

Obedience is Better

1 Samuel 15:19-26



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FOCAL (1 Samuel 15:19-26 KJV) "Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the LORD, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the LORD? {20} And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and have gone the way which the LORD sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. {21} But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God in Gilgal. {22} And Samuel said, Hath 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 hearken than the fat of rams. {23} For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king. {24} And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice. {25} Now therefore, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may worship the LORD. {26} And Samuel said unto Saul, I will not return with thee: for thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD hath rejected thee from being king over Israel."

We have heard many people - usually religious people - tell us that Christianity is a religion of *sacrifice*. That the Christian should *give up* certain things, devoting these things to the Lord. We have seen and heard **overweight preachers tell us that we should give up any sin**

but that of overeating. We have heard balding preachers tell us that we should give up the sin of long hair. We have heard tone deaf preachers tell us that we should give up the sin of certain music. We have heard the world preach that we should give up religion altogether and just *love one another*. Everyone has their definition of what Christianity is. But only one definition matters, and that definition proceeds from God the Father through Jesus Christ our Lord. True religion is defined as what God wants us to do - and what God wants us to do is defined in this verse:

Focal (1 Samuel 15:22 KJV) "And Samuel said, Hath 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 hearken than the fat of rams.**"

1. Why Does God Demand Obedience?

God does not demand our sacrifices, but He does *demand* our *obedience*. God demands our obedience because God alone is God.

I was told by one of our Wednesday night Bible teachers that a six year old child asked her this question.

"If God made all things, then who made God"?

That's a *very good* question. If God made all things, then who made God? Quite simply, God was *not* made - He has *always* existed. Our Lord told Job:

Job 38:4-13 (HCSB) 'Where were you when I established the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding. (5) Who fixed its dimensions? Certainly you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? (6) What supports its foundations? Or who laid its cornerstone (7) while the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy? (8) Who enclosed the sea behind doors when it burst from the womb, (9) when I made the clouds its garment and thick darkness its blanket, (10) when I determined its boundaries and put its bars and doors in place, (11) when I declared: "You may come this far, but no farther; your proud waves stop here"? (12) Have you ever in your life commanded the morning or assigned the dawn its place, (13) so it may seize the edges of the earth and shake the wicked out of it?

The simple answer I suggested that dear teacher give her student was this - no one made God. God has always existed, and God will always exist. Who made God? No one! **God is called the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the end**². He was at the beginning of creation, and will be around long after creation has ended.

When God gives us a command He doesn't require that we understand it - He just requires that we obey. His commands are not half formed or uninformed, but come from a Being so immense in power that we can only speculate about Him. It was God Who raised up Saul to be King over Israel. The Lord told him:

1 Samuel 15:17 (HCSB) Samuel continued, "Although you

1 Holman Christian Standard Bible

2 (Revelation 1:8 KJV) "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty."

once considered yourself unimportant, have you not become the leader of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel

God demands obedience because God is God - and there is no other! It is God Who makes and Who breaks. It is God Who raised up Saul from nothingness and put him in the exalted position of King over Israel. It is God Who alone gives life, prosperity, and blessing. King Saul should have realized the truth that King Solomon knew, that is,

Ecclesiastes 7:13-14 (HCSB) Consider the work of God; for who can straighten out what He has made crooked? (14) In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity, consider: without question, God has made the one as well as the other, so that man cannot discover anything that will come after him.

It was God Who caused Saul's prosperity, and God Who could take away the same. God demands obedience from the believer because He alone knows what tomorrow holds - because it is He Who holds tomorrow in His hands. As that old song says,

I don't know about tomorrow,
I just live from day to day.
I don't borrow from it's sunshine,
For it's skies may turn to gray.
I don't worry o'er the future,
For I know what Jesus said,
And today I'll walk beside Him,
For He knows what is ahead.
Many things about tomorrow,
I don't seem to understand;

But I know Who holds tomorrow,
And I know Who holds my hand.

Saul should have remembered that it was the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End Who sent him out to battle. Rather than do what he *thought best*, he should have done what *God thought best*. God alone is Creator, and He alone knows what is best for that which He created.

2. God As Creator Always Knows Best

When I was a little boy there was a show on television called *Father Knows Best*. In that show *Robert Young* played the father who - most of the time - knew what was best for his family. *Jim Anderson* - the character that Robert Young portrayed - many times did make mistakes. He lost his temper, made poor choices, and in short was quite human. So father *didn't* always know best. That was the television show.

Contrary to the television show, we can say with assurance that our Heavenly Father *always* knows best! So when He sent Saul to

Focal (1 Samuel 15:3 KJV) "Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass."

utterly destroy Amalek and all his people - including men and women, children, babies, and *even* the

livestock, then this is what God wanted Saul to do. This may seem heartless to us, that God would have even **infants** as well as **suckling** babies killed. Yet the truth of the matter is that **God made all things, and He ultimately owns all things** - so therefore He can do as He wants with that which He has made. God told Israel through the **Prophet Jeremiah**:

Jeremiah 18:1-10 (HCSB) *This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: (2) "Go down at once to the potter's house; there I will reveal My words to you." (3) So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, working away at the wheel. (4) But the jar that he was making from the clay became flawed in the potter's hand, so he made it into another jar, as it seemed right for him to do. (5) The word of the LORD came to me: (6) "House of Israel, can I not treat you as this potter treats his clay?"--this is the LORD's declaration. "Just like clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, house of Israel. (7) At one moment I might announce concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will uproot, tear down, and destroy it. (8) However, if that nation I have made an announcement about, turns from its evil, I will not bring the disaster on it I had planned. (9) At another time I announce that I will build and plant a nation or a kingdom. (10) However, if it does what is evil in My sight by not listening to My voice, I will not bring the good I had said I would do to it.*

We might want to debate with God when He makes the tough decisions. We might want to argue with Him that His decision to take the lives of even babies and children was exceedingly - so it seems to us - cruel. Yet what God has decreed the believer should do no matter what. We

are not God, and *never* will be God. It is He Who is the Potter and we who are the clay. If I were to tell you that the Amalakites, like many of the pagan cultures of that day, were into child sacrifice, would that make God's command any easier to take? If I were to tell you that children of abuse usually grow up to be abusers as well, and God determined - as the Potter - that to allow the Amalakites to live would be destructive to all society - would this make your heart any easier when considering His order.

There is only **one God. The job is filled!** You cannot move into that position, no matter how hard you try. God as Creator - as the Potter - always knows best. As humans we always get into trouble when we try to be God, because, quite frankly, we're not qualified to *be God*. He tells us:

Isaiah 55:8-9 (HCSB) "For **My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not My ways.**" *This is the LORD's declaration. (9) "For as heaven is higher than earth, so My ways are higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.*

We cannot be God. When Adam listened to Satan's voice, the lie that said

Genesis 3:5 (HCSB) "In fact, **God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God,** knowing good and evil."

then he began to consider that he knew better than God. When Adam ate of that fruit his foolishness plunged us all into spiritual death. The only way we could be

redeemed from that death was when Jesus Christ came and suffered for us on that Cross of Calvary. If Adam had left that fruit alone, how much better would our lives have been today. If Saul had obeyed God perfectly, rather than questioning God or doing what he *thought* God wanted then he would have remained King. But when he put himself in a place that should *only be occupied by God* then he was removed from this high office.

FOCAL (1 Samuel 15:23 KJV) "For **rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.** Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king.

God likens a *failure to obey Him* to be **as great a sin as is witchcraft or idolatry.** God always knows best. If we would just obey Him as He asks our lives would be blessed beyond measure. King David said:

Psalms 146:5 (HCSB) **Happy is the one whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God,**

and his son, King Solomon said:

Proverbs 16:20 (HCSB) **The one who understands a matter finds success, and the one who trusts in the LORD will be happy.**

If old King Saul had only known what his two successors knew, that happiness for the believer comes

only by trusting in and obeying God our Father!

3. We Are Called To Obey

FOCAL (1 Samuel 15:21-22 KJV) "But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God in Gilgal. {22} And Samuel said, Hath 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 hearken than the fat of rams.** "

The Chinese Theologian *Watchman Nee* said in his book *Spiritual Authority*³:

"The **greatest of God's demands** on man is not for him to bear the Cross, to serve, to make offerings, or to deny himself. The greatest demand **is for him to obey.** God ordered Saul to attack the Amalakites and destroy them utterly. Obedience alone is absolutely honoring to God, for it alone takes God's will as its center."

The believer is *called* to obey, and the unbeliever will be *compelled* to obey. The Bible tells us that

Philippians 2:10-11 (HCSB) **at the name of Jesus every knee should bow**--of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth-- **(11)** and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

One day the unbeliever will be in a place which we can only call *judgment*. John the Revelator was shown this day of judgment. He wrote that he saw:

Revelation 6:13-17 (HCSB) ... the stars of heaven fell to the earth as a fig tree drops its unripe figs when shaken by a high wind; (14) the sky separated like a scroll being rolled up; and every mountain and island was moved from its place. (15) Then the kings of the earth, the nobles, the military commanders, the rich, the powerful, and every slave and free person hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains. (16) And they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of the One seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, (17) because the great day of Their wrath has come! And who is able to stand?"

One day the Lamb of God Whom the world mocked will come in power and in vengeance. On that day Grace will be far away. All who refused to do the work of God, refused to believe on Jesus Christ for salvation - they will be so terrified that they will cry out for the mountains to fall on them. Yet this could all be avoided if they but do as you and I have done - accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior! As our Lord has said:

John 6:29 (HCSB) "This is the work of God: that you believe in the One He has sent."

We can debate about salvation, we can have theological discussions about it, we can argue back and forth about so called *doctrinal positions*, or we can just cut to the chase and **believe in Jesus Whom God hath sent**. I

prefer to admit my ignorance and believe! I believe, along with the Psalmist, that

(Psalms 100:3 KJV) "Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture."

God made us. It is God Who has declared that we are sinners, and it is God Who has offered the remedy for sin. We can continue to be puffed up and believe that we know what is best - or we can trust Him as our Savior and Lord. **Think about Noah** for a moment. That dear man built an ark because God told him to do that.

Because **Noah was obedient to build the ark, the sacrifice he later made after the waters receded was acceptable to God**. If you would have your sacrifice acceptable, then you *must* first be obedient! **C.H. Spurgeon** said,

"Sacrifice, but also obey! A cup of cold water given to a disciple in the name of a disciple, and in obedience to the Lord, is a golden deed valued by our Heavenly Master above all price - more precious in His sight than silver - yes, much more than fine gold. "⁴

If humanity would be saved, Noah must not question God, but he must build an Ark. He can sacrifice after obeying, but not before. If you expect to *have your nets filled to breaking* then you must be willing to stop debating God and do what He said. You must...

Luke 5:4 (HCSB) ... "Put out into deep water and

⁴ sermon *Obedience Better Than Sacrifice*, by C.H. Spurgeon, sermon 686

let down your nets for a catch."

While you debate God nothing happens - but when you obey He blesses. Though it defies logic we must be willing to obey Jesus in even the strangest of things. We must be willing to

Matthew 17:27 (HCSB) "... cast in a fishhook, and catch the first fish that comes up. When you open its mouth you'll find a coin.."

The sad truth is there are too many who profess the name of Christ today who are *reasoning creatures*. We want to tell Jesus, "This is foolish! Put a hook in the water and get a fish with money in it's mouth - this is madness. Why not get a job? Why not *sell the contents* of the alabaster box and keep that money⁵? When we debate with the Master and are rebuked how often have we went off, like Judas, and sold our souls for thirty pieces of silver? Wouldn't it be better for us to quit worrying about the details that only God can answer, and just trust and obey Him. If you are saved by believing on Jesus then you are called to obey Him in whatsoever He asks. Obey Him in prayer. Obey Him in love. Obey Him just as He Himself modeled obedience for us in the Garden of Gethsemane. Three times He cried out to the Father,

Luke 22:42 "Father, if You are willing, take this cup away from Me--nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done."

Jesus didn't want to have to endure what He had to endure for us - and who can blame Him! To be separated

from God the Father, to have sin dumped on a sinless life, to suffer unimaginable pain for an uncaring world ... we can well understand His plea. **Father, if You are willing, take this cup from Me.** Yet Jesus didn't end here, but in perfect obedience continued by saying **not My will, but Yours be done.** This is what the Christian is called to say. This *must* be the banner that flies over the Army of Christ - **Not my will, but Yours, O God, be done.**

May God touch our hearts with these words.

5 Matthew 26:7-13