

Broomfield



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Religious Pretense, Part 4

Vanity

The books of Ecclesiastes and Proverbs are a most important study for the child of God. They largely were written by King Solomon throughout his life, and thus contain the reflections of a man of God who enjoyed everything that a worldling could ever want or ask for in this life.

Early in his reign, Solomon was asked by God to request anything that he wanted and God would give it to him. Solomon requested wisdom! He desired the ability to apply God's word to his life. He desired an intimate and close walk with the Lord.

In response, God gave him wisdom and much, much more.¹ From this point on Solomon enjoyed the best that this world could offer including the passing pleasures of sin!

Thus in the Wisdom Books penned by Solomon, the King describe the excesses of life. They paint a picture of the gems of beauty that are so coveted by earthlings. And he shows the life that accompanies power, wealth, and prestige. He concludes that it all is passing, empty, and therefore not worthy of our affection as children of God; it truly is vanity!

For example, consider wealth. Everyone of us wouldn't mind having more of it. But Solomon said, "Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom. Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven" (Proverbs 23:4-5). How sad it is to spend 20, 30, 40 years of your life living to gain the world, and yet in the end to lose or forfeit your soul! What a shock to spend your life laboring for the passing things of this world only to find that in the end they have let you down! Solomon is giving us a glimpse into Christ's parable of the land owner who thought that he was set because he had gathered many crops into his barns.

Luke 12:20, "But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?"

Truly, "In the end," says Solomon, "Most of the things in this world will fail us" — including religious pretense!

¹ Compare 2 Chronicles 1:11-12

Shiloh

The passage at hand describes the conditions of 1104 BC. The Philistines have decided to attack Israel because Samson has been plaguing them. And they decide to attack at Israel's most sacred spot, Shiloh. Our text finds God's people situated 20 miles west of Shiloh at a city called Ebenezer where they have engaged the Philistines in battle.

Now, on the first day of battle, God's people are soundly defeated. Accordingly these spiritually sick, if not dead, people become religious, and so opt to bring the Ark of the Covenant to the battlefield trusting that it would deliver them.

Our text is the record of what religious activity void of Christ produces!

It now is the second day of battle, the ark is on the field of battle, and God's people have engaged the enemy.

1 Samuel 4:10 - 11, “And the Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent: and there was a very great slaughter; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen
And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain.”

Notice the contrast to the fighting that occurred the day before. In that engagement only 4,000 men died bravely on the battlefield. No one fled. They all died with their weapons in their hands endeavoring to protect Shiloh from the Philistines. And yet in the battle referenced in verses 10-11, it is quite a different story. We read five very shocking statements:

- Israel was defeated. The term rendered *defeated* or *smitten*² is a strong word in the Hebrew. It was used in reference to being struck with or suffering from disease or pestilence. It denotes a blow which is fatal or disastrous. For example, it is used of a miscarriage or more accurately, an abortion.³ And it refers to the plagues of Egypt.⁴ And thus in their second battle against the Philistines, Israel was crushed!
- Secondly notice, every man fled to his tent. This is such a far cry from the day before where valiant soldiers died fighting. Here we read that they are fleeing, and so presumably are being struck down from behind!
- Thirdly notice that the slaughter was very great⁵. Of the forty-eight occurrences of this word in the Old Testament thirty-two are translated in the Septuagint *plague*. And hence, the word denotes intense devastation involving great loss of life. Picture bodies strewn everywhere; death and destruction seen for mile and one grasps the meaning of this term. Indeed, Israel's loss wasn't pretty for “there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers.” Again we could translate this as 30 units of men, however the language of this passage is one of intense devastation which would comport better with a figure of 30,000.
- Now if this wasn't bad enough, notice fourthly that the Ark was taken. As a means of deliverance, the Ark was nothing more than a wooden box overlaid with gold. But as a sacrament — a means by which God issued forth His grace — this represents a greater loss than 30,000 men. In fact,

² נָגַף nagaph

³ Compare Exodus 21:22-25. Because of Exodus 21:24-25, it is believed that the fight of Exodus 21:22 resulted in a live birth. However if further injury occurred (cf. Exodus 21:23) that is, the baby was killed/aborted- there should be life for life (cf. Exodus 21:24-25)!

⁴ Compare also Numbers 16:46

⁵ מִקְהָה makkah

- this kind of devastation would only be paralleled when, in 586 BC, Jerusalem fell and the Temple was ransacked! The loss of the Ark was so devastating because this was the vessel by which God communed with His people! This was the heart and soul of the covenant! So with the lost Ark, Israel's relationship with God was severed! And thus, God's people were bereft, abandoned, forlorn, without hope, comfort, promise or God
- And to make matters worse, notice fifthly that the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died. These two men were the future High Priests of Israel. In other words, next to Eli they were the most important men in Israel. AND THEY WERE KILLED!⁶

In fact for a variety of reasons we know that following this battle, the Philistines advanced on Shiloh and destroyed it!⁷ Listen to the divine commentary on this history:

Psalm 78:60-62, “So that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men; And delivered his strength [the Ark] into captivity, and his glory into the enemy’s hand. He gave his people over also unto the sword; and was wroth with his inheritance.”

Psalm 78:64, “Their priests fell by the sword; and their widows made no lamentation.”

This passage pictures a huge disparity between the two battles which are being described here. In 1 Samuel 4:2, God's people were beaten. In 1 Samuel 4:10-11, God's people were slaughtered, devastated, and ruined!

The difference between the two battles is the object of their trust.⁸ In the first battle, rebellious Israel [which was the cause of their defeat] was fighting in reliance upon God. In the second, rebellious Israel was fighting in reliance upon a religious icon — the Ark.

As readers we should be left with the obvious conclusion: RELIGIOUS PRETENSE KILLS! IT DESTROYS ITS ADHERENTS! IT RESULTS IN UNTOLD SORROW AND SUFFERING! AND IT LEADS TO COMPLETE AND TOTAL DEVASTATION!

From this I hope you see the failure of religious pretense. It not only will let the worshipper down but it also will leave them in a precarious situation. This has always been the result of religious pretense.

The Failure of Religious Pretense

Christ said this about the demon-possessed man that “found religion.”

Matthew 12:43-45, “When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the

⁶ Robert Bergen wrote, "For the first time in history Israel's most sacred material possession was now in the hands of pagans, and its two most powerful active priests had died at the hands of the infidels." (1, 2 Samuel, NAC, page 92).

⁷ That being the promise of God in 1 Samuel 2:32 (in which the Lord said that Israel would see the distress of God's dwelling in Shiloh). The fact that after this time, we read that the focus of Samuel's ministry shifted away from Shiloh to Ramah (1 Samuel 7:15-17, 5). Future priests could only be found at Nob (1 Samuel 21:1; 22:9, 11). The words of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 7:12-15) which indicate that Shiloh wasn't just abandoned, but laid to waste.

⁸ In the words of Walter Brueggemann, "Their defeat with the ark is even more devastating than the defeat without the ark" (*First and Second Samuel*, page 29).

last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation."

What a graphic picture. Prior to becoming "religious" the person indeed had his problems. But upon gaining "religion" the person finds himself in a state seven times as bad! This is the effect of religious shows.

Christ tells us why this happens.

Matthew 23:25-28, Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whitened sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity."

External acts of godliness and devotion do not cleanse a man from sin. At best they only mask his sinful heart and make him more culpable. Thus, while the world and maybe even the person himself are duped into thinking that they are holy, upright, and godly inside they are filled with the rottenness of death! In fact these "religious" people can expect this from God on the Day of Judgment:

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."

Oh what a shock there will be on the last day. Thousands upon thousands of men and women who trusted in a religious system to save them will come before God. And rather than hearing, "Your great acts of devotion have impressed Me!" They will hear, "Be gone! Your Religion has ruined you!"

And yet this is not the half of it- for it gets far worse.

Romans 2:11-12, "For there is no respect of persons with God. For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law."

Those who have never heard about Christ will be damned. But those who have rejected Christ in favor of a religious show will be judged. The term judged is a stronger word than perish. It means that they will suffer a stricter form of punishment than the pagan. They will bear greater pain and a deeper pit in hell. This ultimately is the wages of religious pretense!

Let us beware of practicing our righteousness before man! Let us beware of placing confidence and trust in a spiritual discipline or practice. Let us forsake religious pretense!

If you profess Christ, if you preach about Him, teach about Him, hear about Him, read about Him, talk about Him, discuss Him, dispute about Him, and take His name to your mouth but do not walk with Him or trust in Him then He will be of no more help to you than was the Ark to Israel!

It is not enough to claim Christ, you must walk with Him!

It is not enough that you look holy, you must have been made holy by the blood of the Lamb.⁹

Warning to Children

Children listen to me this day because you are particularly vulnerable to religious pretense. You are greatly blessed to be children of the Covenant. You have the word of God. Your mom and dad love you and pray for you. This body has committed itself to serving you. You are being taught things into which angels have longed to look. And your temptation will be to think that on account of these privileges God is pleased with you.

Listen, don't confuse Christ with the means that He has given for you to walk with Him; i.e., Bible reading, theological education, Scripture memory, worship, and the Sacraments. Rather strive to make Him your own. Trust Christ. Serve Christ. Cultivate a walk with Christ.

Warning to Adults

And yet the same warning can be said all the adults. Yes, become people of the book, men and women who love worship, and strive to serve and honor Christ in all that you do. But in and through it all, beware that you do not slip and find yourself trusting in your religious activity.

Crime and Caution

1 Samuel 4:1a, “And the word of Samuel came to all Israel.”

It is not a mistake that this phrase precedes our current section. The first seven chapters of 1 Samuel were written to verify and authenticate Samuel as a true prophet of the Lord. These chapters show how God establishes the Kingdom of David!

We are at a time in Redemptive history where we discover that no longer are visions rare¹⁰ or God is mute neither are God's people left to follow wicked and evil men. Indeed it is through Samuel that God has spoken to His people. It is through Samuel that God leads His people. It is through Samuel that the Lord manifests His will to His people.

1 Samuel 3:21-4:1a, “And the LORD appeared again in Shiloh: for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD. And the word of Samuel came to all Israel.”

From this we get a glimpse at THE CRIME involved when God's people fall into religious pretense.

One doesn't find religious pretense where true religion is not found. It is found in spite of true religion.

Religious pretense is not found where the gospel is not being preached but in the words of Christ “men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19b).

If given the choice between a relationship with an infinite, eternal, and unchangeable Being **or** a religion of ascendancy whereby we gain the right to enter into God's presence we will choose the religious show every time!

⁹ Compare Hebrews 12:14

¹⁰ Compare 1 Samuel 3:1

And so we see the CRIME of Religious Pretense. Again it exists NOT in the absence of true religion BUT in spite of it!

How can one safeguard your heart from Religious Pretense? How can you get away from "pick me up" Christianity which views God in much the same way as the addict his drug?

Paul answers that question for us.

Paul wrote 1 Timothy to a pastor. Timothy was struggling with his first charge as a preacher. He was placed by God in Ephesus to oversee the souls of men and women who were hostile to him and God. Now if this wasn't bad enough, there also were the winds of error that were circulating throughout the congregation. False teachers arose spouting teachings that were contrary to God's word.¹¹ They were advocating a doctrine of asceticism by which the Christian would be made more acceptable to God.

So Paul instructed Timothy as to what he should do.

1 Timothy 4:1-5, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer."

Apparently these false teachers were advocating abstinence from marriage and from foods as a means to be more pleasing to God. In light of this, Paul tells Timothy to boldly expose these false teachers for what they were- charlatans.¹² And then he gives this instruction:

1 Timothy 4:7-8, "But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."

Based on the context, do you see the contrast?

"Worldly fables" and "bodily discipline" clearly are in reference to the religious asceticism that was being espoused by the false teachers — the religious forms that you and I so often rely upon. In contrast, the child of God is to discipline himself for the purpose of godliness! And how do we do that? Notice the verses here.

Self Discipline for Godliness

1 Timothy 4:6, ".If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained."

¹¹ Compare 1 Timothy 1:6-7

¹² Compare 1 Timothy 4:6

Based on this we understand that godliness is cultivated. As we are nourished on the words of faith and sound doctrine, and as we endeavor to practice it/live it out in our lives. In other words, not only must we seek to commune with Christ through His word. But we must endeavor to continue to commune with Him as we sit in the house, walk by the way, lie down, and rise up. We must know the gospel and follow it. And then

1 Timothy 4:10, “For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.”

This is the final puzzle piece which completes the picture. Not only do we strive to know the gospel and live it, but in and through it all we place our hope NOT in the religious activities that God has given for us to know Him BUT in the living God!

In fact, this is the bottom line — in and through all things has Christ remained your hope?!

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About the Preacher

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