

Displacement

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The Scriptures present to us in very striking contrast the life history of two men named Saul. In the Old Testament we have Saul of Gibeah, who became the first king over the tribes of Israel; in the New Testament Saul of Tarsus, who became the Apostle Paul. Both were outstanding men: the one by reason of his great stature and imposing physical appearance; the other a man weak in bodily presence, but intense and powerful in his spirit.

Both of them were brought to a point where they had to face a most testing situation. They did not reach it in the same way, and the outward appearance of it greatly differed, yet in its underlying principles the situation was exactly the same. The strong contrast lies in the way they solved the problem it presented. If we tried to express it in one word, we should call it the problem of **displacement**.

This word has been largely used of recent years. People by the ten thousand, or even the hundred thousand, have been driven from the land of their birth and find themselves aliens in a strange land having lost their nationality, their possessions and sometimes their families and friends. They are like so much flotsam and jetsam on the sea of nations. They are **displaced persons**, and may well call forth our sympathy and prayers. This term will suit us very well as we consider the history of the two men named Saul.

With Saul of Gibeah all was bright at the beginning. His imposing appearance helped to carry him from comparative obscurity to kingship. But a test came in the matter of the Amalekites. God's command was their utter destruction, but Saul thought otherwise. Now for the test: would he allow God's will in this matter to displace his own will? He would not. Though to obey is better than sacrifice, he committed himself to **disobedience**. As a result he was rejected from the kingship in favour of David.

The test now came in another form. He had not allowed **his will** to be displaced by God's will: would he now allow **himself** to be displaced by David? No, he would not he fought against it might and main, and thereby committed himself to those months and years of self-seeking misery which only ended on Mount Gilboa, as recorded in 1 Samuel 19: 31.

With Saul of Tarsus things were very different. True, at the outset of his career he attained to some eminence amongst his co-religionists. He stated it thus, "I . . . profited in the Jew's religion above many my equals [contemporaries] in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers" (Gal. 1: 14). But this only landed him into a furious crusade against the followers of Jesus of Nazareth, who was anathema to him.

But on the road to Damascus everything was altered fundamentally and for ever. Jesus of Nazareth revealed Himself to him in the glory of God, and in the once despised Jesus he found a new and commanding Object, which from that moment dominated his life. As he afterwards said before Agrippa and Festus, "I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision" (Acts 26: 19). He became **obedient**, and not disobedient like Saul of Gibeah. Moreover he was **wholly displaced** in his own eyes by the Christ who had been revealed to him. He stated it thus: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 3: 20).

Saul of Gibeah, disobedient and fighting all his days against being displaced by another. Saul of Tarsus, obedient and "lady displaced by the Son of God, whose love unto death had captured his heart. The history of the one is recorded to warn us; of the other that we may find in him a pattern to follow, as he himself was inspired to tell us — "a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him [Jesus Christ] to life everlasting" (1 Tim. 1: 16).

So let each one of us calmly and honestly face the issue. Am I following in the steps of Saul of Gibeah or Saul of Tarsus, who became Paul — meaning, **little** — the Apostle of Jesus Christ? Am I disobedient and fighting against being set aside or displaced; or am I obedient to the truth of the Gospel, and glad to be set aside — displaced in order that Christ may be placed in His rightful position in heart and life? To be Christ-centred and not self-centred is proper Christianity.

And now let us note how strikingly the contrast appears when we reach the closing scenes in the lives of the two men. Near the end of his sad career, and after David had for the second time spared his life, we find Saul saying, "I have sinned . . . **I have played the fool**, and have erred exceedingly" (1 Sam. 26: 21). We turn to the last Epistle that came from the pen of the Apostle Paul, just before his martyrdom, and we find him saying, "**I have fought a good fight**, I have finished my course, I **have kept the faith**" (2 Tim. 4: 7). Saul of Gibeah fought for his kingship and his crown, when God had displaced him. It was a bad fight. Saul of Tarsus, now Paul the Apostle, fought for the truth of the Gospel and the glory of his Lord and Saviour. It was a good fight.

But could any contrast be more complete or more striking than "I have played the fool," and, "I have kept the faith." Pithy sentences indeed! And each one of us, as we approach the end of our earthly course, will find that our lives are to be summed up under one sentence or the other.

Let us face the issue now, Which is it going to be?