

OBEDIENCE

Assenting to rightful authority without hesitation or resistance

Topic: Obedience Is Better Than Sacrifice

But Samuel replied, What is more pleasing to the Lord: your burnt offerings and sacrifices or your obedience to his voice? Listen! Obedience is better than sacrifice, and submission is better than offering the fat of rams.

~1 Samuel 15:22 (NLT) ~

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INTRODUCTION

All through life, we are taught about obedience and its affect on our life. As parents, we teach our children to obey and when they fail to obey, we issue out reprimands and acts of correction. Obedience is the foundation of a good society. When people obey rules and regulations things can run smoother. In human behavior, obedience is a form of "social influence in which a person yields to explicit instructions or orders from an authority figure". Obedience is generally distinguished from compliance, which is behavior influenced by peers, and from conformity, which is behavior intended to match that of the majority. Obedience yields from the heart and not from the norms of society. We can also say that love is the key to an obedient heart. Obedience comes naturally to us when we love someone. We obey our parents because we love them. Students obey their teachers because they adore them.

For the Christian, obedience to God is certainly important in our life. As a Christian, our obedience to God must be an obedience by faith and not an obedience under the law. Under the old covenant, obedience was required under threat of death, regardless of the state of a person's heart. Under the present covenant of grace we obey, not because it is commanded of us, but because our thankfulness for what Jesus has done makes us want to obey. Obedience to God proves our love for Him, demonstrates our faithfulness to Him, glorifies Him in the world, and opens avenues of blessing for us. In our study, we will explore what it means to obey God from the heart and what it means to not obey God from the heart. We will look deep into the fundamental truth that "Obedience is Better Than Sacrifice".

OUR STUDY

Our study text taken from the book of 1 Samuel, chapter 15 tells the story of a man, Saul (we will not call him a man of God) who was made King over a people of God. This man's heart was not a heart of obedience to follow the commands of God; this is the reason why we can not call him a man of God. The story in our text has a history dating back to the time of Israel's exodus from their Egyptian slavery; a story that had its beginning before the time of King Saul.

Where it all begin (Exodus 17:8-16).

During the people of Israel's exodus, while they were still Rephidim (meaning of which is a place of rest), they were attacked by the warriors of Amalek. Mind you, the people of Israel were not fighters; they were former slaves. However, they had a God who fought for them. In their defense, Moses commanded

Joshua, “Choose some men to go out and fight the army of Amalek for us. Tomorrow, I will stand at the top of the hill, holding the staff of God in my hand”. The Bible tells us that Joshua did as Moses had commanded. As long as Moses held up the staff of God in his hands, Israel had the advantage; when his hands got tired and started to lower, the Amalekites gained the victory. So, Aaron and Hur stood on each side of Moses holding up his hands. As a result, Joshua overwhelmed the army of Amalek in battle. Although the Lord had given the people of Israel the victory, Amalek’s attack against Israel (God’s people) would not go unpunished by God. We are such a blessed people because we serve a God who may give us the victory in a situation wherein our enemy raises an attack against us, but is a God who will not let what the enemy does to His people go unjudged or unreciprocated.

Judgement enacted against the enemies of God’s people.

After God had given the people of Israel victory over the warriors of Amalek, He gave instructions to Moses as to what Moses was to do as God set out to do what He planned to do.

Exodus 17:14-16 (NLT)

- ¹⁴After the victory, the LORD instructed Moses, “Write this down on a scroll as a permanent reminder, and read it aloud to Joshua: I will erase the memory of Amalek from under heaven.”
- ¹⁵Moses built an altar there and named it Yahweh-Nissi (which means “the LORD is my banner”).
- ¹⁶He said, “They have raised their fist against the LORD’s throne, so now the LORD will be at war with Amalek generation after generation.”

It was here where God had committed his plans to destroy the very existence of the Amalekites. It was here where God declared that there will be a time where the memory of Amalek and its people would be no more.

Back to our text.

So now, Saul has been made Israel’s King as the result of Israel’s request for a king. The time had come for God to perform what He had spoken concerning the Amalekite nation. God sends His servant Samuel to speak with King Saul giving him instructions concerning what he is to do.

1 Samuel 15:1-3 (NLT)

- ¹One day Samuel said to Saul, “It was the LORD who told me to anoint you as king of his people, Israel. Now listen to this message from the LORD!
- ²This is what the LORD of Heaven’s Armies has declared: I have decided to settle accounts with the nation of Amalek for opposing Israel when they came from Egypt.
- ³Now go and completely destroy the entire Amalekite nation—men, women, children, babies, cattle, sheep, goats, camels, and donkeys.”

The instructions were clear. For the man who leads the people of Israel (God), all he is to do is simply obey the commands given by God. The time has come for God to settle accounts with the people who opposed His people. God tells King Saul...”Now go and **completely destroy** the entire Amalekite nation. This meant men, women, children, babies, cattle, sheep, goats, camels, and donkeys. This meant that nothing was to remain; there was to be no memory of the nation of Amalek after this encounter.

Unfortunately (and I like to say, sadly), when God does not have a man's full heart; when a man is not fully committed to following the ways of God, that man is not capable to following with unwavering obedience the commands of God.

The Bible tells us that King Saul does mobilized his army (200,000 soldiers from Israel and 10,000 men from Judah) and goes to a town of the Amalekites and does wage war against them as God had commanded. However, Saul fails to obey the command fully in that he spared Agag's (the Amalekites king) life and kept the best of the sheep and goats, the cattle, the fat calves, and the lambs—everything, in fact, that appealed to them. He destroyed only what was worthless or of poor quality. Saul's actions were in direct disobedience to what God had commanded. Saul performed what was in his heart which was things of a selfish nature. He spared what his heart wanted for himself; what appealed to his heart and desire. Saul's actions demonstrate clearly that he did not have a heart of obedience to serve and obey all God commands His children to do.

As a child of the Most High God, we are called to live a life of total obedience unto God. God's command for us to be obedient is not a selfish act on God's part. In fact, God's command for us to be obedient unto Him is truly an unselfish act of God. God, who is omnipresent (having the ability to be everywhere at same time) and who is omniscient (having unlimited knowledge), sees and know what lies ahead for man. In His omnipresence and in His omniscience, God will direct us away from harm and into safety even through we cannot see the approaching harm nor the unsafe environment we are headed to. Not only that, God desires to lead us to the places and to becoming the people he ordained for our life. However, as a God of choice and not a God of force, whether we reach those places or become those people is largely the results of our obedience unto God's leading. Psalm 37:23 says, the steps of good man are ordered by the Lord; but here's the thing... While God may truly order his steps, the good man must move in obedience in taking the steps for his life ordered by the Lord.

What is obedience and why is it important to God?

Obedience can be defined as assenting to rightful authority without hesitation or resistance. It is when one willingly submits to the authority or direction of another. In order to understand why obedience to God is important, we must understand what obedience to God in fact is according to what the Bible says. The general concept of obedience both in the Old and New Testament relates to hearing or hearkening to a higher authority. One of the Greek terms for obedience in the Bible conveys the idea of positioning oneself under someone by submitting to their authority and command. Another Greek word for obey in the New Testament means "to trust". There are six (6) reasons we can highlight to show why obedience to God is important.

- 1. Jesus calls us to obey.** In Jesus Christ, we find the perfect model of obedience. As his disciples, we follow Christ's example as well as his commands. Our motivation for obedience is love. The Gospel of John 14:16, Jesus says "If you love me, you will keep my commandments".
- 2. Obedience is an act of worship.** While the Bible places a strong emphasis on obedience, it's critical to remember that believers are not justified (made righteous) by obedience. Salvation is a free gift of God, and we can do nothing to merit it. True Christian obedience flows from a heart of gratitude for the grace we have received from the Lord.

3. God rewards obedience. Over and over again we read in the Bible that God blesses and rewards obedience.

Deuteronomy 28:1-14 (NKJV)

1. “Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth.
2. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God:
3. “Blessed *shall you be* in the city, and blessed *shall you be* in the country.
4. “Blessed *shall be* the fruit of your body, the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks.
5. “Blessed *shall be* your basket and your kneading bowl.
6. “Blessed *shall you be* when you come in, and blessed *shall you be* when you go out.
7. “The LORD will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before your face; they shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways.
8. “The LORD will command the blessing on you in your storehouses and in all to which you set your hand, and He will bless you in the land which the LORD your God is giving you.
9. “The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways.
10. Then all peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they shall be afraid of you.
11. And the LORD will grant you plenty of goods, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your ground, in the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers to give you.
12. The LORD will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand. You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow.
13. And the LORD will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath, if you ^[d]heed the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, and are careful to observe *them*.
14. So you shall not turn aside from any of the words which I command you this day, *to* the right or the left, to go after other gods to serve them.

What we glean from this Scripture is that there are abundant blessings destined for the child of God who lives in total obedience to God. The word blessed appears six times in these fourteen verses. There are so many things this Scripture shares that the Lord will do to the obedient child. This alone should inspire and encourage our heart to want to live a life of obedience to God.

4. Obedience to God proves our love. The books of 1st and 2nd John clearly explain that obedience to God demonstrates love for God. Loving God implies following his commands.

1 John 5:2-3 (NKJV)

2. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments.
3. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.

2 John 6 (NLT)

Love means doing what God has commanded us, and he has commanded us to love one another, just as you heard from the beginning.

It's important to understand that if we say we love God, we must be obedient unto God; this is how our love is manifested.

5. Obedience to God demonstrates faith. When we obey God, we show our trust and faith in him. Faith and trust go hand in hand with one being obedient. It's impossible to truly love God if we are not truly obedient unto God. Our life is the manifestation of whether we love God enough to have the faith to trust God unconditionally. This is what the apostle John (who is an old man by this time) conveyed to the saints.

1 John 2:3-6 (NLT)

³. And we can be sure that we know him if we obey his commandments.

⁴. If someone claims, "I know God," but doesn't obey God's commandments, that person is a liar and is not living in the truth.

⁵. But those who obey God's word truly show how completely they love him. That is how we know we are living in him.

⁶. Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Jesus did.

6. Through obedience, we experience the blessings of holy living. Only Jesus Christ is perfect, therefore, only He could walk in sinless, perfect obedience. But as we allow the Holy Spirit to transform us from within, we grow in holiness. This is the process of sanctification, which can also be described as spiritual growth. The more we read God's Word, spend time with Jesus, and allow the Holy Spirit to change us from within, the more we grow in obedience and holiness as Christians. The process of growing in obedience and holiness is just that...a process. There are no "quick fixes" or "overnight successes". Growing in obedience and holiness comes through our walking in intimate relationship with Jesus, through our yielding ourselves unconditionally to the will of God regardless whether we understand the why or know the how in yielding. As we submit in obedience, the why will become clearer and how will be opened up to us.

The sacrifice of our disobedience.

1 Samuel 13:13-14 (NLT)

¹³. "How foolish!" Samuel exclaimed. "You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you. Had you kept it, the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever.

¹⁴. But now your kingdom must end, for the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart. The Lord has already appointed him to be leader of his people, because you have not kept the Lord's command."

Wow! What a sacrifice King Saul made in exchange for an act of obedience unto the Lord. When the Israelites begged God for their own king, just like the other nations had, God gave them a king – Saul. God warned them that it was not in their best interests to have a king. He wanted to be able to choose and raise up leaders for them Himself, who would be godly leaders and who would lead them into the will and the blessing of God. God knows what is in men's hearts and He knows who the best man for the job is. If a

leader does not honor God, the people would not honor God. This will bring a nation and a people down. Unfortunately, many fail to understand that their individual act(s) of disobedience will not only lead to their detriment but will also lead to the detriment of those connected to them. Our disobedience to God will not only affect us, it will also affect others as well. We see an example of this in the book of Janah, chapter 1. When the Lord gave instructions to Jonah to go to the city of Nineveh and cry against it because of their wickedness in the sight of the Lord, the Bible tells us that Jonah rose up and fled to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. Jonah went down to Joppa and boarded a ship headed to Tarshish. As we read, the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea to the point that the ship was being tossed and driven by the blustering wind. Those on the ship with Jonah were afraid and every man began to cry to his god except Jonah who gone down into the sides of the ship and was fast asleep. When all was said and done, the men with Jonah learned that what was happening to them was the direct result of Jonah's disobedience to his God.

Sometimes the consequences of disobedience can be painful and lasting. While God is a forgiving God and a God of second chances, some acts of disobedience have life-long effects. Yes, we may be restored to a right relationship with our Savior and Lord; yes, the Lord may hear our prayers and may receive our undivided worship unto His name, but our disobedience could have shifted the trajectory of our life in a way where it is impossible to shift it back. This was the case with King Saul. After his act of disobeying the command of God to destroy the people God had vengeance against for their attack against the people of God, the Lord gives Saul a rebuke that changes not only his life but the life of his family as well.

Deuteronomy 28:15-29 (NLT)

15. "But if you refuse to listen to the LORD your God and do not obey all the commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come and overwhelm you:
16. Your towns and your fields will be cursed.
17. Your fruit baskets and breadboards will be cursed.
18. Your children and your crops will be cursed. The offspring of your herds and flocks will be cursed.
19. Wherever you go and whatever you do, you will be cursed.
20. "The LORD himself will send on you curses, confusion, and frustration in everything you do, until at last you are completely destroyed for doing evil and abandoning me.
21. The LORD will afflict you with diseases until none of you are left in the land you are about to enter and occupy.
22. The LORD will strike you with wasting diseases, fever, and inflammation, with scorching heat and drought, and with blight and mildew. These disasters will pursue you until you die.
23. The skies above will be as unyielding as bronze, and the earth beneath will be as hard as iron.
24. The LORD will change the rain that falls on your land into powder, and dust will pour down from the sky until you are destroyed.
25. "The LORD will cause you to be defeated by your enemies. You will attack your enemies from one direction, but you will scatter from them in seven! You will be an object of horror to all the kingdoms of the earth.
26. Your corpses will be food for all the scavenging birds and wild animals, and no one will be there to chase them away.
27. "The LORD will afflict you with the boils of Egypt and with tumors, scurvy, and the itch, from which you cannot be cured.
28. The LORD will strike you with madness, blindness, and panic.
29. You will grope around in broad daylight like a blind person groping in the darkness, but you will not find your way. You will be oppressed and robbed continually, and no one will come to save you.

Not only had Saul's disobedience led to the removal of him and his household from ever sitting on the throne as king over God's people, Saul's disobedience brought a curse upon him and his family that would be intense and no one will be able to help him. Obedience to God is surely better than the sacrifice we will make by any acts of disobedience on our part.

CONCLUSION

We have shared more on obedience than we have on the sacrifice of not being obedient. This is because the light should be shined on us obeying rather than on what we risk sacrificing by not obeying. It is my desire that we, as a people of God, strive to live in obedience unto God and not live as those who sacrificed the blessed life God has for us due to our lack of obedience. The blessing is being able to become who God desires us to be; being able to do all God delights in us to do; being able to travel in our life to every place (literally and spiritually) God promises we would travel to; being able to experience the fullness of all God has and is on this side of Heaven. This is what the life of obedience looks like for the true child of God. My brother and my sister, seek to obey God even during those times and in those situation and circumstances where you don't understand why you must obey. Submit your whole heart unto God so that your feet can rest in every step God has ordered. Live the life of the one who chooses to obey rather than to sacrifice.

God's peace and blessing be upon you....

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