

SAUL'S EXCUSES

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The Book of Proverbs exposes man's nature and tendencies, and provides wise instruction to escape the foolishness that is a threat to all our souls. One of man's most foolish traits is to justify himself and rationalize and make excuses when he has done wrong. Proverbs 21:2 says, "*Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the Lord ponders the hearts.*" Similarly, Proverbs 16:2 says, "*All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the Lord weigheth the spirits.*" And Proverbs 30:12 also speaks about the universality of this habit of mankind and its ultimate futility: "*There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness.*" The danger of self-justification is proclaimed in Proverbs 12:15: "*The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.*" Thus, Proverbs 3:7 instructs: "*Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil.*" But, sadly, even when he is shown his errors, man tends to hate reproof and usually turns against the one who corrects him (Prov 9:7-8; 15:10-12; 23:9; Matt 7:6; Gal 4:16). But God knows the truth about all men, and He will judge all men according to what they really are (Rom 2:5-11; 2 Cor 5:10; Rev 22:12), not according to what they *think* they are. Therefore, to hate instruction is to despise one's own soul (Prov 15:31). And, though this way *seems* right to man, the end is eternal death (Prov 14:12; 16:25). Unfortunately, that is the nature of most men (Matt 7:13-14). And Israel's first king, Saul the son of Kish, is one of the most tragic examples of this that we learn about in the Bible.

Blaming others

When Samuel came to King Saul in the aftermath of the battle with Amalek (1 Sam 15:12), Saul typified man's tendency to justify himself. Saul greeted Samuel with these words: "Blessed be thou of the Lord: I have performed the commandment of the Lord" (1 Sam 15:13). This was classic self-deception. God had told Saul to kill *every* person and *every* animal of the Amalekites, explicitly saying, "Spare them not" (1 Sam 15:3). If Saul had done this, there would have been no animals making noise when Samuel came to him. Instead, Saul declared his innocence even with the sounds of the animals he had spared ringing in his ears. That is why Samuel asked, "*What means then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear* (1 Sam 15:14)?" Saul demonstrated man's great capacity to rationalize and make excuses for his sinful actions (see also 1 Sam 13:8-14). Saul first blamed it on the people, saying, "*They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen*" (1 Sam 15:15). But Saul was the king, and possessed the authority and responsibility to make certain that God's commands were carried out.

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(continued)

Therefore, Saul had no right to put the blame upon the people. The people must follow the king, not vice versa. Saul's own words betray his knowledge of this fact as he stated, "the rest *we* have utterly destroyed" (1 Sam 15:15). It is interesting and very revealing that when it came to killing the animals, Saul said *we*, but when it came to sparing the animals, Saul said *they*. This was a lame excuse.

Proclaiming good intentions

Secondly, Saul said that the reason they had spared the best of the animals was "to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God" (1 Sam 15:15). His reasoning here was: 1) sacrificing them to God would be a good thing to do (after all, God liked sacrifices, didn't he?); and 2) in sacrificing them, the animals would end up dead anyway, like God commanded. But the bottom line is that this was *not* what God commanded Saul to do, and this did not at all fulfill what God did command. That is why God rejected Saul's excuses. In response to what Saul said, God reminded Saul through the prophet Samuel that "*the Lord sent thee on a journey, and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed*" (1 Sam 15:18). Saul plainly had not done that. Therefore, God asked Saul, "*Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the Lord, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the Lord* (1 Sam 15:19)?" Even this was not enough to convince Saul, and Saul proceeded to argue with the Lord God Himself! "*And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and have gone the way which the Lord sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God in Gilgal*" (1 Sam 15:20-21). Saul's ways were right in his own eyes to the extent that he argued with God. Man's ability to justify himself is astounding indeed. Saul again blamed the people and used the rationalization about making a sacrifice to God with the animals that had been spared. But Saul's own mouth condemned him (Luke 19:22), as he said those animals *should have been utterly destroyed*. He did not yet recognize that those words implied that he had indeed disobeyed God, but God (and Samuel) knew the truth. Saul was truly a gifted excuse-maker, but he is not alone. Like King Saul, when man sees himself in the spiritual mirror, the word of God, he often goes his way and forgets what he is like, doing nothing to change himself (Jas 1:22-25). It is essential that we not be like Saul and most men, but rather that we accept correction and see ourselves as we really are, like God sees us (1 Cor 13:12). Only then can we repent and become what we should be in God's sight (2 Cor 13:5; 1 Cor 11:28-32; Psa 119:59; Lam 3:40).