, Pray for me; pray for me, preacher. My wife has left me. Pray for me here. Pray for me here. Pray for me here. I don't want this trouble. What they need is God. All false religion is self-centered.

There is the satanic force, there is the superficial faith, and there is the selfish focus of false religion. And I want to tell you again, that the devil is not opposed to religion. He's in it up to his ears. It'll be a great day in America when people stop enduring religion and start enjoying salvation—to come to know the Lord Jesus Christ.

## **Conclusion**

A woman was in her house. A knock came on the door. She opened the door, and there was a man there, and he said to her, Lady, do you know God? She was flustered, taken aback. She stuttered and stammered, was embarrassed; she just stepped back and shut the door. The man bowed his head and walked away. Later, her husband came home. She said, Darling, let me tell you what happened today. She said, A man knocked at the door of our house and he asked me a question. He asked me if I knew God. I didn't know what to say. I shut the door in his face. I'm so sorry. I wish I could find him and apologize to him.

Apologize? he said. You should've slammed the door in his face. What right did he have to ask you such a question? Why didn't you tell him we are members of the biggest, most influential church in our city? She said, Husband, he didn't ask that. He

asked if I knew God. Well, why didn't you tell him we're reputable people; we have a good reputation; we're well-known in this community? He didn't ask that. He only asked if I knew God.

That's what I want to ask you today: not, Are you a member of Bellevue Baptist Church?; not, Do people think you are fine?; not, Do you have manners and culture?; not even, Do you have religion? Do you know God? Are you saved? Oh, my friend, you can be. You should be. Would you bow your heads in prayer? While heads are bowed and eyes are closed, I want to lead you in a prayer, and if you've never prayed this kind of a prayer, you can pray it from your heart. Maybe you've been sort of an unbelieving believer. Maybe you've had an intellectual faith, and maybe you've been impressed with miracles and things, but you've never really bowed to Jesus.

Would you pray this prayer: Dear God, I know that you love me, and I know that you want to save me. Jesus, you died to save me. You promised to save me, if I would trust you. I do trust you. Tell Him that. Lord Jesus, I trust you. I believe you're the Son of God. I believe you paid for my sin with your blood on the cross. I believe you walked out of that grave, and now I receive you, by faith, as my Lord and Savior. I take myself off the throne, and I enthrone you, Lord Jesus. Now, right now, I do. Come into my heart. Forgive my sin. Cleanse me. Save me, Jesus. Pray that from your heart: Save me, Lord Jesus. Did you ask Him?

Then, pray this way: Thank you for doing it. I receive it by faith, and that settles it. You're now my Lord, my Savior, and my God, and I will live for you the rest of my life—not in order to be saved, but because I have been saved. I receive salvation as a free gift, preparing to serve you the rest of my life. In your name I pray. Amen.