

## 1 Samuel 15 — Obedience Is Better Than Sacrifice

May 29, 2022

Good morning CrossWinds! If you are a visitor on this Memorial Day weekend, it is great to have you. My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. This morning, we are continuing in our study of 1 Samuel. We are in 1 Samuel 15. Turn to that chapter in your Bible and take out your sermon notes. While you are doing that I want to take a moment to bring to your attention two things happening this summer.

1. Vacation Bible School: It will be held June 13 -17 on both campuses. If you are interested in helping or if you would like to register your child, scan the QR code in the bulletin to get connected.
2. At a recent staff meeting, the pastors were talking about how it is difficult for the church family to stay connected in the summer. The pastoral staff came up with the idea of encouraging you to invite church friends to join you when you are heading out on the boat or on your way to the golf course to shoot a few holes. We hope that encouraging everyone to invite a friend from church to join them will help us grow closer together in the summer, not drift apart.

We came up with a name for this campaign. We called it the Plus One campaign for the summer. You will see graphics about this this summer. We encourage you to not just spend time with people from church you already know but to invite new people to join you that you do not know.



Let me pray, and then we will get to our study.

Whenever we look at the news, we see leadership failures. We are more familiar with the leaders who fail us than leaders who are faithful to us. Most of the high-profile leaders in the world are corrupt. They stay in power through evil and deceptive practices. On the rare occasion we see a good leader, our guts tell us it will only be a matter of time until he or she also becomes corrupt and starts using the country instead of serving the country.

Why are so many leaders corrupt? The Bible tells us it is because of human sinfulness. The more power people have, the easier it is for them to become corrupt. This is one of the reasons our Founding Fathers created a government system with checks and balances. They were trying to limit corruption.

As we have studied 1 Samuel, the life of King Saul has been a study on leadership corruption. That was especially apparent in the later half of 1 Samuel 14 that we studied last week. We watched King Saul's ego and desire for power get in the way and lead him to make bad decisions. He put his entire army under an oath to not eat until he had revenged his enemies, the Philistines. He starved his army out of success. When Jonathan, King Saul's son, tasted a little honey with the top of his spear --- even though he never knew about his father's silly oath to not eat that day --- King Saul attempted to kill him. We were left with the impression that King Saul was a complete basketcase. He would starve his army out of God-given success and attempt to kill his own son for a minor and innocent violation of one of his random, pointless orders.

At this point, after Saul attempted to kill his own son, God was so done with him. Even though Saul did not die until 1 Samuel 31, since God was done with him, his obituary is inserted at this point. After this week, Saul was literally a dead man walking until the end of this book, since God has rejected him as king.

Saul's obituary reads like a regular obituary except the front of it reads like we wouldn't expect after reading the earlier parts of this chapter. Let me show you what it says.

When Saul had taken the kingship over Israel, he fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, against the Ammonites, against Edom, against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines. Wherever he turned he routed them. And he did valiantly and struck the Amalekites and delivered Israel out of the hands of those who plundered them. 1 Samuel 14:47–48 (ESV)

This gives us a different impression of King Saul than we had from the earlier parts of this chapter. When it came to Saul's military accomplishments, he did extremely well. He was almost always victorious. These kingdoms were located in the four directions around Israel. While Saul was militarily incompetent in this chapter because he let his ego get in the way, most of the time he was a great military success. He was admired in the eyes of the world. But while Saul was a success on the battlefield, as we learned last week, his personal character was a mess. His obedience to God's Word was poor. His faith in God's character was absent. His treatment of his soldiers was poor. So while Saul had great military success for most of his life, when you look under the hood of his life at the parts of his life that counted in God's eyes, he was a failure.

What a reminder this is for us. What matters is not the list of achievements on our resumes. What matters is not the height on the corporate ladder to which we can climb. What matters is not the list of accomplishments they put in our

obituaries. What matters is who we are in our relationship with God. What matters is our obedience to God's Word and our trust in God's Word. What matters is how we treat other people who are made in God's image. Those are the things that matter. Today, as we look at 1 Samuel 15, we will see that in spite of great military success, Saul was rejected by God and lost his kingdom because of character issues, not military competence issues.

Saul was on a losing streak. In 1 Samuel 13, Saul lost his dynasty. As a result of his disobedience to God's word, his son would not sit on the throne. In chapter 14, Saul lost the confidence of his army as he starved them to death as they pursued the Philistines. Today, in chapter 15, Saul lost his kingdom. Let's dive into the words of this crucial chapter.

### **God's king must listen to God's Word.**

And Samuel said to Saul, "The LORD sent me to anoint you king over his people Israel; now therefore listen to the words of the LORD." 1 Samuel 15:1 (ESV)

There is a lot in this opening verse. Saul was no ordinary king. There were three elements of his kingship that made it unique.

1. The Lord was the one who made Saul king. Saul was not king because he was born into a kingly line. He was not king because he conquered a nation. He did not become king because he was clever or popular. It was quite the opposite. He was a reclusive farmer that was a loner when he began. The only reason Saul was king of Israel is that God chose him and made him king. Saul had absolutely no reason to look in the mirror and have an ounce of pride. His kingship had nothing to do with himself. It was a gracious gift of God. If it wasn't for God choosing Saul and making him king, he would still

have been a farmer plowing a field. He needed to remember where he came from and give God all the credit. Last week, in chapter 14, we saw that Saul forgot the credit went to God. He was making the kingship about himself.

2. King Saul had to submit to Samuel the prophet. This is not apparent in our English translations but it is apparent in Hebrew. Where it says, "The Lord sent me..." The "me" is in the emphatic tense. Saul was to never forget that he was not the ultimate authority. His kingship was different. He was a king under the authority of God and under the prophet of God who spoke God's words to God's people. Saul had to remember he was not at the top of the food chain. He served under God and God's prophet.
3. The people over whom Saul reigned were not his people, they were God's people. Saul was to never forget that the people were not there to serve him. They were God's people, and he was to steward them for God's purposes. He was taking care of the people of God not to be using the people for his own gain.

Since God made him king, since he was under the authority of God and God's prophet, and since he was taking care of God's people, then he must listen and obey God's words. The Hebrew is very vivid here. It double emphasizes this point. "Saul, you must most definitely hear and obey God's words." As God's king over God's people, obedience to God's voice was an essential and non-negotiable part of his position. Whatever he did as a king, hearing and obeying God's words to him was the one thing he *must* do!

If you have a teenager, this verse reminds me of the talks I am sure you have had with your children. Sometimes you need to sit them on the couch and tell them that if it wasn't for Mom and Dad, they wouldn't exist. Mom and Dad feed and clothe them. Mom and Dad make the rules, and as a teenager, they are not in charge. These are the non-negotiables of living in Mom and Dad's house. This is the same kind of conversation God had with Saul through Samuel the prophet. The ground rules of what Saul must do were set. Saul clearly understood the ground rules of being king. Now let's see if he obeyed them.

“Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘I have noted what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way when they came up out of Egypt. Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.’ ” 1 Samuel 15:2–3 (ESV)

Who was Amalek? He was the grandson of Esau. We read about him in Genesis 36:12. His descendants were known as the Amalekites. They had a long a history of violence and hostility against the Israelites. They were the first people to attack and try to destroy the Israelite nation after it came out of Egypt. They were a nomadic people who lived to the south and southeast of Israel in the Sinai Desert. The Bible portrays them as terrorists who preyed on weak people and had no regard for God. After they tried to wipe out the Israelites God promised to bring judgment on them and wipe them off the face of the earth. You may remember Israel's battle with the Amalekites. It is in Exodus 17:8-16. As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning. When he put his hands down, the Israelites were losing. Aaron and Hur held Moses' hands up for him until Israel had victory that day. Israel's battle against the Amalekites ends with God promising to eliminate the Amalekites from the face of the earth.

When we turn to Deuteronomy, which is Moses' second giving of the law before he died, Moses reminded the Israelites a second time that in the future, when they were established in the land, God would have them eliminate the Amalekites.

“Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you came out of Egypt, how he attacked you on the way when you were faint and weary, and cut off your tail, those who were lagging behind you, and he did not fear God. Therefore when the LORD your God has given you rest from all your enemies around you, in the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you shall not forget.  
Deuteronomy 25:17–19 (ESV)

God said, "Now that Saul is king and Israel has rest in the land, this is the right time to attack and destroy the Amalekites."

Many people find God's command to genocide the Amalekites disturbing to modern sensibilities. How could God hold the Amalekite people responsible hundreds of years later for something their ancestors did? How could God justify wiping a nation off the face of the earth? That sounds so unfair. To let you know, after the Amalekites attacked Israel in the Exodus, they did not change direction and become nice people. The book of Judges tells us they continued to attack and try to destroy Israel for hundreds of years. God was patient in those days, giving them hundreds of years to repent, but generation after generation they refused. Later, we will see their current king murdered many people. While God gave them hundreds of years to repent of their ways, the character of this nation never changed.

I should also point out that we tend to evaluate the genocide of a nation from a human perspective. This was not Saul's decision. This was not one

human being deciding to wipe out a nation. This was God carrying out just judgment against a nation's sin after waiting patiently for hundreds of years for repentance. God is not just the one who gave us life, but as the creator he is uniquely qualified to be the just judge of everyone's life. If God decides he wants to wipe a nation off the face of the earth because of its sin, God can do that. He is God, not another human being like you and me.

Third, we should remember there was a preventative nature to destruction of wicked nations in the Promised Land, not simply a justified judicial nature. God's people were to completely wipe out the sinful nations in the Promised Land so that God's people would not learn and follow these nations' sinful ways. Some of these nations burned their children to death as worship to false gods. The one true God of the universe did not want his people to be deceived and follow those corrupt pagan practices. The complete destruction of these nations by God's people was a little like cutting a cancerous tumor out of a body. Yes, it is radical surgery, but if the cancer is left it won't be long until it destroys the entire body.

Many of you who are familiar with the Bible will know God's people did not completely annihilate these hard-core pagans out of the Promised Land. God's people learned their godless ways and went into exile because of their corruption. So while the genocide of the evil Amalekites sounds barbaric, in God's good there are many good reasons for this to take place at this point in Israel's history.



There is a special word for this particular kind of warfare. It is called harem warfare. That word is used multiple times in this chapter. It means everything in the pagan nation God's people were conquering was to be destroyed. No plunder was to be taken. Nobody was allowed to live. The Israelites were conquering and gaining the plunder of another nation. They were acting as God's hand of judgment on a nation and wiping it, s stuff, and all history of its existence off the planet.

Let's see if Saul carried out God's instructions.

So Saul summoned the people and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand men on foot, and ten thousand men of Judah. And Saul came to the city of Amalek and lay in wait in the valley. 1 Samuel 15:4–5 (ESV)

The main point of this verse is Saul got a lot of people together for this war. In chapter 14, he had 3,000 in his army, but most of the soldier's abandoned him. He was down to 600 at one point. This time, his army was massive --- 210,000 people. An army that size should have gotten the job done.

Then Saul said to the Kenites, "Go, depart; go down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them. For you showed kindness to all the people of Israel when they came up out of Egypt." So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites. 1 Samuel 15:6 (ESV)

Who were the Kenites? They were a nomadic tribe of metalworkers who lived in the land of the Amalekites. Moses' father-in-law was a Kenite. While the Amalekites tried to attack and destroy the Israelites in Exodus 17, in Exodus 18 we see the Kenites came to Israel's assistance after that battle. The Kenite's help to Israel was not forgotten. Saul didn't want to risk collateral damage so he warned the Kenites to get out of the way. With the Kenites out of the way, Saul

began the terrible task of acting as God's hand of judgment and wiping a nation off the face of the earth.

And Saul defeated the Amalekites from Havilah as far as Shur, which is east of Egypt. 1 Samuel 15:7 (ESV)

That is a short verse but there are a lot of body bags behind this verse. As you can see from the map, this was a large area. Lots of people died as Saul carried out God's command.



It looks like Saul was obedient to God's word, until we read the next verse.

### Saul partially obeyed God's Word.

And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive and devoted to destruction all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fattened calves and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them. All that was despised and worthless they devoted to destruction. 1 Samuel 15:8–9 (ESV)

That special Hebrew word, the word harem --- which means to completely destroy something as God's hand of judgment --- is used three times in these verses. Two times it is used to describe the things Saul chose to destroy, but one time it is used to describe things Saul chose NOT to destroy. Saul destroyed the people and all the worthless stuff. Saul chose to not destroy the king, the best of the animals and the good stuff.

Why did Saul not kill Agag the king? We don't know. One of the customs of pagan kings in that day was to keep the kings of the kingdoms you conquered alive. You cut off their thumbs and big toes then you had them as servants

picking up scraps around your house, hobbling around without balance. It was to stroke your ego and leave the king of your conquered kingdom alive in humiliation. That may have been Saul's plans for Agag because as we saw last week, Saul had a big ego and was filled with pride like a hot air balloon.

This isn't as clear in the English but it is clear in the Hebrew. The Hebrew is careful to point out that it was Saul who chose to spare the king, the best of the livestock, and the best of their stuff. It was the people who followed his lead. That detail will be important to remember as we get further into this chapter. Deviation from God's instructions was Saul's idea.

The word of the LORD came to Samuel: "I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments." And Samuel was angry, and he cried to the LORD all night. 1 Samuel 15:10–11 (ESV)

It says God regretted having made Saul king because Saul turned back from following him and had not fulfilled his words. Saul chose to not listen to God's words. Saul broke the ground rules God just reviewed with him in verse 1.

When we read that God regretted making Saul king, we breeze through the verse and miss the significance of what is said. In the Hebrew that particular phrase about God regretting something he had done is only found one other time in the Old Testament. If you and I were readers of Hebrew, we would have instantly heard an echo of that earlier reference and connected God's feelings about Saul in this moment with that earlier reference. What is that reference? It is Genesis 6:5-6 which describes how God felt about mankind when the earth was filled with wickedness in the days before the flood. In that time, God's response to the evil of mankind was to send the flood and wipe out the earth except for

Noah, his family, and the ark. This shows you how upset and deeply grieved God was over Saul's willful sin, his partial obedience to God's word in this moment.

The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. Genesis 6:5–6 (ESV)

It was not just God who is deeply grieved in this moment but Samuel was also grieved. He was angry.

...And Samuel was angry, and he cried to the LORD all night. 1 Samuel 15:11b (ESV)

Why was Samuel so angry at Saul? Samuel remembered what we read in chapter 12 that if Israel's king did not obey God's word then God's hand would not just be against the king but against the nation. Samuel knew that God's hand of judgment would not just be against Saul but against the nation. Many people were going to suffer. When the leader sins, the people always suffer. Samuel was angry about what was about to happen.

And Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning. And it was told Samuel, "Saul came to Carmel, and behold, he set up a monument for himself and turned and passed on and went down to Gilgal." 1 Samuel 15:12 (ESV)

Samuel got up early the next morning to search for Saul. Here we find an interesting piece of information. On the way to find him, Samuel found out that Saul just set up a monument to himself and his victory over the Amalekites. Saul build a Mount Rushmore and had his face carved into the rock so people would not forget his greatness and his victory in the battle. Does anyone think Saul has an ego problem? Most definitely! When you are building monuments to yourself, you think far too much of yourself.

When Samuel learned that Saul build a momument to himself to help everyone always remember his greatness in the battle with the Amalekites, I am sure that just made Samuel's anger toward Saul even hotter.

What happened next was Samuel found and confronted Saul about his sin. While Samuel was angry, Saul tried to weasel out of his sin. Saul gave six sinful responses to his sin. They are the same sinful responses to sin that many of us use today. As we will see, none of them work.

**And Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed be you to the LORD. I have performed the commandment of the LORD." 1 Samuel 15:13 (ESV)**

The very thing God told Samuel the night before that Saul had not done was the very thing Saul immediately claimed he has done. This was Saul's first attempt at escaping the consequences of his sin. He lied through his teeth.

#### **1. Saul lied about his sin.**

Imagine how that lie sounded to Samuel's ears when he knew Saul was telling a bold-faced lie. Before we wag our heads in disbelief at lying Saul, isn't it true that we are no different? When someone calls us out about our sin, don't we have a tendency to bend the truth and lie? It is so easy to try to cover the truth about our sin with deception. It comes so naturally when put under pressure. We are no better than Saul because we are no different than Saul. We lie to cover our sin.

The problem with lying as we attempt to cover our sin is liars eventually get caught. That is exactly what happened to King Saul. Samuel caught him in the lie.

**And Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear?" 1 Samuel 15:14 (ESV)**

Samuel said, "If you carried out God's command, why do I hear the sound of all these sheep and oxen? Where did they come from?" The Hebrew is a little humorous. Saul was supposed to listen to God's voice. If Saul was supposed to listen to God's voice, then why was Samuel hearing the voice of sheep and oxen? Saul was caught in his lie, as liars often are. Let's see how he continued to try and weasel his way out of his sin by coming up with more sinful responses

## 2. Saul tried to blame shift his sin on his soldiers.

Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen to sacrifice to the LORD your God, and the rest we have devoted to destruction." 1 Samuel 15:15 (ESV)

Remember in verse 9 it told us that it was Saul's idea to spare Agag the king, the best of the animals, and the best of the stuff. Now that Saul was caught, he tried to shift the blame to the soldiers. "It was the people's idea to keep this stuff, not my idea." Isn't this the way we try to deal with our sin? We blame our bad choices on other people instead of taking responsibility for what we have done? If you have a teenager, you know how this works. If you ask him or her about his or her homework, he or she always has an excuse for why it is not done. "The dog ate my homework." "My school computer is not working." "The Internet in our house was down." The list of excuses and blaming doesn't seem to end. Blaming other people or circumstances for our sin is a common way all of us try to justify our sin.

This is what Adam did with Eve in the Garden of Eden. When God approached Adam about eating the forbidden fruit, what did Adam say? "It was Eve's fault. She gave it to me!" No, Adam. Take responsibility for your stuff. Blaming our sin on others is a sinful response to sin.

### **3. Saul tried to rationalize his sin.**

Saul said the reason they did not obey God's word and destroy everything was because they wanted to bring the animals to God and offer them as sacrifices. Saul claimed he had a good motive for not obeying God. He claimed he had a better idea than obeying God. Rather than listen to God's commands, he made up his own plans that he thought were better. He would keep the best of the stuff for sacrifice. Remember, Saul and the people were not to keep anything for themselves in the battle against the Amalekites. They were to function as God's hand of judgment against the Amalekites destroying everything about them to erase their history from the face of the earth, not to treat their animals and stuff like a free Amazon shopping spree.

Don't we do this all the time? Don't we try to rationalize disobedience to God's word because we think we have a better plan than obeying God's word? Rationalizing our disobedience to justify our disobedience is a sinful response to our sin. "I cheated on my taxes so I could give more to the church." "I copied my friend's homework so I could go to youth group." "I know the Bible says not to let unwholesome talk come out of my mouth but somebody needed to put them in their place."

### **4. Saul tried to minimize his sin.**

Saul lied about his sin. Next, he tried to blame his soldiers for his sin. Then, he tried to rationalize his disobedience to justify his disobedience. Now, he tried to minimize his sin by focusing on what he did right and telling Samuel to not focus on what he did wrong. He said, "The rest I did destroy. I destroyed all

the people and all the bad stuff. Samuel, look at the stuff I did right, not the stuff I did wrong."

It is a little like giving your children three things to do when you leave home. They need to clean their rooms, take out the trash, and take the dog for a walk. You come home at the end of the day and they took the dog for a walk and took out the trash but they didn't clean their rooms. When you talk to them about not cleaning their rooms, all they want to talk about are the things they did right that day, not the tasks they avoided that day.

This is another sinful response to sin and is not just something our kids do, but isn't it something we do? Instead of confessing our disobedience to God, we want to focus on the few things we did right and hope it cancels out our disobedience. "I know I shouldn't have looked at that website, but God, I went to church on Sunday. Don't those two cancel each other out?"

The problem with all these fast-talking excuses was Samuel was wise to them. He saw right through Saul's line of excuses so he stopped him mid-sentence.

Then Samuel said to Saul, "Stop! I will tell you what the LORD said to me this night." And he said to him, "Speak." 1 Samuel 15:16 (ESV)

I think Saul was about to regret letting Samuel speak the truth. It was going to hurt.

And Samuel said, "Though you are little in your own eyes, are you not the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel." 1 Samuel 15:17 (ESV)

This was referring to Saul's humble beginnings as a farmer. As we know, his position as king had gone to his head. Samuel reminded him, "You are not a



country farmer anymore. You are the head of the nation, and you are in charge.  
Stop blaming your sin on other people. You are the king."

"And the LORD sent you on a mission and said, 'Go, devote to destruction the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.' " 1 Samuel 15:18 (ESV)

"God gave you a job to do. You were to completely annihilate the Amalekites and all their stuff." That was his job.

So Samuel reminded Saul of his position and his mission. This gave Samuel the background he needed to make his point.

"Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you pounce on the spoil and do what was evil in the sight of the LORD?" 1 Samuel 15:19 (ESV)

Saul had a clear and unambiguous word from God. He directly disobeyed God. Why did Saul not complete the task? What led him to partial obedience? The answer is found in this verse. He pounced on the spoil.

Here is an interesting parallel. Do you remember last week when Saul's army was famished because the men were forced to march 25 miles without food or drink? In the evening they were famished. Desperate for food they pounced on the animals at nightfall and ate the meat without properly draining the blood because they were so hungry. That same word picture is used to describe how Saul pounced on the Amalekite animals and valuable treasure. Saul rationalized his disobedience to God by loving all the valuable Amalekite stuff more than he loved God. Saul was a materialist. He loved stuff more than he loved God. If he could get more nice shiny stuff, that was reason enough to disobey God.

Here is a great reminder for us. When we love the stuff of life more than the God who died to save our lives, we will pounce on stuff and rationalize ways to disobey God's word to keep it. Look what Jesus said about this.

**“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” Matthew 6:24 (ESV)**

#### **5. Saul tried to argue his way out of sin.**

At this point Saul realized he could not wiggle his way out of his sin. He knew he could not successfully justify his sin with Samuel. So he changed tactics. He decided to argue with Samuel to justify his sin. Let's read these verses together and as we do you can hear Saul raising his voice yelling at Samuel trying to use the brute force method of persuasion.

**And Saul said to Samuel, “I have obeyed the voice of the LORD. I have gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me. I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have devoted the Amalekites to destruction. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal.” 1 Samuel 15:20–21 (ESV)**

Can you hear Saul raising his voice at Samuel trying to get Samuel to back off about his sin?

Saul was not the first, nor will he be the last person, to try arguing his way out of getting caught in his sin. We do the same thing. The problem with trying to argue your way out of your sin is that in the heat of the argument, you often say things you regret. You say things you wish you could take back. That is what happened to Saul. He slipped new information into the discussion he should have kept to himself. Prior to this Samuel was only talking to Saul about keeping the Amalekite animals alive. Now Samuel knew Saul also kept Agag, the king of the Amalekites, alive! Oops! Probably shouldn't have told Samuel about that one.

And 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 listen than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king.” 1 Samuel 15:22–23 (ESV)

The penalty was spelled out at the end. God was rejecting Saul from being king. He could no longer be king because he has rejected and did not obey God’s word. The earlier part of the speech was intended to expose what Saul was incapable of seeing, which was the devastating seriousness of what he did.

More pleasing to God than burnt offerings and sacrifices is God’s people obeying him. Listening is better than the fat of rams. The fat of rams is the best part of the sacrifice. Obedience is more pleasing to God than the best worship you can give God in church. Listening to and obeying God’s words brings more pleasure to God than singing in church, than reading the Bible, than listening to sermons, you name it. Far more important and far more delightful to God is when God’s people obey him. We cannot have a healthy, vibrant relationship with God if we are not submitting to him and obeying his will. Obedience to God is more important than worship of God.

And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, 1 John 2:3–4 (ESV)

Obeying God’s words and following God’s will is the most pleasing form of worship God can receive from our lives. When we know what is right, we must do what is right. We must not be like Saul and lie, blame, rationalize, minimize or try to argue our way into partial obedience to God’s Word because we think we know better. Let me give you some examples.

The Bible tells us to save sex for the wedding night.

Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. Hebrews 13:4 (ESV)

That is hard in our sex-saturated culture. More pleasing to God than going to church, than giving in the offering plate, than singing songs of worship is obeying God's Word in the area of sexual purity. No amount of religious activity can be used to justify sexual sin.

Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. Ephesians 4:29 (ESV)

More pleasing to God than going to church and helping on the worship team or reading your Bible is obeying God's Word about our words. In our social media world where everyone cuts one another down, as Christians, we are to be different. We are about building people up, not tearing them down.

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Ephesians 4:32 (ESV)

More important than going to church, worship or any religious activity is that we forgive those who have hurt us just like Jesus has forgiven us. We need to forgive the family members that has hurt us. We need to forgive the people at work that stabbed us in the back. It is not that church and worship is unimportant but that obeying God when it comes to forgiving those who have hurt us is more important.

So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Matthew 5:23–24 (ESV)

God says obeying his command about restoring broken relationships is so important that if during church you realize you have a broken relationship with someone, God would rather you walk right out of worship and work on restoring that relationship than to wait until the end of the service. That is how important obedience is compared to the worship of God.

Samuel also said rebellion is like the sin of divination. To know God's word and intentionally disobey it is as offensive to God as witchcraft.

Sometimes when I am talking to teenagers about obeying their parents, they don't think obedience is a big deal. Obedience to our parents is a big deal. The Bible says obeying parents is a commandment that comes with a promise, that it may go well with you. If teenagers disobey their parents, it will not go well for them. Remember that obedience to God is always more pleasing to God than worship.

Samuel also said presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Presumption means stubbornness, pride, and insubordination. That is what Saul was doing with God. Pridefulness and rebelliousness is as offensive to God as worshipping an idol.

Friends, in response to what Jesus has done for us, the best thing we can give God is not worship or religious ceremony but the wholehearted obedience of our lives to God's Word. Whenever we think we can change, reinterpret or partially obey God's words, that is offensive to God in the same way it was for King Saul.

After Samuel laying Saul out, Saul finally got it. You would think that Saul would repent. He didn't. What happened next was only superficial repentance. It was worldly sorrow, not genuine repentance. This is another example of the wrong way to respond to sin on the part of Saul.

#### 6. Saul had worldly sorrow for his sin.

Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice. Now therefore, please pardon my sin and return with me that I may bow before the LORD." 1 Samuel 15:24–25 (ESV)

At first, it looked like Saul got it. He realized he didn't obey God's voice. He said, "Please pardon my sin so you can return with me that I may bow before the Lord." What was Saul worried about? Was he worried about the offense of his sin in the eyes of God? Was he concerned about falling out of God's favor? No. He was only worried about the public perception of the crowd if Samuel didn't join him in worship. Saul's false repentance was all politically motivated. Saul started by confessing his sin but quickly slipped into what he was really afraid of losing, which was the respect and popularity of the people.

And Samuel said to Saul, "I will not return with you. For you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel." 1 Samuel 15:26 (ESV)

Yikes, that had to hurt. "You are done."

As Samuel turned to go away, Saul seized the skirt of his robe, and it tore. And Samuel said to him, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you." 1 Samuel 15:27–28 (ESV)

The skirt of the robe is the bottom hem of the robe. The only way Saul could have grabbed this is if he was on the ground begging for Samuel to come back and publicly join him in worship so Saul didn't have to face public shame.

The same Saul who a few verses before was building a Mount Rushmore monument to his own greatness was now on his knees begging for Samuel to not reject him in public so he didn't face public shame for his sin.

This tearing of Samuel's robe turned into a picture of what just happened to Saul --- God had torn the kingship out of Saul's hand and would give it to someone better than Saul. Wow! That had to hurt.

“And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret.” 1 Samuel 15:29 (ESV)

Samuel told Saul there were no second chances. It was done.

Then he said, “I have sinned; yet honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may bow before the LORD your God.” 1 Samuel 15:30 (ESV)

Do you see this worldly sorrow instead of genuine repentance? More important to Saul than repenting of his sin before God was losing the respect and admiration of the people.

So Samuel turned back after Saul, and Saul bowed before the Lord. 1 Samuel 15:31 (ESV)

Apparently, Samuel changed his mind. Samuel went back with Saul, but it wasn't to join him in worship. It was to do the same thing Jonathan did in an earlier chapter. It was to finish the job Saul had not done.

Then Samuel said, “Bring here to me Agag the king of the Amalekites.” And Agag came to him cheerfully. Agag said, “Surely the bitterness of death is past.” And Samuel said, “As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women.” And Samuel hacked Agag to pieces before the Lord in Gilgal. Then Samuel went to Ramah, and Saul went up to his house in Gibeah of Saul. And Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death, but Samuel grieved over Saul. And the Lord regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel. 1 Samuel 15:32–35 (ESV)

## Applications

1. Obedience to God's Word is important to God. Saul didn't take obeying God seriously. He took it casually. He only obeyed God's words partially. He tried to reinterpret God's words. God was extremely offended by that because obedience to God's Word is extremely important to God. That is a reminder we all need to hear in a time when it is so easy to rationalize partial obedience to the word of God in our culture.
2. Obedience to God is more important than worship of God. That doesn't mean worship is unimportant. Worship is important. It is just that obedience to God's word is far more important to God than any type of worship.
3. There are sinful ways to respond to sin. In this chapter, Saul gave us many examples.
  - 3.1. Lying about our sin and claiming it never happened is a sinful response to sin. It is something we do all the time.
  - 3.2. Blaming our sin on other people or circumstances is a sinful response to sin.
  - 3.3. Attempting to rationalize our sin because we have other plans that are good is a sinful response to our sin.
  - 3.4. Attempting to minimize our sin and only look at the things we did right instead of owning up to the things we did wrong is a sinful response to sin.
  - 3.5. Defending ourselves by arguing for our sin is a sinful response to sin.
  - 3.6. Having worldly sorrow, not genuine repentance is a sinful response to sin.



## Conclusion

If you are like me, you find yourself thankful that you are not a soldier in Saul's army. We are not serving under a king who is constantly looking for ways to justify his sin instead of repenting of his sin.

Thankfully, we are serving under King Jesus. Unlike King Saul who only partially obeyed God's word, King Jesus perfectly obeyed God's word, even when it was hard. Jesus perfectly obeyed his father's word even when it involved going to the cross and dying in our places for our sin, even when it meant that God the Father's will was for God the Son to become sin for us to die for us. Jesus did not try to find a way out of that hard obedience. He leaned into it and accomplished it perfectly, fully saving each of us from our sin.

This is why I am so thankful to be serving in the army of King Jesus instead of King Saul. How about you?



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