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Sham Christianity, Part 4

Pathology

Throughout history, deadly epidemics have ravaged mankind. In the fourteenth century, the infamous Black Death killed millions in Europe. Cholera, diphtheria, malaria, and other sicknesses have ravaged towns and cities throughout history. Our generation has witnessed the rapid spread of the HIV virus and AIDS. And yet more deadly than all of these diseases is the plague of false teaching that has afflicted the church throughout its history.

What could be more serious or deadly?

While illness may kill the body false teaching damns the soul. And yet thankfully, like AIDS and the plague, false teaching has a definite, observable pathology.

Matthew 7:21, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.”

1 John 4:2-3, “Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.”

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1 John 5:2, “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.”

Truly false teaching has an observable pathology.

Pathology is defined as the study of the elements of abnormality that characterize a disease. Accordingly scientists study the pathology of a disease to equip themselves better to recognize it and so combat it. In light of this, every Christian should be a spiritual pathologist, knowing the difference between genuine Christianity and its imitation. And it is to this, understanding the pathology of Sham Christianity, that we turn our focus.

Our passage contains the description of Saul's rise to power as the first King of Israel. And yet we have seen that as a king and a servant of God, Saul was a SHAM! His was not a regency of fidelity to the Lord. As a Christ merchant, he used God, Israel, and religion to further his own cause. Thomas Watson described Saul to a “T” when he wrote this:

“Fair streams may run on the top of a river- but vermin may lay at the bottom!”¹

But once again, that is the beauty of this text. Because we know Saul was an imposter, we conclude that this passage contains the characteristics NOT of the rise of a genuine servant of Christ BUT of that which was necessary to fool not only the people of God, but Saul himself. And thus, the characteristics mentioned here do not testify to salvation. While some of the characteristics may accompany Genuine Christianity, they are not its proof.

Let's continue in our examination of sham Christianity. Thus far we have seen that it is not without a life change, accompanied by incredible resources, not void of an experience and it is marked by an active, inactivity.

Characterized by Indifference

Notice fifthly and finally, sham Christianity is characterized by an indifference to the things of the Lord.

1 Samuel 10:14, “And Saul’s uncle said unto him and to his servant, Whither went ye? And he said, To seek the asses: and when we saw that they were no where, we came to Samuel.”

Saul’s uncle was possibly Ner, the father of Abner who later would become the commander of Saul’s army.² Recall that our introduction to Saul came when Kish (Saul's father) discovered that some of his donkeys had wandered off.³ So that he might not lose this wealth, Kish ordered his son, Saul, to take a servant and retrieve the donkeys. Saul immediately obeyed and went to great lengths to find them.⁴ After a couple of days, Saul wisely noted that they had better get back “...lest my father cease to be concerned about the donkeys and become anxious for us” (1 Samuel 9:5b).

Recall that the introduction of Saul is one of contrasts. He had everything this world might value in a leader. He was

- Good looking.
- Respectful.

¹ Thomas Watson, [The Christian Soldier, or Heaven Taken by Storm](#), 1669

² Compare 1 Samuel 14:50-51

³ Compare 1 Samuel 9:3

⁴ Compare 1 Samuel 9:4-5

- Obedient.
- Thoughtful.
- Rich.

Yet he clearly lacked a relationship with God. He lacked a relationship which is why we read that it was Saul's servant who suggested that before they go home they first should check with THE prophet, Samuel. Saul clearly did not know Samuel, but Saul's servant wanted to check with Samuel to see if Samuel could tell them where to look for the donkeys.⁵

While here, Samuel took Saul into his confidence, shared with him the glorious news of the coming of the Kingdom of God, and then anointed Saul as the first King of Israel.⁶ Along with this anointing came three specific signs which BOTH would confirm the authenticity of Saul's anointing AND give the future king an incredible message of comfort. These three signs addressed Saul's

- Concerns, 1 Samuel 10:2.
- Earthly Needs, 1 Samuel 10:3-4.
- Divine Calling, 1 Samuel 10:5-6.

All these things were being attended to by God!

Now our text contains the record of the fulfillment of these signs. This fulfillment meant that the promise given to Israel thru Moses concerning a day when God would bless His people with a king⁷ was being fulfilled. Moses prophesied this event and placed it before the eyes of Israel as their hope. Moses did all this during the miraculous days of the Exodus. This would indicate that though the redemption of God's people from Egypt was amazing, nevertheless it would not compare to the time when God raised up a king.

Now, Israel longed for a king during this era of the Old Testament. It was an event into which angels longed to look into. And it was now being fulfilled in Saul!

Understand that we have come upon a profound moment in Redemptive History here! And all of this brings us to our passage this morning where following the fulfillment of the three signs; the newly anointed King comes to his home and is questioned by his uncle.

1 Samuel 10:14, **“And Saul’s uncle said unto him and to his servant, Whither went ye? And he said, To seek the asses: and when we saw that they were no where, we came to Samuel.”**

What an opportunity for Saul to give glory to God and tell of the incredible plan of God whereby He was bringing His people from being a Theocracy to a Monarchy and thereby delivering Israel from all her foes. And what do we read?

1 Samuel 10:14-15, **“And Saul’s uncle said unto him and to his servant, Whither went ye? And he said, To seek the asses: and when we saw that they were no where, we came to Samuel. And Saul’s uncle said, Tell me, I pray thee, what Samuel said unto you.”**

On the one hand you have Saul's response: “To look for the donkeys.” (THAT'S IT? Saul has just participated in an event which the participants in the Exodus would have considered an advancement, and that's all he says?) And then we read of his casual reference to “THE prophet of the land”- Samuel- whom evidently everyone

⁵ Compare 1 Samuel 9:6-10

⁶ Compare 1 Samuel 9:25-10:1

⁷ Compare Deuteronomy 17:14-17

knew about except Saul.⁸ Such flippancy! Such “casualness” when it came to the things of the Lord.

But then in contrast we read of Saul's Uncle and his urgency to hear what THE prophet, this man of God, had to say!

O.K. so Saul is being a little cautious with his knowledge of God's plan, the three miracles... the anointing... the glorious news that God has heard the cry of his people and has raised up a deliverer. At least this what Josephus posited here and which many a commentator has followed. They say that Saul didn't want his uncle to be jealous (which is quite out of character for Saul but for the time being we'll let slide). Accordingly if Saul is being bashful here, we know that it simply must be a matter of time before he opens up.

- For as it relates to the Kingdom of God- the unfolding of the covenant of God
- Again, redemptively speaking, this is as important a time as when Moses approached the Pharaoh and demanded the release of Israel.⁹

And that is why we are shocked that Saul never opens up, but instead hides the truth of his calling.

1 Samuel 10:16, “And Saul said unto his uncle, He told us plainly that the asses were found. But of the matter of the kingdom, whereof Samuel spake, he told him not.

Dead Sea Scrolls

The discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls remains one of the most significant archeological discoveries of the twentieth century. Among other things it verified that our copy of the Hebrew Old Testament is sound.

In the spring of 1947, an Arab shepherd boy was grazing his flock in the hills bordering the western shore of the Dead Sea. As most boys of his age, he began throwing rocks to pass the time. Suddenly he heard a loud crash like the sound of breaking glass. Leaving his flocks to investigate, he entered a cave and there found hundreds of clay jars filled with scrolls. Now, he was not sure what he had found, the boy took a couple of the scrolls and proceeded to lead his flock home for the night, occasionally using the scrolls to hit those animals in his flock which strayed!

In the coming days he would show his find to others who didn't think very much of his discovery. In fact because the scrolls were written in Hebrew most thought they were stolen and so they didn't want anything to do with them. Eventually, in fact, months later, one of the scrolls ended up at the American Oriental Society which identified the scroll as a manuscript of Isaiah predating any known copy by almost 1000 years.

As that shepherd boy led his flock, beating them with the scrolls little did he know that he held in his hand one of the most important Biblical discoveries of the 20th century! From the reading of 1 Samuel I would suggest to you that this shepherd boy had a better understanding of the value of his find than did Saul when it came to the Kingdom of God.

Evil or Ignorance

What do we read here, “But he did not tell him about the matter of the kingdom which Samuel had mentioned” (1 Samuel 10: 16b)?

How could you possibly withhold this information (again, note where we are in redemptive history)? It's

⁸ Compare 1 Samuel 4:1

⁹ If Saul was 1/10 of Simeon or Anna he would have known this. Compare Luke 2:34-38

unthinkable! You'd have to be as spiritually dead as a door nail. Completely ignorant of the things of the Lord. Dull of hearing... hard of heart ****or**** nothing short of evil.

Imagine if after being commissioned by God Moses purposely did as Saul did here? We'd say that Satan had filled his heart.

So which is it when it comes to Saul: is this ignorance or evil?

At this point we do not have any reason to believe that Saul was intentionally being wicked here. Thus we conclude that it must be the former. Saul did not share the news of the Kingdom of God NOT because he was filled with Satan BUT because he simply was clueless when it came to the things of the Lord.

Saul held in his hands the most incredible news. He was a participant in that which Moses himself considered to be the next movement of God in redemptive history. And Saul, "kept it under a bushel"¹⁰ because he clearly did not know its value. V. Philips Long wrote this:

“...Saul's silence appears not as that of a man whose hour has not yet come, but as that of a man who has failed, or is about to fail, in his first assignment and would just as soon keep quiet about it... Whatever may be said on points of detail, the narrative is certainly more suggestive of timidity than of humility.”¹¹

And that brings us to the fifth and final characteristic of Sham Christianity, Indifference to the things of the Lord.

You say, “Wait! This looks more like cowardice than indifference- especially when you think of Saul hiding behind the baggage in 1 Samuel 10:22.”

True, timidity clearly was how Saul's indifference was manifested. But the only way Saul could shrink back as he did here is if he first did not understand what he held in his hands. The antidote to timidity in the life of the child of God always is a greater understanding of who God is, the nature of His Kingdom, and His plan for us in Christ. One must come to a greater apprehension of God. Fear God and the fear of man will disappear.¹²

Saul has just participated in three miracles in which God demonstrated His glory. And prior to that, he spent an entire evening with Samuel where he was briefed on

- The character of God.
- The nature of His Kingdom.
- His plan for Saul and Israel.

That the newly elected King shrunk back WITH this knowledge would imply a serious indifference to the things of the Lord. Robert Bergen observed this:

“[Saul] was genealogically linked with the most depraved tribe of the period of the judges and is depicted as pastorally incompetent, spiritually ignorant and disobedient, and, at times, oddly irrational. On balance, the portrait is a troubling one and foreshadows the sad outcome that awaits the man and the nation.”¹³

¹⁰ Compare Matthew 5:15

¹¹ V. Philips Long, *Reign and Rejection of King Saul: A Case for Literary and Theological Coherence*, Lightning Source Inc, 1990, page 211, ISBN 1555403921

¹² Compare Psalm 111:10 and Proverbs 29:25

¹³ Robert Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel: The New American Commentary*, B&H Publishing Group (June 1996), **ISBN-10:** 0805401075, page 118

And so with this we conclude that the fifth and final characteristic of sham Christianity is indifference! Now again this is not to suggest that sham Christians don't care about spiritual things, they do. It is that they don't care about the things that

- God cares about.
- Really matter.
- Are weighty in the Kingdom of God.

Luther, touching upon this theme, put it this way:

“If I profess with the loudest voice and the clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God, except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battle-fields besides is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.”¹⁴

Many a sham Christian

- Reads the word.
- Goes to church.
- Prays.
- Sings in the choir.
- Teaches Sunday school.
- Passes out gospel tracts.
- Washes the feet of the saints.
- Involves themselves in social and political causes.
- Ah but when it comes to that which is essential to Genuine Christianity, there is a spiritual void.

Sham Christianity is not about what a person does; it is about what a person lacks. There was much for which to commend Saul, but when it came to that which really was important, the apprehension and welcoming of God's eternal plan, there was a blinding indifference.

Well, what is really important when it comes to authentic Christianity? What is the heart-beat of the genuine Christian when it comes to God and His kingdom?

Zechariah 3:1-5; illustrates the answer. Zechariah was written in 520 BC following the return of God's people to Jerusalem (after the Babylonian exile). Along with the rebuilding of the Temple, a group of priests were laboring to re-establish the ceremonial system of Judaism- which included the sacrifices, the offerings, the morning and evening prayer, and its worship!

Understandably Satan was working quite diligently at foiling God's people's attempts at every turn. Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem, Gentile officials of Persia, constantly maligned, slandered, and threatened Israel as they went about the work of rebuilding the city of Jerusalem.¹⁵ But when it came to the rebuilding of the temple and the reinstating of its worship, Satan did not delegate its opposition. Rather Satan personally took it upon himself to thwart the work of the High Priest named Joshua.

¹⁴ Chuck and Donna McIllhenny, Frank York, *When the Wicked Seize a City*, Authors Choice Press (November 1, 2000), **ISBN-10:** 0595154328, Page 85

¹⁵ Compare Nehemiah 2-6

Satan did this the only way he knows how... by accusing Joshua of foul revolt against God.

Zechariah 3:1, “And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him.”

Again this is a climatic time in the history of God's people; the worship of Israel was about to be restored. So Satan went “to the top” and attacked the High Priest. Yet God intervened.

Zechariah 3:2, “And the LORD said unto Satan, The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?”

I love this! God doesn't debate Joshua's worthiness to stand before the Lord and serve. In fact, He points it out! “Is this not a brand plucked from the fire” references the blackened and charred stick that sets at the outer edge of a fire. God is saying, “You're right Satan; that's what Joshua is!”

Why did God point this out?

You'd think God would defend Joshua, rather than give Satan more fodder with which to attack! But God pointed out Joshua's sin because He wanted Satan AND US to see what He was going to do.

Zechariah 3:3-5, “Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD stood by.”

What is the essence of authentic Christianity?

What is the heart-beat of the genuine Christian when it comes to God and His kingdom?

What is it that Saul lacked?

This text illumines it: it is grasping on to Christ for cleansing! A genuine believer knows that they are sinners; they are conscious of a definite need for the Savior.

This is what makes them- with

- David, Psalm 51; 32:1.
- Paul, Philippians 1:21; Galatians 6:14.
- Mary and Martha, John 11:3, 27-27; Luke 10:38-39.
- Joshua, Zechariah 3:1-7.
- James, James 4:10.

Cling to Christ! TRULY THIS IS THE HALLMARK OF SAVING FAITH!

And that is why the basis of assurance when it comes to salvation is NOT what we do, say, think, or feel BUT the object of our trust and devotion.

Had Saul had this trust... this dependence... this devotion... he would have been spiritually illumined to the profound position in which he stood as one who was to transition Israel into a monarchy and thus he would not

have feared man. As it was when asked as to what Samuel had said, Saul could only speak of the donkeys revealing a heart darkened in its understanding!

- Is your heart darkened in its understanding?
- On the day of judgment is God going to spew you out of His mouth?

You say, "I fear He might; for I am so unworthy!"

You can't help seeing parts of your life in Saul; so on what basis are we to believe that we will be saved when he was not?

The Biblical basis for assurance, when it comes to salvation is found in 1 John 2:25-29. John begins by referencing the promise that God has made to His children, eternal life!

1 John 2:25-26, "And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life. These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you."

.Not surprisingly, there is a lot of misinformation when it comes to what constitutes salvation; Satan would have it no other way. John wrote to give the final say that we might not be deceived! John tells us that we can know we are saved by the blood of Christ because of the work of the Holy Spirit.

1 John 2:27, "But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him."

Sadly this passage has been misunderstood by such groups as the Quakers and the Charismatics. As if this text says that we do not need Scripture or a preacher or a teacher. We only need the gift of the Holy Spirit, "He will teach us all things."

Again let me remind you that the context here is the Spirit of God teaching us concerning the assurance of our salvation! And thus we read 1 John 2:27. The Holy Spirit teaches about ones eternal life. Though John is going about it in a different way, nevertheless his message here is one and the same as Paul's in Romans 8.

Romans 8:16, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:"

Truly, assurance is a glorious work of the Spirit of God by which He affirms our interest in Christ and teaches us that we are saved.

Now what is the result of this work of the Spirit of God? What is His teaching?

1 John 2:28, "And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming."

The key to assurance when it comes to salvation is "abiding in Christ." This means the one who "abides in Christ" renounces all claims to self-effort, and clings to Christ as His only hope. This is the premier act of righteousness¹⁶ which without no man can see the Lord.

The sham Christian is indifferent. He loves hearing about

¹⁶ Compare 1 John 2:29

- Five steps to a great marriage.
- Eight ways to raise a healthy child.
- Six steps to joy in the midst of sorrow.
- How to keep your head about you when the world is falling apart.

But to wax on about Christ, His cross, His Kingdom, our sin, and the need for a Savior, the sham Christian falls asleep! In light of this if

- You are bored with Jesus Christ.
- You are indifferent to the gospel.
- His cross and His atonement are old hat to you- if you're ready for something different.

It may very well be that you are not saved. Your indifference on this matter betrays the heart of Saul.

Accordingly, do not remain indifferent but come to Christ this day and confess your sin — confess

- That you are apathetic when it comes to the gospel.
- Your arrogance whereby you have looked lightly upon your sin.
- Accept the cross-work of Christ as the only sacrifice for your sin.
- Cling to that cross-work- even though the feelings may not be there.

May God give us the grace to have and hold such faith.

About Bethel Presbyterian Church

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Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

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