

## Acts 8

### Being Sincere, But Sincerely Wrong

This chapter in the bible reminds me of an old Star Trek favorite (season 2, episode 24), called “The Ultimate Computer”. Captain Kirk warns an attacking spaceship that any aggression would lead to a magnified response. The seemingly helpless starship warned the much more powerful destroying enemy that the starship was equipped with *a mystery element* that would greatly magnify any attack and return it upon the enemy. The Kingdom of God is similar. The saints seem like helpless targets; but they are connected to the mysterious Kingdom of God, that never loses a battle. We might feel like we are alligator bait.



**Read Acts 8:1-8:** Thinking about spiritual warfare and martyrdom can be a scary topic. It is much more comforting to think about it as an opposing force that accompanies God's spiritual outpourings. In other words, resistance is like a sign of something good coming soon. We saw this with 9/11, Columbine High School and Charlie Kirk. Whenever God pours out his spirit on men, the demonic forces do the same thing.

Nothing gets wasted by God. What Satan intends for evil God uses for good. Saul of Tarsus is seen here as a primary enemy of the church. God will *flip the script* and use him to become the main church builder and author of scripture in his time (as the Apostle Paul). The attacks and scattering of the church did not diminish the spread of the gospel. To the contrary, it exploded the gospel across the whole world. When you think about it, Jesus told his people to leave Jerusalem and spread the gospel...and they had not gotten around to getting that done. It had been 3-5 years with no action. There is always an easy way or a hard way to do things.



*Jesus came up and said to them, "All authority (all power of absolute rule) in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. <sup>19</sup>Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations [help the people to learn of Me, believe in Me, and obey My words], baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>teaching them to observe everything that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always [remaining with you perpetually—regardless of circumstance, and on every occasion], even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28)*

Why is Saul of Tarsus so incensed by these Christians? Was he a perfectionist looking to silence those unauthorized and untaught men who seemed to be re-interpreting the scriptures? Was he zealously seeking recognition from his leaders? He claimed to be stamping out blasphemy. He thought that he was right. Many people have been martyred by people who thought they were doing God's work.

*"They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God." (John 16:2)*

### **Definition of Biblical Blasphemy**

Biblical blasphemy refers to the act of expressing disrespect or irreverence toward God or sacred things. It encompasses various behaviors and attitudes perceived as offensive in religious contexts.

### **Key Aspects of Blasphemy**

1. **Speech Against God:** Speaking ill of God, using His name in vain, or denying His power and authority.
2. **Sacrilege:** Treating sacred objects or beliefs with contempt.
3. **False Prophecies:** Claiming to speak on behalf of God without divine authorization.
4. **Attribution of Evil to God:** Implying that evil acts or intentions can be associated with God.

Is it logical that a scriptural purist like Saul would really find fault with what was called the followers of The Way (the church)? Saul was an observant Pharisee. If the Pharisees were memorizing scripture, they should embrace the church growth and the movement of the Holy Spirit, right? Theoretically yes, except for a very big problem found in Judaism. Paul was a zealous Pharisee. In addition to memorizing scripture, he poisoned his own logic by elevating

*the Mishna* above scripture. The Pharisees followed the written word (the Bible) as well as their *oral traditions*. The oral traditions were extra-biblical rabbinical writings, including the Mishna. Why would Pharisees bring in the Mishna if their goal was to restore the Hebrew language and knowledge of God to their people?

Most people in those days were illiterate, and the Pharisees adopted the attitude that these *ignorant people* could misinterpret scripture and do all kinds of damage from false interpretations. The rabbis spent their time in synagogues sharing the *Rabbi-approved* interpretations of scripture; thereby making themselves *an intermediary between God and men*. *The Catholic Church* also has a history of doing this. The Catholic popes and priests used to discourage people from trying to interpret the bible themselves. They did not trust the common man to get it right. In the end, the Catholic church injected all kinds of heresy into their interpretations. They added all kinds of nonsense about the Pope's infallibility and fabrications about Mary and the saints and many other unbiblical practices.

The Jewish Mishna was called *the fence around scripture*, to prevent men from misinterpreting it. In other words, it would take verses like: "Keep the sabbath holy" ... and they would write chapters about how that is practically done. It became a ridiculous listing of what constituted a violation of sabbaths and what passed. The minutiae it called for made life impossible. It became *a ridiculous book of loopholes and exceptions* allowing the priests to do what they wanted while being able to punish and penalize the common man. Jesus kept saying that these oral traditions accomplished the opposite of the scriptures. Instead of helping, it turned people off to the scriptures by placing enormous burdens on men that they did not even want to attempt. Instead of a day of rest it became an impossible nightmare.

*The scribes and Pharisees tie up heavy loads [that are hard to bear] and place them on men's shoulders, but they themselves will not lift a finger [to make them lighter]. (Matthew 23:4)*

The Mishna became a disaster. Jesus distanced himself from the Mishna all of the time. He would say "**You have heard it said...but I tell you...**" The Pharisees actually taught the Mishna much more than they taught scripture. Whatever you add to scripture works against scripture. The Mormons carry a King James bible with their own books. They claim to respect both. They do not. They use their books to trump scriptural interpretations every time. They will never set aside their teachings when the bible is in conflict. The bible becomes their unused reference to try to add legitimacy to their imaginary books. God's word is sufficient. Addition or subtraction to it is damaging and very dangerous.

*You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, so that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I am commanding you. (Deuteronomy 4:2)*

In the end, the attacks on the church resulted in spreading the evangelists and healers and prophets worldwide. It put the church into overdrive.

It is interesting that the Apostles were left alone during the scattering of the church. This could be that the progress was taking place in the *second wave* of saints at this time. The original 12 may have seen most of their usefulness take place already. When Paul became saved, he eventually went to Jerusalem and submitted himself to the original 12. It is very interesting that

they seemed to be a diminished version of their original selves. Perhaps God's main work in their lives was done. Note Paul's impression of Peter and John and the others:

*But from those who seemed to be something—whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man—for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me. (Galatians 2:6)*

### New Beginnings

Phillip had signs and wonders accompanying his powerful messages. Is this one way to confirm that the messages are from God? If the focus is on God, there will be confirmations coming from God's hand. If the emphasis is on the signs and wonders it will all be contrived and forced. Some Catholics will travel around the world to go to where people are having apparitions and visions.

*15 And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. 16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. 17 And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; 18 they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.” 19 So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. 20 And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen. (Mark 16)*

*Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. (James 5)*

When someone is advertising all of the miracles over the message, it should be a cautionary sign:

*The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, 10 and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. 11 And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, 12 that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (2 Thessalonians 2)*

Why does God allow the demons to exit so obnoxiously? They interrupt and add chaos. They shriek and make abrupt reactions. Perhaps he is letting them show the utter chaos and distortion that accompanies evil influences. Would you interpret the No Kings rallies as being more

**Read Acts 8:9-25:** All men want to be respected and considered to be significant. Men thrive on leading others. This natural desire can become distorted if it is unchecked or without merit. Simon the Sorcerer was able to amaze people with his magic. He leveraged that skill into elevating himself among the locals. It is unhealthy and inappropriate to see ourselves as superior or to manipulate others. It leads to abusive and selfish behavior. God built us to serve, not be served. Once people have power, they tend to direct the benefits towards themselves. The apostles and disciples were subject to the same temptations, as they were being used by God to heal and deliver people.

Having this much power to heal at your fingertips is dangerous. It would be almost impossible to not get an inflated view of yourself in a successful healing ministry. This may be one reason

that some church builders had significant personal challenges and issues. It kept them *down to earth*. The misuse of public persuasion comes with accountability. There are televangelists and cult leaders who have mastered the techniques of group hypnotism, the power of suggestion, crowd control and enriched themselves in the process. Enriching themselves while claiming to represent God will result in a terrible judgement.

## Techniques of Hypnosis Used by Televangelists

TECHNIQUE	DESCRIPTION	PURPOSE
<b>Induction Techniques</b>	Using calming music or repetitive phrases to put the audience into a relaxed state.	To increase receptiveness to suggestions.
<b>Embedded Commands</b>	Phrasing messages to include subtle commands (e.g., "You will feel blessed").	To implant suggestions subconsciously.
<b>Storytelling</b>	Sharing compelling personal stories or testimonials that evoke strong emotional responses.	To create a connection and enhance trust.
<b>Visual Imagery</b>	Using visuals and dramatic presentations to create vivid mental images.	To engage the audience and evoke feelings.
<b>Repetition</b>	Repeating key phrases or ideas throughout sermons or broadcasts.	To reinforce beliefs and messages.
<b>Group Dynamics</b>	Creating a sense of community or collective emotion during gatherings.	To amplify emotional response and impact.

## Power of Suggestion in Televangelism

- Emotional Appeals:** Televangelists often appeal to viewers' emotions, creating a sense of urgency or need for divine intervention, which can lead to increased donations.
- Promise of Rewards:** Many use the suggestion of spiritual or material rewards for donating, tapping into the belief that giving money will result in blessings.
- Call-and-Response Techniques:** Encouraging the audience to respond verbally or emotionally can enhance group dynamics, making individuals feel part of something bigger.

4. **Miracle Claims:** Suggesting that miraculous healings or personal success stories are a direct result of faith can lead to heightened emotional and financial investments from the audience.
5. **Framing:** Using language that frames financial support as a spiritual duty, thereby shifting the perception of giving from transactional to sacrificial.
6. **Personal Connection:** Establishing a personal connection with the audience through direct eye contact (via camera) and personalized testimonies encourages viewers to feel that the message speaks directly to them.
7. **Urgency and Scarcity:** Creating a sense of urgency around donations, such as limited-time offers for blessings or gifts, compels immediate action from viewers.

By applying these techniques, televangelists can effectively leverage the power of suggestion to build trust, elicit emotional responses, and ultimately enrich themselves financially.

If the devil cannot beat you he may use flattery or somehow try to join you. Simon the Sorcerer wanted to use whatever powers he could enlist to hold power over the lives of others. He wanted in on whatever power these saints seemed to have to heal. It drew quite a crowd. Peter denounced Simon for thinking that he could commandeer or buy into God's spiritual power or use it for personal gain. Simon realized the trouble he was in, and he begged Peter to pray for him and he stepped away from the church.

We live in a pluralistic (live and let live) society. After studying the bible for 43 years, I can clearly see how false prophets and false beliefs kill countless people. Their direction and advice is bad. A sorcerer is not a harmless member of society. He represents the devil, who comes to kill, steal and destroy. Magic is no different than idolatry. It is all looking for answers in the wrong places.

*I am making this covenant, with its oath, not only with you <sup>15</sup> who are standing here with us today in the presence of the Lord our God but also with those who are not here today. <sup>16</sup> You yourselves know how we lived in Egypt and how we passed through the countries on the way here. <sup>17</sup> You saw among them their detestable images and idols of wood and stone, of silver and gold. <sup>18</sup> Make sure there is no man or woman, clan or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the Lord our God to go and worship the gods of those nations; make sure there is no root among you that produces such bitter poison. <sup>19</sup> When such a person hears the words of this oath and they invoke a blessing on themselves, thinking, "I will be safe, even though I persist in going my own way," they will bring disaster on the watered land as well as the dry. <sup>20</sup> The Lord will never be willing to forgive them; his wrath and zeal will burn against them. All the curses written in this book will fall on them, and the Lord will blot out their names from under heaven. <sup>21</sup> The Lord will single them out from all the tribes of Israel for disaster, according to all the curses of the covenant written in this Book of the Law. (Deuteronomy 29)*

We are called to release people from the bondage of lies. It does not matter if it is from teaching in error, or teaching falsehoods. A bible teacher needs to make corrections when confronted with the truth. We can see that we should not expect cooperation from those who have abandoned intellectual honesty and sensible thinking.

*"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? (Isaiah 58:6)*

The apostles were surrounded by people with sicknesses, diseases and demonic oppression. There were more people to help than there were hours in the day. There were times when Jesus literally did not hardly get any sleep. It is tempting to get as much help with God's work as possible. These helpers must be in a right relationship with God; or they will have the opposite effect.

The scriptures warn us about prematurely laying hands on new leaders. It is hard to reverse any transfer of authority that you make. I have seen wealthy supporters who were not yet mature in the LORD become elevated to elder status because they were underwriting much of the ministry's costs.

*Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure. (1 Timothy 5:22)*

Peter and John had success preaching to the Samaritans. Historically, they would not have even spoken to them. There was a huge disdain for being idolatrous Hebrew half-breeds who compromised the scriptures to fit their territory and history. What social boundaries will God have us cross in this next wave of the Holy Spirit? Will the Muslims be the next group of converts? Iran has had millions of Muslims convert to Christ in recent times. Interestingly Jesus showcased a Samaritan and a Lebanese Gentile woman and a Roman Centurion as being the best faith examples near Israel.



The Samaritans believed the scriptures; but it was just a bunch of exciting facts. Next, they were introduced to the Holy Spirit, to make it personal and to enter into a life covenant with God, through Jesus. There were all kinds of people joining into the act, so to speak. The ultimate experience is to have God living in you and speaking to you in very personal ways. That does not happen to spectators. It is critical to confirm that we are not just being moved by our opinions or emotions.

**Read Acts 8:26-40:** Walking in the power of the Holy Spirit is an adventure. You become more aware of angelic activities all around you. You do not know where it is leading. It is more

exciting when you are not driving the bus. Phillip met a very interesting and influential man from Ethiopia. This man who met Phillip in the middle of the desert was similar in national influence to Joseph under Pharaoh.

It is interesting that God told Phillip to run. A running man in that Jewish culture was considered disgraceful. In the first century, cultural norms and values in Jewish society, particularly in relation to masculinity and dignity, significantly influenced perceptions of behavior. Generally, it was considered unbecoming or disgraceful for a Jewish man of stature to run, as it was associated with a lack of self-control and decorum.

## Social Context

- **Dignity and Respect:** Men in positions of authority or societal respect were expected to maintain a composed demeanor. Running could be seen as an act of haste or desperation, conflicting with the image of dignity.
- **Cultural Narratives:** Jewish texts and traditions often emphasize steadiness and deliberation over impulsive actions, reinforcing the notion that running was inappropriate for a respectable man.

God humbles us in many ways. Phillip had to put himself out there and make himself available to a stranger. Phillip explained the passage from Isaiah 53. It is about a messiah who was overlooked and mistreated. Being treated like an outsider probably resonated with the Ethiopian pilgrim. The Ethiopian official requested to be baptized on the spot. After this encouraging life changing moment, Phillip was transported by the Holy Spirit around 20-30 miles to Azotus/Ashdod.