

WHAT IS ACCEPTABLE OBEDIENCE?

In 1Sam 15:3 King Saul is commanded by God to “go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.”

- a. And vs7 says: “And Saul attacked the Amalekites from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is east of Egypt.”
- a. But vs9 says: “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 every thing that was despised and worthless, that they destroyed utterly.”

Samuel, the prophet, was sent by God to confront King Saul with his disobedience and to tell him that God had rejected him and would take the kingdom away from him.

- a. But King Saul protested his innocence: “I have performed the commandment of the LORD” (vs13).
- a. So Samuel said: “What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?” (vs14).
- a. King Saul replied: “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 utterly destroyed” (vs15).
- a. With growing impatience and anger, Samuel responded: “. . . the LORD sent you on a journey, 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? (vs18,19).
- a. But King Saul stubbornly refused to admit his disobedience. He said: “But I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and have gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me, and brought Agag king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the LORD . . .” (vs 20,21).
- a. But Samuel held Saul’s feet to the fire: “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 hearken 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 has also rejected you from being king (vs22,23).
- a. And now, finally, King Saul owns up to his disobedience: “And 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’ (vs24).

It’s clear that King Saul had a very poor understanding of what constitutes acceptable obedience to God.

- a. Saul wanted to believe that what he had done was acceptable to God.
- a. He tried to convince himself, and he tried to convince Samuel, that he had obeyed God’s command . . . when, in fact, he had not obeyed.
- a. And because his “obedience” was not acceptable to God, God rejected him.

Many people today have the same problem Saul had.

- a. They think they have obeyed God, when they really haven’t.
 - ▶ They want to think that what they have done is acceptable to God
 - ▶ They try to convince themselves, and they try to convince others, that what they have done is alright with God . . . when, really, it isn’t
- a. They simply do not understand what constitutes acceptable obedience to God.

In this sermon:

- a. I want to help you understand that God requires obedience.
- a. I want to help you understand what obedience requires.

1. God requires obedience. And God has always required obedience.

OLD TESTAMENT

Deut 10:12,13 ~ “And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, 13 "and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good?”

Deut 11:26-28 ~ “Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse: 27 the blessing, **if you obey** the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you today; 28 and the curse, **if you do not obey** the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way which I command you today . . .”

Deut 18:19 ~ “And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him..”

NEW TESTAMENT

Matt 7:21 ~ “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.”

2Cor 10:6 ~ “. . . and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.”

Heb 5:8,9 ~ “. . . though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. 9 And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, . . .”

2Th 1:7,8 ~ “. . . and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, 8 in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

From cover to cover, the Bible teaches that God requires obedience to His commands.

But having established that God requires obedience, what does obedience require?

- a. King Saul thought he had obeyed God acceptably, but he had not.
 - ▶ Saul was satisfied with his “obedience,” but God wasn’t.
 - ▶ Saul’s “obedience” was really disobedience.
- a. It’s possible that you could be satisfied with your obedience to God, when God is not at all satisfied.
 - ▶ It’s possible that your “obedience” is really disobedience.

So . . .

2. What does obedience require? What are the characteristics of acceptable obedience to God?

OBEDIENCE REQUIRES FAITH

- a. Whatever you do in service to God, and all that you do in service to God, must be done

by faith.

- ▶ Heb 11:6 ~ “But without faith it is impossible to please him . . .”
 - ▶ Rom 14:23 ~ “. . . for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.”
- b. And to do it “by faith” means to do it with conviction (fully convinced that what you are doing has God’s approval).
- ▶ Rom 14:5 ~ “Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind.”
 - As an example, Paul used the eating of meats, and said: “I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself” (vs14), but “he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith . . .” (vs23)
 - That’s why Paul says: “Test all things; hold fast what is good” (1Th 5:21).
+ NASB: “examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good”
 - And that’s why he instructed Timothy: “But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been **assured** of, knowing from whom you have learned them, . . .” (2Tim 3:14).
- c. And, of course, your conviction that what you’re doing is right must come from your knowledge of God’s word.
- ▶ Consider the passage we just read (2Tim 3:14), and this time we’ll read v15 also: “But you must continue in the things which you have **learned** and been **assured** of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 and that from childhood you have known **the Holy Scriptures**, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”
 - ▶ And, Rom 10:17 ~ “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”
- d. So, whatever you do in service to God, and all that you do in service to God, must be done by faith, and that faith must come from your knowledge of God’s word.

OBEDIENCE REQUIRES RESPECT FOR ALL THAT GOD HAS SAID

- a. You cannot draw a line through the commands of God and make some commands **ESSENTIAL**, and others **NON-ESSENTIAL**.
- b. To obey God acceptably you must have the same attitude toward the commandments of God as the Psalmist did in **Psa 119**.
- ▶ 119:86 ~ “All Thy commandments are faithful.”
 - ▶ 119:151 ~ “. . . all Thy commandments are truth.”
 - ▶ 119:172 ~ “. . . all Thy commandments are righteousness.”
 - ▶ 119:4-6 ~ “Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently. 5 O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! 6 Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments.”
- c. I know that some of the Lord’s commands are “weightier” than others, but the faithful servant of God, the truly obedient servant, is committed to doing all the Lord commands.
- ▶ Matt 28:18-20 ~ “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you . . .”
 - ▶ Matt 23:23 ~ “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.”
- d. Remember the teaching of Jesus about this in Lk 16:10 and Jas 2:10.
- ▶ Lk 16:10 ~ “He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.”
 - ▶ Jas 2:10 ~ “For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.”

OBEDIENCE REQUIRES FULL COMPLIANCE WITH GOD'S COMMAND

- a. Partial "obedience" is not acceptable obedience.
 - ▶ King Saul did much of what God commanded him to do in the matter of the Amalekites.
 - Saul "attacked the Amalekites, from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is east of Egypt. 8 He also took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword" (1Sam 15:7,8).
 - "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 un-willing to utterly destroy them. But everything despised and worth-less, that they utterly destroyed" (1Sam 15:9)
 - And God 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.' And it grieved Samuel, and he cried out to the LORD all night" (1Sam 15:11)
 - ▶ Saul wanted God to accept what he had done -- but Saul did not fully comply with God's command, and God would not accept it.

OBEDIENCE REQUIRES A WILLING HEART

- a. Whatever you do in service to God, and all that you do in service to God, must be done with a willing heart.
 - ▶ This is the clear teaching of the Old Testament prophets.
 - Isa 1:19 ~ "If you are **willing** and obedient, You shall eat the good of the land . . ."
 - Psa 100:2 ~ "Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing."
 - Ex 25:2 ~ "Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring Me an offering. From everyone who gives it **willingly** with his heart you shall take My offering."
 - Ex 35:4-5 ~ "And Moses spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying, 'This is the thing which the LORD commanded, saying: 5 'Take from among you an offering to the LORD. Whoever is of a **willing** heart, let him bring it as an offering to the LORD. . .'"
 - 1Chr 29:17 ~ "I know also, my God, that You test the heart and have pleasure in uprightness. As for me, in the uprightness of my heart I have **willingly** offered all these things; and now with joy I have seen Your people, who are present here to offer **willingly** to You."
 - Deut 28:45-47 ~ "Moreover all these curses shall come upon you and pursue and overtake you, until you are destroyed, because you did not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which He commanded you. 46 And they shall be upon you for a sign and a wonder, and on your descendants forever. 47 Because you did not serve the LORD your God with **joy** and **gladness of heart** for the abundance of all things. . ."
 - ▶ And this is the clear teaching of the Lord's apostles as well.
 - It is clearly taught in all that Paul says about the churches of Macedonia giving to relieve the needy saints in Judea in 2Cor 8,9.
 - + 2Cor 8:3-4 ~ "For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were **freely willing**, 4 **imploring us** with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints."
 - + 2Cor 8:12 ~ "For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have."
 - + 2Cor 9:7 ~ "So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver"

- And it is clearly taught in **Rom 6** in the things Paul says about true conversion to Christ.
 - + **Rom 6:17-18** ~ “But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you **obeyed from the heart** that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. 18 And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.”

OBEDIENCE REQUIRES THE RIGHT MOTIVE: LOVE.

- Whatever you do in service to God, and all that you do in service to God, must be motivated by love: love for God, and love for others.
 - ▶ **Matt. 22:35-40** ~ “Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, 36 “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” 37 Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”
- Everything that was commanded in the law and the prophets was summed up in the commands to love God and love others.
 - ▶ Two contrasting examples in the New Testament serve to underscore the Lord’s teaching with regard to this requirement (**1Cor 13:3 vs Mk 9:41**).
 - **1Cor 13:3** ~ “And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.”
 - **Mk 9:41** ~ “For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.”
 - Certainly, men would commend the act by the rich man far above the simple act of hospitality; but listen to God’s estimate of them:
 - + Of the rich man giving all his goods to feed the poor, it is said: “it profits . . . nothing”
 - + Of the simple act of hospitality, it is said: “he will by no means lose his reward”
 - We instinctively ask, “Why?” And the answer is:
 - + The rich man did a great act of charity, but without love in his heart (something besides sincere love and concern motivated him in his giving): “. . . and have not love . . .”
 - + The act of hospitality was done out of sincere motives: “. . . because you belong to Christ . . .” (sincere, Christ-like motives prompted the giving)
 - Judged by the outward appearance only, the giving away of a fortune would always be commended far above simple acts of hospitality, but “. . . the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (**1Sam 16:7**).

You can often satisfy men simply by what you do, but God is always concerned with why you do the things that you do.

Conclusion.

Near the beginning of the sermon, I said:

- Saul wanted to believe that what he had done was acceptable to God.
- He tried to convince himself, and he tried to convince Samuel, that he had obeyed God’s command . . . when, in fact, he had not obeyed.

What about you? Are you truly obedient to the Lord?

- Is your “obedience” in accord with the Lord’s requirements for acceptable obedience?

- ▶ Are you doing all that you do by faith?
 - sure and certain that what you're doing has God's approval?
 - sure and certain because you have studied and learned God's will?
- ▶ Are you showing respect for all of God's commands?
 - trying to please Him in all things?
- ▶ Are you fully complying with all God's commands?
- ▶ Are you doing all that you do willingly and gladly?
- ▶ Are you doing all that you do out of sincere love for God, and sincere love for others?

To be the Lord's true disciple, you must commit yourself "to observe all things whatsoever the Lord has commanded you" (Matt 28:19).

- a. If you will do that, the Lord promises: "and, lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world" (Matt 28:20).