To Obey Is Better Than

Introduction: (Scripture Reading: Romans 1:1-6)

Obedience Is Better

A. The Day King Saul Learned Obedience Was The Way

1. One day God gave Saul a very simple and clear command. Utterly destroy the Amalekites *(I Sam 15:1-3)*
   a. Background: Saul had been anointed by Samuel as Israel’s first king. He was a physical specimen... He looked the part! He was acting the part as well at this point in time. He had been liberating God’s people from the oppression. He fought valiantly. He led Israel to victory.
   b. Now God wanted Saul to go to war against the Amalekites. It’s important to see that this war was not about more money or land... it was about the punishment of sin & wickedness.
   c. There was nothing obscure or confusing about God’s command. It was straightforward. He was to go out and fight against them, destroy them, and destroy them completely. There were to be no survivors. Not even among the animals. This wicked people were to be wiped out.
   d. For a while everything looks good... Saul gathered together a massive army. He went to the city and prepared for war. He warned the Kenites, another nation, to get away because they were innocent in the matter. Then Saul waged war and completed his victory against them.

2. Everything went smoothly. Saul returns from battle victorious and Saul looked good. However, God was not pleased because Saul had disobeyed Him. *(verses 8-27)*
   a. Saul destroyed everything that was despised and worthless... I believe this is likely talking about their idols and anything connected to their idolatry and other sinful ways. However, Saul spared the things that were valuable. It would appear this shows a discerning spirit in him
   b. Saul had what appeared to be a good reason for sparing what he did ➔ He brought them back to sacrifice to God. He wanted to use them to worship God! He wanted to glorify God. And he saved only the very best, because when you worship God you give God the best! This would seem to be a great testimony to God's greatness over the gods of the Amalekites!
   c. Notice how when Samuel was told by God what happened, Samuel wept all night! Why? He is torn up over Saul’s disobedience. He understands the nature and consequence of sin. He was a man of God who loved God and others... so he hurt when he saw people disobey God!
   d. When Samuel confronted Saul, Saul defends himself. Saul is not making excuses. He sincerely believed that what he did was right. Saul was shocked by God’s condemnation. He surely expected a pat on the back from Samuel and the Lord! He actually felt like he obeyed God!
   e. When Samuel rebukes Saul, he corrects his misunderstanding about God – Saul felt like worship mattered so much to God that it trumped obedience. While God does appreciate and desire man’s worship, what God wants more is obedience. Obedience is better than worship!
   f. When Saul chose to disobey God, Saul chose to sin. In this moment Saul was choosing to reject God’s word. His disobedience was an act of presumptuousness.

3. There are some important observations and lessons we need to take away from Saul’s tragic decision:
   a. First, God wants our obedience more than He wants our worship! I can worship God all day, with all my might, in front of many people and it doesn’t matter if I am not obeying Him! God is not bought off with our worship. Worship from a disobedient life is not pleasing at all!
   b. Partial obedience is not really obedience! When God tells us to do something, God expects us to do it all the way and do it all His way. Partial obedience isn’t good enough!
c. We must be careful about the sin of presumption in obeying God – We make a presumption when we assume God will be okay with something that He has not spoken about.

d. Obedience means that we cannot make exceptions or substitutions to God’s will. It doesn’t matter if it makes more sense to me, if I think God will excuse me, or if I think it is better my way. We call it “God’s will” for a reason… it is HIS and not MINE! Substituting is disobedience!

e. Just because the outcome you get appears good, it’s not okay to take the wrong path to get there. The end doesn’t justify the means. Is it really my place to decide what is good? Especially if it means setting aside God’s will to get there? Saul found out what he thought was a good cause really wasn’t a good cause at all! If we set aside God’s will we will discover the same!

f. We need to be careful of the voices we are listening to. Remember, Saul said, “I feared the people and obeyed their voice.” Their conquering king turned into a coward when it came to standing up to his own countrymen.

4. Now, how might this play out in a practical way in our daily life?

   a. I cannot go out and live however I want Monday through Saturday and expect that a little worship on Sunday makes everything okay. The church isn’t a hospital… at least not in that sense!

   b. It’s not my place to be creative when it comes to my worship, whether privately as an individual or collectively as a local church. Man might be creative and able to change up our worship, making it more flashy and exciting, but the only question that matters is “What did God say?”

B. Obedience Is Still Better Than...

1. Obedience is better than my emotions (John 17:17; Romans 10:17)

   a. Usually it surfaces when a disagreement takes place over religious beliefs or practices. Someone is being told they are wrong and they respond, “I feel like God...” ➔ It’s an argument from emotion, not scripture and it is based on understanding that may be right or wrong

   b. Obeying what God has said is more important than my feelings. Ultimately it doesn’t matter if I feel something is right or wrong; it is either right or wrong. Feelings don’t change it.

   c. People obeying feelings rather than God creates division... It creates division because I feel one thing and you feel another thing. If our faith and practices are based on our emotions, who are we to tell the other person they are wrong? This is why so many just accept division.

   d. This means my obedience to God must be based on scripture. How do I know what God wants? How do I know His will? I have to go to God’s word and prove it. If God’s word contradicts what I believe or practice then I am wrong no matter how I feel about it. Will I give it up?

   e. This issue arises often when dealing with how a person is saved. My emotions may tell me not to make such a big deal out the method, just as long as people believe in Jesus, but that is not what matters. Obedience matters. I may be emotionally attached to a doctrine, is it truth?

2. Obedience is better than my thoughts and ways (Isaiah 55:8-9; 1 Corinthians 1:25)

   a. Our thoughts are often sincere, but that doesn’t make them right. Just ask Paul. He said he thought he was serving God by opposing Jesus. Just because a person thinks it’s okay or right to do something, that doesn’t make it right or okay to do it!

   b. There are some people in the Bible who made some terrible choices which began with a phrase like, “Behold I thought...” ➔ When such thinking enters our hearts, faith will exit!

   c. When we set aside God’s instructions and commands for what we think, our ways take the place of His ways, we are playing God. We are no longer serving God but we are serving ourselves!

   d. Obeying God is better than my wisdom. So when I am setting out to serve God in some way, it better be God’s word I consult first. No matter how great I think my plans are, it’s His work!

   e. One area this often surfaces in is regarding what churches do. How about having fund raisers for the local church? How about adding in things to make worship more exciting? How about providing for people’s recreational interests? What about creating a leadership within the
local church that is more elaborate? These things may all make sense in my head and they may achieve what appears to be good results, but obeying God’s plan is better!

3. Obedience is better than my physical condition (Ezra 9:1-2; 10:3-5)
   a. The children of Israel had returned from captivity. They were reestablishing themselves in Jerusalem. But there was a problem. They had married foreign wives... women given to idolatry. This was against God’s laws. It was a matter of disobedience. The issue was complicated. It involved married. It was widespread. It even involved the leadership.
   b. What did they do? They didn’t say, “We are starting over so from here on out no more marrying pagan wives.” They put them away. They did this even though children were involved. Obeying God was more important than their relationships and they understood it!
   c. My obedience to God’s will is more important than my relationships with others, it is more important than my perceived happiness, it’s more important than my convenience, it’s more important that what I want to do, it is more important than what I think is best for me!
   d. Obedience to God must take precedence over difficult consequences. Take the marriage situation for example. Obeying God meant that marriage relationships had to be dissolved. It meant that kids had to grow up in a split home. If people are living in adultery and they learn God’s will about marriage one may say, “What about the kids? Surely God doesn’t want them to grow up in a broken home!” God doesn’t want it, but God wants obedience. They can grow up in a divided home where God is obeyed or a unified home where God is disobeyed!
   e. Moses should be an inspiration to us as we seek to obey God in spite of the cost or consequences. Moses chose to identify with God’s people instead of being numbered with the Egyptians. When he did, he gave up the best the world had to offer. He put himself in a position to have to suffer much. How could he? He focused on the reward. We must too! (Heb 11:26)

None of this is to say that obedience alone is enough. We have to stay Biblically balanced in the exercise of our faith. Is it obedience alone? No. Is it enough that we seek to obey God if we don’t love Him. Is it right that we obey God but neglect to love others? Certainly not! But we cannot use any of these as excuses to neglect obeying God!