



**Series:** 1 Samuel  
**Date:** March 5, 2023  
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**Text:** 1 Samuel 15  
**Title:** Half-Hearted Obedience Reveals the Condition of Your Heart

Good morning, Mercy! I hope you are doing well. This morning we are going to walk through 1 Samuel 15. We're going to see the downfall of King Saul. If you were to guess what he did to be removed from king, if you haven't read this passage before, I'm sure your imagination would run wild with potential things he could have done. What we're going to see in this passage is Saul's half-hearted obedience that led to the loss of his kingdom. It was his lack of obedience that caused God to be displeased with King Saul. Why is that? What we will

see in this passage, and what we see throughout scripture is that our obedience is tied to what we love. It shows us where our loyalties lie. Does it lie with God, or with ourselves?

Here's the big idea for today: **Half-hearted obedience reveals the condition of your heart.** We're going to see God give a clear command to Saul. And he will only do it half-way. And his half-hearted obedience shows what he really loved. It was true for Saul and it's true for us. My hope for us today, is that as we look at the life of Saul, it would serve as a mirror into our own hearts. Proverbs 27:17 says: **As water reflects the face, so the heart reflects the person.** Church, God is after our hearts not our religious activity. It's only when we live fully in obedience, that we will experience the joy Christ intends for us.

A quick warning for this passage. The beginning and end of this passage is pretty shocking. It's one of those, "I can't believe this is in the Bible" kind of moments. And as we walk through it, I'll do my best to help us understand these moments.



1 Samuel 15:1-2 - **15** Samuel told Saul, “The LORD sent me to anoint you as king over his people Israel. Now, listen to the words of the LORD. **2** This is what the LORD of Armies says: ‘I witnessed what the Amalekites did to the Israelites when they opposed them along the way as they were coming out of Egypt.

Okay, so God is telling Saul, I witnessed, and I remember what the Amalekites did to the Israelites when I was delivering them from slavery in Egypt. The Amalekites were terrible people and are long-time enemies of God and Israel. They were renowned for their brutality and murder. In Exodus 17, we see that they were lying in wait in the wilderness and ambushed Israel and became the first battle that Israel had with any enemy. You might remember the scene, it’s the scene where Moses would hold the staff in the air and while he did, Joshua and Israel would win but when he got tired and his hands lowered, they’d start to lose. Aaron and Hur would need to help him. In Deut. 25:18 says this about the Amalekites: **17** “Remember what the Amalekites did to you on the journey after you left Egypt. **18** They met you along the way and attacked all your stragglers from behind when you were tired and weary. They did not fear God. **19** When the LORD your God gives you rest from all

the enemies around you in the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess as an inheritance, blot out the memory of Amalek under heaven. Do not forget. Now the passage we’re in today is hundreds of years after that battle and we now find ourselves seeing the Amalekites again in 1 Samuel. But remember that last part. He’s making a promise to Amalek that God’s going to punish him for his treatment of Israel. God remembers his covenant promise that they would be his people and he would be their God. He would defend them.

Let’s move to verse 3, **3** Now go and attack the Amalekites and completely destroy everything they have. Do not spare them. Kill men and women, infants and nursing babies, oxen and sheep, camels and donkeys.”

Alright, this is a pretty clear command from God to Saul, but it is a shocking request from God. And it’s okay to admit that this is a hard word from God and it’s hard for us to read. I think it’s important for us to remember the context of everything that has happened before. These are evil people and God has given them hundreds of years to turn from their sin and to turn to him and they haven’t. God been very patient, considering what they have done. And considering what they do to people, it would also be a fair question to ask, why God didn’t stop



them sooner? But we think about this passage and these babies, and we say, “Hold up. They didn’t do anything why do they get destroyed?” What is going on? That is an understandable question. While I don’t have a ton of time to spend here, I’ll say this. This is an example of God’s justice on a group of people. As westerners, when we think about justice, we think about it through a western individualistic worldview. But, the majority of the world, especially the east, think through the world through the lens of community. Every individual is part of a larger group, and no one ever truly stands alone as separate from the group. This is very different from the western culture and parts of America. Now it is true that justice and judgment can be applied to the individual. When we die and get to heaven we won’t be judged by God as a part of a group, we will be judged as an individual on whether or not we believed in the gospel. So, the Amalekites former sin, has now caused Judgment on these people, who have also continued in their brutality. They never turned from their ways. This is a divine war. It’s important to understand that with this command that God wasn’t just having a bad day and he just decided to kill a bunch of people. NO! This was not a war of conquest. Saul was not to grow rich from this war

it he was simply supposed to be an instrument of God’s justice. This will be important as we move forward.

Ok, so we saw God’s justice communally, and now it’s important to see that God’s blessing will work communally as well. <sup>4</sup> Then Saul summoned the troops and counted them at Telaim: two hundred thousand foot soldiers and ten thousand men from Judah. <sup>5</sup> Saul came to the city of Amalek and set up an ambush in the wadi. <sup>6</sup> He warned the Kenites, “Since you showed kindness to all the Israelites when they came out of Egypt, go on and leave! Get away from the Amalekites, or I’ll sweep you away with them.” So the Kenites withdrew from the Amalekites.

Okay, so now we see God remembering the kindness of the Kenites. Now, were these particular Kenites alive when their people showed kindness to Israel? No. But God still remembered them. And he’s blessing their kindness by sparing them. God is right to do both. He is right to execute justice and he’s right to extend blessing. Moses’ father-in-law was from the Kenites, and they would later play a big role in with Israel and would be incorporated into the blessings of Israel.



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Now let's look at how Saul responded to the command of God.

**7 Then Saul struck down the Amalekites from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is next to Egypt. 8 He captured King Agag of Amalek alive, but he completely destroyed all the rest of the people with the sword. 9 Saul and the troops spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, goats, cattle, and choice animals, as well as the young rams and the best of everything else. They were not willing to destroy them, but they did destroy all the worthless and unwanted things.**

- 1) **Half-hearted obedience shows what we really care about.**

Saul only did part of what God asked him to do. He obeyed, kind of. He killed everyone except King Agag. He kept him alive. And they also kept the best of the sheep, goats, cattle, and choice animals. We're starting to get a glimpse into the heart of Saul. This isn't what God asked. This wasn't justice. It wasn't what God wanted. He basically did to the Amalekites what they did to Israel. This was vengeance! And what's worse, is that all the things he kept were items of wealth. And by keeping King

Agag alive it basically him keeping a trophy for himself. Why did he this? Second half of verse 9 says it. They were not willing destroy them, but they did destroy all of the worthless and unwanted things. We are like Saul sometimes. We will obey God as long as it serves us. We're selfish like that. We will obey until it bumps up against what we really want to do. Think about God's command to Israel to tithe. To give of a tenth and to offer sacrifices. And when he asked for them to sacrifice, he asked for their best animal. Imagine how hard that would have been for a farmer. How tempting would it have been to sacrifice the lame or deformed ones and keep the best animal. When it came time for Saul to destroy everything, he wasn't willing to destroy the things of value. The things that would have given him status. But he did destroy the "worthless and unwanted things." See what he did. He started to draw boundary lines around his obedience. We do this..., "God, I'll obey you and do everything you say, but I this little sin. I'm not giving you that." I'm not giving you my sex life, I'm not going to let you make the call with my career, I'm not going to trust you with my kids, or with the degree I choose. God you can have everything else, just not this! Our half-hearted obedience shows us what we really care about. It always does. Half-hearted obedience is evidence that we're



servicing another god. Saul wasn't servicing God. He was servicing himself and his pride. He was wanting to build his own kingdom. And we do the same thing, do we not?

I think a good question for us is, why do we do this? Why do we obey half-heartedly? Why do we live for ourselves in this way? It's because we've been blinded by selfish desire. The lie that we believe is that we will find satisfaction outside of God. When you quit seeking satisfaction from God, your heart starts to turn to other things. James talks about this in James 3:16, "For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice."

## 2) Half-hearted obedience is evidence of pride.

And pride blinds us. Walking in pride is the equivalent of spiritual drunkenness. You can't see. You make foolish decisions. And the worst part, is that you will think you're completely right in the decisions you'll make. You are deceived and you don't even know it and you at times will refuse to listen to those who aren't spiritually blind. Look at what happened with Saul in 10-15. <sup>10</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to Samuel, <sup>11</sup> "I regret that I made Saul king, for he has turned away from following me and

has not carried out my instructions." So, Samuel became angry and cried out to the LORD all night. <sup>12</sup> Early in the morning Samuel got up to confront Saul, but it was reported to Samuel, "Saul went to Carmel where he set up a monument for himself. Then he turned around and went down to Gilgal." <sup>13</sup> When Samuel came to him, Saul said, "May the LORD bless you. I have carried out the LORD's instructions." <sup>14</sup> Samuel replied, "Then what is this sound of sheep, goats, and cattle I hear?" <sup>15</sup> Saul answered, "The troops brought them from the Amalekites and spared the best sheep, goats, and cattle in order to offer a sacrifice to the LORD your God, but the rest we destroyed."

This man's pride has blinded him. His lack of awareness to what he has done is shocking. Look at what he did. He plundered the Amalekites and built a statue for himself. Instead of an Ebenezer to God, he basically made an Ebenezer for himself to be remembered. In his own honor and he had the audacity then tell Samuel that he's carried out the Lord instructions. No, you didn't! Not even close. He's completely blind and deluded into thinking that he obeyed God rightly. This is such a scary reality. Like Saul, many of us have deceived ourselves into thinking that we're okay when we're not. And like Saul,



when our brother or sister calls us out in our sin we deflect and make excuses. Samuel called him out on it, he deflected responsibility. He blamed it on the troops. This is King Saul. A man who was a foot taller than everyone in Israel, he had the power to do anything he wanted, and he blame-shifted. Saul deceived himself, and he couldn't see the spiritual reality of what was happening even though it was right there. Then when faced with the reality of his disobedience, he blamed other people.

Even In Jesus' ministry we see how pride can make people spiritually blind to what's staring them right in the face. Let's look at Mark 8:17-19. After Jesus Just fed 5000 people the disciples started to grumble, complain, and worry about where their next meal would come from because they misplaced some bread: <sup>17</sup> Aware of this, he said to them, "Why are you discussing the fact you have no bread? Don't you understand or comprehend? Do you have hardened hearts? <sup>18</sup> **Do you have eyes and not see; do you have ears and not hear?** And do you not remember? <sup>19</sup> When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of leftovers did you collect?" "Twelve," they told him. These men just a few hours ago helped distribute food for over 5000 people that Jesus miraculously provided, and now they forgot.

Who cares if we lost the leftover bread, we have the God of the universe in the boat with us. He can provide for all of our needs.

Don't let this wash over you. So many of us are blinded, not by just the reality of our sin. But we're also blinded by God's love for you. The more we live in half-hearted obedience, the more you will try and seek satisfaction in other things apart from God. And then, when those things don't satisfy and you start to experience the results of seeking satisfaction apart from God, we tend to then blame God for him feeling distant. And the true reality is that his love for you has never changed. You can measure God's love for you by the lengths he went to save you. Some of you this morning are struggling. You're sitting here, knowing that you're living in half-hearted obedience and your eyes are being opened to it. Listen, God loves you. You have an opportunity to stop running and accept his love. You might be asking, "How Lord, how can I even do that?" We're going to talk about that in a minute. Hold on. There's still some more work to be done in our hearts and then we'll look to Jesus through this passage.



As we get to verse 16, we see that Samuel has had enough of Saul's deflection and pride, <sup>16</sup> "Stop!" exclaimed Samuel. "Let me tell you what the LORD said to me last night." "Tell me," he replied.<sup>17</sup> Samuel continued, "Although you once considered yourself unimportant, haven't you become the leader of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel <sup>18</sup> and then sent you on a mission and said, 'Go and completely destroy the sinful Amalekites. Fight against them until you have annihilated them.'<sup>19</sup> So why didn't you obey the LORD? Why did you rush on the plunder and do what was evil in the LORD's sight?" <sup>20</sup> "But I did obey the LORD!" Saul answered. "I went on the mission the LORD gave me: I brought back King Agag of Amalek, and I completely destroyed the Amalekites. <sup>21</sup> The troops took sheep, goats, and cattle from the plunder—the best of what was set apart for destruction—to sacrifice to the LORD your God at Gilgal."

Whenever we are confronted with our sin, we have a decision to make self-deception or repentance. Self-deception leads to blame shifting, hiding, rationalizations, living a lie, and choosing to live in a false sense of security. And Saul made his choice. He was going to dig his heels in. And he even wanted to use animals from his plunder

to sacrifice to God. He's still being prideful, and he wants to use his plunder as an offering to God. Wow.

<sup>22</sup> Then Samuel said: Does the LORD take pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? Look: to obey is better than sacrifice, to pay attention is better than the fat of rams.

3) God wants obedient devotion, not religious cover-up.

This is huge! At some point, in the culture of Israel, they began to say: "Ah, it's no big deal. I'll just go ahead and sin, have my fun, but it's all good because I'll just go and make a sacrifice to God and then he has to forgive me" I've done this before, haven't you? Ah, I'm going to choose disobedience here because I'll just pray and ask for forgiveness later. Because, after all, God is forgiving. Isn't what Christianity is all about? He has to forgive me. I've done this in my life many times. And what it revealed about me is that God was an add on to my life, he wasn't the Lord of my life. And not only that, he wasn't the love of my life. What we choose to obey is what we really love. Samuel is telling Saul that God doesn't really care about his burnt offerings and sacrifices. Especially, if it's



just heartless, thoughtless, religious activity. Your burnt offerings aren't enough Saul. Don't you see, Saul? He cares about your obedience, because what and who you obey shows what you love. God is after our hearts, church. He's not after your religious lip service.

This idea changed my life, church. I lived in half-hearted obedience for many years of my life because I hated that God would actually ask me to live a certain way. Jesus, I love you and all just don't ask me to live a certain way. Obedience sounded like such a legalistic idea. What do you mean, obey? That's legalistic. The gospel is about grace, not obedience. Then I was reading through the book of John and then I read something that changed my life. It's my favorite passage of scripture to this day. <sup>9</sup> "As the Father has loved me, I have also loved you. Remain in my love. <sup>10</sup> If you keep my commands you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. <sup>11</sup> "I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.

I was like wait a minute. If I keep Christ's commands, then I will remain in his love? That sounds conditional and the opposite of Ephesians 2 which says that I'm saved by grace and not by works. What's going on? Well, the

context of John 14-17 is the last supper that Jesus is having with his disciples and he's telling them what they need to know before he dies. And he goes on to tell that at he will depart from them and that he'd send the Holy Spirit. He told them that he wouldn't leave them as orphans. Then I read John 15:11 in a new way...<sup>11</sup> "I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete. Church, look at it. It's my favorite verse and I'll never stop talking about this verse the rest of my life. Jesus is telling us here that he's telling the disciples these things so that his joy would be in them. and that their joy would be complete. He's telling them the key to joy in the Christian life. When we obey Jesus in devotion to him, he gives us joy. He's not saying, obey so that you can stay on my good side. He's saying children. I want you to walk in Joy and this is the key. When you obey you get my joy. I will place it in you. What kindness! What an extravagant blessing. He could have just said, obey because I'm God. But, no! He wants us to walk in Joy and he was telling them that he was good for him to die so that the Holy Spirit would come. The holy spirit would indwell them and help them to obey.

This changed my life. God wants me to be joyful. So, I started to obey everything God wanted for me, and you



know what I found out? He wasn't trying to steal my joy. He wasn't trying to be a wet blanket that was just out to kill my fun. No, he wanted me to experience joy and to witness wild things. Prior to learning this, I had seen very little fruit. But I started telling everyone about Jesus, why? Because I wanted to be obedient and then I started to see people's lives changed? Is it because I'm awesome? No! I'm an idiot. Just ask my friends. I learned that one of the reasons I was so dissatisfied in life was because I didn't see God's doing anything. I couldn't see his activity, so I doubted his existence and even his love. But God was after my heart, not just my religious cover-up.

If you think you are fooling God, you are not. Saul thought he could just offer some sacrifices and take advantage of God's grace. NO. And some of you think the same. You need to hear that obedience is better than your confession. You can't take advantage of him. He sees through you.

But also, I think this passage is for the Christian who is fighting to obey God. You're fighting day in and day out to be obedient. You're fighting that sin, asking for God's help, and you keep falling. I want you to hear this. God is

pleased with you. Your fight against sin is the evidence of your obedience. God is pleased with you and listen to this. I want to free you this morning. As a believer in Christ, you will not be judged by the perfection of your obedience... no! You will be judged by the perfection of Christ's obedience in your place! In fact, the author of the book of Hebrews in Hebrews 10 points to this very passage in 1 Samuel, applying it to Jesus: He obeyed and then sacrificed himself on top of that. To obey is better than sacrifice. And Jesus did both. He obeyed perfectly and sacrificed himself on the cross perfectly in our place. His obedience earns our acceptance before God, if we will receive it.

Saul refused and Samuel continued to show him the error of his ways <sup>23</sup> **For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and defiance is like wickedness and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king.** This is a tough, word, basically Samuel told Saul that his rebellion was worse than witchcraft. That's what divination means. And what's wild is that Saul was known for being tough on witches in this day. The Amalekites were known for having witches and summoning evil spirits to help them in battle. Often times they would kill animals and wear their skin as a sacrifice to evil spirits.



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And Samuel is saying that his half-hearted obedience is worse than the Amalekites sin. Whew! And it was because of his half-hearted obedience that he's rejected as king.

<sup>24</sup> Saul answered Samuel, "I have sinned. I have transgressed the LORD's command and your words. (He should have stopped here) Because I was afraid of the people, I obeyed them. (This is an excuse. He doesn't have to fear anyone. He's the king. Whatever he says goes. This is a terrible apology. Have you ever had anyone apologize but then right after that give you all the excuses for why they did what they did. It ruins the apology.) <sup>25</sup> Now therefore, please forgive my sin and return with me so I can worship the LORD." <sup>26</sup> Samuel replied to Saul, "I will not return with you. Because you rejected the word of the LORD, the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel." <sup>27</sup> When Samuel turned to go, Saul grabbed the corner of his robe, and it tore. <sup>28</sup> Samuel said to him, "The LORD has torn the kingship of Israel away from you today and has given it to your neighbor who is better than you. <sup>29</sup> Furthermore, the Eternal One of Israel does not lie or change his mind, for he is not man who changes his mind."

<sup>30</sup> Saul said, "I have sinned. Please honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel. Come back with me so I can bow in worship to the LORD your God." <sup>31</sup> Then Samuel went back, following Saul, and Saul bowed down to the LORD.

4) God sees through half-hearted repentance, so fully surrender.

Even after all of this, Saul was still holding onto his pride. Verse 30 shows us that. He still want's Samuel to honor him in front of the people. And even worse than that, he wants to be seen with Samuel. What is unspoken but is so clear is that he want's Samuel to come with him as they offer an unholy sacrifice to God. He's attempting to, by his presence, get Samuel to put his stamp of approval on what he did. It seems like he could be repenting here, but he isn't. Saul will continue to live like this. He continues to live in his pride and God took the kingdom away from him. What 1 Samuel is doing here is it's about to transition to the life of David. Saul was a tyrant and an evil king. David was a great and God honoring king. Was David perfect, no. Far from it. But the different between Saul and David was that David repented well. David was a murdering and an adulterer, but he was quick to repent,



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and God called him a man after his own heart. We can choose the path of Saul or David.

This passage ends as graphically as it starts.

<sup>32</sup> Samuel said, “Bring me King Agag of Amalek.” Agag came to him trembling, for he thought, “Certainly the bitterness of death has come.” <sup>33</sup> Samuel declared: As your sword has made women childless, so your mother will be childless among women. Then he hacked Agag to pieces before the LORD at Gilgal. <sup>34</sup> Samuel went to Ramah, and Saul went up to his home in Gibeah of Saul. <sup>35</sup> Even to the day of his death, Samuel never saw Saul again. Samuel mourned for Saul, and the LORD regretted he had made Saul king over Israel.

Samuel finished what Saul should have done from the beginning. And Samuel mourned over Saul, and the Lord regretted that he made Saul king over Israel. This is a story of warning to us. It’s a sobering reminder half-hearted obedience and what it means about our hearts. We can half-heartedly obey and blind ourselves to the reality of our sin and our standing before God. But God wants our hearts! The gospel tells us that we couldn’t obey perfectly. But there is one who did. Jesus obeyed perfectly for you so that you can now obey Jesus, not to earn salvation, but just because you love him, and he will give you joy! Praise God.

Let’s pray.