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Praise Him with the timbrel and dance. (Psalm 105:4)

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“In the heavenly Lamb thrice happy I am, And my heart it doth dance at the sound of His name.” ...Spurgeon

## New Covenant Stewardship...

This week I heard a pastor on national radio say "If you spend money on things you don't need, it is sinful." While that may be an extreme example, it is not unusual to hear similar messages, browbeating Christians into giving more. Often, the real concern is for the support (or lack thereof) of the preacher's particular church or "ministry." Others, *with all good intention*, preach or teach about "good stewardship" with that same *underlying legal sentiment*, or, at least, the listener is left with that impression (and much guilt!).

It is true, one can certainly build a good case for black and white regulations defining biblical Christian "stewardship". Of course, *tithing* is "Law No.1" ("God's gonna get it one way or another"). And didn't Paul say, "Having food and clothing therewith be content" (1Tim 6:8). Honestly, do you know *anyone* who *doesn't* possess things which aren't food and clothing? If we want to go down that road, we *all* better jump on the "guilt train." Of course, to avoid that, we interpret "food and clothing" to mean "*necessities*"; and we all have a *floating* definition of "*necessity*". The problem is, there is no "float" room under law. You can't have it both ways.

In the New Covenant, the grand law of stewardship is this: "**Every man according as he purposes in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loves a cheerful giver**" (2Cor 9:7). Each one's relationship and intimate communion with Christ will determine the measure of his/her liberality, and no one but Christ Himself can evaluate the believer's heart. There are certainly many good principles in scripture to inform our stewardship; but they always must be presented with a foundation of grace and love, allowing Christ through His Holy Spirit to shape and motivate each individual heart.

As far as our individual perspective on material things is concerned, **contentment with what the Lord deems necessary is the key**. (That goes for churches and 'ministries' too!) Paul said, "I know how to be abased, and I know also how to abound" (Phil 4:12). That yielded perspective will deliver us from bondage to the idol of covetousness (Col 3:5). Then we shall know indeed that He has given us *richly all things to enjoy* (1Tim 6:17). ●ejr3

Through the Bible... Part Twelve

## Saul - A King after Israel's Own Heart

*And [Kish] had a choice and handsome son whose name was Saul. There was not a more handsome person than he among the children of Israel. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people.* (1Sam 9:2)

The Word of God had become very rare in Israel - there was no open revelation (3:1). *Where there is no vision* (proclaimed revelation of God) *the people perish* (Pr 29:18). With the raising up of Samuel, God prepares a restoration of sorts. The *Word of the Lord* will again be proclaimed in Israel, and, through it, the Presence of God will return (3:19-21).

But as God is preparing Samuel, the people are floundering, without any real concept of *God* being their true and ever-present King. Clinging to the *outward remnants* of their religion, they attempt to use the Ark of the Covenant as a "lucky charm" to defeat the Philistines. As a result they actually lose the ark to the Philistines. The primary outward representation of the presence of God among them has been lost, and, through the naming of Eli's grandson, Ichabod, the pronouncement is made - *the Glory has departed from Israel* (4:21).

As a precursor to the restoration, God providentially returns the ark to Israel; but all is not well. Fifty thousand Israelites of Beth Shemesh perish for looking into the ark (6:19). We are reminded that men are very comfortable having *vicarious religious objects* for their "holiness", but must flee or perish at the manifestation of the true Shekinah Glory. *Who is able to stand before this holy LORD God.?*" (6:20).

In time, Samuel stands before Israel and calls them to repentance, offers sacrifice, and they are delivered from the Philistines by the hand of God. But, as we have previously noted, people quickly focus on, and begin to depend upon, the human instruments of leadership instead of the King Himself. And so, as Samuel ages, and his sons apostatize, the people become fearful, and they demand a king *just like the other nations* have (8:5). Samuel warns them of the foolishness of their choice; but the people insist, and he is instructed by the Lord to present them with a king. And so, God gives Israel *a king after their own heart* - like the other

nations.

Saul *appears* to be the perfect choice. He is rugged and handsome, head and shoulders above his peers. Furthermore, the Lord chooses one who is yet humble, thinking himself unqualified, or unworthy to be king (*1Sam 9:21; 15:17*). Saul is anointed with the Holy Spirit, completing the *triad of anointed offices* in the Old Testament - *prophets, priests, and kings*. Everything seems right about this selection, and the people erupt in unbridled celebration (*11:15*).

But, as Saul ascends to a position of authority, his true character emerges. Without consulting the Lord, he conscripts *for himself* three thousand men and launches into an unauthorized battle with an enemy that turns out to be as numerous *as the sands of the sea* (*ch 13*). Placed in a jamb, he disobeys Samuel's clear instructions to wait for him to come, and thrusts himself into the priesthood, offering sacrifices. When confronted by Samuel, he begins a strange and continuing pattern of self-defense: He proclaims himself righteous based upon a superficial and partial pseudo-obedience, and then mixes it with a pathetic "It's-not-my-fault-I-had-no-choice" *victomology*. He indicts "the people" for instigating his own failure, and even claims that, ultimately, it was out of respect for "Samuel's God" that all this disobedience occurred! It is all but foolish rebellion in the eyes of the Lord, and Samuel proclaims the departure of the kingdom from Saul and his descendants (*13: 13-14; 16:14*).

Nevertheless, Saul continues on with an inflated view of his own importance, and a new constant companion— "*an evil spirit from the Lord*" (*16:14; 19:9*). With a false religiosity, he commands his troops to a complete fast during a time of battle. For disobedience to this foolish directive, Saul is even willing to kill his own son, Jonathan, whose true wisdom and courage had defeated the enemy (*ch 14*).

With the emergence of David, and the people's admiration of Him, the spirit of jealousy drives Saul even further to edge of insanity. He sets himself against the "man after God's own heart" with repeated attempts on David's life, as well as again attempting to slay Jonathan (*18:11; 19:10; 20:33*). David is driven into exile, and yet refuses twice to seize the opportunity to kill Saul by his own hand

(*24:6-13; 26:6-12*). In the fear of the Lord, he still maintains respect for the *anointed office*, and knows he must await the Lord's appointed time. That time eventually comes as Saul resorts to the occult in an effort to find a solution to his predicament, seeking advice from the now dead Samuel through the witch-medium of Endor. The Lord allows Samuel to appear and pronounce the final judgment upon Saul (*ch 28*). His ignominious death would soon follow (*ch 31*).

Saul's life is a true tragedy. *Self-will* and *pragmatism* drowned out the voice of God's overtures of grace. Given repeated opportunities for lasting blessing, Saul continually self-destructs. His pseudo-repentance is always between the bookends of self-justification and excuses. Each time his heart is left more hardened as he approaches the limits of God's longsuffering. Instead of God's blessing leading him to repentance, he treasures up wrath against the day of wrath (*Rom 2:4-5*).

I fear there may be many in the professing church who, like Saul, are fully satisfied that a half-hearted, partial obedience is "good enough" for God. They appear *religiously respectable*, but inwardly they are whitewashed sepulchers full of dead men's bones (*Matt 23:27*). Their portion is in this world (*Ps 17:14*), and the fear of the Lord is not before their eyes (*Rom 3:18*). *Self-ambition and pragmatic living*, in their estimation, are the marks of a godly life - a life *not* wasted. They are embarrassed and offended by their peers who "*carry their religion too far*", and often are the instigators of persecution against them. But they shall not stand.

As our "David" approaches, the lines will be clearly drawn, and rather than suffer for His name's sake, they will quickly disavow any connection to Him. As He takes His rightful position over His creation, there will be no place found for the "Sauls" of the church. Their presence shall not be allowed to defile nor diminish the unbounded joy of the wedding supper of the Lamb and His Bride. Saul shall perish - David shall reign.

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