

THE CHURCH OF Jesus Christ

“... Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice ...”

1 Samuel 15:22

A Message from the Quorum of Twelve Apostles

The scriptures teach us that in order to have everlasting life in the Kingdom of God we must be obedient to His commandments. The Old Testament story of King Saul illustrates that God puts obedience above service. King Saul was commanded by God to smite the evil Amalekites and utterly destroy them and all of their possessions. When Saul returned from his mission and met the prophet Samuel he said, “...*Blessed be thou of the Lord: I have performed the commandment of the Lord.*” However, God had spoken to Samuel and said, “*It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments.*” Samuel was grieved to receive the word of The Lord and cried to him all night. It must have hurt him deeply to hear Saul’s lie.

His answer to Saul was, “*What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?*” Saul’s response was that the people brought back the best of the flocks – to sacrifice unto the Lord God – and that he did utterly destroy the rest. Samuel then told Saul that God had spoken to him and revealed his disobedience. He asked him why he disobeyed and chose to do evil in the sight of the Lord. Saul would not acknowledge his sin and said, “*...I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and have gone the way which the Lord sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God in Gilgal.*”

Samuel replied, “*...Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king.*”

Saul may have thought he was doing good by bringing back the best of the flocks to sacrifice as an offering to God. He may have thought it would be good to take Agag as a prisoner and humiliate him as an example to others. But the fact is that he disobeyed God’s commandments. He lost his position as king, and worse yet, the Spirit of the Lord departed from him, and he was troubled by an evil spirit for the rest of his life. What a pity! God chose Saul to be the first king of Israel. He was chosen from the smallest tribe and was born into a lowly family, but God gave him a new heart, and changed him into another man. However, because Saul was not obedient to God’s commandments, he was not able to fulfill the calling he received.

There are many lessons we can learn from this story:

Disobedience and Sacrifice

If we are disobedient to God's commandments **no amount of sacrifice, or service, can make up for our disobedience.** We can attend every Church service, read and study the scriptures, fast and pray, give to the poor, and visit the sick, but these good things cannot hide from God the secret sins we have in our lives. Doing good things may make us feel better but do not excuse us for our sins. **Saul disobeyed the commandment of God and his desire to sacrifice the best of the flocks could not make up for his disobedience.** Romans 6:16 tells us that, "...to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness."

Disobedience and Sin

Is there a difference between disobedience and sin? Christ made it very clear, disobedience to God's word is sin. Christ taught us that we can sin in thought, word or deed and these can be **sins of commission.** We can also **sin by omission** in not following commandments, instruction and moral laws. However, because we are human, we tend to rationalize our disobedience and justify the sins we may commit, labeling them as "no big deal," or, "it didn't cause anyone harm." Following are just a few examples of how we may be disobedient:

- We may not consider a consistent lack of Church attendance a sin, but it is disobedience to God's word: *"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching"* (Hebrews 10:25); *"And the church did meet together oft, to fast and to pray, and to speak one with another concerning the welfare of their souls. And they did meet together oft to partake of bread and wine, in remembrance of the Lord Jesus"* (Moroni 6:5-6).
- We may not consider willfully withholding our time and substance for the welfare of The Church a sin, but it is disobedience to God's word: *"Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. (Malachi 3:8); "I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive."* (Acts 20:35).
- We may not consider that judgments against our brothers and sisters in Christ is a sin, and that gossip is destructive, but they are disobedience to God's word: *"Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."* (Matthew 7:1-2); *"For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread."* (2 Thessalonians 3:11-12).
- We may not consider that wearing inappropriate clothing is a sin, but it is disobedience to God's word: *"Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand."* (Philippians 4:5).
- We may not consider that crude or profane language, participating in dirty jokes and stories, viewing "x" rated material, drunkenness, and other secret behaviors, are sins, but it is disobedience to God's word: *"But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath:..."* (James 5:12); *"That he no longer should live*

the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries..." (1 Peter 4:2-3).

Saul rationalized that he only disobeyed a little, but it was clearly a sin before God. Even though we may feel our disobedience is small and insignificant, before God **it is still sin**.

Disobedience and Conscience

Saul's disobedience led to the searing of his conscience. Eventually, he did not believe that what he was doing was sin because he had no conscience. When we receive the Holy Ghost it acts as our conscience and condemns us when we sin. If we continue to disobey the Holy Ghost our conscience may become seared, and just as Saul, our spirits could be troubled for the rest of our lives. Our present day society has largely lost its conscience as a result of disobedience to God's commandments. Today, it seems that anything goes, and people have invented their own moral codes to replace God's word. Could it be that we, *The Church*, are losing our conscience? Jeremiah noted in his day that the people were not ashamed when they had committed abominations, "...*nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush...*" (Jeremiah 6:15). Have we come to the point that we are not ashamed of our disobedience and sin? God forbid!

Christ's Teachings on Obedience

Perhaps the most personal commandment given to us by Christ is this: "*If ye love me, keep my commandments.*" (John 14:15). It is important that we keep all of the commandments God has given us through His word. When Christ was asked, "...*which is the great commandment in the law?*" he said this: "...*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*" (Matthew 22:36-40). He made it clear that all of the commandments are important and will be satisfied if we obey these two "great" commandments.

Obedience and Forgiveness

The following scriptures offer food for our souls. If we heed the counsel, encouragement and examples given we will be blessed in many ways:

- "*Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:*" (Matthew 7:24); "*A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*" (John 13:34-35). "*For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.*" (1 John 5:3)
- "*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*" (2 Timothy 2:15); "*Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.*" (Psalm 119:11)
- "*So will I sing praise unto thy name for ever, that I may daily perform my vows.*" (Psalm 61:8); "*This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.*" (Psalm 118:24); "*Rejoice evermore.*" (1 Thessalonians 5:16)

- *“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” “...greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.” (1 John 4:1, 4)*
- *“Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed...” (James 5:16); “Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil.” “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.” (Ephesians 4:26-27, 29); “Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.” (Matthew 5:23-24)*
- *“Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.” (1 Thessalonians 5:17-18);*

Can we keep all of God’s commandments? Yes we can! Will we fail Him from time to time? Yes, we will – but His commandments show us that we can repent and receive forgiveness:

- *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9); “Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning.” (Joel 2:12)*
- *“I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee.” (Isaiah 44:22)*
- *“But as oft as they repented and sought forgiveness, with real intent, they were forgiven.” (Moroni 6:8). God chose us, from “smallest tribes” and “lowly families,” just as He chose Saul, gave us “new hearts,” and made us “new men and women.” Philippians 4:13 says, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” The devil will try to discourage us by whispering in our ears that we are not worthy of forgiveness and cannot be redeemed. But he is the father of all lies! Resist him and he will flee from you!*

Will we strive to be obedient to God’s commandments? The decision is ours. If we choose to follow only some of the commandments it would be well for us to listen for the “bleating of the sheep” and the “lowing of the oxen” reminding us of the disobedience and sin in our lives.

The counsel of Brother Mormon of old remains true today. May God help us to obey his words:

O then despise not, and wonder not, but hearken unto the words of the Lord, and ask the Father in the name of Jesus for what things soever ye shall stand in need. Doubt not, but be believing, and begin as in times of old, and come unto the Lord with all your heart, and work out your own salvation with fear and trembling before him.

Mormon 9:27

This is the seventh of a series of messages to *The Church*. For more understanding of what we believe please visit our web site to obtain resource and contact information:

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