



# "Lessons from a King" : *The Peril of Partial Obedience*

1 Samuel 15

## "Lessons from a King"

- *The Peril of Partial Obedience*

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**TEXT - 1 Samuel chapter 15**

Thus far we have seen Saul plucked out of obscurity and given reign over the nation of Israel as King. He was given the blessing and literally the power of God to rule God's people. He *had* been a nobody. God likes to choose such 'nobodies!' Saul had been lifted up at the hand of God to position and authority. Yet somewhere along the way He had forgotten. Somewhere along the way he had allowed his ego to swell and he began to usurp the authority of God. He decided that *he* knew better and that he was a pretty smart guy so he began to give himself allowances that were never his to take.

What came next should be no surprise to any of us. Because he had previously usurped the authority of God, he had been effectively spiritually 'spanked', but in grace he was allowed to remain in his position as king. But Saul went on to make a fatal error. One that many of us make. And that is the mistake of believing that God's grace and patience in such matters is unlimited! Luke 12:48 warns all of us today that "*For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.*" Saul had been warned before. And while there was remorse on his part, there failed to be repentance. There failed to be a change of behavior.

Sadly, it has been my experience that often those who have been redeemed from the deepest holes are the ones who fall to this trap. Such seems incredulous, as the salvation we have received from the depths of sin and bondage has, for many of us, been extreme. Yet often rebellion and pride not only still exists, but actually often flourishes in this environment! Maybe we think that we *climbed* out of the hole rather than were in truth *pulled* out? But no matter the underlying causes of such, the manifest result seems to be the same: *we have forgotten the cross...we have forgotten who we were and who we really are still, and so in our pride we allow ourselves a latitude...a permissive 'level' of disobedience.*

What Saul had been given should have been forever held with awe and humility. God had given him an incredible privilege in which to play a historic part in the furthering of the kingdom of God. His name would go down in history! But now in what context? As a humble and submissive servant of God? Or a prideful and rebellious child who sought his own will and furthering, over that of his Creator?

We have already read of Saul's 'stumbles.' Chapter 15 is not the first time Saul has had issues of disobedience! And God had thus far been patient and forgiving. But scripture is full of record that God often comes to the end of His patience and mercy...especially for those who wear the mantle of leadership. For we stand in the realm of representing God and kingdom, and thus it seems He has us on an especially "short leash." In Genesis 6:3 God tells us plainly that "*My Spirit shall not strive with man forever...*"

As believers, we quickly learn that God is gracious. He pours out His kindness, forbearance, and patience, which is why He does not end us all where we stand today! In reality, He gives mankind, especially *members of His covenant community*, many chances to repent. His historical "M.O." is that He sends warnings...often through others around us, of impending doom and the discipline that is coming if we continued in our sin. (that's one of the purposes and needs of spiritual community life and interaction.)

When we escape the discipline we are due it is only because of God's grace and loving kindness! But such mercy is often instead perceived as tolerance, or worse, as special dispensation for us alone because we are unique and 'chosen.' We walk on thin ice when we think we can presume upon His kindness and patience. For we truthfully know the Lord's patience toward sin and sinners will run out eventually (*Rom. 2:4-5; 2 Peter 3:8-10*).

In the Bible, there is often a spiritual picture or metaphor for a physical or tangible issue. The people or nation of Amalek is included in this as Amelek in scripture gives us a picture of the flesh. In Deuteronomy 25, we are told that the Amalekites method of attack would be to sweep in and go after the back of the pack as the people of Israel marched through the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land. In other words, the Amalekites would, without remorse, integrity or discretion, sneak in and go after those at the back of the community. Those who were young or old, sick, feeble, distracted or dispassionate. Those folks who for one reason or another, hung back. The Amalekites are *still* going after the same folks today and the flesh is killing them off one after another.

That's exactly how the flesh works. It exploits the areas of our lives where we are weak, feeble, or holding back. Concerning the Amalekites who harassed the people of Israel, God said, "It's time to deal a death blow to these people."

Thus far, God had held back His hand from coming against Saul to end him. But in this chapter, Saul was given a final chance to obey. He disobeyed and he sought to justify his actions...and excuse Himself from the bar of obedience. Saul claimed he "kind-of" obeyed! He "mostly" followed God's directions, and any shortcoming was justified as he had a really good reason to not follow through 100%! His speech to Samuel has been repeated millions of times since then with little change in vernacular! Saul did what many of us do. He attempted to appease God by obeying *most* of what He instructs us to do. The thinking goes like this: "*If I do most of what He asked, then He will **mostly** be pleased with me.*" The attempt is to please God and still have at least a 'taste' of what *we* want and desire that is outside of His direct will.

Over the years of ministry, I have had on several occasions, people tell me that even though they knew that some thing or some act was not Gods express will, that they would go ahead and indulge and then ask God for forgiveness after! For example, more than once I have had a husband tell me that if he tried to lead his wife and home in the express way that God has so instructed, that his wife would leave him and that "God doesn't like divorce" so he defaulted to the passive roll in his house and failed to live up to scripture. Again, such is the perceived "special dispensation" of God we think we have because we have a really good reason to disobey. It is situational truth and situational ethics.

These folks thought they could disobey God a little every day of their lives, in attempt to not disobey God 'big' in the end. We always get ourselves into trouble when we begin to humanly 'reason through' the issues of Lordship and obedience. A few of those marital situations have already ended in divorce anyway, and why not? The wife failed to respect her milquetoast husband and it all fell apart from there.

The thinking goes like this: I can have premarital sex because "*we are really in love and are going to get married anyway.*" I can watch porn because "*I am not married and therefore not getting sex and hey, it's better than me sleeping around, right?*" I can withhold my service because I am really busy...I can withhold my finances because I have a lot of expenses this month. I have heard said "*hey man! it's easy for you...you don't have two kids and a house payment!*" All of it is just the reasoning of Saul played out in today's world!

Let us make note that Saul did not flagrantly blow off the direction of God! No, he *mostly* obeyed. But it still cost him his position and standing. Did God still love Him? You bet! But it did not change the fact that all that He had at that point had been given to him by God out of His love! It was grace manifested in physical and concrete ways. But as Job said, "*God gives...and God takes away.*" Saul did not lose the eternal love of God, but He lost a lot of everything else. A lot of what was given by God because of firstly His love for Saul, but also because Saul had said yes to God. Yes ...he would lead. Yes ...He would listen. Yes ...He would be God's king and would obey. But **he** had failed to keep his end of the agreement!

Saul, like us, tried to justify his actions. He tried to "explain" his sin. He pointed out the "extenuating circumstances." But Samuel came right back at him, pointing out that none of it mattered as much as obedience. That Saul's sacrifices and offerings were not the point and were not what God was seeking. He wanted Saul's obedience. No doubt because obedience reflects submission and one's acquiescence to God and His authority. While we often play this issue down, God does not!

He herein spells out His position, saying that rebellion...*and that is what all disobedience is*, is on par with the practice of witchcraft! That our stubbornness is equal with idolatry! As long as we continue to "grade" sins on a curve...based on human design and resignation, we will continue to have spiritual disasters in our lives and we will lose parts of those lives and the richness of them, never to be seen again! As I have said in the past, some things like this cannot be fixed and restoration will never be experienced in this life. With some things, there is no going back.

I am reminded of an individual who used to attend church here a long time ago. When I drive past her house, my heart always breaks as I see what appears to be a virtual loveless marriage and absentee husband because he chose a job over his wife. Everyone knew this guy was overtly selfish and self-centered and warned her when marriage was purposed. But she ignored the evidence and rejected the counsel of so many. And now she is stuck. No biblical way out, and no relationship or real marriage despite the piece of paper between them.

Matthew 7:13-14 says "*Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.*"

Saul jumped into his task, but failed to follow through. It's an old story! The fact is, many of us have a King Agag in our lives. And because we killed mostly everyone or everything else, we feel somehow justified in saving a few of the sheep for posterity and failing to kill the king. But in failing to obey in this matter...failing to completely follow through with what God had instructed, the secondary sins began to stack up. There was the sin of pride...the sin of boasting...the sin of blaming others...the sin of deception...the sin of covetousness. He was argumentative, stubborn and unrepentive. What he thought was a small thing would ultimately destroy him, because *it wasn't a small thing to God!*

When it all 'hit the fan', Saul quickly began to dance. He moved quickly once the penalty of sin was being realized. But Saul was acting out of remorse due to the *cost* of His sinful actions, not because of the pain and grief that His God endured on his behalf. Not because he was told to act in a different manner and he refused and therefore brought anguish to his God. To Saul, God's marching orders didn't make sense to him so he usurped them with his own logic and plan. There was no remorse or regret as to the false testimony concerning the nature of His Creator that he gave to the world around him through his rebellious actions.

How often shameful are *our* actions, when we pull a "King Saul!" And we may or may not realize that much of our destiny and God's plan for us is now being shelved because of our pride, rebellious spirit and disobedience. There are people that are even now amongst us that will not see their full calling realized because they cannot *follow*...they have to always be the boss, and they don't play well with the other children, so ministry leadership is out of the question. Some who cannot follow their husbands and allow him to lead, so neither of you will ever see ministry leadership. Some who have the same reoccurring sin issue...the "King Agag" that fails to be put to death, and eventually that Agag will get free and kill you instead! And like Saul, you are right now saying "no, no...I'm alright...that won't happen to me." But that is what all the Saul's before you said! Wisdom and spiritual maturity is reflected in submission and hearing biblical counsel.

Proverbs 11:14 says "*Where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counselors there is safety.*" And in 15:22, Proverbs tells us "*Without counsel, plans go awry, But in the multitude of counselors they are established.*"

Correcting this situation relies upon our understanding and our acknowledgment of God's full will for us, ...who are our King Agag's ...and moving emphatically to put him to death. Whatever it is...whatever is the earthly cost! Because there is one thing we can be sure of, and that is that in the kingdom dispensation...*where we as believers say we live*, any earthly and temporal rejection of our wants, desires, and personal understandings and interpretations are inconsequential to the eternal and to what God wants to give us.

1Corinthians 2:9 tells us "*...Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.*" And perhaps we should add the implied in this verse: "*...has prepared for those who love Him more than King Agag.*"

Psalms 38 speaks of a heart such as what we have herein described:

- 1 *O LORD, don't rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your rage!*
- 2 *Your arrows have struck deep, and your blows are crushing me.*
- 3 *Because of your anger, my whole body is sick; my health is broken because of my sins.*
- 4 *My guilt overwhelms me — it is a burden too heavy to bear.*
- 5 *My wounds fester and stink because of my foolish sins.*
- 6 *I am bent over and racked with pain. All day long I walk around filled with grief.*
- 7 *A raging fever burns within me, and my health is broken.*
- 8 *I am exhausted and completely crushed. My groans come from an anguished heart.*