

**Contrast: The Difference of a Life In Christ
Religiously Lost Versus Relationally Saved
1 Samuel 28**

Introduction: 1 Samuel 28 ultimately highlights the need to understand the contrast between being religiously lost and relationally saved. However, before we get into that vitally important comparison, let me first walk you through this unique Bible passage that sets it up.

Interestingly, I'm writing the final draft of this sermon a little over a month before our annual Trunk or Treat event that takes place the Saturday before Halloween. Given what happens in this narrative, it would have been fun to have handled this passage that weekend, but our verse-by-verse study through Samuel brought us to it earlier.

Proposition: There are three parts to the story of 1 Samuel 28 that set up our conversation about the difference between being religiously lost and relationally saved.

The first part of the story establishes the setting.

(1) The Setting of the Story. (28:1-6)

Two key circumstances create the setting for this story. The first circumstance is that,

A. David is stuck in his charade of pretending to be an ally of the Philistines. (28:1-2)

- 1. 1 In those days the Philistines gathered their forces for war, to fight against Israel. And Achish said to David, "Understand that you and your men are to go out with me in the army." 2 David said to Achish, "Very well, you shall know what your servant can do." And Achish said to David, "Very well, I will make you my bodyguard for life."**
2. Today's story will put this situation on pause. What's the situation? Well, last week, Jonathan Pugh walked us through chapter 27, where this all got set up.
3. In short, David decided his best move was to take his people to the land of the Philistines, form an alliance with the King of Gath, and convince the King of Gath that he was raiding Jewish cities, all while he raided historic enemies of Israel instead. It's a total charade about to backfire in David's face, but we won't see what happens until the next chapter. Therefore, all we need to know at this point is that Achish wants David and his army to be the ones who stand guard around him and his generals when they go to battle. Battle

against who? Well, this is where the plot thickens, and you start to see the mess David's charade has got him into.

The second circumstance that creates the setting for this story is that,

B. King Saul is stuck in the reality of his rebellion against God—the Philistines are preparing to invade, and God is no longer speaking to him. (28:3-6)

1. **3 Now Samuel had died, and all Israel had mourned for him and buried him in Ramah, his own city. And Saul had put the mediums and the necromancers out of the land. 4 The Philistines assembled and came and encamped at Shunem. And Saul gathered all Israel, and they encamped at Gilboa. 5 When Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly. 6 And when Saul inquired of the LORD, the LORD did not answer him, either by dreams, or by Urim, or by prophets.**
2. Samuel, who was the prophet of God to Israel and, as such, spoke for God to Israel, was dead. This wasn't new information (1 Samuel 25:1); therefore, it's safe to assume the narrator must be reminding us of this fact for a reason. In a minute, we will find out why. But for now, we just need to remember that Samuel died, and they buried his body.
3. However, the most important point so far is to notice that Saul's circumstances are dire. The Philistines are gathering to invade Israel, David is now living among the Philistines, and rumors are likely circulating that he has allied with King Achish.
4. Furthermore, God isn't speaking to Saul at all at this point. God had not only removed his Spirit from Saul (1 Samuel 16:14-23), but God was also no longer communicating to Saul through the ways of the past --- dreams, Urim, or prophets. Samuel died; however, the other men who had the gift of prophecy that Samuel disciplined weren't receiving a Word from God for Saul either! It's abundantly clear that Saul had been cast out from God, and no situation is more dire than that!
5. Now, before I go on, I need to explain something in this text. Verse three has been translated differently. Some translate verse three as the ESV does ("the mediums and the necromancers"), while others translate it as "mediums and spiritists" (NASB) and still others "the mediums and the wizards" (RSV). The difference between the translations is inconsequential because every possible translation appears to point us to the same general thing. The Faithlife Study Bible sums it up this way,

Note: **"Those who allegedly communicate with the spirits of the dead."**¹

6. OK! Some of you are saying, "Wait a minute, does the Bible say there are people who can communicate with the dead?" "Does this mean there are ghosts, as in their spirit is stuck between this life and the next?" This raises all kinds of questions, so let me give you some quick facts from the Bible on the subject. I'm not preaching about it in today's sermon, but given the level of confusion in our culture on this subject, I did want to clearly state what the Bible teaches.

a. **When a person dies, their soul instantly enters heaven (the eternally blessed presence of God) or hell (the horrific punishment of God).**

1) **22 The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, 23 and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. (Luke 16:22-23)**

Note: This passage is a parable, a fictional story to communicate a truth. We shouldn't form entire doctrinal positions off one parable. However, it is still important to note that there is a fundamental assumption in the parable that one man enters into the blessings of the presence of God and the other into "torment." There is no in-between period; rather, it happens as soon as they die.

2) **42 And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43 And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." (Luke 23:42-43)**

Note: Jesus told the thief on the cross who repented and believed in Him that he would be in heaven with Him that day!

3) **21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. 23 I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. 24 But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. (Philippians 1:21-24)**

¹ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., Whitehead, M. M., Grigoni, M. R., & Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible* (1 Sa 28:3). Lexham Press.

Note: Paul clarified that he would immediately be with Jesus if he died! However, he also made it clear that it was more necessary to remain in the flesh and serve the church, meaning he would no longer serve the church once he died because he would be with Jesus. The point is that for those who are in Christ, when we die, our spirit instantly leaves our flesh and consciously enters the presence of Christ. We are no longer here! Paul repeated this truth in 2 Corinthians.

- 4) **6 So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight. 8 Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. (2 Corinthians 5:6-8)**

Note: Notice again that it is instant! There is no in-between period where you are a ghost floating around the earth or living in purgatory until you earn the right to go to heaven. Jesus is our right (John 3:16), and the Spirit is our guarantee (Ephesians 1:14) and assurance (Romans 8:14-16)!

- 5) For more insight on this subject, read this blog from John Piper - <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/will-we-meet-jesus-as-soon-as-we-die>.

- b. **God has the power to let the dead appear and communicate with us. (Matthew 17:1-3)**

Note: 1 And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. 2 And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. 3 And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. (Matthew 17:1-3)

- c. **Satan and demons are real and are at work on the earth. (Mark 1:39, Luke 8:30, Ephesians 6:11-12)**

Note: God can choose to use the dead to reveal things to us if He wants, but those under the influence of Satan or his demons can also be caused to see things with or without people acting as mediums and necromancers to reveal what they want as well.

- d. Therefore, because God clearly condemned mediums and necromancers, those who claim to be ones were most likely complete charlatans who did nothing but fool people into thinking they heard from the dead or

were, in fact, being used by Satan and his demons to ultimately lead people away from a life of trust and faithfulness in the Lord.

7. Now, with that, let's get back to our text. The narrator points out that Saul had run the mediums and necromancers out of Israel. Why is that important? Well, because the Law of Moses required all the mediums and necromancers to be killed, as well as those who sought their services! Again, the Faithlife Study Bible correctly noted,
8. Note: **"The Law demands that mediums and necromancers, as well as Israelites who seek their services, are to be killed (see Lev 19:31; 20:6, 27; Deut 18:10–12). Saul does not follow the Law completely; he had cast the mediums out of the land but hadn't put them to death."**²
9. Therefore, it appears Saul did just enough to make it appear to others that he was obeying the Law, all while giving himself an opening to break it. That is, in not executing the mediums and necromancers, Saul gave himself the opportunity to find them and use them, which takes us right into the religious hypocrisy of King Saul.

The second part of the story is,

(2) The Hypocrisy of the Story – While publicly banning those who communicated with the dead, King Saul secretly accessed one! (28:7-10)

- A. **7 Then Saul said to his servants, "Seek out for me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her." And his servants said to him, "Behold, there is a medium at En-dor." 8 So Saul disguised himself and put on other garments and went, he and two men with him. And they came to the woman by night. And he said, "Divine for me by a spirit and bring up for me whomever I shall name to you." 9 The woman said to him, "Surely you know what Saul has done, how he has cut off the mediums and the necromancers from the land. Why then are you laying a trap for my life to bring about my death?" 10 But Saul swore to her by the LORD, "As the LORD lives, no punishment shall come upon you for this thing."**
- B. There isn't much to explain here other than the fact the medium knew if she got caught, she could die and that Saul used the name of God, who ordered the mediums and necromancers to be killed, to assure her she wouldn't be killed! If that's not religious hypocrisy, I don't know what is! Saul is acting like a spokesperson for God while confidently using God's name and character as a way of assuring a person living in total rebellion against God that they are essentially both justified and safe in doing so!

² Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., Whitehead, M. M., Grigoni, M. R., & Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible* (1 Sa 28:3). Lexham Press.

The third part of the story is,

(3) The Purpose of the Story – God made it clear that He was going to use the Philistines to execute His judgment on King Saul and his legacy. (28:11-25)

A. 11 Then the woman said, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" He said, "Bring up Samuel for me." 12 When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice. And the woman said to Saul, "Why have you deceived me? You are Saul." 13 The king said to her, "Do not be afraid. What do you see?" And the woman said to Saul, "I see a god coming up out of the earth." 14 He said to her, "What is his appearance?" And she said, "An old man is coming up, and he is wrapped in a robe." And Saul knew that it was Samuel, and he bowed with his face to the ground and paid homage.

1. Some scholars note that this lady was likely a charlatan; thus, she was shocked that her seance worked! She likely had never actually seen anything before, but this time, God sent Samuel.
2. Some scholars don't believe this is Samuel at all. R. D. Phillips did a great job refuting their positions and showing us that we have every reason to believe the person who shows up is the Samuel, who had served Israel as God's prophet. Phillips wrote,
3. "This raises a question on which expositors of Scripture have differed: did the witch really summon the spirit of Samuel from the grave? Most commentators in the course of church history have denied that Samuel truly was summoned. A popular view of the early church was that the evil woman had summoned Satan to appear in the guise of the prophet Samuel. Tertullian wrote, "God forbid we should believe that any soul, much less a prophet, could be called forth by a demon." In the time of the Reformation, Martin Luther argued, "Who could believe that the souls of believers, who are in the hand of God and in the bosom of Abraham, were under the power of the devil ...?"⁵ John Calvin added that "God would never have allowed His prophets to be subjected to such diabolical conjuring ..., as if the devil had power over the bodies and souls of the saints which are in His keeping." On these grounds, Luther asserted that the supposed appearance was a deception of Satan, whereas Calvin suspected a delusion in the minds of Saul and the abominable woman. The problem with this denial is that there are elements in the text that cannot be so easily dismissed. First, not only did Saul and the woman describe the spirit as Samuel, but the inspired writer agrees. Verse 15 states, "Samuel said to Saul." Moreover, the summoned spirit replied to Saul with the very message that Samuel had given him in life: "The Lord has done to you as he spoke by me, for the Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, David" (1 Sam.

28:17). A deluded Saul seeking comfort would not likely have conjured these words, and if Satan had appeared to deceive Saul, it is not obvious why he would have spoken such truth. Moreover, the spirit uttered a prophecy that came true: "Tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me. The Lord will give the army of Israel also into the hand of the Philistines" (28:19). Speaking from the realm of the dead, the spirit expected to see Saul and his sons in the same realm on the very next day. Does this mean that a servant of Satan actually succeeded in raising the soul of a prophet, one who had entered death in God's saving care? The answer of most commentators today is that the Bible does seem to state that Samuel was summoned, yet it could not have been by the demonic power of the medium that this happened. Therefore, it is most likely that Samuel came not at the command of the witch but at the unexpected will of God. This would explain why the woman cried out in shock when she saw the spirit, whom she initially identified as a "god": "When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice" (1 Sam. 28:12). This suggests that her regular occult activities were fraudulent and that she was just as shocked as Saul when an actual spirit from the dead appeared. Matthew Henry comments: "God permitted, on this one occasion, the soul of a departed prophet to come as a witness from heaven, thus sending him to confirm the word he had spoken on earth."³

- B. 15 Then Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" Saul answered, "I am in great distress, for the Philistines are warring against me, and God has turned away from me and answers me no more, either by prophets or by dreams. Therefore I have summoned you to tell me what I shall do." 16 And Samuel said, "Why then do you ask me, since the LORD has turned from you and become your enemy? 17 The LORD has done to you as he spoke by me, for the LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, David. 18 Because you did not obey the voice of the LORD and did not carry out his fierce wrath against Amalek, therefore the LORD has done this thing to you this day.**

Note: In 1 Samuel 15, we see Saul's final failure with God. In 1 Samuel 13, Samuel had already assured Saul that Saul's family heritage would not continue ruling Israel, but in 1 Samuel 15, we find out God was even done with prospering Saul as King.

- C. 19 Moreover, the LORD will give Israel also with you into the hand of the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me. The LORD will give the army of Israel also into the hand of the Philistines."**

³ Phillips, R. D. (2012). [1 Samuel](#) (P. G. Ryken & R. D. Phillips, Duguid Iain M., Eds.; 1st ed., pp. 474–477). P&R Publishing.

1. Remember that Saul's narcissistic leadership led him to kill all the priests in Nob, the very priests who offered the sacrifices to God that meet the requirements of the Covenant God made with Israel through Moses to protect and prosper them! God told Israel a human King was a bad idea, and now all of Israel was going to suffer because of it!
2. Specifically, however, in context to the purpose of this passage, Saul now knows that not only is he getting ready to die the next day, but his dream of handing the throne of Israel to his descendants is about to end as well. Saul had been living like there was a way for him to manipulate God into giving him what he wanted, but in one moment, the few shreds of false hope he had clung to since the events of 1 Samuel 15 were destroyed, and Saul lost all hope. The Bible says,

D. 20 Then Saul fell at once full length on the ground, filled with fear because of the words of Samuel. And there was no strength in him, for he had eaten nothing all day and all night. 21 And the woman came to Saul, and when she saw that he was terrified, she said to him, "Behold, your servant has obeyed you. I have taken my life in my hand and have listened to what you have said to me. 22 Now therefore, you also obey your servant. Let me set a morsel of bread before you; and eat, that you may have strength when you go on your way." 23 He refused and said, "I will not eat." But his servants, together with the woman, urged him, and he listened to their words. So he arose from the earth and sat on the bed. 24 Now the woman had a fattened calf in the house, and she quickly killed it, and she took flour and kneaded it and baked unleavened bread of it, 25 and she put it before Saul and his servants, and they ate. Then they rose and went away that night.

Note: Ironically, narcissists constantly demand love, yet no matter how loyal people are to them, they never truly believe they are loved. We've seen this numerous times throughout Saul's life. We've seen him accuse everybody of betraying him and that nobody cared for him, yet, right here in his vulnerability and brokenness, these people are still genuinely concerned about him and want to serve him.

Challenge: The contrast between Saul and David is a prototypical example of the difference between a person who's religiously lost and one who's relationally saved. Which one are you?

Before you answer that question, let me flesh out what I mean by "religiously lost" and "relationally saved" by showing you three specific ways they contrast.

The first way a religiously lost person and relationally saved person contrast is that,

- (1) **A religiously lost person sees God's rules as restrictive, while a relationally saved person sees God's rules as love.**

- A. David wrote,
- B. **1 Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; 2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. (Psalm 1:1-2)**
- C. Nothing in Saul's story suggests he agreed with David's words in Psalm 1. To Saul, God's instructions seemed like obstacles or necessities, never gifts.
- D. On the other hand, a relationally saved person doesn't see God's rules as condemning them or restricting them from living but rather as God unleashing them to live! They see them as the road map to maximize living, not minimize it.
- E. For instance, I don't see God's instructions to not cheat on my wife as some sort of restriction on my ability to experience life but rather as one of the keys to having a healthy, joyful marriage!
- F. Jesus said I came that you might have life! It's not about what He's keeping us from doing but what He's taking us into! We are born in sin and death. His death and resurrection give us access to the life He created us to have, and His instructions tell us how to actively live in it! This is why Paul's letters generally all start with the doctrines of the Gospel of Jesus and then end with instructions on how to live in it!

The second way a religiously lost person and a relationally saved person contrast is that,

- (2) **A religiously lost person seeks ways to justify disobeying God's rules, while a relationally saved person strives to obey them.**
 - A. **"8 I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart. 9 I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation; behold, I have not restrained my lips, as you know, O LORD." (Psalm 40:8-9)**
 - B. Saul seemingly assumed he had done enough because he got rid of the mediums and necromancers. Saul didn't love God; he loved being King, so he found ways to tell himself he obeyed God enough to get God's blessings as King. He found ways to justify disobedience when he didn't think God's rules made sense or didn't apply to his circumstances!
 - C. On the other hand, if you love God because you are in a real relationship with Him through Jesus Christ, you have so much respect for who He is and what He has done in adopting you as his fully favored child that you are naturally driven to obey Him! This is why Jesus said,

- D. **27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. (John 10:27)**
- E. For a person who is relationally saved, anything less than obedience feels like a betrayal of the love God has given you and even like a betrayal of yourself. Therefore, you don't look for ways to disobey the Lord; instead, you strive to live your life in obedience to Him! There's no doubt you fail, but the effort of your life is not to find ways around his instructions but to push yourself to obey them! Love says I want to find ways to honor you, not dishonor you! Again, this is why Jesus said,
- F. **"15 "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." (John 14:15)**

Similarly, the third way a religiously lost person and a relationally saved person contrast is that,

- (3) **A religiously lost person obeys God's rules to try and get something out of the relationship. In contrast, a relationally saved person obeys God's rules because of what they have in the relationship.**
 - A. "Me monsters" love religion because it gives them a way to serve themselves and call it holy! In Saul, we see a man who consistently viewed his relationship with God as a tool to be King. God was there to get what he wanted.
 - B. However, with David, above everything, he wanted God! This is why we hear David crying this out when he finally comes to grips with just how sinful his life had become when he had an affair with Bathsheba and arranged her husband's death to cover it up. David cried out,
 - C. **10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. 11 Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. 13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. (Psalm 51:10-13)**
 - D. Saul only ever saw his failures in light of their potential effect on his earthly success, but David saw them in light of what they said about his relationship with God! When David realized his sin, he longed to be restored in his relationship with God, not as King!
 - E. This is super applicable in marriage. For instance, do you do things to get your spouse to do things for you, or do you do things because you love your spouse? One is driven by what you can get out of the marriage, and the other is driven by what you have in the marriage. You long to do what is right for your marriage because you are committed to loving your spouse and giving life to your spouse,

not getting life from your spouse. You don't do what's right for your marriage to have a marriage, but rather to love your spouse. The focus of a relationship is not to have the relationship, but it's the person you're in the relationship with!

- F.** This is precisely what it means to be in a relationship with Christ. It's not to get salvation; it's to get Jesus! The greatest two commandments weren't to love being saved and having friends and neighbors but to love GOD and others!

So, are you living like a religiously lost person or a relationally saved person? One is a path to death, while the other is clearly the path of life!