

Partial Obedience Is Perfect Disobedience

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 28 February 2016

Preacher: Don Coleman

[0 : 00] We'll take your Bibles tonight and open them to Samuel.

! First Samuel, or as the Donald would say, one Samuel. I'm not trying to be political, it's just one of those funny things out there.

Okay, well let me go ahead and read our passage. Don't always do that on the front end because kind of the approach to teaching through this book is to really read it as we go along.

But this time I want to read the entire chapters, chapter 15 by the way, if you haven't guessed. And, you know, really, if you've been here for the last umpteen Sunday night, you should know that we're ready for 1 Samuel chapter 15.

And so open your Bibles to that and let me read it. We'll read the entire chapter. Samuel also said to Saul, the Lord sent me to anoint you king over his people, over Israel.

[1 : 18] Now, therefore, heed the voice of the words of the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts, I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt.

Now go and attack Amalek and utterly, 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.

Are there parts of scripture, by the way, that you just wish weren't there? That's one of them. So Saul gathered the people together and numbered them in Tilaim, 200,000 foot soldiers and 10,000 men of Judah, pretty sizable army.

And Saul came to the city of Amalek and lay in wait in the valley. Then Saul said to the Canaanites, go, depart, get down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them.

For you showed kindness to all the children of Israel when they came up out of Egypt. So the Canaanites departed from among the Amalekites and Saul attacked the Amalekites from Havilah or Havilah all the way to Shur, which is east of Egypt.

[2 : 53] He also took Agag, king of the Amalekites alive and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were unwilling to utterly destroy them, but everything despised and worthless that they utterly destroyed.

Now the word of the Lord came to Samuel, saying, I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments.

And it grieved Samuel, and he cried out to the Lord all night. So when Samuel rose early in the morning to meet Saul, it was told Samuel, saying, Saul went to Carmel.

And indeed, he set up a monument for himself, and he has gone on around, passed by, and gone down to Gilgal. Then Samuel went to Saul, and Saul said to him, Blessed are you of the Lord, I have performed the commandment of the Lord.

But Samuel said, What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear? And Saul said, They have brought them from the Amalekites.

[4 : 15] 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. Then Samuel said to Saul, Be quiet, and I will tell you what the Lord said to me last night.

And he said to him, Speak on. So Samuel said, When you were little in your own eyes, were you not head of the tribes of Israel? And did not the Lord anoint you king over Israel?

Now the Lord sent you on a mission, and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed. Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord? Why did you swoop down on the spoil and do evil in the sight of the Lord? 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, and I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, and best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal.

[5 : 29] 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.

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. Then 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 worship the Lord. But 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.

And as Samuel turned around to go away, Saul seized the edge of his robe, and it tore. 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.

[6 : 44] And also the strength of Israel will not lie nor relent, for he is not a man that he should relent. Then he said, I have sinned, yet honor me now, please, before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may worship the Lord your God.

So Samuel turned back after Saul, and Saul worshiped the Lord. Then Samuel said, Bring Agag, king of the Amalekites, here to me.

So Agag came to him cautiously. That's right. And Agag said, Surely the bitterness of death is past. But Samuel said, As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women.

And Samuel hacked Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal. Then Samuel went to Ramah, and Saul went up to his house at Gibeah of Saul.

And Samuel went no more to see Saul until the day of his death. Nevertheless, Samuel mourned for Saul. And the Lord regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel.

[7 : 56] All right, so there it is. Quite a story. And perhaps with some of us here, at least part of that story is familiar about Saul.

And what could we say is the subject here? Really, in a word, the issue here, maybe the issue, the subject of this chapter, in a word, would be obedience.

The issue here is obedience. And like the little song, you know, that goes kind of like this, and I'm not going to sing it, but I'll give you the words, okay?

Okay? Obedience is the very best way to say that you believe. Obedience is the very best way to show that you believe.

And then the chorus kind of goes like this, O-B-E-D-I-E-N-C-E. Obedience is the very best way to show that you believe. We want to live pure.

[9 : 16] We want to live clean. We want to do our best. Sweetly submitting to authority, leaving to God the rest. Walking in the light.

Keep our attitudes right on the narrow way. For if you believe the word you receive, you always will obey. It's kind of neat words.

I didn't know all those words. I kind of know the tune, but again, I thought I would spare you that part of it. It's really the words that are important. And the principle that is taught concerning obedience.

And so what Saul does in this story, clearly, and what happens to him as a result, clearly teaches a very important principle about obedience.

And I guess we could put it in these words, and this will suffice as a title for the sermon. And that is, partial obedience is perfect disobedience.

[10 : 18] With God, partial obedience is perfect disobedience. Because obedience is doing exactly what you're told to do. Remember that kind of definition?

Doing exactly what you're told, when you're told to do it, and with the right heart attitude. Could we say that Saul did exactly what he was told?

Well, he came real close, didn't he? In fact, real close. When you consider all of the thousands of Amalekites that were destroyed because of God's judgment.

Thousands of them, and the multiple thousands of livestock that were destroyed, and houses burned, and possessions destroyed. When you put that next to just one man, Agag, spared alive. And a few sheep and oxen. But hey, I'm going to sacrifice those to the Lord. Then, you know, from our perspective, and we can't help ourselves, we would come to this conclusion.

[11:21] Well, come on, God. Give the guy a break. Give him a little slack. I mean, he came real close. And yet, with God, partial obedience is perfect disobedience.

And especially as it is applied to those God has raised up to places of leadership and authority. Be it a king of a nation, a president of a nation, a pastor of a church, parents of a family, and you could go all the way through the gamut.

God expects obedience. All right, so I want to point out tonight, or let us see this principle, rather, by pointing out a number of things in this particular passage.

And the first one, and we really have to deal with this, though I will perhaps not deal with it like some would like. But we have to notice, first of all, what I would call a perplexing command.

And this is not the only time we find something like this in the passage. We studied through Joshua and Judges, and we have seen similar things like this that God has said and commands that he has given God's people to absolutely, totally annihilate a people, specifically the people who are living in the promised land, the Canaanites.

[12:42] And so it's kind of perplexing to us, kind of troubling to us. And we want to try to come to some kind of understanding, almost to the point of trying to explain it away, in a sense, to maybe give some possibility that would let God off the hook in our minds.

But you just can't get around it. This is a very troubling, very perplexing command. And again, let me just read it to you. Again, let me have you look there.

Samuel said to Saul, he came to Saul, the Lord sent me, remember, to anoint you. And this is what the Lord says, and what does he say?

Go and attack, verse 3, Amalek, and that's kind of the patriarch of the Amalekites. Amalek, go attack him and utterly destroy all that they have.

All right, so all of their possessions, that would include, you know, physical possessions, inanimate possessions, you know, furniture, pottery, you know, whatever they have in their possession.

[13:55] But not only that, but also livestock, because he says, destroy them all and kill both man and woman, infant, nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.

Now, that's disturbing. I mean, it really is. And how do we explain that? I mean, what do we do with that? What do we make of that? I mean, that's very severe that God, it would cause us to question, you know, why God would give such a command.

And again, this is not the only time we find it in the Old Testament. In fact, it has led some to believe that the God of the Old Testament is different from the God of the New Testament. That the God of the Old Testament is the God of judgment and wrath.

And the God of the New Testament is benevolent and loving and gracious and forgiving. But it's the same God. Now, you know, it would take us probably a month of Sunday nights to really delve into all of the, you know, the details of this and the reasons for this and all of the scriptures that perhaps deal with it.

But let's just take it at its face value. In the first place, we need to realize that the command here comes from directly from God.

[15:12] There's no mincing of words, no, no, nothing vague about any of this. There's nothing secondhand, although Samuel is the one that's speaking in behalf of God.

He's simply the mouthpiece for God. In fact, that's what verse 1 is intended to establish. Samuel is emphasizing his credentials here in verse 1.

And therefore, the right to speak for God. And it's not that Samuel is having to introduce himself to Saul. Saul's forgotten all about Samuel. He knows who Samuel is.

But it is just an official way to establish his right to speak for God. And he says, the Lord sent me to anoint you king over his people Israel.

So he's hearkening Saul back to the time when Samuel performed that official act in behalf of God, functioning in place of God.

[16:10] And so this is basically what he's saying. Remember me, I'm God's prophet. All right, so I have every right to come and say these things to you to speak for God. And then in verse 1 also, Samuel reveals the divine origin of this message.

So, you know, we can't say that Saul misunderstood. Saul got it wrong that maybe he's just kind of reading between the lines. Maybe he's going out on his own and doing these things. Or perhaps, you know, this is based upon some kind of tradition that was handed down. This came directly from God. And this is what verse 1 or verse 2, rather, is establishing for us. Well, verse 1 and 2. In verse 1, Samuel says, Heed the voice of the words of the Lord. That's an interesting expression. You would think it would say, Heed the voice of the Lord. And it would say the same thing. But it's heed the voice of the words of the Lord. Now, is there a difference between the words of the Lord and the Lord himself? [17:15] No difference whatsoever. His word is the same as his person. Now, that's not true of any of us. I mean, hopefully it's true of us most of the time, you know, within a large measure.

But sometimes our words don't match, you know, and so we can't take those words at face value and take them as truth. But with God, his words are the same as himself. And so is he the voice of the words of the Lord? And then also in verse 2, Thus says the Lord of hosts. So this is a message coming directly from God. So there's no confusion here. Now, that doesn't necessarily help us with, you know, this, you know, troubling command that he gives. It doesn't somehow explain that to us. It really fortifies how strong this is. That it's the Lord speaking himself.

[18:15] This is directly from the Lord. And verse 2 says the Lord of hosts. And that's important. The words Lord of hosts or really Lord of armies.

The Lord of armies. That expression, you'll find it 76 times in the Old Testament. And every time it appears, all 76 times, it always is used by a prophet to introduce an authoritative revelation from God.

This is the Lord of hosts. So you can take this as coming directly from God. The message is from God. All right. Again, that doesn't help us much if we're disturbed by the command.

But, you know, I guess we could, if we stopped at this point, we'd have to say, well, if you've got trouble with that, just take it up with God. He's the one who said it and gave the command. And the fact that we don't understand it and the fact that maybe we can't reconcile it with our, you know, unique perspectives on God or our human perspectives on God.

The fact that that's true. And change it. God spoke. These are his words. His divine words. He's the Lord of hosts. God says, second of all, I would say this, that the substance of the message, and I'm not saying this is what Scripture says, the substance of this message containing a command to annihilate the Amalekites, it's connected to prophetic judgments recorded hundreds of years earlier.

[19:56] And we have a sense of that right here in chapter 15, though it's just a little kind of a summary statement about it. But it's connected to what has been recorded, what God said, some events, and also what God said in judgment way back in Exodus chapter 17 and verse 8.

And that takes us back to that very familiar story about Israel and the Amalekites. The Israelites had been delivered out of Egypt.

God had already delivered them from the Egyptian army by parting the Red Sea, and they've crossed over the Red Sea. And so God delivered them, saved them. But later in their journey, if you remember this part of the story, and you should because I preached on it not too long ago.

Later on, they are attacked by the Amalekites. The Bible says, Then came Amalek.

The Israelites are at Rephidim, and God has provided refreshing water for them, and they are refreshed and rested. And then the Bible says, Then came Amalek.

[21:06] And attacked them. And if you remember from the story, the Amalekites did not attack them the traditional way, the way that an army would and should and appropriately attacks.

That is, from the front, or at least to attack in a manner that's normal. But they attacked from the rear, remember? And they didn't attack their strongest, they attacked their weakest.

They attacked their women and children and older people and sick people. And this was the Amalekites' approach. And it angered God, and he pronounced judgment upon them.

And so a gist of this is rehearsed here in verse 2, where it says, I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt.

And so because of that, God had cursed the Amalekites. And he prophesied this in Exodus chapter 17, verse 15, where the Bible says, God says he would completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.

[22 : 18] So, see, this command that God is giving to Saul, now king of Israel, Saul's army, it's a command that's linked to something God promised would be done hundreds of years before.

And so here we are, several hundred years later, and God is going to give Saul, King Saul, the honor of fulfilling this prophecy.

At least that's how Saul should have looked at it. And so in no uncertain terms, God says, now go and attack Amalek and utterly destroy.

I mean, that phrase is repeated, I don't know, half a dozen times throughout this chapter. Utterly destroy all that they have, and you know the rest. Okay. So here's Saul's big chance.

He's already failed the Lord a couple of times before this. And here's his chance to prove his love for God, his allegiance to God, his willingness to obey his commands, and he has this great honor to fulfill God's prophecy, God's judgment upon the Amalekites.

[23 : 31] Now, in the Hebrew, this is called a harem. A harem. I think that's how it's pronounced. And a harem, it was reserved for those people who had come under the Lord's severest judgment.

And we only have a few examples of this in the Old Testament. You could say that it was something directed toward the Canaanites. I mean, there's a number of references to that, that Israel was to go into the promised land and not make friends with the Canaanites, not just simply drive them out of their land, but to utterly destroy them.

That's a harem. It's part of God's judgment, severest judgment. Another example, well, really the first example that we have in regard to God's judgment upon the Canaanites would be Jericho.

Right? Remember? Jericho. And what did God command Israel to do? To not leave anyone alive and not to take any of their possessions.

There would be no profit from their attacking Jericho because it was solemn unto the Lord. So this, see, this judgment was a solemn thing, even a holy thing.

[24 : 58] And so it required, as in Jericho, as God desired for the Canaanites in the promised land, and here as God desires for the Amalekites, it required the destruction of the people.

It required the destruction of all of their possessions, which is, remember, why God dealt so severely with Achan, who took some things out of Jericho, cost him dearly, and cost his family too. And so no one was to profit from this judgment. And yet when you read chapter 15, you really, and you don't really have to read between the lines, you understand that Saul and the people of Israel were profiting from the Amalekites.

They were destroying everything. It wasn't worth anything. But they kept keeping the other for themselves, even though Saul tries to smooth it over by claiming that really he was just, you know, going to sacrifice this to the Lord.

So I don't know if that answers this perplexing problem here, this troubling command. But this is it. You just take it as the Bible gives it to you.

[26 : 10] And, you know, we could search for some other possibilities. In fact, I have read some scholars who have speculated that the reason why God was having the Israelites destroy not just the people, but also the animals is because of the sexual perversion of these cultures.

And it could be true. Very likely is true. And that kind of sexual perversion, I don't have to give all the details. We've got young people in here. It's something that would spread also to the animals.

All right? So you know what I'm saying. And so this was why God required not just the armies be defeated, but all of the citizens be destroyed.

And not just the citizens, the people, even down to the youngest of them, but all of their livestock as well. Sheep and goats and oxen and all of them. All right. But I don't want to, you know, make the mistake of trying to let God off the hook here, so to speak.

Maybe speak for God and say, well, you know, it seems severe, but, you know, really it was very reasonable and here's why. I can't speak that way. All I know is what the Bible says and God said that they were sinners, they were wicked, and apparently wicked to a level that God required absolute destruction.

[27 : 32] In fact, he did do that, by the way, to the entire world except for one family when he sent the flood. All right. So, a perplexing command.

Let's move on to the second one. Didn't tend to spend that much time on that one. A partial compliance. That's the second thing that we see in the passage. Partial compliance.

Verse 4 says, So, Saul gathered the people together. 200,000 foot soldiers. 10,000 men of Judah, specifically.

Probably a reference to citizen soldiers. So, that's a lot of people. This is a big army. So, it looks like Saul is going to obey God's command. God gives the command and so Saul musters the armies of Israel.

Going to carry this thing out. Great. Good for Saul. Verse 7, And Saul attacked the Amalekites. He attacked them. From Havilah all the way to Shur, which is east of Egypt.

[28 : 37] Good for Saul. All right. So, we're reading the story and we're, you know, we're thinking, you know, this is good. He's doing what he's supposed to do. Good for Saul. He's fulfilling God's prophetic judgment.

And by the way, this was a huge area of geography here. All the lands, really all the lands between Arabia and Egypt. The, what we would call the Ishmaelite territories.

And so, this is not just one little battle. I mean, this is a series of battles and a series of destruction of cities and people and possessions and livestock and all of that.

And so, this is, you know, kind of a systematic annihilation of the Amalekites just as God had commanded. So, it was a protracted battle.

City after city. No prisoners are taken. Right? All the livestock destroyed.

[29 : 38] Right? I mean, as they're going, this is the, at least what we, the idea we get is we're reading along until we read a little further, but to this point, looks like everything is going on just as God had commanded.

You know, and they're city by city and they're destroying all the people. No prisoners are taken because God had commanded that everybody be annihilated. No livestock are taken and incorporated into the livestock of Israel.

I mean, a big army like that would have to carry, take along with them huge herds of livestock just to keep them fed. And, you know, generally, normally, armies like that that are going city by city and conquering a people, they would be fed by the confiscated animals along the way, but they're not doing any of that, right?

They're destroying all of them, right? At least that's the way it appears to this point. And yet, not quite, huh? Out of all of those, and we can just assume thousands of people that are destroyed according to God's command, one man is spared.

Just one. The king of the Amalekites, a guy by the name of Agag, I've always thought what a terrible name to have. Just one man. In fact, the writer wants strongly to emphasize that fact and does so with a little redundancy.

[31 : 07] This is just kind of literary technique to emphasize this one, we would say, slight little breach of the command.

And so, it's really, it's given twice. Verse 8, he also took Agag, king of the Amalekites, alive. And then, in the very next verse, but Saul and the people spared Agag.

It's redundant. And it's redundant for a purpose. Because you, you know, the reader, and understand, the authors of the books of the Bible, some of them we know their names, some of them we don't.

We don't really know who wrote Samuel. I know it wasn't Paul, Tom. Always have to get that little dig in there, don't you? But the writers, especially these Old Testament, these kind of, these early prophetic books, really, they're writing in a style that leads the reader.

And so, leading the reader to points in the writing that are intended to shock us and to amaze us.

[32 : 23] And you'll find that in nearly every book of the Bible. And so, that's what's happening here. And so, we're reading along thinking, well, Saul, he's, you know, finally got on track.

He had a really shaky start as a king. He's really been kind of a dismal failure up to this point. And God's been disappointed in him and so forth.

And now, we read and it looks like he's getting on track. And then, they spare one man, the king. And everything changes from that point on.

Also spared some of the livestock. Right? Saul allowed his army to do that. You do get a sense from the reading of the passage that it was the people of Israel who wanted to do this.

But Saul is king. Right? He allowed that. And he allowed the best of the livestock to be spared. But hey, let's give the man a break.

[33 : 29] Everything else, Saul, completely destroyed. Right? I mean, he spared one man. Just one.

Out of thousands and thousands. He kept alive the best of the livestock. I mean, waste not, want not.

You know, just apply that here. I mean, big deal. So he let some of these animals live and let this one king live. I don't know what his intention was, you know, about allowing him to live.

Listen, this is nothing less than a self-serving select submission to God. All right, how do you like all those S's? A self-serving select submission or partial obedience to God.

This is a sin that is repeated over and over and over and even into our day and we are guilty of this as well. Pursuing gain under the guise of serving God.

[34 : 33] In fact, we can see that in Saul's response to Samuel here. We don't really have to read between the lines though you do need to read and reread and you just get some sense of the, of what's going on here in Saul's mind and heart.

Because in verse 9 he says, everything despised and worthless that they utterly destroyed. All right, that is everything not worth keeping was destroyed.

Does that sound like, you know, does that line up with Saul's, you know, later his excuse that, well, we kept these animals, they're the best because we're going to sacrifice all of them to the Lord.

That didn't really line up. They destroyed everything not worth keeping. They only kept what was of value to them. But when Samuel found out about it, Saul said in verse 15, he said, we spared the best of the sheep and the oxen to sacrifice to the Lord, your God, and the rest we have utterly destroyed.

You see, there's a contradiction here. They didn't keep these things so that they could sacrifice them to the Lord. They kept them because they wanted them. And later, when, you know, the gig is up and Saul's been found out, then he adds this other little part to it.

[35 : 59] Well, we were going to give those to the Lord. Part of our worship. So that leads us to a third thing. So we have a perplexing command, a partial compliance, and then third, a perfect concept.

A perfect concept that we all need to know and learn. In fact, I would even say it is a concept that is perfecting, a perfecting concept. And when we get a hold of this concept that Samuel teaches us, I don't think Saul got the lesson, but we, I hope, have.

When we get a hold of that, we understand that this is really a thing that God uses to perfect us.

And so Samuel arrives on the scene. We just kind of continue on in the story here.

He arrives on the scene. He knows that something is not right. Partly because God has already told him that things are not right.

He told him in verse 11. He said, I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments.

[37 : 10] Now those are the details that God gave Samuel. So Samuel gets there, goes there, and Saul comes out and greets Samuel. You just get this, he says to him verse 13, blessed are you of the Lord.

Really, if you translate that and get him behind that, he's probably thinking, oh no, what are you doing here? Blessed are you of the Lord, Samuel.

And then he says, I have performed the commandment of the Lord. Really? Really? I kind of imagine that even while he's saying that, or maybe as soon as he said the last word of that, there was a bah in the background of the sheep and probably the mooing of the cows or the oxen.

I mean, no sooner had that come out of his mouth. I've obeyed the command. And so Samuel says, what then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears?

What's this about? And the lowing of the oxen which I hear? And of course, Saul says, oh, that, well, yes, we did keep a few of the livestock, just a few, the best of them, but don't worry, Samuel, we're going to sacrifice those to the Lord.

[38 : 38] That is, we did that because of our love for God, and our worship of him, and just think how the keeping of these animals will enhance our worship of the Lord, you know.

And just think if I could win the lottery, how much I could give to the church. And we could come up with all kinds of scenarios.

And how does Samuel respond? be quiet. Yeah, shut up. I'm not supposed to use that word. Be quiet.

Shut your mouth. We'll go with that one. And then Saul gives this, what I've called a perfecting concept.

One that apparently had not occurred to Saul. is also one that is, at least from this point on for sure, is taught repeatedly throughout Scripture.

[39 : 48] And so what is the concept? Well, look again at verse 22. I mean, you already know it. 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. Now, just connect this concept or this idea of sacrifice, connect that with worship.

That's what it was. A form of worship, a form of worship prescribed by the Mosaic Law, Old Testament, Old Covenant. We don't do it that way now, but our sacrifice, you know, is worship. worship. Our worship is sacrifice. And so he's talking about worship. So is, you know, is the prescribed procedures of worship, does God want that?

Well, of course he does. He does want that. But does he want that more than your obedience? Which is also a form of sacrifices.

[41 : 03] Which is most important to God. He's not saying one is not important and the other is. They're both important to God. But obedience is more important to God.

In fact, if we could learn that concept, then it would greatly enhance our worship. That's why I say this is a perfecting concept.

And it's a concept that's taught throughout the Bible, and it again has the power to perfect us in our worship of God. Let me give you a few examples. Psalm 40 verse 6.

Some of these are going to be familiar to you. Psalm 40 verse 6. Sacrifice and offering you did not desire. My ears you have opened.

Burnt offering and sin offering you did not require. Then I said, Behold, I come. And the scroll of the book is written of me. I delight to do your will, O my God. and your laws within my heart.

[42 : 03] What's the emphasis here? Obedience to the will of God. Not the ritualistic kind of surface forms of worship, which is what Israel's worship had basically become.

And I'm afraid what our worship even today is becoming. Psalm 51 verse 16. For you do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it.

That is, if I thought that was going to take care of my sin, I'd do that. But you do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit.

A broken and a contrite heart. A totally yielded heart. These, O God, you will not despise. Isaiah chapter 1 verse 11.

To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices? To me, says the Lord. I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or goats.

[43 : 10] When you come to appear before me, who has required this from your hand? To trample my courts? Bring no more futile sacrifices. Incense is an abomination to me.

The new moons, the Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies cannot endure iniquity. And the sacred meeting, your new moons, and your appointed feasts, my soul hates. They are trouble to me.

I'm weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you, even though you make many prayers. I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood.

See, what he's doing is speaking of their disobedience, their rebellion, which is far more important to God than their ritualistic, ceremonial worship practices, even though many of those are required and prescribed by God for Israel in the Old Testament.

But you first obey and then you worship. Jeremiah chapter 7, thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices and eat meat, for I did not speak to your fathers or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices, but this is what I commanded them saying, obey my voice and I will be your God and you shall be my people and walk in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you, and on and on.

[44 : 45] Hosea chapter 6 verse 6, for I desire mercy and not sacrifice and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. Amos chapter 4 verse 4, come to Bethel and transgress at Gilgal, multiply transgressions, what he's saying, go ahead, come and perform your worship practices in my house, and just go ahead and do that, bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days, offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, proclaim and announce the free will offerings, for this you love, love.

You love it, I don't. You children of Israel, says the Lord again, is responding to their rebellion, their worship, even their sacrifices, they love them more than God loved them.

I could go on and on, we get into the New Testament, Matthew chapter 9 verse 13, but go and learn what this means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance, Hebrews chapter 10, for it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins, therefore when he came into the world, he said, sacrifice an offering you did not desire, but a body you have prepared for me, and burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin you had no pleasure, then I said, behold I have come, in the volume of a book it is written of me to do the will of God, so Jesus is quoting the Old Testament thing.

So on and on we could go. Here is the principle, the concept of God desires obedience more than sacrifice, and when we get that in the wrong order, God actually despises our worship, despises it, and there are people packing out pews in churches all over the place on Sunday and other times, and they are not obeying God's word, their lives are open rebellion to God, and they come, they think that they can worship the Lord, and they go away feeling better about themselves, but God hates it, despises it.

This was what Saul was trying to do. Well, let's go on. That leads to a fourth thing in the passage, what I would call a phony contrition, or contriteness.

[47 : 13] It's phony. Verse 24, Then Saul said to Samuel, I have sinned. That sounds real genuine, doesn't it? I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words, and how I wish that he had just put a period there.

Just at that point, been okay, but no. He had to pitch a little blame. He said, I have sinned because I feared the people and obeyed their voice.

So who's he blaming? The people. People made me do this. I couldn't resist them. I'm just one man. All these people, they might kill me, they might stone me.

I just had to do it. They made me do it. And then, kind of to further reveal that his contrition, his repentance, his phony, he then begged Samuel to return to the people with him.

Return with me, Samuel said, no, you've got to return with me when I go back to the elders. And why would he want that so badly? Well, because if Samuel didn't go with him, it would have looked bad, made him look bad to the people.

[48 : 39] It's all about Saul here. It's all about him. He wants to appear religious. He wants to blame everyone else for his failures, and this is not the first time he has done that.

He wants Samuel to help him maintain this kind of phony facade about him, a kind of phony spiritual facade, righteous facade.

All he really regrets is getting caught. getting caught. All right, so what happens next, and finally? We have a perplexing command.

We have a partial compliance to the command. A concept, a perfecting concept, obedience is better than sacrifice. We have this phony contriteness from Saul, and then finally, a very profound censure of Saul.

Saul. It's all over for Saul. We've already had some indications of this before. In fact, God has already spoken to this before. We looked at that, I think, last Sunday, maybe the Sunday, well, not last Sunday, Sunday before.

[49 : 51] It's all over now. Though he will continue to reign as king for a number of years yet, till David comes to the throne. But he's been rejected.

And he's given, at this point, a very strong censure. And it's profound, really, how the Bible describes this.

First of all, in verse 27, and as Samuel turned around to go away, I love this scene here. Samuel turned around to go away.

Saul seized the edge of his robe, and it tore again. And what an opportunity Samuel took here. He said, the Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today.

I was reading that again this afternoon, and I thought of my friend, Gary Brown, who lives in Arkansas. Gary's had a heart attack just recently.

[50 : 57] But Gary, preacher, pastor, but he was very gifted in drama, and he would do these monologues of Bible characters, Bible stories, and he was really very good at it, very good at it.

In fact, he would do what he called monologue revivals. He'd just go and spend four or five nights in a church, and each night he would be in character, and he would preach in that way.

I only had the opportunity to see him a couple of times doing his dramatic monologues, and one of those times was this very scene here.

And it kind of opens up, it starts with Saul. He's Saul in the dramatic monologue, and he's sitting and he has a piece of material and he's ripping it slowly, and you can kind of imagine the sound of that.

And that's what he does at the beginning, that's the first thing. And then he kind of speaks in character and relating what Samuel said to him.

[52 : 17] The kingdom is torn from me. Really profound. And it's a profound indicator, not the only one here, the first one, that it's all over Saul.

God's done with him. And he doesn't know when, but the kingdom is going to be torn from him, dramatically, hurtfully, torn from him.

So first of all we have that. And then second in verse 29, the Bible says, and also the strength, and that's capital S, so this is a reference to God, Yahweh God.

The strength of Israel, the real strength of Israel, will not lie nor relent. Not going to change his mind. And he's not a man that he should relent.

That's a very profound statement of God's censure he's putting upon Saul. God's not a man like everybody else. He never lies. And play around with words, speaks the truth.

[53 : 30] And he doesn't change his mind, doesn't relent. Then the third indicator here is in verse 35, and Samuel went no more to see Saul until the day of his death.

Now that may not sound very dramatic to you, very serious, but it certainly is. Samuel was the voice of God in Israel. God's mouthpiece. He was the preacher in Israel, the prophet.

And when God had something to say to Israel, he said it through Samuel. And so this is tantamount to God saying, I'm not going to speak to you, Saul, anymore.

no more word from God. Can you imagine? Saul will get nothing more from God. And then one final thing, worst of all, really, I guess it's all bad, but the most serious statement of censure is in verse 35, and the Lord regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel.

Now that in itself is an interesting concept, that God would regret something. In fact, we have that twice in chapter 15.

[54 : 55] We have it stated at the beginning of this judgment part of the passage, judgment of Saul, and we have it at the end. It's kind of like bookends on God's judgment.

I regret that I've made Saul king. And it ends with I have regretted, God regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel.

And that is as bad as it can get, really, for Saul. And it means simply that God takes obedience very seriously.

Not just for Saul, but for all of us. Far more serious than I think we know. We're willing to admit. He takes it very seriously, and especially the obedience of those he has placed in positions of leadership, to whom much is given, much is required.

Thank you.