

## Obedience

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### Basics

God is pretty serious about this obedience stuff.

Your intention might be right and you might even have good intentions, but he expects obedience in his way. In what is a very very sad story, God rejected Israel's first king, Saul on account of disobedience. The story unfolds as follows in 1 Samuel 15(NIV):

God instructed King Saul to punish the Amalekites, (who had many many years earlier ambushed the Israelites from the rear end (where sick and tired people are) during the exodus from Egypt. This was the instruction (verse 3):

*"Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys."*

Saul, planned the ambush attack well, he took 12,000 soldiers... He was successful in the victory BUT they didn't destroy everything, he spared their king Agag and kept the best loot. Verse 9 says:

*"But Saul and the army spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs— everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed."*

God was pretty upset and he told the Prophet Samuel (verse 10):

*"I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions."*

When the Prophet (after crying to God all night for the King) went to meet King Saul. The King was ecstatic about the victory, he said (Verse 13-15):

*"The Lord bless you! I have carried out the Lord's instructions." But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?"*

*Saul answered, "The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the Lord your God, but we totally destroyed the rest."*

Saul obeyed the instruction - but only partially. He even seemed to have good intention. He wanted to sacrifice the cattle to God (presumably to thank him for the victory). He figured that must be a great thing!

But the prophet declared what is most important to God. In verses 22 – 23, he declares:

*"Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in **obeying** the Lord? To **obey** is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king."*



What a sad end!

Here was someone who God had made great (verse 17): *“Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel.”*

Saul on realising his sin after the pronouncement cried and begged but it was final. See what the end of the chapter (verse 35) says:

*“Until the day Samuel died, he did not go to see Saul again, though Samuel mourned for him. And the LORD regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel.”*

## Other examples from the bible

The above key story tells us that it is important to hear God and follow his instructions fully, even we don't always understand for if we don't obey, as in Saul's cases, we could lose the promises of God.

There are other examples of the importance of obedience:

### 1. Obedience leads to long life (and other benefits).

*“Obey the LORD, be humble, and you will get riches, honor, and a long life.”<sup>i</sup>*

### 2. We become God's friends through obedience.

*The Lord is the friend of those who **obey** him and he affirms his covenant with them.<sup>ii</sup>*

### 3. God hears our prayers when we obey him.

*The Lord Almighty had said: “If you **obey** my laws and perform the duties I have assigned you, then you will continue to be in charge of my Temple and its courts, and I will hear your prayers, just as I hear the prayers of the angels who are in my presence.”<sup>iii</sup>*

### 4. Obedience leads to God keeping his promises and preventing disaster

*“If you serve me faithfully as your father David did, **obeying** my laws and doing everything I have commanded you, I will keep the promise I made to your father David when I told him that Israel would always be ruled by his descendants.<sup>9</sup> But if you and your people ever disobey the laws and commands I have given you and worship other gods, then I will remove you from the land that I gave you, and I will abandon this Temple that I have consecrated as the place where I am to be worshiped. People everywhere will ridicule it and treat it with contempt.”<sup>iv</sup>*

## Today's perspective

A Gallup poll of Americans<sup>v</sup> and who they trust found that trust in institutions, including God (or religion) is falling. Only 41% of Americans say they trust organized religion, down from 52% in 2006 and from 65% in 1973 and even trust in the medical system is going down. Trust was at 80% in 1973, and in 2016 it is 39%. It is not just religion people no longer trust. Another pew study<sup>vi</sup> for example found only 19% trust their government.

We are therefore a generation that seems to be less trusting and so it can be a challenge to want to hear about a God who asks us to obey him. In what many people perceive to be – without question. It doesn't have to be that way of course.

## How I do it...

The biggest test of obedience so far has come to me in the area of money matters.

God expects us to give to his work and to others. While the new covenant (New Testament) teaching is that there is no fixed percentage (simply, "God loves a cheerful giver"<sup>vii</sup>), 10 % is used in church tradition as a basis for giving. I use this as a minimum in my own giving.

I have found that even in tough financial times when it seems "painful" but I still obeyed God and gave, he has then blessed me with unexpected finances – almost as if he is repaying me for pain! With time, I have now learnt to obey, without questions (sometimes are harder than others of course) for I now know that when God asks for obedience, it is not for our bad. He himself declares:

"I alone know the **plans** I have for **you**, **plans to bring you prosperity** and not disaster, **plans to bring about the future you hope for.**"<sup>viii</sup>

## Your turn

What will you now do differently? Examples to think about include:

- What has God been telling you to do that you have been disobeying?
- Which promise of obedience listed above will you now stand on in your next devotional time?
- What other benefits of obedience can you find from your own bible reading?

*Write here*

## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> Proverbs 22: 4 (GNT)

<sup>ii</sup> Psalms 25: 14 (GNT)

<sup>iii</sup> Zechariah 3: 7 (GNT)

<sup>iv</sup> Zechariah 3: 7 (GNT)

<sup>v</sup> <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/americans-dont-trust-their-institutions-anymore/>

<sup>vi</sup> <http://www.people-press.org/2015/11/23/beyond-distrust-how-americans-view-their-government/>

<sup>vii</sup> 2 Corinthians 9: 6- 7 (ESV)

<sup>viii</sup> Jeremiah 29: 11 (GNT)