

## TO OBEY IS BETTER THAN SACRIFICE

I Samuel 15:1-33

### I. INTRODUCTION: I

1. **2** This passage records the pivotal event in the reign of king Saul, the first king of Israel.
  - A. King Saul was instructed by the Lord through the prophet Samuel to “utterly destroy” the Amalekites (v. 3; Ex. 17), but he was “unwilling” to do all God had commanded (verse 9).
  - B. Because of Saul’s disobedience, God rejected him from being King, (v. 26).
    - (1) He had sinned before (sacrifice at Gilgal; I Sam. 13:7-14), and proved cowardly later (Goliath; I Sam. 17).
    - (2) But God pointed to this episode as **the** decisive turning point in Saul’s reign (**I Sam. 15:26**: “...the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel”; **28**: “So Samuel said to him, ‘The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you.’”).
2. **3** We can learn many lessons from this inspired historical event (Rom. 15:4; **I Cor. 10:11-12**: “Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. 12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.”).
3. Let’s consider some of these lessons.

### II. DISCUSSION:

1. **4** God expects and demands complete obedience: v. 3
  - A. Was there anything unclear or complicated about God’s instructions? Yet Saul failed to “utterly destroy” the Amalekites (vv. 7-9).
  - B. “Well, God is such a loving and forgiving God surely he forgave Saul. After all, Saul did “most” of what God said. NO!” (vv. 18-19, 22-23)
  - C. Saul only obeyed as far as it pleased him, and that is **not** obedience at all! (self-willed; **Matt. 21:28-31**; **Isa. 66:2**: “But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.”; Saul had “itchy feet”; Psa. 27:14).
  - D. What God expected from Saul, He expects from us...complete obedience; not “to make haste” and substitute our will for His will!
  - E. Do we really treat Jesus in a way that we recognize that he “has all authority in heaven and on earth...” (Matt. 28:18)?
    - (1) Not if we do not do exactly as His word tells us? Lk. 6:46
    - (2) The heading in my Bible (I Samuel 15) is “Saul’s Incomplete Obedience”; an oxymoron! One either obeys or disobeys! There’s no such thing as “incomplete obedience”!
  - F. **5** Did Saul really love the Lord? Jn. 14:15 When is our “love” for the Lord truly love?
    - (1) When we follow 95% of what His word says?
    - (2) When we follow 99% of what His word says, or 100%?  
(vv. 20-21; Jn. 14:15; **I Jn. 2:3-5**: “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. 4 He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.”)

(3) We cannot be saved if we do not love the truth! 2 Thess. 2:10-12; Prov. 23:23

(4) We cannot be saved without obedience! Heb. 5:9

G. Just because **we** think something is “good” does not matter. What matters is doing the will of God! **Isa. 55:8-9:** “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD. 9 ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.’; **Matt. 7:21-23** (Christians in all denominations?!)

2. **6** Schemes devised by human wisdom are futile:

A. Saul and the Israelites thought up a scheme that pleased them and which they thought improved upon God’s plan (**vv. 9, 15**).

B. **So God said, “Oh, I’m sorry, I didn’t realize you were going to sacrifice those things to Me. Ummmhh, well now that I think about it, your plan is better than Mine. Go right ahead; I’ll be pleased whatever you decide to do.” (v. 19)**

C. The wisdom of man is worthless!! No matter how noble our motives might be, God is not impressed. **1 Cor. 1:25:** “Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”; Matt. 7:21-23; 1 Cor. 2:4-13

D. **7** Application:

(1) In the New Testament God prescribes a plan whereby man can be saved:

(a) Hear (Rom. 10:17; Rom. 1:16-17; 2 Thess. 2:13-14),

(b) Believe (Faith) (Jn. 8:24; Heb. 11:6),

(c) Confess (Matt. 10:32; Rom. 10:10, Acts 8:36-37),

(d) Repent (Acts 2:38; 17:30),

(e) Baptism (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Gal. 3:26-27),

(f) Remain faithful (Rev. 2:10; Col. 1:22-23).

(g) **When man teaches that all you must do to be saved is “to pray the sinners prayer and accept Jesus as your personal savior” is he doing things God’s way or Saul’s way? Is he “waiting on the Lord” or acting “hastily”?**

(2) In the NT God prescribes a means and a method to call men unto Him (Jn. 6:44-45):

(a) Power to save is in the gospel: Rom. 1:16-17

(b) Man is called to salvation through the preaching of the gospel: Mk. 16:15; 2 Thess. 2:13-14

(c) Hearing the gospel produces faith leading to salvation: Rom. 10:17; **Col. 1:21-23:** “And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled 22 in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight — 23 if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard...”

(d) **So when men devise a plan (i.e., social gospel) where “We’ll slip em’ a little gospel with their chili supper.” Or “We’ll slip em’ a little gospel with their softball game.” Are they doing things according to God’s way or Saul’s way? Are they substituting human wisdom for divine wisdom? Are they “waiting on the Lord” or acting “hastily”?**

(3) **8** In the NT God reveals the work of the church (evangelism, edification, limited benevolence) and the organization (local church) by which that work is to be done:

- (a) **Evangelism:** local church(s) sent support directly to preacher(s) (Phil. 1:3-5; 2:25; 4:14-18; 2 Cor. 11:8-9). We find no missionary societies in the NT! We find no sponsoring churches in the NT!

**Are we going to do what God said, or are we going to imitate the attitude of Saul? Shall we substitute human wisdom for divine wisdom? Are we going to “wait on the Lord” or act “hastily”?**

- (b) **Edification:** local church is to “edify itself in love” (Eph. 4:16). The obligation of building up (edifying) the church is the responsibility of the church, not another organization (e.g., Bible college, Sunday School Corp. etc.). Additionally, edification in NT is “spiritual” edification (cf. Eph. 4:14) not “social” or “recreational” edification.

**Are we going to do what God said, or are we going to imitate the attitude of Saul? Shall we substituting human wisdom for divine wisdom? Are we going to “wait on the Lord” or act “hastily”?**

- (c) **Benevolence:** objects of benevolence for the church in the NT were always “**needy saints**” (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35; 6:1; 11:29; Rom. 15:26, 31; 1 Cor. 16:1; 2 Cor. 8:4; 9:1, 12; 1 Tim. 5:16). Important not to confuse the issue! Individual Christians have a great benevolent responsibility to all men (e.g., Matt. 25:31-46; Gal. 6:10, Jas. 1:26-27; etc.). But, the NT limits the benevolent responsibility of the church to “needy saints.” And, in the NT when it came to needy saints, the church was always the organization doing this work according to God’s revealed pattern:
- (i) Church cared for its own needy (Jerusalem): Acts 2:44-45; 3:6; 4:32-35; 6:1-2.
  - (ii) One church sent to many churches to relieve “...brethren dwelling in Judea” (e.g., the church in Antioch sent to churches of Judea): Acts 11:27-30.
  - (iii) Many churches sent to one church (Macedonia, Achaia, and Galatia sent to church in Jerusalem): 1 Cor. 16:1-3; 2 Cor. 8:1-5; 2 Cor. 9:1-2; Rom. 15:25-32.
- (d) In the NT there were no sponsoring churches (for either evangelism, edification, or benevolence), there were no fellowship halls for social edification, there were no gymnasiums and softball fields for recreational edification, there were no church-supported colleges, there were no church-supported old age homes or orphan homes, etc. The church did its God-given work by using the God-given pattern.
- (e) **You judge which is right? You judge what work the church should do and how she should do it? God’s work done God’s way or man’s work done man’s way? What you or I “think” doesn’t matter...what matters is what God thinks, and what God says!** Isa. 55:8-9; Jer. 10:23; Prov. 14:12

### 3. **9** God commands must be carried out as given:

- A. Saul’s alterations of the Divine way were nothing less than utter foolishness, and a rejection of what God has revealed (**vv. 16, 22-23, 26**)(v. 16: “Be quiet!”; “Stop!”; Shut up!).
- B. Failing to do things exactly as God reveals is to rebel against God, to reject Him; regardless of what we think of our motives! To reject His word is the exact same thing as if we stood face-to-face with God and said, “God you don’t know what you’re talking about, I’m smarter than you and I’m going to tell you what we should really do and how we should do it.” (**v. 23**: “For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.”)
- C. Was God unclear in His instructions to Saul? **v. 3**: “Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.”

D. Is God unclear in His instructions to us? **1 Cor. 2:4-5:** “And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”; Rom. 1:16-17; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Eph. 3:3-4; 1 Pet. 4:11; Col. 3:17 (b-c-v!!)

E. **Application:**

(1) Worship:

- (a) Lord’s supper (1 Cor. 11:23-29; Acts 20:7),
- (b) Preaching/teaching (Acts 2:42; 20:7),
- (c) Giving of our means (1 Cor. 16:1-2),
- (d) Prayer (1 Tim. 2:1-4),
- (e) Music: singing hymns, spiritual songs (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).

Just as Saul’s alterations of the Divine way were nothing less than utter foolishness, and a rejection of what God has revealed, so are man’s ways when he tries to worship God on any other terms than what God has revealed in His word! Matt. 15:9; Lev. 10:1-2 (silver-haired elderly woman)

(2) Calling men to God:

- (a) Should we use God’s way? Rom. 1:16-17; 2 Thess. 2:13-14
- (b) Or, man’s way: lasagna dinners, “gospel” gymnasts, “Pumping Iron for Jesus,” “coon hunts for Christ,” etc.
- (c) Just as Saul’s alterations of the Divine way was nothing less than utter foolishness and a rejection of what God has revealed, so are man’s when he tries to draw men unto God by any other means than the gospel!

(3) Work of the church and the all-sufficiency of church:

- (a) Should we use God’s way? Eph. 4:11-16 (v. 16: “...the edifying of itself in love.”)
- (b) Or man’s way: missionary societies, sponsoring churches, church supported institutions, etc. (*Michigan Monthly* (Rochester College): “a newsletter for the Church of Christ and related institutions”). Were there “related institutions” in the first century?
- (c) Just as Saul’s alterations of the Divine way were nothing less than utter foolishness, and a rejection of what God has revealed, so are man’s when we try to:
  - (i) Involve the church in work that God has not given the church to do, or,
  - (ii) When we invent organizations to do the church’s work for her, or,
  - (iii) When we use a pattern for accomplishing the work of the church that we have designed and God has not!
- (d) **Are we going to do what God said, or are we going to imitate the attitude of Saul? Are we going to “wait on the Lord” or act “hastily”?**

***There is one final and very important lesson we must learn from Saul’s tragedy...***

4. **10** Zeal and good intentions alone cannot save:

- A. For all appearances Saul is zealous for God’s cause: **v. 4:** “So Saul gathered the people together and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand foot soldiers and ten thousand men of Judah.”
- B. But, is zeal and sincerity **alone** pleasing to God? It didn’t save king Saul!
  - (1) It didn’t save Saul of Tarsus:

- (a) **Sincere? YES! Acts 26:9:** *“Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.”*
- (b) **Zealous? YES! Acts 22:3:** *“I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers’ law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today.”*
- (2) Notice how Paul describes his former, “zealous and sincere” self: **Acts 23:1:** *“Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.”*
- (3) But a “zealous and sincere” man can still be a very wrong man! **1 Tim. 1:13:** *“...I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor (i.e., violently arrogant).”*
- (4) Did God excuse and save Paul because he believed what he did, he did zealously and sincerely and “in the name of God”? No, he still needed to obey! **1 Tim. 1:15**
- C. **Application: Example: Did those cancer patients in the 1970’s that sincerely believed that the drug “laetrile” would cure their cancer have their cancer cured? No!! Then, will those that...**
  - (1) Sincerely believe that they don’t have to be baptized to be saved; are they saved?
  - (2) Sincerely believe that we can use carnal attractions (e.g., food, fun & frolic) instead of the gospel to draw men to God, do they really draw men to God? **Jn. 6:66:** *“From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.”*
  - (3) Sincerely believe the church can do any work man deems a “good work” (e.g., “chili cook-off), do they please the Lord? **Matt. 7:23:** *“And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”*
  - (4) Sincerely believe they can worship God in any way that suits them? e.g., instrumental music
    - (a) **Of course not!! Such people and such thinking will no more please God, regardless of the “sincerity involved; than did laetrile cure those cancer patients that sincerely thought it would cure their disease! Matt. 7:23:** *“And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”*
    - (b) **Don’t get me wrong! Our motives and our sincerity are critical, but all the good and sincere motives in the world profit us nothing when they are not coupled with humble and contrite obedience.**  
**Isa. 66:2:** *“But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.”*  
**Heb. 5:9:** *“...He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him...”*  
**1 Jn. 2:3-5:** *“Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. 4 He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.”*

### III. CONCLUSION: !!

1. How are you going to react to God’s word? Are you going to “wait on the Lord” (i.e., do His will) or act “hastily” (i.e., do your own will)?
2. King Saul is a perfect example of how people react when their unwillingness to submit to God’s will is pointed out to them:

- A. First, they try to **deny** their disobedience: **v. 13**: “Then Samuel went to Saul, and Saul said to him, ‘Blessed are you of the LORD! I have performed the commandment of the LORD.’”
- (1) Talk to nearly anyone caught up in the errors of denominationalism or the digressive teachings and practices of wayward churches of Christ and you’ll hear this very same response when you use God’s word to point out their error.
  - (2) They’ll say, “We’re doing God’s will! It really doesn’t matter what the Bible says, because we know in our heart we are pleasing God.” Prov. 14:12; Matt. 7:23
- B. When people cannot deny their disobedience, they then try to **justify** it: **v. 15**: “And Saul said, ‘They have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep and the oxen, to sacrifice to the LORD your God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed.’”
- (1) Again, those caught up in error and false teaching do the same. “Look at all the good we are doing for God.” cf. Matt. 7:21-23
  - (2) God does not need us to do anything for Him. He wants us to simply obey His straightforward commands as revealed in His word (1 Jn. 2:3-5; 5:3).
- C. When denial and self-justification fail, people try to **excuse** their disobedience: **vv. 20-21**: “And Saul said to Samuel, ‘But I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me, and brought back Agag king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. 21 But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal.’”
- (1) Again, those caught up in error and false teaching do the same thing.
  - (2) They’ll say, “Well, the Bible cannot be fully understood, anyway that’s just your interpretation, we just follow our heart and we know our God is a God of love and forgiveness and He’ll be pleased.” Matt. 7:21-23
3. Disobedience cannot be **denied**, **justified**, or **excused**! **vv. 16a** (“Be quiet!”), **22-23**: “So 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 heed than the fat of rams. 23 For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He also has rejected you from being king.’”
4. Just as God told Saul what to do, God has told us what to do.
- A. Even though we might be sincere and think we have good motives, when we fail to act by faith in doing “...the will of My [our] Father in heaven,” we are rejected by God just as He rejected Saul (**1 Cor. 10:11-12**: “Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. 12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.”).
- B. **\*\*** Like Saul, if we disobey God will reject us! **Matt. 7:23**: “And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

An original sermon by Craig Thomas, evangelist working with the Westside church of Christ in Bloomington, IN.