



**BETHEL**  
PRESBYTERIAN

# **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

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## **Sham Christianity, Part 3**

### **Warnings against False Belief**

Scripture is filled with warnings, exhortations, and examples designed to make sure that Christ's saving grace is operative in our lives. Heretofore I've referenced a couple of them. Both Peter and Paul exhort this way:

2 Peter 1:10, "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall:"

2 Corinthians 13:5, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?"

And yet there are many, many more.

James 2:19, "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble."

Believing in monotheism is not grounds to think that you are saved. No! James says that we must base our salvation on something else. Speaking of the false Christian, Paul said this:

Titus 1:16, “They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.”

Truly not all who profess knowledge of God are saved. Many in Paul's day said the right things but in the end were lost. Along these lines John wrote:

1 John 2:4, “He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”

John gives a scenario of a person that professes faith in Christ and yet is deluded. His understanding of salvation is flawed, and he is not saved. Brothers and sisters, it is imperative that we know for certain that we are saved. For truly on the last day many who. . .

- Occupied church pews.
- Went on mission trips.
- Grew up in a youth group.
- Were baptized.
- Professed a love and a devotion to Christ.

Will be lost!

The CHURCH in Laodicea — an entire church — received these shocking words from Christ:

Revelation 3:15-16, “I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.”

I hope you see from this that you can't take refuge in your church attendance, membership, or baptism. Indeed! Salvation is housed not in the church we attend — even church members can be spit out of Christ's mouth. In fact forgive me for the strong statement but,

- Are you a spit wad? Someone who someday God is going to spit out of His mouth?
- Are you a false believer?
- Is your Christianity a fake?
- Are you a SHAM?

This morning we look at a text which helps us as we answer this question. This passage 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 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. The characteristics mentioned here do not testify to salvation. While they may accompany Genuine Christianity, they are not its proof.

## **Based on Experience**

Accordingly let's continue in our examination of Sham Christianity. Thus far we have seen that it is not

without a life change. It is accompanied by incredible resources. And now we will see that it is not void of experience.

1 Samuel 10:10, “And when they came thither to the hill, behold, a company of prophets met him; and the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them.”

I mentioned this in conjunction with verses 5-6, but of the three testifying signs this is the most important. It testified NOT ONLY to the fact that, as Saul endeavored to fulfill his calling, God's enabling grace would be with him (what a wonderful promise of assurance!). BUT of the three signs which authenticated the prophetic message, this was the only sign which Samuel could not have “pre-arranged.” The first two signs could have been fabricated. Of course we cannot think of Samuel doing this but still, the possibility existed. Yet with this last sign, all doubt is banished.

In light of this (and other reasons<sup>1</sup>) the spotlight here is being directed to this profound experience where the Spirit of God descended upon Saul and radically engifted him for service. Let's look at it in more detail.

1 Samuel 10:10, “**And when they came thither to the hill**, behold, a company of prophets met him; and the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them.”

Again, the “hill” in this verse was Gibeat-ha-Elohim, a mound approximately three miles north of Jerusalem. This was a high place which heretofore was closely associated with the worship of God. Accordingly, this “hill of God” was so important that a small city named Gibeath sprung up there.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore as a holy place it served as the home for an order of prophets.

Yet unfortunately at this time, this sacred place was under the control of the Philistines on account of the “garrison” stationed there. So when he came to this holy hill:

1 Samuel 10:10, “And when they came thither to the hill, **behold, a company of prophets met him**; and the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them.”

Just as Samuel predicted<sup>3</sup> Saul met this band of prophets which had attached themselves to this high place. This would have been one of many orders which dotted the landscape of Israel. In the words of Ronald Youngblood:

“The beginnings of the Israelite monarchy witnessed the emergence of a prophetic movement known as the 'sons of the prophets' (cf. 1 Kings 20:35). 'Sons' is used here in the sense of 'members of a group'... The bands or companies... were often large in number (50... 100...). They were frequently associated with time-honored places, often at or near shrines, such as Ramah (19:18-20), Bethel (2 Kings 2:3), Jericho (2:5), and Gilgal (4:38).”

“Members of prophetic bands were often young (2 Kings 5:22; 9:40); they frequently lived together (2 Kings 6:1-2), ate together (2 Kings 4:38), and were supported by the generosity of their fellow Israelites (2 Kings 4:42-43). Such characteristics led the church father Jerome to refer

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the response of the people to this third sign demonstrated Saul's godless character before and after the sign.

<sup>2</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 10:5

<sup>3</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 10:5

to them as the 'monks of the OT'..."<sup>4</sup>

In fact these prophetic orders were so common in Israel at this time that we are not surprised to discover that Samuel himself was the head of one of them. In 1 Samuel 19 David is fleeing for his life from Saul:

1 Samuel 19:18-20, "So David fled, and escaped, and came to Samuel to Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done to him. And he and Samuel went and dwelt in Naioth. And it was told Saul, saying, Behold, David is at Naioth in Ramah. And Saul sent messengers to take David: and when they saw the company of the prophets prophesying, **and Samuel standing as appointed over them**, the Spirit of God was upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied."

And so as Saul approached Gibeath-ei Elohim, he met a prophetic order most likely returning from worship. And just as Samuel predicted, the Spirit of God came upon him mightily, so that he prophesied among them: in the words of the NRSV, Saul fell into "prophetic frenzy."

Prophesying as referenced here involved a profound experience wherein the participant's faculties were moved along by the Spirit of God.<sup>5</sup> This is not to say that the individual lost control of themselves or that they entered into an altered state. Rather, listen to the words of Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 20:8-9, "For since I spake, I cried out, I cried violence and spoil; because the word of the LORD was made a reproach unto me, and a derision, daily. Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay."

Jeremiah had a unique calling, to preach a message to a people who not only would not hear, but would persecute him as a result.

That is more in line with the "prophetic frenzy" referenced here of Saul. A compulsion to speak a message from God came upon him such that he could not hold it in. One moment he was walking along the road, carefree and oblivious to the things of the Lord. The next, he found himself burdened with a message of the Lord... a message of His kingdom... a message of His glory.

And what was to account for this compulsion to proclaim the word of the Lord?

1 Samuel 10:10, "And when they came thither to the hill, behold, a company of prophets met him; **and the Spirit of God came upon him**, and he prophesied among them."

The text says, "the Spirit of God came upon him mightily" (NASB). Again we must not take this as a description of a conversion. For, just as quickly as the Spirit of God came upon Saul in this text, we read that this Holy Comforter just as quickly left and was replaced by a demon.

1 Samuel 16:14, "But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him."

And lest there be any question, the text adds to this an important detail not crucial to the miracle, but

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<sup>4</sup> Ronald Youngblood, *Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, Volume 3*, [\*The Expositor's Bible Commentary\*](#), Zondervan, July, 1992, ISBN: 0310364507 pages, 624-626

<sup>5</sup> Compare 2 Peter 1:21

certainly crucial to our interpretation of it.

1 Samuel 10:11-12, “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? And one of the same place answered and said, But who is their father? Therefore it became a proverb, Is Saul also among the prophets?”

This is amazing. Saul's reputation amongst his fellow countrymen at this time was that he was the furthest thing you could get from a man of God.<sup>6</sup> In fact, Saul's prophesying was so mind-boggling that it became a saying in Israel for when the impossible became a reality.<sup>7</sup>

- 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?<sup>8</sup>

Truly Saul was and would continue to be a reprobate amongst God's people (as the subsequent history overwhelmingly demonstrates). Accordingly that we read here that “the Spirit of God came upon him mightily” tells us that even the most profound experience is no proof that a person is saved.

From this text we conclude that you can participate in a profound happening involving even the Spirit of God and yet in the end you could lose your soul. Salvation is not based upon what we experience! We see this truth throughout Scripture.

In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul is writing to a church struggling with sin. Divisions were rampant. And so was an immorality rarely named among the Gentiles.<sup>9</sup> In the process of rebuking this congregation, Paul addressed the issue of spiritual gifts since that had become their focus. To a congregation enamored with outward demonstrations of holiness and devotion, Paul set out to teach them NOT ONLY that the greatest and most important gift that any person could receive from God was love BUT that without love; their salvation amounted to a zero!

1 John 4:20, “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar<sup>10</sup>: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?”

Now we're not talking here if you lack an amount of love, love is a difficult virtue in your life, or at times you act quite the opposite of love. No! Rather if you lack love in its entirety — kingdom love, the love of Christ — the Bible would indicate that you lack spiritual life!

Accordingly notice what a person could experience as a member of a church in the Apostolic age and yet

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<sup>6</sup> Amongst my commentaries there are an equal number of suggestions that this phrase is negative as there are statements that this is positive. I obviously am siding here with those who take the expression as a positive statement reflecting amazement over a working of God (compare 1 Sam. 19:24 where it is used as an expression of impossibility).

<sup>7</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 19:24

<sup>8</sup> For this to remain a saying, Saul would have had to remain a reprobate after the signs. If Saul's reputation henceforth were that of a man of God, the use of this expression would not have been appropriate. “Is Saul among the prophets? Why, yes!” But if he remained a rebel, there would have been grounds for the continuation of this expression in the context of the unbelievable.

<sup>9</sup> Compare 1 Corinthians 15:1

<sup>10</sup>This could be rendered deluded.

still be a zero when it comes to salvation.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.”

Truly! You can experience all sorts of “Spiritual” things in this life. You can

- Speak with a golden tongue.
- Prophecy.
- Be given profound insight into spiritual realities.
- Be known as a man or woman of great faith.
- Be generous with your money.
- Even die a martyr's death.

And yet in and through all of these things it still is possible to fall short of love, to fall short of salvation! Again may we never forget.

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.”

So once again we are brought to a crucial point. What constitutes salvation? On what does a person's right-standing with God depend?

Already we've seen that it does NOT depend upon a heart change, the resources you possess in Christ, **\*\*or\*\*** An experience.

- Going forward at a crusade.
- Feeling goose bumps upon hearing about Christ.
- Participating in a Bible study.
- Signing a card.
- Hearing a voice.
- Being “slain in the spirit.”
- Speaking in tongues.

None of this is the ground upon which to base your salvation.

Well, what is the ground or basis for genuine salvation?

To answer this I want you to turn again with me to Romans 3.

Last time we saw that Romans is an epistle written to introduce Paul to this church. See, it was Paul's desire to go to Spain.<sup>11</sup> And yet this presented a problem for none of the churches which heretofore had

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<sup>11</sup> Compare Romans 15:24

helped him were far enough west to be of any assistance. He needed a church much closer to this land... and that church was the church in Rome.

Accordingly Paul's intention was through this epistle to introduce not only himself, but also his teaching to this body. And what an introduction!

The one book in Scripture that is as close to a systematic theology textbook is Romans.

- In chapter 1 Paul establishes the fact that ALL Gentiles without Christ are doomed.
- In chapter 2 he teaches the same with regard to the Jew.
- In chapter 3 he brings it to a climax as he demonstrates that ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Now nestled in Paul's discussion is an important statement of what constitutes genuine salvation.

Romans 3:21, "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets."

Apart from any nuance, hint, or breath that we must do such and such in order to be saved, Paul is reminding us that man had been created under the Covenant of Works. Instilled in us is the passion to earn the right to stand before God. Accordingly, we are born with a longing to work our way to God. Every religion outside of Christianity attests to this fact.

And yet herein is the good news... Paul says here that APART FROM LAW KEEPING, that God's righteousness is manifested. This manifesting is more than simply "being seen." Rather it involves an imputation whereby the sinner stands before God acceptable, morally blameless, and righteous.

And so while no amount of law keeping can save a man, nevertheless "the righteousness of God" — Christ's own right standing before the law — has been revealed salvifically in the lives of certain individuals, namely the law and the prophets.

Romans 3:21, "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets."

Paul is not teaching a new message. This truth can be traced back, thru the law and the prophets, to the very beginning! And thus we read these words of Paul:

Galatians 3:8, "And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed."

Truly salvation apart from law keeping has been a message proclaimed throughout God's word, both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Romans 3:22, "Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:"

This passage is talking about the right standing before God which is acquired thru faith in Jesus Christ by all those who rely upon Christ alone for their salvation. See, Jesus Christ is God. And as God, He deigned to become a man thereby placing Himself under the covenant of works. And he deigned to uphold the

law perfectly, He did not sin or falter even at one point. And then He died in the place of the sinner who deserved death on account of his transgression.

Herein we discover the plan of God's salvation and so THE BASIS upon which the sinner can stand before God!

How can a man be saved?

If it is not on account of a life change, the gifts you have received from God, or an experience, then on what basis can a man stand before God and be accepted?

One can be saved only on account of the righteousness of Christ, which again is what ultimately was pictured in the Old Testament sacrificial system. In the Old Testament a sinner could bring a spotless lamb to God, lay his hands upon its head, and confess his sin which symbolically transferred his guilt and thereby he was ceremonially cleansed.

Well brothers and sisters by this ritual God was teaching the only means by which a person could be saved. Notice it is not by the blood of bulls or goats but by the blood of Christ sacrificed on account of our sin.

Accordingly if you will place your hands upon His thorn-pierced brow (do you see now why He had to wear the crown of thorns on His head?) confess your sin, God will by all means cleanse you from all your unrighteousness.

This is the only basis upon which a man can stand before God!

Oh family of God, don't miss it. There will come a day when we, like Moses standing before the burning bush, will behold God face to face. And at that time He will ask you, as He asked Moses, "What do you hold in your hand?"

If on that day you are found to be holding.

- Your works.
- An experience.
- A trite saying.
- A morally enviable life.
- Or anything else besides Christ.

Then I bear you witness today that you will hear those awful words, "Depart from Me!" (Matthew 7:23).

But if on that day you are found to be holding in your hand

- Christ.
- His sacrifice alone.

then you will receive that glorious summons, "Well done, good and faithful slave... enter into the joy of your master" (Matthew 25:21). Truly Christ alone is the only basis upon which we can be saved!

But you say, "But my grip is so feeble. I scarcely grasp on to Christ that I discover my other hand



reaching for gilded toys of dust.”

Yet herein there also is good news. It is not the strength of your grip that matters. Nor is it the purity or fidelity of your faith. What matters is God's grip on you! Indeed, it is not who you are or what you've done that matters in the Kingdom of God, but WHOSE you are. And it is not how true and firm is your grip on grace, but God's grip on you!

Where did the prodigal meet his dad?

The text clearly indicates that he met him IN THE FOREIGN LAND IN WHICH HE WAS LOST. The prodigal wasn't left to search for his father in order to attain forgiveness. NO! His father was chasing after him!

That you have turned again to Christ is evidence that Christ first has sought you!

1 John 4:19, “We love him, because he first loved us.”

Accordingly may we not leave here this day without verifying what exactly is in our hands! Is our hope and confidence Christ? Or is it something else?

Let's close this service confessing our reliance upon the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

## **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 (10<sup>th</sup> 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 [Trust Your Experience?](#). 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 24, 2007. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.