

INTRO: Is visible success an evidence of God's eternal blessing? That is the assumption of many professing Christians. It's certainly the principle behind the prosperity gospel. But is it true? To answer that question, we pose it this morning to King Saul. Let's turn to 1Sam 14:47, p.237 in your pew Bible.

1Sam 14:47-52. *“When Saul had taken the kingship over Israel, he fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, against the Ammonites, against Edom, against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistine. Wherever he turned he routed them. And he did valiantly and struck the Amalekites and delivered Israel out of the hands of those who plundered them. Now the sons of Saul were Jonathan, Ishvi, and Malchi-shua. And the names of his two daughters were these: the name of the firstborn was Merab, and the name of the younger was Michal. And the name of Saul's wife was Ahinoam the daughter of Ahimaaz. And the name of the commander of his army was Abner the son of Ner, Saul's uncle. Kish was the father of Saul, and Ner the father of Abner was the son of Abiel. There was hard fighting against the Philistines all the days of Saul. And when Saul saw any strong man, or any valiant man, he attached him to himself.”*

Saul is busy, fighting on every side (47). He is successful, routing them wherever he turned (47c-48). He's valiant. He does military and material good to Israel, saving them from those who plundered them. He's got a nice family (49-50). He's got influence, importance, power, authority, even celebrity and popularity (51-52)—all without blessing. Saul is busy but not blessed. He is successful, but rejected by God. He's a family man with political connections and military clout. Everybody's got Saul's six. And yet the one thing necessary is what he does not have—acceptance and blessing with God. Busyness without blessing...success without blessing...family without blessing...power and popularity without blessing. Saul is living proof that that the prosperity gospel is false. For all this success, Saul remains saddled with the guilt of his own selfish sin. And sadly, it's about to get worse.

1Sam 15:1-3 *“And Samuel said to Saul, ‘The Lord sent me to anoint you king over his people Israel; now therefore listen to the words of the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘I have noted what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way when they came up out of Egypt. Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.”* The backstory is Ex 17:8 “Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. That's where Aaron and the brothers hold Moses' hands up in prayer, Israel prevails, and God swears afterward in Ex 17:14 “I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven...The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.” And God expected Israel to share his opposition to Amalek in Dt 25:17-19 “Remember what Amalek did to you...You shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you shall not forget.” Now Amalek's debt comes due.

But...genocide. Ethnic cleansing. Religious violence. This is the Ultimate Intolerance. This looks like Social Injustice on a cosmic scale perpetrated by an irresistible God. Talk about perpetuating inequalities. And we Christians don't just think this is a myth. This really happened in history. God really told the real Saul to wipe out real Amalekites. That's offensive. What are we doing preaching this stuff in the 21st century? How can this be Christian? How can we possibly interpret this judgment in a way consistent with the Christ of the New Testament, with forgiveness, with love? Well, how does Jesus Christ Himself interpret just these kinds of judgments from the OT? He doesn't ignore them or downplay them. He teaches them as warnings of a more comprehensive judgment still to come. That's how Jesus interprets Sodom's destruction in **Luke 17:29** *“Just as it was in the days of Lot—they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all—so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed...”* You've been warned. This is why Peter interpret it the same way in **2Pet 2:6** when he says God

“condemned Sodom to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly...” In fact, the accountability doesn’t decrease, it increases. Jesus says in Matt 10:15 and 11:23 that Judgment Day at the end of time will be more tolerable for Sodom than for you who reject the preaching of Jesus through His messenger, or the miracles of Jesus displayed in the Bible. “*I tell you, it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.*” Sodom had little revelation of God. We have Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and a whole Bible testifying to His truth.

As bad as this judgment on the Amalekites looks, it pales in comparison to the judgment that’s coming on all the earth for all those who reject Jesus as God’s Son. Jesus doesn’t walk this back; he doubles down. But he does so to warn us, to tell us the truth, precisely because he doesn’t want us to suffer this fate. And this is what we would expect from a God who is both righteous and merciful, both holy and compassionate, both light and love, patient but no pushover. This sweeping, summary judgment of a whole people signals that one day, God’s common grace will end for those who keep rebelling against his law and love. He was patient with the Amalekites for centuries. And then, his patience ended. So it will be when Jesus returns to judge the living and the dead. He is patient. But He is not a pushover. He will judge.

Non-Christian, I know these things are hard to hear, but be honest with yourself and God. The real reason you don’t believe the Bible is not that the Bible deserves your judgment. It’s that you deserve God’s judgment. We all do, myself included. That is the truth none of us can handle apart from Christ Jesus. That’s why we trust in Jesus—to take God’s judgment in our place, for our sins, in his death on the cross. We do not become Christians because we think we’re innocent. We become Christians because we know we’re guilty, and only Jesus can take our guilt and make us good. Any worldview that tells you otherwise is a crutch and a sugar-coated lie that pats you on our back all the way to Hell. We don’t want that for you. Neither does God. But God is a righteous judge, which means he is angry every day over sin and injustice, not just in other people but in you. And the only way to be reconciled to Him is by faith in his righteous Son who became the sacrifice for our sins in his own body on the tree, Jesus. Don’t kid yourself. Judgment is coming. But for those in Christ, it has already come, because Jesus suffered it in our place.

We’re about to see that Saul had a problem with this command, too. But his hang up was not humanitarian. It was economic. What God commanded here was a holy war ban. Everything was to be devoted to destruction for the glory of God’s righteous judgment and holiness. Nothing was to be saved alive, man or beast, for any reason, so that none of the survivors or their culture would tempt Israel to worship false gods, or worship the true God in a false way.¹ But like Achan, Saul and the people felt there were some things that were just too good to destroy—too good to devote to God.

1Sam 15:4-9 “*So Saul summoned the people and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand men on foot, and ten thousand men of Judah. And Saul came to the city of Amalek and lay in wait in the valley. Then Saul said to the Kenites, ‘Go, depart; go down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them. For you showed kindness to all the people of Israel when they came up out of Egypt. So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites. And Saul defeated the Amalekites from Havilah as far as Shur, which is east of Egypt. And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive and devoted to destruction all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep and*

¹ The herem ban Dt 20:16-18 “*But in the cities of these peoples that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, but you shall devote them to complete destruction...that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices that they have done for their gods, and so you sin against the Lord your God.*”

of the oxen and of the fattened calves and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them. All that was despised and worthless they devoted to destruction.”

From the looks of it, Saul does what we might have done. He saves the best and destroys the rest. How resourceful. After all, isn't there really a stewardship issue here—waste not want not? No, it's an obedience issue. God had said clearly in v.3 *do not spare*. But in v.9 *“Saul and the people spared.”* What did they spare? The best...all that was good. But what is good and best? What is worthless and despised? It's whatever Saul and the people think is good and best. They judge for themselves what deserves to be judged, based on personal taste and public opinion...just like today. All that is despised and worthless in their own eyes, they'll destroy. But if it's good and best in their eyes, they save it. What's more, the terms of this kind of ban mean that everything devoted to destruction belonged to God. So what they're giving to God is only what's despised and worthless. Saul thinks he and the people are wiser than God. The more things change, the more they stay the same. Now... how does God respond to Saul's resourcefulness, his sense of economic and religious conservatism? Is God proud of Saul?

1Sam 15:10-15 *“The word of the Lord came to Samuel: ‘I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments.’ And Samuel was angry, and he cried to the Lord all night. And Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning. And it was told Samuel, ‘Saul came to Carmel, and behold, he set up a monument for himself and turned and passed on and went down to Gilgal.’ And Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, ‘Blessed be you to the Lord. I have performed the commandment of the Lord.’ And Samuel said, ‘What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear?’ Saul said, ‘They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen to sacrifice to the Lord your God, and the rest we have devoted to destruction.”* God regrets.² He's not admitting he made a mistake or changing his mind. He's grieving Saul's disobedience. This is a statement not of God's intentions, but His affections. He is grieved. God can do things, commit to things, that nevertheless grieve him. He does not afflict the children of man from his heart (Lam 3:33), nor does he take pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek 33:11). Yet he does afflict, and he does kill the wicked. He does things that are against his own revealed moral will, in order to accomplish his secret will of decree, yet in a way that he himself remains sinless. That is what causes God grief. And that is what it means for him to regret. He is sad, grieved to his heart, that making Saul king has resulted in Saul's disobedience and rejection. And Samuel's anger and restless prayer identifies with God's grief. Is Samuel angry at God, Saul, circumstance, self?³

² Because Firth is otherwise such a reliable guide, it is all the more disappointing to read his errant theological reflection that “God's *openness* expresses both his freedom and his compassion” (AOC 178, *emph. mine*). More reliable is Bergen's note on the similarity of God's regret here to Gen 6:7, which “suggests that the Lord was deeply concerned,” and also “suggests that the writer was making a deliberate connection between the Genesis and Samuel narratives. Certain similarities exist between the outcomes of the stories. The sins of humanity in Gen 6 caused the Lord to destroy the sinners, yet gave rise to the Lord's selection of Noah...Saul's sin here destroyed his kingship, yet they also served as a springboard for the Lord's selection of David” (NAC 170). And again (174), “Saul had shown that he was spiritually incorrigible, in spite of previous warnings and penalties...; as a result, his punishment would not be altered. Though the Lord ‘was grieved’ (v.11; *nhm*), he would not ‘change his mind’ (*nhm*). The surety of the Lord's words was based in the stability of the divine nature.” R.P. Gordon also notes “Too much can be made of the surface tension between the statements, in verses 11 and 29, concerning the possibility or impossibility of God's repenting. When God issues a decree that is plainly intended as irrevocable, as in the rejection of Saul, then, says our text, there is no possibility of that decree being rescinded (cf. Nu. 23:19)” (*1&2 Samuel*, 146).

³ “Samuel grieved even over one with whom he probably had a rather rocky relation. Here we can see a true pastor and prophet who did not rejoice in the wrong” (Tsumura, NICOT). Similarly Bergen, who sees Samuel's anger “doubtlessly mirroring the Lord's displeasure” (NAC 171).

Meanwhile, Saul is busy congratulating himself by carving a monument to his own victory. In fact, when Samuel arrives, Saul is oblivious to his own guilt. He goes right out to shake Samuel's hand with a smile. "Hey brother, welcome, glad you're here. Blessings. It's finished! I did it. I obeyed.⁴ Aren't you proud of me? How's the statue look?" "*I have performed the command of the Lord.*" Saul is actually serious when he says that...and he is seriously self-deceived. He thinks he's obeyed! But as readers we're like, "Umm, no you didn't. You're not even close." And of course, Samuel isn't buying it either, because he has two functional ears. "*What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear?*" If you had obeyed, there would be no baaaa." If you had obeyed, this place would be dead silent.

Yet Saul is ready with an answer. "Oh that... Yeah THEY brought them... THE PEOPLE spared the best... TO SACRIFICE to the Lord YOUR GOD... and the rest WE devoted to destruction. Save the best, destroy the rest.⁵ Sounds rational, resourceful, economical. The problem is that God didn't ask for the regular ritual sacrifices. He commanded a total ban. The ban was different than a regular sacrifice. Under a total ban, all the spoils were God's, nothing left for Israel. In regular ritual sacrifice, Israel got to own and eat part of the sacrifice themselves in fellowship with God. So Saul is playing fast and loose with sacrifice categories. It sounds great to say we saved the best as a sacrifice to God; but what he really means is we saved the best to eat for ourselves because we thought it'd be a waste to give it all to God under the total ban that He commanded. And notice the little word game Saul plays with blame and credit. They spared, but we destroyed. And whatever they spared it was to sacrifice to God anyway, so no harm no foul right? Samuel tells him to stick a sock in it. Look there in v.16.

1Sam 15:16-21. "*Then Samuel said to Saul, 'Stop! I will tell you what the Lord said to me this night.' And he said to him, 'Speak'. And Saul said, 'Though you are little in your own eyes, are you not the head of the tribes of Israel? The Lord anointed you king over Israel. And the Lord sent you on a mission and said, 'Go, devote to destruction the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.'* Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord? Why did you pounce on the spoil and do what was evil in the sight of the Lord?' And Saul said to Samuel, '*I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, I have gone on the mission on which the Lord sent me. I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have devoted the Amalekites to destruction. But the people took the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal.*' Saul still thinks he has the authority to tell Samuel when it's ok for him to speak. Saul's command "Speak" is totally irrelevant. You want to look at him like...are you done? "Did you just tell Samuel to speak? Dude, the prophet just said he was getting ready to tell you what God told him. HE will speak whether you tell him to or not. Get the shoe on the right foot. That's the problem. Saul always remembered where he came from, but that was never more than false humility. True humility obeys God's word even when it's counterintuitive, less than economical, or "God forbid", expensive.

⁴ "Saul immediately proceeded to brag about his obedience (lit. 'I have established Yahweh's words.' For Samuel, and for the readers who are aware of the Lord's words to Samuel in v.10, Saul's words are bitterly ironic. The king has indeed 'established Yahweh's words,' but he words he 'established' are regarding disobedience (v.10), not obedience (v.3)" (Bergen, NAC 171).

⁵ "The root *hrm* refers to sacrifice where something or someone is given over entirely to Yahweh, essentially because it is already his. By contrast, *zbh* in sacrificial contexts usually refers to a practice where the participants shared a common meal involving the sacrifice. The change in the sacrificial form implies a change in the livestock's ownership. Under *hrm* everything was Yahweh's already and could not be claimed by another, but sacrifices associated with *zbh* belonged to the worshipper and were then offered to Yahweh. Although it sounds a noble response, Saul's dissembling is effectively a cover for theft, albeit one attributed to the people" (Firth, AOTC 175). So also Tsumura (NICOT 398) "Sacrifice and 'the ban' are not the same thing; the 'ban' is the total destruction, devoting everything to Yahweh as his share, while sacrifice usually provides portions for men. God had not asked for a cultic sacrifice." Thus "'partial fulfillment is not a possibility' in the logic of ban" (395, citing Moberly).

So Samuel reiterates God's command, clear as day. "*The Lord said... Why then did you not obey...?*" But Saul doubles down. I did obey. *I have obeyed.. I went on the mission.* I got Agag, devoted the people to destruction, but THE PEOPLE took the best of the animals in order to sacrifice to God. How can you fault them for that? We did it for God's sake! We thought THIS would please God (...better than doing what God actually told them to do). But is that how God works? Is that what pleases God—me thinking that I know what should please God better than God himself? So Samuel re-acquaints Saul with the God he says he worships in v.22.

1Sam 15:22-23. *And Samuel said, 'Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has also rejected you from being king.'*" If you don't know this about God, you don't know Him period. What matters to him is your obedience to His word. Obedience to what God says is always more pleasing to God than any sacrifice. You can't just give something up for lent and then be like, "Yeah, I threw the divine dog a bone, so now I can sleep around, browse porn, cheat on my taxes and skip church when I feel like it. In fact, Samuel says that any disobedience to God's revealed word is like witchcraft and idolatry. Ignoring or twisting God's word is breaking the second commandment, which in turn breaks the first... You are worshipping God in a way he has not commanded, and therefore you are worshipping a God that is not sovereign at all. You're worshipping a different Jesus.... Truth be told, you're worshipping yourself, your own assumptions and appetites. And finally in v.24, Saul begins to get it...or at least, he tries to fake it to make it.

1Sam 15:24-31 *"Saul said to Samuel, 'I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice. Now therefore, please pardon my sin and return with me that I may bow before the Lord.' And Samuel said to Saul, 'I will not return with you. For you have rejected the word of the lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel.' As Samuel turned to go away, Saul seized the skirt of his robe, and it tore. And Samuel said to him, 'The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you. And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret.' Then he said, 'I have sinned; yet honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may bow before the Lord your God.' So Samuel turned back after Saul, and Saul bowed before the Lord.*

You don't just worship and relate to God or think of him however you like. You take God at his word, He takes you under his care. You reject God's word, He rejects you, simple as that. He sets the terms of our engagement with Him, not us. Oh, you thought you were more economical, more merciful than God, more fair than God? Saul thought he'd do something more useful than what God commanded him to do. Samuel isn't having it. So Saul musters his best impression of someone who is humble and repentant. *I have sinned, I have transgressed.* But confession is not necessarily repentance. After all, he's still blaming the people.⁶ I did what I did *because I feared the people and obeyed their voice.* They pressured me into it! But what's Saul's aim here anyway? Pardon my sin and return with me that I may bow before the

⁶ So also D. Firth, "Saul claims to have been forced to obey them instead of Yahweh, making his subsequent request that Samuel forgive him awkward because he has not fully accepted his guilt. The only other monarch to express himself in this way is Pharaoh (Exod 10:16-17; see Frisch 1996: 102), an allusion that hardly strengthens Saul's position...Although Samuel goes with Saul, forgiveness is not mentioned...Saul could correct his actions but never does" (AOTC, 176, 177).
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Lord. Honor me now before the elders. This confession is not aimed at God's honor. It's so that Saul can save face.⁷ Saul would rather face than save his soul.

1Sam 15:32-35 *"Then Samuel said, 'Bring here to me Agag the king of the Amalekites.' And Agag came to him cheerfully. Agag said, 'Surely the bitterness of death is past.' And Samuel said, 'As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women.' And Samuel hacked Agag to pieces before the Lord in Gilgal. Then Samuel went to Ramah, and Saul went up to his house in Gibeah of Saul. And Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death, but Samuel grieved over Saul. And the Lord regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel."*⁸ Samuel shows Saul how to obey; and he makes it crystal clear that Agag deserved it.

POINT: Jesus deserves our faithful obedience, which is why partial obedience grieves Him.

God grieves our sins but never goes back on his own word (15:11, 29, 35; cf. Gen 6:6; Ezek 24:14). God regretted, grieved the consequences, of making Saul king. But once he decrees judgment, like he did on Saul, he will not go back on his word, no matter how much it pains Him to condemn. God never regrets as we do. He never regrets in the sense of feeling he's done something morally wrong or displayed a lapse in judgment. But he does feel what we might call sorrow, compassion, grief, and hurt over how we sin in response to his providence, and even over how his judgments hurt us. Friend, do not test God. He is compassionate. He grieves our sinfulness even more than we do. Yet once he has finalized his judgments, they are unchangeable. Now is the time for salvation. The time to repent is now. God does not owe you another opportunity. Take him at his word now. Take His offer of free forgiveness in Jesus, and obey Him with all your heart, before it's too late for you.

God takes it personally when the world mistreats his people...and he will not forget (15:2). *"I have noted what Amalek did."* The Amalekites are the ones who found themselves on the wrong side of history, because they were on the wrong side of God and His people. God's vengeance is the hope of God's people. We are not allowed to take our own vengeance for the world's persecutions and sins against us. But God's vengeance is flawless in righteousness. And even the glorified saints, sinless now in heaven, cry out for it—"O Sovereign Lord, holy and true how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" And when that vengeance comes down, heaven praises it in triplicate in Rev 19:2 *"Hallelujah, for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality and has avenged on her the blood of his servants. Once more they cried out, Hallelujah The smoke from her goes up forever and ever. And the twenty four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne, saying, 'Amen, Hallelujah.'* Three times in a row, God's vengeance on the enemies of his people is praised in heaven—and there is no sin there. If you hate the idea of God's vengeance, beware you are not still in danger of suffering it.

Man

Selective obedience is disobedience (15:13-14).⁹ Saul only obeyed in part, which meant he had disobeyed. Selective obedience offends God because it presumes that we are wiser than He is. We think

⁷ "Saul worshipped the Lord without recovering his relationship with his God!" (Tsumura, 408), implying that Saul will not be saved in the end; Saul never does recover his relationship with the Lord.

⁸ "Saul's sin not only weight heavily on Samuel but it also affected the Lord who 'was grieved that he had made Saul king over Israel.' In combination with v.11 this note regarding the Lord's grief frames the judgment narrative of vv.12-35 and sets the tone for its interpretation" (Bergen, NAC 176).

⁹ This phrasing is mine, but finds confirmation in Bergen, "partial obedience was in fact disobedience" (NAC 172).
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we know what he should want or expect from us, and what we can withhold for ourselves (15:9, 15; cf. Gen 3). We think we know how to save the best and give up the rest. And that is the very spirit of independence and defiance that we must repent of. Sacrificial intentions cannot sanctify disobedience (15:9, 15, 21). Marriage, homo, abortion, Equality Act?

Disobedience falsifies worship (15:22-23 corp app). However Saul thought he was pleasing God, he was wrong. Self-deceit is a real danger. The only way to avoid it is to listen regularly to God's word, repent regularly of your disobedience, and ask God to give you a heart that loves and follows His ways. No service or sacrifice will please God if you live in a way that deliberately ignores or twists his words. You yourself hate it when people twist your words to say what you don't mean. And God hates it when we do that to Him, and then come here on Sunday and say "I have obeyed the command of the Lord." That ruins God's Sunday.

Christians should be thorough in killing our own sins (Matt 5:32; Rom 8:13; 2Cor 10:3; Eph 6:12).¹⁰ We Christians apply OT warfare texts to our own sins, not to other people. That's because the NT takes this violent war theme and internalizes it. Jesus says in **Matt 5:29** "*If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.*" He doesn't say to cut off your neighbor's hand. And even in Matt 5, he's not speaking literally. He's talking metaphorically about killing the sin that rises in your own heart. This is what Paul means in **Rom 8:13** when he tells us to "*put to death the deeds of the body.*" It's what he means in **2 Cor 10:3-4** when he says "*though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.*" Paul says in **Eph 6:12** "*We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*" We hack our own sin to pieces before the Lord. And this is why we must notice that...

Confession is not the same as repentance (15:24, 30). Confession can be merely political and self-serving. It was for Saul. He only confesses to save face. Saul himself says it in v.30. "*I have sinned; yet honor me now before the elders of my people....*" Is that how and why we confess, for our own honor among people? That is a superficial and self-serving confession, not a saving one. "OK OK, just don't humiliate me in front of everyone. Make me look like I am still in right relationship with God...even though we both know otherwise. And this leads to our next application.

Outward success is no measure of God's blessing (14:47-52). Saul had position, power, victory, family, and success; but busyness is not blessedness. Power is not approval. And you can have a family without having forgiveness in the blood of Jesus. Don't confuse outward success with eternal salvation. Saul was a successful military general...and he was not saved in the end.

The age of common grace will soon end with judgment and salvation (15:33; Rev 19:11-14). We win when we read in 1Sam 15:33 "*And Samuel hacked Agag to pieces before the Lord.*" But that is precisely how Jesus Himself ends His parable of the Ten Minas in Luke 19. The governor entrusts 10 servants with 10 sums of money while he goes to take a kingdom in a far country, but his citizens hate

¹⁰ So also Gordon, "But how, then, shall we 'slay the Amalekite' in the late twentieth century? The answer can best be framed along the lines of Ephesians 6:12...and in keeping with the broad concept of 'spiritual warfare' in the New Testament... 'The flesh', at any rate, constitutes an enemy against which the Christian is bound to wage a 'perpetual warfare (Ex 17:16; Gal 5:16-21)" (R.P. Gordon, 148).

him and say “*we don’t want this man to rule over us.*” He comes back, holds his servants accountable, and then in the last line of Jesus’ parable, the governor says in **Luke 19:27** “*But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me.*” That judgment is coming in the future for all those who reject Jesus’ righteous rule over them. That is Christian truth, because Christ Himself is the one who taught it. And we teach it not as hate speech, but because love warns of real danger when others ignore it.

Conservatism is not the same thing as Christianity. The people conserve what they think is best, when they should have destroyed it as an act of worship to God. Saul looked at this like Judas looked at the woman who ‘wasted’ the bottle of ointment on anointing Jesus for burial. Oh we could have given it to the poor. Oh we could have done wonderful things with the money and the things we saved. Oh this is a stewardship issue.” No, it’s an arrogance issue, a selfishness issue, an obedience issue, and a worship issue. We do not decide how God wants to be worshipped, nor do we steal what God reserves as His own. Saul thinks God SHOULD be more pleased if the best is saved for a sacrifice. God is ACTUALLY more pleased by obedience to his command, not by questioning his command, replacing it with our own, and then expecting him to take it as doing him a favor. God cares little for efficiency and economy. This destruction was neither efficient nor economical. It was neither green nor conservative. And nothing was to be left over for the people. This was all for God’s honor. And that is what neither Saul nor the people could abide—that any sacrifice would be all and only for God, and not at all for people.

Pastors should not let themselves be pressured into giving people what God has forbidden.

Congregations should not pressure their leaders to give them what God has forbidden (15:9, 21, 24).

Public App (VanDrunen, *Politics after Christendom*, 51-53, 160). Unbelievers may hear 1Sam 15 from a Christian pulpit and feel terrorized that Christians somehow want to do to non-Christians what Samuel did to Agag. They may fear that individually, in terms of religious violence. Or they may fear it politically, in terms of Christians trying to impose on everyone else a so-called ‘Christian’ rule of law. So if you’re a non-Christian and you fear those things from us, be assured, that is not at all how we Christians apply these texts to our world today. There is no OT text that justifies the violence of religiously motivated groups or vigilantes under the New Covenant in Christ. Our holy war is waged within our own hearts, where the Spirit sets its desire against the flesh, and the flesh against the Spirit. Christians who think otherwise are misguided.

Nor do we think that voting either red or blue is a way of conquering political evil or re-establishing a purportedly Christian political model or social ethic. Christians should not be out to conquer America politically. **The Great Commission is to make disciples of all nations, not a nation of all disciples.** The church is the new holy nation, not the state. So we should not seek to build an explicitly Christian government. We should seek to build an explicitly Christian church, no matter what the state looks like, does, gives, or takes away.

Now, for you Christians, that may sound like a very limited vision for government. It is. Here’s how David VanDrunen puts it: “I reject...that legitimate political institutions should be redemptively transformed and can thereby manifest the new-creation kingdom. Civil government and other human institutions can be legitimate without having to bear such an eschatological burden. In other words, Christians can and should embrace both legitimacy and provisionality (of non-Christian civil government)” (55). Civil government is legitimate but also distinct from Christ’s eschatological kingdom

(55).¹¹ Remember, Jeremiah told the exiles in Babylon to do good to a city whose destruction he would later foretell. It's legitimate, then, to do good to a non-Christian system of governance that is only temporary.

What Christians pursue in the public square is a limited provisional justice shared by all people of all ethnicities and faiths under the Noahic covenant. Could we defend the application of the TC to public life? Maybe. Should we? Probably not. Does this mean common gov't is not accountable to God? NO. it means common government is accountable to God, but only under the terms of the Noahic covenant, not the new covenant. All individuals and even governments are in covenant relation to God, and are accountable on those terms. But that covenant is the Noahic Covenant with all creation. Not all people are in covenant with Christ under the New Covenant in his blood. Will they be held accountable for their unbelief toward Jesus? Yes. But they will be held accountable by Jesus in the next life, not by a Christianized civil government in this life. And that brings us to our conclusion.

CONCLUSION

Samuel told Saul *"The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you"* (15:28). We'll soon meet that neighbor in David. Yet as David was better than Saul, so much more is Jesus better than you and me. Where we rule for our own honor, Jesus rules for God's honor. Where Saul took what was only God's to have, Jesus gave what only He could give—righteousness, atonement, salvation, redemption, and wisdom. Friend, what God wants from you is the genuine confession that you cannot give him the perfectly complete obedience He deserves. Only Jesus gives Him that, and admitting as much is how you honor God best, by faith. Is that what you are giving God? Or are you giving him something else you think he should want instead?

¹¹ David VanDrunen, *Politics After Christendom: Political Theology in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), p.55, cf. 160.
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