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Sham Christianity, Part 1

To speak of perspective is to dive into deep waters. The expression, “History is written by the victors” is one reason that when looking at a map detailing the struggles that occurred in the American-Indian war of the frontier, there are incongruities. Generally when the cowboys won, the victory is labeled a battle. However, when the Indians won it is labeled a massacre. For example, we speak of the Battle of Beecher Island, September 1868¹, and the Deerfield Massacre, of February 1704². However, if the victors were the Indians we probably see them differently today.

The truth is that in war, both sides are often guilty of waging battle AND both sides are often guilty of massacring innocent, defenseless people. And it oftentimes requires time and distance from the events to gain a different perspective on the matter.

The passage at which we are looking is powerful. When the history was taking place, no doubt wonder and amazement were aroused as Israel was introduced to their first king, his name was Saul. He was good looking... tall... dashing in appearance.³ Saul came from a good home with a great upbringing.⁴

¹ The Battle of Beecher Island, September 17-19, 1878 occurred in Yuma County, Colorado between approximately 700 of the Arapaho, Cheyenne, Sioux Indians and 51 regulars of the United States Army.

² This battle of the French and Indian war saw the 47 French and 200 Indian soldiers attacked the English Puritan settlement of Deerfield, Massachusetts whose armed strength consisted of 16 soldiers and 50 men settlers, along with 109 women and children. The women and children were then forced marched to Quebec with the French and Indians killed the stragglers. [The Redeemed Captive](#) recounts this story from 1704 from the perspective of Minister John Williams.

³ Compare 1 Samuel 9:2; 10:23

And the miraculous accompanied his ascension... as well as many victories.⁵ In fact, listen to the description of this man's regency, purely from a national perspective:

1 Samuel 14:47-48, "So Saul took the kingdom over Israel, and fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, and against the children of Ammon, and against Edom, and against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines: and whithersoever he turned himself, he vexed them. And he gathered an host, and smote the Amalekites, and delivered Israel out of the hands of them that spoiled them."

No doubt many a heart of a faithful Jew went out after Saul! And yet with time and distance, we have a different opinion of this man.

Yes! Saul was a king who epitomized the best that this world had to offer.⁶ Yet Biblical history remembers him as a blind, foolish, reprobate who was more concerned about appearance than the things of the Lord. Scripture indicates that he had no heart for God or the things of the Lord.⁷ Thus when word was passed around that Saul prophesied, what sticks out is the people's response. They were amazed.

1 Samuel 10:11, "And it came to pass, when all that knew him beforetime saw that, behold, he prophesied among the prophets, then the people said one to another, What is this that is come unto the son of Kish? **Is Saul also among the prophets?**"

In fact Saul's prophesying was so mind-boggling that it became a saying in Israel for when someone dared to speak the impossible.

"Did you hear? We just proved victorious over the Philistines! No way! We were out-gunned, out-manned, and out-maneuvered. Hey, is Saul among the prophets?"

The implication? If God could enable someone of the likes of Saul to prophesy, nothing is too difficult for Him!

Truly, Saul is remembered as a spiritually dead individual.

- When the time came for God to advance His Kingdom plan and anoint a King in Israel, Saul shrunk back and hid behind the baggage, 1 Samuel 10:22.
- He would have willingly killed Jonathan- his own son who was a man of integrity, boldness, and zeal for the Lord- had it not been for the people's intervention, 1 Samuel 14:44-45.
- He trampled underfoot the command of God and offered a sacrifice which only a priest could perform, 1 Samuel 15:1-9.
- Unlike the youthful David, he feared Goliath, 1 Samuel 17.
- He was tormented by a demon, 1 Samuel 18:10.
- He found himself at odds with a man after God's own heart- so much so that he wanted to kill him, 1 Samuel 18:10-16.
- He murdered God's priests, 1 Samuel 22:17-18.
- He consulted demons, 1 Samuel 28:6, 7, 8-14.

⁴ Compare 1 Samuel 9:1-5

⁵ Compare 1 Samuel 10:11; 11:11; 13:4; 14:20-23

⁶ Compare 1 Samuel 8:19-20

⁷ Compare 1 Samuel 9:6-7; 10:16

- He was more concerned for outward appearance than even his own crown. After the crown was ripped from his hand on account of his disobedience, notice the concern which weighed heavily upon Saul as he spoke to Samuel:

1 Samuel 15:30, “Then he said, I have sinned: **yet honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel**, and turn again with me, that I may worship the LORD thy God.”

Truly, Saul was a fool in sheep's clothing... a stranger to the things of the Lord.

And yet that's what makes our text all the more important. From the perspective of an eye witness of this account, you would have cause to be excited if you were an Israelite... encouraged at what God was doing. And your heart might go out to him.

Yet you would be wrong. For with time and distance, we look back upon Saul as a sham and his rise to the throne as one big show. Thus what we have in our passage are NOT the elements of the rise of a genuine king. Saul was nothing like

- David, who was God's choice when it came to what Israel needed in a king
- Hezekiah or Josiah — who faithfully served the Lord.
- Christ — THE King of kings and Lord of lords.

BUT Saul shows us that which was needed in order for an imposter to be recognized as a king. Accordingly our passage is rightly titled, “Sham Christianity” and so details NOT the rise of a genuine servant of Christ BUT the elements by which God's people concluded that this man was of God... the real deal.

Brothers and sisters, if you were to fake a conversion what elements might be involved? What do false servants and sham Christians have in common?

With Life Change

There are five elements listed here that show us the sham Christian. Let's look at them one by one...

I 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.”

From the outside looking in, this looks rather promising. We already have discovered that though on the surface there was no one like Saul in Israel, nevertheless he lacked an understanding of God.

When Saul determined that he needed to break off the search for his father's lost donkeys, “...lest my father cease to be concerned about the donkeys and become anxious for us” (1 Samuel 9:5b), it is conspicuous that his servant was the one who suggested that they go to Samuel AND that his servant took the lead.⁸ Thus to read here that God changed Saul's heart is possibly to conclude that the Lord here regenerated him.

Yet neither the text nor the subsequent history will allow for this interpretation. Aside from Saul's sordid

⁸ Compare 1 Samuel 9:6

history which I just detailed, the word for change in this text is not what you would expect when it came to describing the conversion of an individual in the Old Testament.⁹ The word rendered *give/changed* in our text comes from the Hebrew word, **תָּפַח** *Thaphak*. This word is used primarily three ways in the Old Testament.

First, the term is used showing the venting of God's wrath on Sodom and Gomorrah. Here the term is rendered *overthrow* or *annihilate*.

Genesis 19:21, "And he said unto him, See, I have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I will not **overthrow**¹⁰ this city, for the which thou hast spoken."

Genesis 19:25, "And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground."

Secondly it is used of the miracles surrounding Israel's exodus from Egypt and her pilgrimage in the wilderness. Here God is said to have *changed* or *turned*:

- The mind of Pharaoh and his servants, Exodus 14:5.
- The hearts of the Egyptians to hate Israel, Psalm 105:25.
- The sea into dry land, Psalm 66:6.
- The wind which drove the locusts into the Red Sea, Exodus 10:19.
- The rod into a serpent, Exodus 7:15.
- The rock unto a pool of water, Psalm 114:8.

Each of the changes recorded here do not reflect a change in the essential matter or character of someone or something, but simply its use or direction.

Thirdly, it is used of the change that occurred when a leper's hair turned white.¹¹

Leviticus 13:3, "And the priest shall look on the plague in the skin of the flesh: and when the hair in the plague is **turned**¹² white, and the plague in sight be deeper than the skin of his flesh, it is a plague of leprosy: and the priest shall look on him, and pronounce him unclean."

Now while there are other uses of this term which are less frequent than what I just referenced,¹³ none of them reflect the change we associate with conversion in the Bible. Rather as we saw when we considered 1 Samuel 10:6, the "change" referenced here is more akin to what we might term the turning over of a new leaf.

Truly as Saul departed from Samuel that day and headed home, something occurred in him that would be definitive for the rest of his life. In fact, the text indicates that the change primarily effected his heart/mind such that now he would have thought differently about God and the Lord's plan for his life. Whereas before, Saul knew nothing of Samuel, the nature of God's kingdom, the Lord's will for His people and how he fit into it all.

⁹ Think of Jacob (Genesis 32:24-32) or Manasseh (2 Chronicles 33:12-16).

¹⁰ *Kph* haphak

¹¹ Compare Leviticus 13:3, 4, 10, 13, 16, 17, 20, 25, 55.

¹² **תָּפַח** haphak

¹³ Compare also the Theological Word Book of the Old Testament, word #512

In fact, he may even have fought Samuel on the roof in 1 Samuel 9:25 when Samuel mentioned the need of a King in Israel, he said, “No! Not me! Are you sure you've got the right man? Why me?”

In contrast, now there was an acceptance of the reality of God, His covenant, and His plan to transform Israel into a monarchy.¹⁴ Henry Smith wrote of this : “as Saul turned to go from Samuel God gave him another understanding... the words do not seem inappropriate here, though they do not exactly correspond to the place of Saul's 'conversion'...”¹⁵ And Matthew Henry said this:

“A new fire was kindled in his breast, such as he had never before been acquainted with: seeking the asses is quite out of his mind, and he thinks of nothing but fighting the Philistines, redressing the grievances of Israel, making laws, administering justice, and providing for the public safety; these are the things that now fill his head... He has no longer the heart of a husbandman, which is low, and mean, and narrow, and concerned only about his corn and cattle; but the heart of a statesman, a general, a prince.”¹⁶

That's the change referenced in this text- the changing of

- Saul's mind.
- How he thought about God.
- The direction of his life.

And that's the change which is involved in most sham conversions. In genuine Christianity when a person becomes a follower of Christ, the ground upon which they stand, or their foundation, is that which is radically transformed. Prior to conversion, the person thinks that the labors of their hands can fulfill God's demands. And so they stand before God and the world on the basis of their own merit, conduct, and deeds. Yet after conversion the person now “boasts in God.”¹⁷ They approach the Lord on account of the righteousness of Christ.¹⁸ And so they look outside of themselves... to Christ and His cross-work, and therein rejoice.

In contrast, the sham Christian has had no such change. Thus when it comes to proof of their salvation, they appeal to a new

- Understanding.
- Direction.
- Purpose.

Yet the ground of their hope and confidence still remains themselves.

Oh Christian, what is your comfort and support this day? On what basis do you consider yourself to be saved?

¹⁴ Prior to this, Israel was a theocracy.

¹⁵ Henry Smith, Samuel, International Critical Commentary Series, T. & T. Clark Publishers (April 1987), **ISBN-10:** 056705005X Page 70. This Commentary Series is available from Google Books and can be downloaded in PDF format.

¹⁶ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary in One Volume (Hardcover)*, Zondervan (1960), **ASIN:** B000FTMB58 page 295. This volume can also be downloaded from <http://www.onlinebible.net> for free.

¹⁷ Compare Galatians 6:14

¹⁸ Compare Philippians 3:9

If you look to the past, to a conversion experience, or if you point to a moment in time when the direction of your life changed, or if your hope and confidence is rooted in an experience you had with the divine then it may very well be that you are not saved.

Saul, Demas, Alexander the coppersmith, Simon the magician, and many more all could have spoke of such things. Yet the one thing they lacked was this:

- Rejoicing in Christ.
- Trusting in His cross work alone for their salvation.
- Boasting in the Lord.

I love the account of Manasseh's conversion detailed in 2 Chronicles. You must know that this king was THE worst of all the kings combined in both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. He brought child sacrifice to Israel. He introduced God's people to the perverse and wretched worship of Molech. He passed Israelites through the fire to appease his false gods, in other words, he burnt people alive. He even sacrificed his own son to Molech.¹⁹ And he did many, many more things. In fact it was so bad that God said this:

2 Kings 21:11, "Because Manasseh king of Judah hath done these abominations, and hath done wickedly above all that the Amorites did, which were before him, and hath made Judah also to sin with his idols:"

2 Kings 21:14, "And I will forsake the remnant of mine inheritance, and deliver them into the hand of their enemies; and they shall become a prey and a spoil to all their enemies."

Amazing! The theocratic promise that God made to His people in Exodus 19:6²⁰ here comes to an end! Because of Manasseh, the theocracy would forever be destroyed!

2 Kings 23:26-27, "Notwithstanding the LORD turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal. And the LORD said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there."

Truly Manasseh was a wicked man! And yet toward the end of his life God redeemed him, bringing him from death to life.

2 Chronicles 33:12-13, "And when he was in affliction, he besought the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, And prayed unto him: and he [God] was intreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD he was God."

2 Chronicles 33:15-16, "And he took away the strange gods, and the idol out of the house of the LORD, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the LORD, and in Jerusalem, and cast them out of the city. And he repaired the altar of the LORD, and sacrificed thereon peace offerings and thank offerings, and commanded Judah to serve the LORD God of

¹⁹ Compare 2 Kings 21:6

²⁰ Compare also Leviticus 26:14-43

Israel.”

In contrast to Saul, notice the elements of Manasseh's changed heart. In involved

- The loathing of self and humiliation.
- The calling out to God.
- The turning from self-trust and idols to the Lord.
- The active pursuit of God's worship.
- And the longing for the rest of God's people to do the same.

We see the same elements in the conversion promised by God with regard to His people in Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 36:26-27, “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.”

Ezekiel 36:28b-29, “and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. I will also save you from all your uncleannesses: and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you.”

Ezekiel 36:31, “Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall lothe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations.”

Brothers and sisters, if you have not known this

- Mourning.
- Transfer of trust.
- Clinging to Christ and His righteousness alone for your salvation.

But if instead your boast is in

- An experience.
- The turning over of a new leaf.
- The labors of your hands.

Then with Saul you ought to be concerned for the state of your soul this day.

Everyone boasts in something. And as Christians we are called to boast in Christ.

Galatians 6:14, “But God forbid that I should glory²¹, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.”

Yet what does this mean? Recall that boasting or glorying primarily deals with what a man hopes in or relies upon, specifically when it comes to approaching God. And thus, to understand this word we begin with a simple question: On what basis will a man stand before God?

Do you remember in the ancient days, as in the book of Esther, how no man, woman, or child could

²¹ καυχασομαι kauchaomai

approach a king without good reason? For example, in antiquity if you saw a king walking and you attempted to approach him without being summoned, you most likely would be killed. Truly, anyone who was granted the ear of the king had to stand before him on the right BASIS. Perhaps yours was the news of war. Or maybe you yourself were royalty. Regardless, you had to have credentials to speak to a king.

It is in light of this that I again ask the question, “On what basis will a man stand before God?”

Now in the Bible, there are only two options when it comes to answering this question. One can approach God on the basis of his own merits, or one can approach God on the basis of the merits of another.

Now get this, on the last day, there will be many who approach God on their own merits.

- I'm generally a nice person.
- I haven't murdered anyone.
- I live by the golden rule.
- I go to church.

And yet because of their sin (and it only takes one), God will cast them from His presence.

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.”

Brothers and sisters don't miss it... The only way a person will be able to stand before God will be if they do so on the basis of Christ! Yet what does this mean?

Because of our sin, there is nothing we can do to merit God's approval... acceptance of us. Yet did you know God became man, upheld the law perfectly, and then died in our place? Accordingly, the change that accompanies a genuine Christian, not a sham Christian, is when a person no longer “boasts” in his own good works BUT instead “boasts” in Christ!

Galatians 6:14, “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.”

Philippians 3:3, “For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”

Accordingly I urge you this day, don't be a follower of King Saul and so remain under God's wrath. Turn from all self-trust unto Christ. In the words of Wilhelmus a Brakel:

“This Jesus, who is good and true, invites you in a most friendly manner to receive Him and to surrender yourself fully to Him, assuring you that upon coming He will not cast you out, but will most certainly take you to Himself into eternal felicity. Should you not listen to such a God who calls, and to such a Jesus who extends such a friendly invitation? Shall this not move your heart?”²²

²² Wilhelmus a Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, Volumes 1 and II, (Simpsonville, SC, Christian Classics Foundation), 1997 (Currently published by RHB, ISBN#: 1877611565 and available from [Monergism Books](#)).

Oh won't you go to Christ this day and receive such a gift?

All you need to do is bow your heart before him. Confess that you cannot save yourself. Accept the sacrifice of Christ as your own. Simply stand before God now and forevermore on the basis of His life and death. If you simply will come to Christ, He will by no means cast you out.²³

About Bethel Presbyterian Church

The Bethel Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word is published regularly.

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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.

All our sermons can be accessed via the World Wide Web. The recording for this sermon and these notes can be found at [Counterfeit Christian](#). The web address for all sermons at Bethel Presbyterian Church can be found out as follows: <http://bethelpresbyterian.sermonaudio.com>

About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on June 3, 2007. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.

²³ Compare John 6:37