



BETHEL
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Sham Christianity, Part 2

Is your Faith Real?

The church is a mixed group of people.

1 John 2:19, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us."

The fact that apostasy exists in Christianity implies that not everyone who joins a church is saved. Indeed! If you can't lose your salvation and yet people fall away, then one must conclude that the church consists of both genuine believers ****and**** false believers. Paul, using the metaphor of dishware, spoke of the body of Christ this way:

2 Timothy 2:20, "But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour."

Timothy was being persecuted by individuals numbered amongst the people of God. Thus Paul's exhortation here was this: Timothy don't be disillusioned, the persecution you have been receiving is not from saved individuals, but non-believers in sheep's clothing! Christ told the parable of the *Wheat and the Tares* this way:

Matthew 13:30, “Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.”

Truly the body the Christ, the church, is comprised of both

- Genuine believers and false believers.
- Children of God and children of darkness.
- True Christians and Sham Christians.

And that is why it is so important that there remain no question as to which are you.

1 John 5:13, “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.”

Truly the status of one's standing before God ought never to be in doubt. God's word gives what is needed in order for us to discern whether or not we are genuine servants of Christ. And it is to this that we turn in our study today.

Our text contains the description of Saul's rise to power as the first King of Israel. And yet we already 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 consumer, he used God, Israel, and religion to further his own cause. But 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 they may accompany genuine Christianity, they are not its proof.

Incredible Resources

Accordingly, let's continue in our examination of sham Christianity. Last time we saw that it is not without a life change. Now, notice that it also is accompanied by incredible resources. Notice the text.

1 Samuel 10:9, “And it was so, that when he had turned his back to go from Samuel, God gave him another heart: and all those signs came to pass that day.”

What an incredible statement! Recall that when we looked at the signs promised to Saul as it pertained to his calling to serve as a monarch in God's Kingdom that each sign served a dual purpose. Not only did they validate the message of Samuel regarding the calling placed on Saul's life, but they also contained a personal message of comfort and hope to the future monarch. For example, the first sign — 1 Samuel 10:2 — spoke of God's involvement in the intimate details of life. Truly, if God cared about Saul's father's donkeys, He certainly would care for Saul. And this is the message repeated by Christ in M Matthew 6.

Matthew 6:26, “Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?”

The second sign — 1 Samuel 10:3-4 — spoke of the provisions promised to Saul as a servant of God. In the sacrificial system God provided for His anointed ones, the priests, through select offerings of God's

people. Specific cuts and gifts were given to God for the support and sustenance of the priesthood. And every worshipper knew this. That God therefore gave to Saul the provision intended only for an anointed man implied not only that Saul was anointed but that as God provided for the needs of the priest, so He would provide for Saul's needs as well. And that truly is the message proclaimed by God to all His children.

Matthew 6:28-34, “And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”

What a glorious provision given to God's children. This brings us to the last sign — 1 Samuel 10:5-6 — spoke of a supernatural engifting by which God would enable Saul to do that which he otherwise couldn't do. Genuine prophetic utterances were the product of the enabling work of the Holy Spirit.¹ And that Saul would receive this enabling, spoke volumes of the grace of God which now was operative in his life. And such is the provision that accompanies service in the Kingdom of God today. Paul speaking of spiritual engifting wrote this:

1 Corinthians 12:7, “But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.”

Peter exhorts us this way:

1 Peter 4:10, “As every man hath received the gift [a special engifting from the Spirit], even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

Thus when we come to our passage this morning we are amazed to read that after Saul left Samuel all those signs came about! In other words, Saul not only received confirmation that he was anointed unto the work of God's kingdom, but he also received the promise of incredible resources from God:

- God's presence.
- God's provision.
- God's power.

Now again, we know the end from the beginning here. As such we know that following his ordination, Saul would participate in atrocities rarely named among the body of Christ, atrocities by which we conclude that not only was Saul not a real king but he clearly wasn't a genuine servant of God either, he wasn't saved.

Saul indeed was an imposter, a phony, A SHAM! And insofar as that is true, then herein we derive this very important principle.

¹ Compare 2 Peter 1:20-21

- One can receive numerous provisions from God.
- One can "walk with Him."
- One can know spectacular resources.
- One can witness and even be involved in the miraculous.

And at the end of your life, you still can receive the sentence of condemnation and wrath.

Matthew 7:22-23, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

And that is a second element we learn here about Sham Christianity: Though you have participated in profound happenings, witnessed the workings of God, and been a beneficiary of "the nearness of God" which is "your good"² you have no basis on account of these things to believe that you are saved. Truly, genuine salvation is not based on an experience.

The book of Hebrews was written to a mixed group of Jews. Some clearly had accepted Jesus as their Messiah and so were saved.³ Some were riding the fence.⁴ They weren't sure if Christ was the Promised One, and so they weren't ready to follow Him.

But then there were those who had rejected Christ.⁵ They made careful search and inquiry and heard of and beheld incredible signs testifying to the reality of Christ. They had themselves participated in the miraculous. They nevertheless came to the point of rejection and so shipwreck. The passage before us was written to ones in the latter group.

Hebrews 6:4-6, "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame."

Though this passage has been the source of much controversy in theological studies, don't be confused. None of what is written here implies a genuine conversion. We do not read here of justification or the forgiveness of sin. Rather we read only of a series of incredible experiences. In fact, this text easily could have been written of Saul.

- Was he not "enlightened" when it came to the Kingdom of God (think of his conversation with Samuel, 1 Samuel 9:25)?
- Did he not "taste of heavenly gifts" and himself "partake of the Holy Spirit" (think of his prophesying, 1 Samuel 10:11)?
- Did he not "taste of the word of God" on numerous occasions (again think of Samuel's proclamation of the word of God, 1 Samuel 3:1; 9:19-20)?
- Didn't he personally witness the "powers of the age to come" (think of the time when the Spirit came upon him and he miraculously conquered the Amalekites, 1 Samuel 11:6ff).
- And yet he rejected all of this in favor of the praises of men and the passing pleasures of sin.

² Compare Psalm 73:28

³ Compare Hebrews 10:32-39

⁴ Compare Hebrews 4:1-16

⁵ Compare Hebrews 6

Truly there have been and will continue to be many in the Kingdom of God who are blessed by incredible resources and yet fall short of salvation! And from this we conclude that salvation is not rooted and grounded in what you have

- Received from the Lord by way of a gift.
- Done in His name.
- Experienced by grace.
- Beheld with your eyes.

In fact the greater the emphasis of these types of things in your walk, personally speaking, the greater is my concern that you are not saved!

Indeed! Talk with anyone who has had much involvement in discipleship and they'll tell you that a sure mark of a false conversion is an obsession with a facet of Christianity. Find a person who after professing faith in Christ is moved and burdened by

- Prophecy.
- The book of Revelation.
- Miracles.
- Tongues.
- Demon Possession.

and I'll show you a Sham Christian nine times out of ten. Just because you have had an experience doesn't mean that it is well with your soul.

Well what ought to be our burden?

What ought to be our passion?

If it is not the miraculous or an experience, then what ought it to be?

The author of Hebrews is using the era of the wilderness wandering as the basis to exhort his audience unto salvation in chapter 4. Recall, that for forty years a group of Jews wandered in the wilderness and never saw the Promised Land, which here is a metaphor of salvation. And it is not as though they hadn't seen and participated in so many glorious things.

Recall, that this is the generation of the Exodus. This therefore consisted of ones who

- Participated in the first Passover.
- Saw the angel of death.
- Watched God part the Red Sea.
- Walked through on dry ground.
- Beheld the quaking mountain.
- Ate of the manna and the quails.
- Saw the Rock which was Christ.
- And much, much more.

And yet of the 2.5 million people of the Exodus only two made it to the Promised Land! Accordingly

listen to the exhortation:

Hebrews 4:1-2, "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it."

What is it that separates Genuine Christianity from the fake?

On what basis is it well with your soul?

What is the difference between Sham Christianity and the real deal?

One thing... it is not what you experience BUT on what you rely. "But the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it" (Hebrews 4:2).

Oh brothers and sisters, in the words of Peter: "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall" (2 Peter 1:10). In the words of Paul: "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves" (2 Corinthians 13:5).

And yet what does that mean?

It means that we do a thorough examination of

1. The object of our trust and devotion.
2. The basis upon which we stand before God!

Are we standing before God on account of an experience? Do I have confidence to approach God because I have

- Led others to Christ?
- Been baptized?
- Read the Bible?
- Joined a church?

Or is my hope and confidence in Christ alone; His life and His death?

One Who Falls Short

I want to talk to the one who has heard all of this before and yet has fallen short. Rarely is there anything new from the pulpit... you've heard it all. You know the Bible stories... you've heard the appeals. You maybe even can testify to multiple experiences in God's Kingdom. But inside you are filled with doubts, unbelief, disinterest, rebellion.

Can I tell you why you are struggling this day?

It is not because you have a problem with the truth of God's word... for if you did you would have approached me long ago with questions. NO! It is because of two things: Your familiarity with the gospel and your commitment to self.

Familiarity with the Gospel

I love how Dr. John MacArthur describes the one who is familiar with the gospel.

“A vaccination immunizes by giving a very mild case of the disease. A person who is exposed to the gospel can get just enough of it to immunize him against the real thing. The longer he continues to resist it, whether graciously or violently, the more he becomes immune to it. His spiritual system becomes more and more unresponsive and insensitive.”⁶

Why is it that you remain unsaved today?

Because of your familiarity with Christ has bred contempt! You have heard the good news so often that it has become a mantra you know by heart but no longer can hear.

Wake up from your spiritual stupor! It is not too late! Listen to the gospel this morning for the first time.

As a sinner you are going to hell! Yet God became man and lived and died on behalf of the sinner. If you will rely upon His sacrifice alone as the payment for your sin, you will be saved! Yet that brings me to the second reason you have rejected Christ: The passing pleasures of sin.

Passing Pleasures of Sin

If it is not because you have grown bored with Christ, it is because you are in love with sin. Romans 7:14 speaks of the ones “sold unto sin.” In other words, it is describing ones who love their own sin!

This has damned more people than every other sin combined! You are an addict. Like the drunk or the anorexic... you are wasting away and you cannot see it.

Oh do not pursue your sin any longer- it leads only to death.

Rather, go to Christ this day and give Him yourself. Many a leper, an aids patient, an unwed mother has found comfort in this verse:

Matthew 11:28-30, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Wait no longer. Turn from your sin unto Christ and He will save you!

But what about the genuine believer?

In light of our text, where ought our focus to be?

First off know that is not an easy message either to hear or to preach. To the genuine believer, this undoubtedly will bring doubts and questions. That is quite natural.

⁶ Dr. John MacArthur, *Hebrews: New Testament Commentary (MacArthur New Testament Commentary Series)* Moody Publishers (September 8, 1983), Page 147, **ISBN-10:** 0802407536

Rope Climber

However you know what a message like this does to me?

I think of a climber hanging from a rope on a mountain face. He has fallen and so is hanging for dear life. And then the worst that could happen occurs... the wind picks up and begins to blow hard upon him.

If you were that climber, what would you do?

You would grasp on to the rope quite hard. You might squeeze so tight that your fingers cut your palms. That is the effect that this topic has on me. The wind has blown quite hard against our faith. Doubts and concerns no doubt have arisen.

But listen, all I know to do is to grab on to Christ... His grace... His mercies and compassion all the more. Let's do that this day!

Recall Peter's exhortation. As an eye-witness of the Transfiguration, Peter had all that he needed in order to be "a solid, steadfast Christian." And yet per his own testimony, the transfiguration did very little for his faith. Notice what he wrote in 2 Peter (for the sake of explanation, I'll use my paraphrase).

2 Peter 1:19-20, "And we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain [again this is in reference to the Mount of Transfiguration]. And [yet] we have the prophetic word [which is] more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place..."

Do you see Peter's focus? It wasn't

- An experience.
- A miracle.
- This provision or that.

It was

- The word of God which is the living, breathing, abiding word of Christ.
- Jesus His Lord
- His life.
- His work.
- His death.
- His resurrection.
- His grace.
- His mercy.
- His forgiveness.

If we are to be numbered among the genuine children of God, this, and this alone, must be our boast, confidence, and joy.

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About the Preacher

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