

■ SAMUEL CONFRONTS SAUL

Week Four | June 25, 2017 | Stories of Our Faith

PREPARATION

■ MONDAY THROUGH WEDNESDAY

Read through 1 Samuel 15:1-35. Pray the Holy Spirit would bring to life the truths of this text and allow you to teach it well to those in your care.

■ THURSDAY THROUGH SATURDAY

Many questions have been included in this week's guide. Read through this lesson to determine which questions will work best to encourage, push, and grow your group.

■ DAILY

As you prepare, pray for the preaching of God's Word this coming weekend. Pray also for your time in this week's study.

THIS WEEK

■ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

When we fear God most, we naturally obey His commands. When we fear people, we stray from His commands and turn our back on Him.

■ THEOLOGY APPLIED

When we seek worldly approval above God's approval, we will always make decisions outside of His Word. When that disobedience happens, God considers it a rejection of Him, and He may remove us from our calling and roles.

■ MEDITATE

"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.'" (1 Samuel 15:24)

GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

♀: *When you were told to clean your room as a child, did you work hard to clean the whole room, or just try to tidy up most of the mess? What's the difference?*

♀: *Imagine a spouse tells you that they "almost" kept their vows of fidelity. In this case, did they really keep their vows at all?*

♀: *How is the church affected when a leader uses God as a cover for their sinful habits?*

Remember the cartoon movie Anastasia? It tells the story of a Russian princess who ends up in an orphanage after her family is killed. Over time, she slowly forgets who she really is, as do those around her. In her eyes, she is a small and worthless orphan. Though her parents told her early in life that she was a princess, once they were gone and she grew up, she couldn't remember her royal calling. As the movie progresses, she seeks to find significance in places that don't provide answers or fulfillment. Over time and through the help of her friends, Anastasia eventually recalls exactly who she is. Her searching comes to an end when she finally remembers the parents who loved her and the task she has as a ruler!

As we turn to 1 Samuel 15, we find Saul in a similar situation. In his view, he feels small. As a result, he constantly seeks affirmation and meaning in all the wrong places. Though God has anointed him as king, he hasn't found security in this high calling. Because of this, he also forgets his task as a ruler to follow God's instructions. Eventually, a friend confronts him reminding him who he truly is. Perhaps he will turn out like Anastasia, remembering his high calling and no longer relying on the approval of others to make him feel valuable. Or, perhaps he'll be unable to recover from his forgetfulness and forfeit his right to rule. Let's keep moving forward to see what happens.

♀: *Think of a time when someone called you out in your disobedience to the Lord. How did that conversation impact you in the long run?*

Q: How would you explain “fear of man” versus “fear of God” to a non-believer?

■ ■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

In 1 Samuel 15:1-35, King Saul is in another wartime situation. Just like in last week’s lesson, he is commanded by God to do something very specific. He has the chance to learn from his previous mistakes and obey God this time. As we read through this passage, we will see the story unfold in these three movements:

1. THE COMMAND GIVEN AND BROKEN
2. THE CONFRONTATION REQUIRED
3. THE COMMAND FULFILLED

GOING DEEPER

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week’s lesson.

THE COMMAND GIVEN & BROKEN

■ ■ 1 SAMUEL 15:1-9

Q: What command has God given to Saul?

Q: In what ways did Saul fulfill the command? In what ways did he not fulfill the command?

In 1 Samuel 15, the Israelites are fighting the Amalekites, and God has given Saul specific orders to wipe out the enemy. The city of Amalek and its people are a thorn in Israel’s side, and their horrific pagan practices (child sacrifice, incest, bestiality, and cultic prostitution) have begun to influence God’s people. God does not want even a

hint of this kind of evil to remain among the Israelites, and so He charges Saul to totally destroy the opposition (v.3).

As we read in last week's lesson, when it comes to God's clear instructions, Saul has a tendency to start well but end poorly. In this story, sadly, he repeats the same pattern of almost following God's directions. In verses 4-9, Saul does "devote to destruction" the majority of the Amalekites. However, King Agag and the best of the Amalekites' animals are spared (v.8-9). In Saul's mind, he has done enough to say he's been obedient to God, and can now also enjoy some personal profit. He believes God will be pleased. The majority of the Amalekites are gone, and now there are spoils to enjoy!

Saul's actions in this part of the story should shine a light into our own lives. How often do we also seek to obey God just enough to feel obedient, while still maintaining wiggle room for the things we don't want to give up?

Q: *King Agag and the best animals were spared. Why do you think the author includes the detail that "Saul and the people" spared them?*

Q: *Discuss Saul's view of what is "good" versus what is "despised and worthless" (v. 9). How does Saul define the two?*

Saul is back in the cycle of hearing God's clear command, yet only obeying the parts that seem reasonable to him. As we saw in 1 Samuel 13, Saul would not wait for Samuel to seek God's favor through the proper channels. Because of his own fear of people and anxiety in battle, he obeyed his desires instead of God's command.

In 1 Samuel 15, we see that he does the very same thing again. As he looks around after defeating the majority of the Amalekites, he begins to make decisions based on worldly definitions of "good" and "worthless" (v. 9). For God, "good" meant totally ridding His people of demonic and horrific practices, and "worthless" meant anything resembling evil. For Saul, "good" meant anything that gave him power and things, and "worthless" meant anything else that didn't give him those things, like Amalek's ordinary townspeople.

In the end, Saul believes that this means holding a king hostage as leverage and enjoying the spoils of war. This is a far cry from God's command for total destruction. While God wants to rid Israel of the evil of the Amalekites, Saul wants to gain their wealth. God wants to totally remove something dangerous while Saul is willing to preserve pieces of it. Unlike Saul, who obeyed his own definitions of "good" and "worthless", we must learn to define things God's way, or we too may find ourselves with tragic consequences. Our obedience to God's commands must not be based on what we find reasonable in them. We must trust His perspective in every situation, and follow Him wholeheartedly.

Q: *How would you define the terms “good” and “worthless”? How does this perception impact your everyday life?*

Q: *What are some areas in your life where, like Saul, you are tempted to “almost” follow God’s Word?*

THE CONFRONTATION REQUIRED

1 SAMUEL 15:10-31

Q: *God says that we have “turned our back on Him” when we fail to do what [v.10]? Why do you think God equates breaking a command with breaking a relationship?*

Q: *How does Samuel respond when he finds out Saul has turned his back on God [v.11]? What does this response show you about Samuel’s true heart for both Saul and God’s people?*

After Saul’s disobedience, God speaks to Samuel, making him aware of the situation. Samuel is understandably angry. After all, he has dealt with Saul’s rebellion before this point. Despite the prophet’s attempts to steer God’s people in the right direction, King Saul continues to jeopardize their favor with God. But the text tells us that Samuel “cried to the Lord all night” (v. 11). Behind his anger was deep sorrow over his king’s (and friend’s) continual sin. Samuel gives us an incredible picture of godly grief. He wants his friend and God’s people to be right with God, and he cares deeply about this sin.

Samuel’s response can teach us all something valuable about confronting a friend in their sin. We should not do so out of inconvenience or frustration, but instead, we should confront our friend out of deep love for them. Samuel’s motivation for confrontation was pure. His friend was missing out on God in the pursuit of worldly things. Many times we feel justified in anger to rebuke someone over their disobedience, however, we should ask ourselves first if we have truly grieved before the Lord. When was the last time we stayed up all night in tears for a person we love who is caught in sin? We cannot challenge someone for not having a right heart when we have not checked ours first. The world promotes confrontation in a million unhealthy ways, but godly confrontation is always done in love.

Q: *Look at verse 13 and read Saul's greeting to Samuel again. Does anything strike you as strange? What does Saul's greeting tell you about the state of his mind and heart?*

Q: *Explain the similarities between Saul's response to this confrontation and the last time he was rebuked in chapter 13. What is Saul's typical reaction to rebuke? What sinful pattern has he fallen into?*

Before Samuel can get a word in, Saul greets him by saying he has “performed the commandment of the Lord” (v.13). Clearly Saul does not know that Samuel has already been informed by God himself about the truth of the situation. The most heartbreaking thing about Saul's statement is that Saul actually believes it. Instead of seeing his disloyalty to God, he thinks he has done God a favor! He assumes that his version of obedience is close enough. Saul's sin has gradually deceived him, and he doesn't even realize it.

When Samuel points to the animals that have been spared and asks questions, Saul enters right back into his usual pattern of blame shifting. Last time Saul was called out in sin, he blamed Samuel for taking too long to arrive. This time, he blames his own people who were led under his command (v. 15, 21).

“They brought the animals; the people spared the best sheep, the people took the spoil!” Saul then goes a step further to put a spiritual spin on the situation. “The people did this, yes, but it was all to have good sacrifices for God, I promise!” (v.15). The writer has included these details to help us examine Saul in the proper light. Verse 9 has already told us that “Saul and the people” spared Agag and the animals. It was not done by the people alone. Moreover, why would God accept a sacrifice from animals He just told Saul to destroy? Saul's heart and mind are obviously compromised and deceived. Again, when push comes to shove, Saul makes decisions out of his circumstances rather than God's instructions. And when things go wrong, he points an accusing finger and even cloaks his lies in spiritual language to avoid the consequences.

Samuel, like always, sees through Saul's attempts and stops him in his tracks (v. 16). Instead of allowing the king to do whatever he wants, Samuel sorrowfully confronts Saul and relays God's final rejection of him. First, in verse 17, Samuel calls Saul out for the deeper, ongoing issue at the root of his disobedience. Saul is led by constant insecurity, despite the fact that God has anointed him as king. From the start, what God says about Saul has never been enough for him. He craves what other kings have—military success, wealth, and fame in the eyes of the people.

Second, in verse 18, Samuel confronts Saul for his recent military sin. “God told you to destroy everything; why didn't you just obey him?” Then, in verse 19, Samuel confronts Saul for his excuses about the animals, calling his sin out for what it really is. Saul was not gathering animals to sacrifice to God. He was “pouncing on the spoils” of war

for himself. All of this, at the end of the day, was Saul doing what Saul wanted instead of doing what God wanted.

Samuel wraps it up by quoting a psalm to Saul—one that helps bring proper perspective. The psalm tells us that God desires obedience much more than sacrifice. Listening to God matters much more than religious rituals. Saul finally admits the truth and owns up to his sin (v. 24-31). The result of the confrontation is painful as Samuel shares that “the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel,” (v. 26) This is the brutal consequence Saul must face for disobeying God.

🔗: *Do you ever spiritualize your sin in an attempt to justify it?*

🔗: *Who or what have you blamed for your sin in the past?*

THE COMMAND FULFILLED

■ 1 SAMUEL 15:32-35

🔗: *What expectations does King Agag have in verse 32? Why do you think he has these expectations?*

🔗: *How is God’s original command to Saul eventually fulfilled [v33]?*

Now that Saul has been removed from kingship and officially rejected by God, we might think the story is over. However, verses 32-35 show us that one way or another, God’s plans always get fulfilled! King Agag is still alive, and God desires for him to account for his sins, and for evil to be driven out from among His people. As we know, the consequence for sin is death (Rom. 6:23), and God has appointed the time for Agag to pay the wages for his terrible sins. Where Saul failed to fully obey God, Samuel steps in and follows the original command of the Lord, killing King Agag.

♀: *What do verses 34-35 tell us about Samuel and Saul's friendship from this point on? What does godly confrontation cost us sometimes?*

♀: *Though they have parted ways, how does Samuel continue to feel about Saul? [v. 35]*

After God's instructions are finally fulfilled, verses 34-35 tell us that Saul and Samuel part ways. This is one potential cost of confronting continual sin in another person's life. Sometimes the friendship itself may end. Reconciliation and restored friendship will not be the result for the prophet and the king. And now, the king has been stripped of his title. Thankfully, God will replace all that was lost with a new king (v.28), but Samuel and Saul's relationship will never be the same. Samuel continues to grieve for his friend, and the team they could have been together, for the rest of his life.

Sad though it may be, the story of Samuel and Saul carries a very important and sobering lesson for us all. We may one day have to step in where a friend fails, and tell them very hard things. Confronting sin may sometimes mean we have to risk losing a dear friendship. While this is uncomfortable and unfortunate, dealing with sin is dreadfully necessary, no matter the cost. We all must examine ourselves and ask the hard question: are we willing to love God and His instructions at any cost?

♀: *How has Christ, as the greater Samuel, stepped in where we have failed?*

♀: *Why can we be confident that we will never face God's ultimate rejection?*

NEXT STEPS

+ *Connect the truths from God's Word to your daily life. Process how what you've learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.*

🕯️: *Who is a “Samuel” in your life who can see through your attempts to excuse your sin? List the names that come to mind, and call them this week to thank them for their love for you. If no one comes to mind, take this week to pray that God would provide a Samuel in your life.*

🕯️: *Are you willing to be a “Samuel” for someone else? Who would you stay up all night crying for in order to correct them in their disobedience? If no one comes to mind, take this week to pray that God would provide you with the courage to be a Samuel.*

🕯️: *What instructions from God are you tempted to “almost” fulfill? This week, carve out some time to repent over any incomplete obedience and reflect on what you need to correct moving forward.*

PRAY

+ *Use these prayer points to connect your time in prayer to this week’s focus.*

- God, give me eyes to see when my mind and heart are compromised. Help me to fully obey you in everything you ask of me.
- God, send me a Samuel who is willing to tell me hard things when I need to hear them.
- God, help me become a Samuel who is willing to tell hard things to those I love for the sake of their spiritual health.
- God, thank you for sending Jesus to stand in my place and succeed in all the ways I have failed. Thank you that I no longer have to fear being separated from you.

1 SAMUEL 15:11, 29, 35: The term “have regret” can be translated many ways. This phrase can mean “relent,” “change one’s mind,” “have pity or compassion,” or “be sorry.” The use of “regret” in verse 11 and 35 describes God feeling genuine sorrow when looking on Saul’s sin. In verse 29, the term means that God will not change His mind concerning a decision once He has made it, namely the decision of taking Saul’s kingship away. Where God can feel “regret” in the sense of feeling grief over sin, He cannot feel “regret” in the sense that He changes His mind once it’s firmly made up.

1 SAMUEL 15:30: Even after Saul admits that he is living in the fear of man instead of the fear of God, this verse shows us that he still has not repented of his deep obsession with what others think of him. In one breath he says “I have sinned.” In the next he says, “yet honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel.” Clearly Saul is still more concerned with his reputation than sinning against the Lord. Even on his way out of the monarchy, he is trying to save face, proving he is indeed not the right king for the people of Israel.

1 SAMUEL 15:32: In Hebrew, the manner in which King Agag came to Samuel can be translated two different ways. One translation is “cheerfully” or “confidently.” If this is the reading, then his following statement is one full of assurance—surely the option of dying is turned aside! Under this interpretation, Agag is likely confident that he will not die because he is presented in front of a prophet (one who speaks for God) instead of soldier (one who would be ordered to kill). When he sees a prophet, he rejoices that death has passed him by. Another translation for Agag’s disposition, however, is “in chains” or “trembling.” If this is the reading, then Agag’s following statement is one of fear—surely death is at hand and nearby. Perhaps, under this view, Agag knows that Saul disobeyed God and when he sees a prophet, he knows the end is in sight. Saul is no longer here to protect him. In either view, it is clear that Agag comes before Samuel hoping not to die. Regardless of his statement, Samuel’s decision does not change, and the Lord’s will is fulfilled.

**All commentary resourcing for this lesson was provided by the ESV Study Bible Commentary Notes and the New American Commentary.*

