

The Book of 1Samuel—15:1-9

“Selective Obedience”—Pt.1

(9/27/15)

I think that 1Samuel 15 is one of the most important chapters in the book.

I believe that because it deals with a problem we’re all guilty of from time to time—selective obedience and its consequences to our walk *with* and ministry *for* the Lord.

This chapter is just too big and too important to try to get through it in one week—so we’ll start it today and finish it next time.

I. The Command—v.1-3

The chapter opens up with God giving King Saul a command—

1 Samuel 15:1-3 (NKJV)

¹ Samuel also said to Saul, "The LORD sent me to anoint you king over His people, over Israel. Now therefore, heed the voice of the words of the LORD. ² 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. ³ Now 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.' "

Wow, that sounds extremely harsh and cruel!

I mean how could a God of love order the execution of an entire group of people including their children and animals?!

Well before you make a definitive judgment from this about God's love and justice—let me give you some background.

A. The historical background

The Lord makes reference to this when He said, **“I will punish Amalek *for what he did to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt.*”** (v.2)

What is the Lord referring to—what exactly did the Amalekites do to the people of Israel when they came out of Egypt?

Well the incident comes out of the last half of Exodus 17.

The children of Israel had just come out of Egypt under Moses and only had gotten as far as the area of Rephidim before the Amalekites attacked them.

To attack God's people was bad enough—but it was *how* and *who* they attacked that really made the Lord furious.

In Deut. 25:17-18 God reminds His people of what the Amalekites did to them on that day—

Deuteronomy 25:17-18 (NKJV)

¹⁷ "Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you were coming out of Egypt, ¹⁸ how he met you on the way and attacked your rear ranks, all the stragglers at your rear, when you *were* tired and weary; and he did not fear God.

You see the Amalekites fought dirty—they didn't attack Israel head on—they came at them from behind and attacked those that were at the end of the line.

You might be thinking, *"Okay, but why did that make God so angry?"*

It was because those at the back of the line were the ones that could least defend themselves—the weak, the sickly, the elderly and the handicapped.

It was those the Amalekites attacked and killed with a vicious slaughter.

So abhorrent was that in the eyes of God that He went on to say in Deut.25:19—

Deuteronomy 25:19 (NKJV)

¹⁹ Therefore it shall be, when the LORD your God has given you rest from your enemies all around, in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to possess *as* an inheritance, *that* you will blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. You shall not forget.

Well that day had finally arrived when God gave Saul the command to utterly wipe out the Amalekites.

Again you might be thinking, *"I understand why God would want the armies of the Amalekites wiped out for what they did—but why would God order the children, infants and even the animals killed as well?"*

That's a very good question and to answer it we need to dig into the cultural background of the descendants of Amalek.

B. The cultural background

We read in Genesis 36 that Amalek was the son of Eliphaz and Eliphaz was the firstborn son of Esau.

Both Esau and his son married Canaanite women.

The Canaanites were a people deeply involved in pagan, demonic worship that even involved their women giving themselves over to these pagan deities (demons) in a sexual manner so as to bear the children of these “gods”.

This practice eventually led to the utter contamination of the Canaanites (including and especially the Amalekites) with demonic inbreeding—very much like the days of Noah mentioned in Genesis 6. (Explain)

Whenever God orders the complete and utter destruction of a group of people—including children, infants and animals it tells me there has been a demonic infiltration and contamination that has utterly corrupted everything and there is no more hope for that people.

And so God has no choice left but to destroy them as a way to keep others from being infected by their practices.

Don't forget that roughly 500 years has passed from the time the Amalekites attacked Israel after they came out of Egypt and God commanding Saul to completely wipe them out.

That 500 year period was God's grace being offered to these people—time He was giving them to repent of their wicked practices and get right with Him.

Of course they refused and the longer they involved themselves in these demonic practices the more corrupt and contaminated they became until there was no more hope for them and God's judgment had to fall upon them.

Pastor Chuck Smith—

“So, may I suggest to you, that the reason that God gave this command was because the Amalekites were very vicious, cruel people. They engaged in extremely vile practices of the worship of their gods. They offered up their children as sacrifices to their gods. In the course of time they would have destroyed themselves. They were infected, you might say, with a deadly contagious disease that could corrupt mankind. Thus, God is ordering their extermination. For God is using Saul and the children of Israel as His instrument in bringing judgment.”

So that was the background behind God's command to wipe out the Amalekites—that then brings us to Saul's compromise.

II. The Compromise—v.7-9

1 Samuel 15:7-9 (NKJV)

⁷ And 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. ⁹ 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.

Saul didn't obey God completely—he selectively obeyed God.

Not only did he spare King Agag and the choicest of the animals—but he allowed others to remain alive as well.

As we go on a few chapters in 1 Samuel to chapter 27, we find that David also went to war against the Amalekites—so there had to be others that Saul did not kill.

Even later than that, at the time of the book of Esther, we read how that Haman (the one who tried to exterminate all the Jews in the land of Persia) was an Agagite (a descendant of Agag the Amalekite).

All of this was the result of Saul's *partial* obedience (which is always *total* disobedience) in not utterly wiping out the Amalekites when God commanded him to do so.

Of course he justified his disobedience—“**...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.**” (v.15)

Oh how easy it is to make our disobedience sound spiritual and even noble!

Now I'd like to spend the rest of our time this morning looking at this story from a spiritual standpoint and how it relates to all of us as the people of God.

The Holy Spirit, through this story, wants to teach us a lot more than a history lesson—He wants to teach us a spiritual life lesson as well.

You see in the Scriptures the Amalekites are a type of the flesh.

In the Bible the word ‘flesh’ is used two different ways to represent two different things.

First of all it is often used to represent the physical body.

Genesis 2:21-22 (NKJV)

²¹ And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. ²² Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.

Luke 24:39 (NKJV)

³⁹ Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have."

But secondly (especially in the N.T.) the word 'flesh' is used to represent our sinful fallen nature. (Explain)

Romans 7:5 (NKJV)

⁵ For when we were in the flesh (**unsaved living in 'Egypt'**), the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members (**physical bodies**) to bear fruit to death.

Galatians 5:16-17 (NKJV)

¹⁶ I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

How do I know that the Amalekites are a type of the flesh in Scripture—because the language God uses of them goes beyond this nomadic people that lived at that time.

Exodus 17:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ for he said, "Because the LORD has sworn: the LORD *will have* war with Amalek from generation to generation."

That language transcends the literal Amalekites and is being used by Holy Spirit to speak of another enemy that all of God's people battle with every day—the flesh.

The flesh is a perpetual enemy that all Christians battle with from generation to generation.

It is the first enemy we face as the people of God from the moment we are born again (delivered out of Egypt—the old life of slavery) and it will be the last enemy we fight with up until our dying breath.

Listen to what it says about Amalek in Numbers 24:20—*"Amalek was first among the nations, but shall be last until he perishes."*

It isn't until the body dies and with it our old fallen sinful nature that the flesh will once and for all time be defeated—and we will receive our glorious new bodies and be fully and completely redeemed.

Until that time God has only one command to us concerning our flesh (sin nature)—utterly kill it by nailing it to the cross of Christ by faith every day until the last work of the flesh is destroyed in our lives.

Listen to the admonition of Paul on the subject—

Galatians 5:19-25 (NLT)

¹⁹ When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God. ²² But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things! ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there.

One author had this to say,

"God declares of the flesh life that you are going to have war with it through all generations. There is no truce with the flesh. There is no peaceful coexistence. There is a battle that's going on. The flesh and the spirit are always contrary. There is a war that is going on inside of every believer—whether or not I am going to yield to the flesh or the spirit. It is a battle over the supremacy in my life. Will I be ruled over by my flesh? Or by the spirit? This battle will continue as long as I am in this body."

Yes it will—and understand that the flesh (and the devil using our flesh) fights dirty.

It's often when we're weakest in our walk with God (barely keeping up—at the back of the line) or physically exhausted or sick; or mentally discouraged or depressed that the flesh attacks us and tries to bring us down.

It's often when our marriage is struggling that suddenly lust rises up from within us for a co-worker or neighbor or Satan joins in and uses someone on Facebook to direct that lust towards.

The flesh is a powerful enemy but God has promised us victory if we do what He has told us to do—

“Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill (be controlled by and keep doing) the sinful things your flesh is trying to get you to do.” (Gal.5;16)

The word ‘walk’ is the Greek word ‘peripateo’ and is in the present imperative which means that Paul is commanding us to *“keep on walking in the Spirit”*—constantly and consistently every day.

What does it mean to **walk in the Spirit**?

First, it means that the Holy Spirit *lives in you*—that you're saved.

Second, it means to be *surrendered* and *obedient* to what the Spirit has revealed in His Word as to the will of God for your life.

Third, it means to be *open* and *sensitive* to the influence and leading of the Holy Spirit in your daily walk.

When a Christian obeys this command Paul promises, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that you “*will not*” (emphatic double negative—“*absolutely will not, no way*”) “*gratify (fulfill) the desires of your fallen nature*”.

Paul said in Romans 6 that this kind of day by day walking in the Spirit will render the fallen nature inoperative and break its power over us. (Rom.6:6)

Now the legalist has a form of spiritual ‘dyslexia’ when they read Gal. 5:16—they read it this way,

“Don’t fulfill the lust of the flesh and you shall walk in the Spirit”—but that’s not what Paul is saying here.

The legalist is always trying to do battle against the flesh—in the strength of his flesh.

You can’t use the flesh to defeat the flesh—which is why New Year’s resolutions fail so miserably.

Galatians 3:3 (NKJV)

³ Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?

Galatians 3:3 (NLT)

³ How foolish can you be? After starting your Christian lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort?

That same author we just heard from a minute ago went on to say—

“God says, in concerning the flesh life, that we, by the spirit, should mortify, or put to death, the deeds of the flesh. We are always on some kind of reformation program. “I am going to lose weight: I want to try and bring my flesh under control,” - always hoping to conform. But it isn’t a reformation that we need, it’s a transformation that we need. We need to be born again, not to reform the old nature.

There are always those who are looking for a little bit of good that they might fan the flickering flame. They are trying to bring into beauty and glory, the 'great you' that is in you - that needs to be discovered. We find a lot of denial of the corrupt human nature. The Bible teaches that man, apart from God, is hopelessly lost and corrupt. "The heart is deceitful, and desperately wicked: who could know it?" We have to be born again, and transformed. The old nature: we have to reckon to be dead, crucified with Christ, so that the body of sin might no longer reign as king over you."

In other words, *"Don't fight the flesh—feed the spirit."*

Draw close to God through His Word and prayer and fellowship with other believers—and the flesh won't be an issue.

One last thing and we'll close—if you don't take your flesh seriously and seek by the power of the Holy Spirit to crucify it every day—if you don't kill it, it will destroy you!

Saul failed to wipe out the Amalekites—and we read in 2Samuel chapter one that it was an Amalekite that killed him.

I think of the tragedy of how many lives have been destroyed by the flesh.

So many people even as we speak all around us are being destroyed by their flesh.

Families are being destroyed by the flesh.

Marriages are being destroyed by the flesh.

Physical health is being destroyed by the flesh (alcohol, drugs, cigarettes etc.)

If you don't bring the flesh to the cross and reckon it to be dead, it will rise up to destroy you and things around you.

Therefore, God said—

Romans 13:14 (NLT)

¹⁴ Instead, clothe yourself with the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. And don't let yourself think about ways to indulge your evil desires (*your flesh*).

“OK so I'm not perfect—who is? So I haven't conquered all of my flesh and I still have a few bad habits—so what! I've conquered most of it—what more does God want from me?”

How about total obedience without the excuses?

1 Samuel 15:9 (NLT)

⁹ Saul and his men spared Agag's life and kept the best of the sheep and goats, the cattle, the fat calves, and the lambs—everything, in fact, that appealed to them. They destroyed only what was worthless or of poor quality.

The real problem with selective obedience is that it puts man in the place of God where people are now deciding what actions, practices and behaviors are good and should be allowed to continue, and what are bad and should be done away with.

God has said that homosexuality (and gay marriage) is corrupt and must be done away with—but many in the church have decided that it is good and should be allowed to continue.

We don't get to decide what is good and evil—that belongs to God—all that we get to decide is whether or not we're going to obey all that God has said—but if not there will be consequences.