

Warning to a Religious Pagan

A religious pagan. Two contradictory terms. King Saul was both. He was religious in his ritual, but pagan in his heart.

King Saul is an important Bible character for us to study because we live in a time when religious activity is easily confused with true spirituality.

Read 1 Samuel 15:10-35

- I. Background Issues. We examined these two weeks ago (see “Hack Your Agag to Pieces,” 6/27/2010). Here is a short review of what we studied.
 - A. Theological Issues related to the slaughter of the Amalekites
 1. I am not God
 - a. God’s judgments are true.
 - b. What He declares is by its very nature morally right
 2. I am not Israel. Israel was the instrument of God’s justice during this period. God dwelt with them in a physical manner through the Shekinah glory. He demonstrated His holiness among them and demanded that they live pure and holy lives. He was giving them a special land. God is working in a different manner today. Civil government has been established by God. The church has not been given civil authority like Israel was given.
 3. I am not an Amalekites.
 - a. This was the first gentile nation to attack Israel. They attacked Israel as they began their journey from Egypt and God promised that He would destroy the nation of the Amalekites for their transgressions.
 - b. This nation practiced generations of child sacrifice
 - c. God delayed his promised punishment for 400 years, to demonstrate that the Amalekites were a completely wicked people.
 4. I am not the Center of the Universe. The focus is on God, not me.
 - B. Does God Change His Mind? Another question that arises from this passage is found in 1 Samuel 15:11, especially as it reads in the KJV. “*It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: ...*” This is not the only passage that some have used to attack God’s sovereignty.
 1. Genesis 6:6 (KJV) *And it repented the LORD that he had made man*

on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.

2. Answer.
 - a. “Repent” is better “grieved.”
 - b. *“The repentance of God is an anthropomorphic expression for the pain of the divine love at the sin of man”* (Kiel and Delitzsch, “Commentary on the OT, vol 1, sv. Gen 6:6)
 - c. The focus here is God’s **grief**, not his change of mind.
 - d. It is like a father giving his son an assignment to do. Upon returning home, he discovers that the assignment was not completed. The father is GRIEVED, at the son’s disobedience. He does not REGRET giving the assignment. Giving the assignment was not a mistake. The son’s action is the source of the disappointment.
 - e. Further, we know from this very passage that God is not admitting that He could not make up His mind. We read in 1 Samuel 15:29 *He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind.”*

Other passages...

 - f. **Malachi 3:6** *“I the LORD do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.*
 - g. **James 1:17** *Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.*

- C. Was Saul a Believer? This question effects the application that we will receive from the passage.
 1. Some argue that Saul was a true believer because:
 - a. He was anointed King. (*“See whom the Lord hath chosen”* - 1 Sam 10:24)
 - b. The Spirit came upon Him. 1 Sam 11:6
 - c. He was King over Israel! This was God’s chosen people. Would God allow a non-believer to be King?
 2. However, a more powerful argument can be made that Saul was not a true believer in his heart. It seems that everything that Saul accomplished could be attributed to **human effort**.
 - a. Saul was ISRAEL’S choice, not God’s choice! (1 Samuel 8)
 - b. Saul’s victories were accomplishments of the flesh
 - c. His rage over David
 - d. His descent to witchcraft (1 Samuel 28:8).

e. Saul demonstrates that one sin leads to another. If you would have asked him, “Saul, would you ever consult a witch?” He would have replied, NO NEVER. Yet this sin led him further down a path that he would have vehemently said he would never descend. **“Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft...”**

3. Saul gives us an example of false worship. This is more than simply insincere worship.

II. The Behavior of a Religious Pagan

Saul’s problem was not a lack of religious effort. It was his HEART.

He wanted to worship God on his OWN TERMS.

That kind of worship is actually IDOLATRY.

It makes US into a god of our own choosing.

A. In His Thinking. Saul’s partial **obedience**. **1 Samuel 15:9** *But Saul and the army spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs—everything that was good.*

1. Saul focused on the things he DID
2. God focuses on our obedience to His WORD
3. Saul was the **Lyin’ King!**
4. Partial obedience is disobedience

B. In His Desires. Saul’s **unwillingness to destroy completely**.

1. 15:9.b *These they were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed.*
2. Saul **REASONED things his way**.

C. In His **Boasting**. 15:12 1 Samuel 15:12 *Early in the morning Samuel got up and went to meet Saul, but he was told, “Saul has gone to Carmel. There he has set up a monument in his own honor and has turned and gone on down to Gilgal.”*

Saul’s **partial obedience resulted in greater motivation for false worship**.

1. Here he has **all these animals!**
2. **“I know... I’ll go and worship God!”**
3. Saul takes the ANIMALS, and goes to GILGAL, to worship God HIS OWN WAY.
4. This is the SECOND TIME Saul was eager to WORSHIP GOD in his OWN WAY..... 1 Sam 13:8-12

5. LESSON: We do not determine theology. We DISCOVER what God has revealed and OBEY.

D. The RESULT: Self Deception. 15:12

III. The Excuses of a Religious Pagan.

You could get rich manufacturing crutches for lame excuses

A. Blame Others. 15:15

B. Seek Sympathizers. 15:20-21

C. Confess with Conditions. 15:24-25

D. Attempt to Manage the consequences. 15:36

IV. Exhortation to Religious Pagans

A. We're a lot like Saul.

1. We think that our RELIGIOUS EFFORT is the same as TRUE WORSHIP.
2. *“Sacrifices offered in apostasy and unbelief were as worthless as the sacrifices of the Canaanites in the sight of a holy God.”* (John Davis, “The Birth of a Kingdom,” 63)

B. Obedience is better than sacrifice.

1. Psalm 40:6 *Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said, “Here I am, I have come— it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.”*
2. Psalm 51:16-17 *You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*
3. Proverbs 21:3 *To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.*
4. Isaiah 1:11–17
5. Jeremiah 7:21–23
6. Hosea 6:6 *For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.*
7. Micah 6:6–8 *With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt*

offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

8. *Matthew 12:7 If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent.*

C. C S Lewis, in his book "The Screwtape Letters", Relates SATAN'S advice to keep people from Christ. *"It will be an ill day for us," the tempter says, "if what most humans mean by 'Religion' ever vanished from the Earth. It can still send us the truly delicious sins. The fine flower of unholiness can grow only in the close neighbourhood of the holy. Nowhere do we tempt so successfully as on the very steps of the altar."*

We are living in a day when many who call themselves Christians are rejecting the clear teaching of the Bible.

Homosexuality

Sexual promiscuity

Financial misdealing

Living off of the efforts of others

Holding our political views in first place above Christian principles

Rejecting the Bible when modern science has another answer

We have RELIGION but we are rejecting God's authority.

D. Abandon your RELIGION and come to JESUS.

E. Obey God as HE DESIRES.

F. Stop inventing ways to please Him and obey His Word.

G. Today we come to the Lord's Table. Let us confess our sin. Let us abandon our selfish ways and turn to the Lord.