

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Saul's Weakness

When God made Saul, son of Kish, to be king over His people there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he (1 Sam. 9:2). He was concerned for his father (v.5), wanted to pay the preacher (v.7) [now there's a man for you], was a humble man (v. 21), was shy (10:22) and God had given him another heart (vv. 6, 9). He was not a vindictive man (11:12-13), and he gave God the glory for victory.

But Saul had a weakness. He seemed to covet a priestly status and pursued this goal in high-handed defiance of God's will. (Both of the errors associated with his rejection as king have to do with unlawful offerings, 1 Sam. 13:8-14; 15:1-23). Put another way, Saul was willing to worship God — provided he could be top banana and do it the way he wished. Of course, genuine worship is impossible when such an attitude prevails.

And Saul had another weakness — of character — perhaps more destructive in the final analysis than his yen to play priest. Unlike David, who would acknowledge his sins and ask forgiveness, Saul made excuses and blamed others for his failings. He assigned himself noble reasons (?) for doing that which was contrary to God's will. The people were scattered — Samuel was late — the enemy was upon us — it was needful that we pray to God — so, I forced myself, and offered the burnt-offering. All so reasonable, right-seeming — and wrong. Samuel said, Thou hast done foolishly; thou hast not kept the commandment of Jehovah thy God. (1 Sam. 13:11-13).

When Saul was sent to destroy the Amalekites, he saved King Agag and the best of the stock. He claimed I have performed the commandment of Jehovah, but about that time an old cow bawled (as F.E.W, Jr. once said,) and gave him away. The people spared the flocks to sacrifice unto Jehovah. A noble motive, and the blame is put on that indefinite mass that is supposed to relieve the individual of the need for conviction and action. (15:13-f.). To obey is better than sacrifice.

Saul's weakness cost him a kingdom. How many of us will miss heaven because we seek to do God's work in our way, and blame others for our sins?

- Robert F. Turner, via *Plain Talk*, April, 1973

God or Baal?

Baal. “Baal” is a standard Hebrew word for “master” or “husband” and is often translated by these words in the Old Testament. We are, however, more familiar with its use as the name of a Semitic deity that was dominant in the land of Israel during the days of the divided kingdom.

Although it is a general term for a number of Semitic deities, the name is mainly remembered and associated with the god of false prophets who served Ahab and Jezebel at one of the lowest spiritual times of the divided kingdom. And most Bible students especially recall the contest at Mt. Carmel between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. There God displayed His power from heaven to prove to Israel that He, Jehovah, alone is God (1 Kings 18).

The acts of worship directed by Israel to Baal involved some extremely bazaar practices: sacrifices and burning of incense which often included the offering of children; priests dancing around the altar and slashing themselves with knives; gross lascivious, adulterous, and drinking celebration.

Such antics and practices warn us that “idolatry” is a powerful influence on men and that it can get absolute control of their lives and totally dominate them. And it should be a reminder to those of us in the modern world that not only is covetousness and materialism idolatry but every lust of the flesh and lust of the eyes can become objects of devotion that rule man (see Col. 3:5; 1 John 2:15-17). And it must also warn us to worship the God who created us and avoid devotion to the “gods” of our own imagination and creation.

God. “God” is the word the Bible in both Old and New Testament uses to describe “deity” — a species of being that is distinct from man, above man, and over man. He is described as the all-powerful and all wise and all loving person who could speak and by His very words “create” — create matter and space, shape matter into objects, and breathe life into many of these objects.

God’s ultimate creation among earthly objects and life was man who was made in the very image and likeness of God. Man, unlike the remainder of earthly creation, was designed with intellect, emotions, will, conscience — and was required to determine his own actions. He acts on the basis of his own choices. This means that man can and may decide to reject God, deny His being, and renounce His commandments (see Genesis 1-3).

God's design of man and His plan from the beginning were to instruct him, insist that he obey His instructions, and punish him if he disobeyed. Man was informed of all this at the beginning and he understood it — though he chose to disobey and follow his own will. God's plan from the beginning and to this day is rather simple: "believe" what I say and "obey" My will.

Man at the beginning and ever since has more often than not chosen to "direct" and "follow" his own will. This results in, regardless of what term you give it, "idolatry" — devotion to and worship of man's own imaginations and lusts. The eternal result is death — separation from God eternally in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone (see Rom 6:23; Rev 21:8).

Man's situation today is no different from the days of ancient Israel when they had to choose between "Baal" and "God." Our choice is still between devotion to the "Baal" or "god" of our own thinking and creation, or to "Jehovah" the "God" who gives us being and insists that we "trust" Him and "submit" to His instruction.

- L. A. Stauffer

SHEEP AMONG WOLVES

Christians are commissioned by their Lord to go forth with the gospel of peace, as sheep among wolves (Matthew 10:16). These two are extremely different animals, and there is no agreement between their dispositions. The disciple's zeal will be met with immediate attempts to extinguish it, and that violently. In this context, the Lord's disciples were cautioned to beware of men, the wolves, who would betray them, hating them, persecuting them, and causing them to be put to death (the same treatment Jesus received).

Dear disciple, you do not suppose that you are going to be received with open arms by everybody, do you? And if you become a gospel preacher you do not imagine that your reception will be improved, do you? What sort of sympathy can sheep expect from wolves? Babe in Christ, be of good courage and be ready to face opposition and ridicule! Our Lord has given us a commission; keep the faith and receive encouragement from your brethren.

It is the nature of wolves to rend, tear and devour their prey. Recall: in the beginning the Lord God said to the serpent, "I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; ..." (Genesis 3:15). I am not the first to understand that "Cain will go on killing Abel to the world's end!" Certainly it is the nature of the world

to hate the children of God. Our Lord declared, "You will be hated by all because of My name" (Matthew 10:22). Further, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword." (Matthew 10:34).

Whenever Abel appears, Cain arrives to slay him. When a Noah comes, the surrounding wicked world seeks his demise. Where we find an Isaac, there also is an Ishmael to oppose him. When Jacob shows his face, there is an Esau who seeks to kill him. When there grows a powerful Israel, there is always the thorn-in-the-side Pharaoh, or Amalek, or Edom, or Babylon. When the godly heart of David arrived, he was hunted by Saul and betrayed by his own son Absalom. When the Son of David appeared, Herod murdered innocent male babies in an effort to exterminate Him. The enmity will always remain.

We are not surprised to hear of Peter preaching, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" (Acts 2:40). The righteous lives of God's people are met with cruel accusations from the wolves. The pure lives of God's people are challenged with wicked slander and false accusations. The kind actions of disciples are met with revenge. The open and honest behavior of those meant to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world are met with suspicion and the assigning of base motives. Truly, the wolf "comes only to steal and kill and destroy" (John 10:10), and he will ravage himself viciously to spend himself in devouring and destroying the godly. That's the nature of the wolf!

The ferociousness of the battle for the souls of men and women is a tell-tale sign of the precious value of each soul (cf. Matthew 16:26). Those zealous and faithful to Christ will quickly find others who will put forth their strength and cunning to oppose every good word and work. Further, God's people should never entertain the notion that "the assembly" is off-limits to wolves. They may tone down their howling when trying to invade the sheepfold, but remember: it is their nature to steal and kill and destroy! What sort of sympathy will be shown by a pack of wolves toward the body of Christ?

Recall: "beware of men;" "watch and pray;" "put on the full armor of God;" "stand firm;" "we are not ignorant of his schemes."

- Gary Smalley

* "A man who can kneel to God can stand up to anything!"

* "A marriage is the union of two forgivers!"

* "A mistake not corrected is another mistake!"

* “A person is never so empty than when he is full of himself!”

* “A pessimist has no starter. An optimist has no brakes!”

THIS WEEK’S LESSON: The sermon for Sunday morning is: *Who Among You Is Wise and Understanding?* (Text: James 3:13-18).

What Must I Do To Be Saved?

HEAR THE GOSPEL

(Romans 10:14-17; John 20:30-31; Romans 1:15-17)

BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST

(Acts 8:37; John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6)

REPENT OF PAST SINS

(Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30)

CONFESS CHRIST

(Romans 10:9-10; Acts 8:37)

BE BAPTIZED

(Romans 6:3-4; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:36-39; 1 Peter 3:21)

LIVE A FAITHFUL LIFE

(Revelation 2:10; 2 Peter 1:5-11; John 15:1-8; Hebrews 10:23-25)