

FOCAL TEXT

1 Samuel 15:1-35

BACKGROUND

1 Samuel 15:1-35

LESSON SEVEN

Obedience

MAIN IDEA

Disciples choose to obey
God completely.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

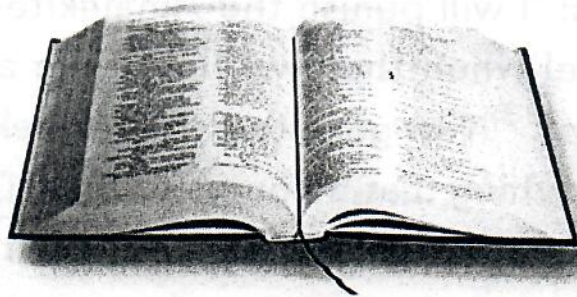
Do I choose to obey God completely?

STUDY AIM

To choose to obey God completely
in every area of my life

QUICK READ

Partial obedience or conditional
obedience is not real obedience
at all. God expects our
wholehearted commitment to
him and his commands.



Introduction

There is something in human nature that makes us resistant to being told what to do, even when we know it is for our best. Have you ever gotten a new appliance or electronic gadget with a complicated set of instructions? Perhaps you looked at the directions and said to yourself, "I don't need these; I can figure it out on my own." Then you struggled your way through, taking more time than reading the directions would have taken, and discovering that the device did not work as well as you thought it should. That's when you realized your pride had kept you from getting the best results. Sometimes we treat God's instructions that way. We foolishly think we know better than God how to accomplish his will. Saul, Israel's first king, fell into that same trap.

Obedience Lesson Seven

Focal Text: 1 Samuel 15:1-35

Background: 1 Samuel 15:1-35

Teaching Aim: To lead members to apply this study to their recent experiences with conviction to determine if their response has been self-centered or God-centered.

Connect with Life: Begin by sharing the following three case studies:

1. Mary has been reminded again this Sunday in the pastor's message that she should be witnessing to those who do not know Christ as their Lord and Savior. The message and the passion with which it was presented really spoke to her. Mary really feels that she is doing a good job witnessing with her life. Mary can't imagine that anyone would doubt that she is a Christian. Isn't that enough? After all, Mary doesn't know anyone who is not a Christian but she would gladly talk with them about Christ if she ever becomes aware of such a person in her life.
2. Bob has always tried to go to church every Sunday when possible. He feels that this is important and he is thankful that church attendance is an important part of his life. Even though Bob misses about half of the Sundays because of family or recreational activities he feels that no one should be concerned since his attitude about the Sabbath is correct. The contacts he has received from his Sunday school class continue to bother him but these folks will just have to understand that we are all entitled to our own interpretation of what it means to observe the Sabbath.
3. Randy has been asked to consider participating in an accountability group related to marriage and parenting. Randy has always considered himself to be a good parent and husband but he has not always found it easy to give the amount of time that he knows he should to his family since he received his recent promotion. Surely everyone will understand the necessity of prioritizing his work at this point in his life since he is trying to move up the corporate ladder. Randy knows that the reason he has been asked to participate in this group is because his friends have become aware of his schedule. Randy will have to say no to the accountability group at this time but has every intention of re-thinking his schedule in a few years.

After reading each of these case studies, ask members what they have in common. (Each of these people is responding to conviction in a self-centered way. They are trying to justify their actions even though their actions do not reflect complete obedience to God.) We will examine the response of Saul to conviction in our study for today and will learn the difference between self-centered conviction and God-centered conviction.

Guide Bible Study: Enlist someone to read 1 Samuel 15:1-3 to remind members of what God told Saul to do. Then read 1 Samuel 15:4-9 to remind members of what Saul did. Ask them to discover the points of disobedience. (Saul spared the life of Agag and saved the best of the

livestock. God had clearly told him to destroy everything.) Write the word, "disobedience" on the board. Share with members that we will discover the results of Saul's disobedience.

After the following verses are read ask members to identify and discuss the result of disobedience:

1. 1 Samuel 15:10-11a (Broken fellowship with God.) God was grieved because he cannot have fellowship with a child that has been disobedient.
2. 1 Samuel 15:11b (Broken fellowship with loved ones.) Samuel was also grieved because he knew that his fellowship with Saul had been broken. He also grieved because he understood the ultimate consequences of Saul's disobedience. "The rejection of sinners is the grief of good people."
3. 1 Samuel 15:12-31 (Focus on self rather than God.) Write the word, "self" on the board four times and ask members to fill in the blank after each "self" and discuss how the related verses verify this condition in the life of Saul.
 - a. Self glorification (1 Samuel 15:12-13). Saul had erected a monument to celebrate his accomplishments rather than giving the glory to God. There was most likely an accompanying parade with Saul at the head of the line and festivities to allow everyone to enjoy themselves and their accomplishments. Little or no thought was given to God. Saul even decided to congratulate himself to Samuel for his having been obedient to God. This statement reveals that Saul began to sense conviction as soon as he saw Samuel. This was probably the first time he had thought about God in this experience.
 - b. Self justification in the fact of correction (1 Samuel 15:14-21). After Samuel pointed out the obvious evidence of Saul's disobedience (v. 14) Saul began to attempt to justify his actions. List each of these on the board as they are read:
 - (1) Saul attempted to blame this on the soldiers and lied about his intentions to make a sacrifice to God (v. 15). Samuel attempted to humble Saul by reminding him of his humble beginnings and his obvious disobedience (vv. 16-19).
 - (2) Saul refused to admit his disobedience (v. 20).
 - (3) Saul attempted to shift the blame to the people (v. 21). Several times Saul referred to God as "your" rather than "my" God.
 - c. Self examination (1 Samuel 15:22-23). Ask members to list the main points of Samuel's message to Saul that finally resulted in conviction. These include:

- (1) Obedience is more important than sacrifices (v. 22). "Obedience ranks only below faith in the qualities God desires of humankind." (See the online commentary.)
 - (2) Disobedience is like idolatry (v. 23a). Saul was guilty of idolatry because he was worshiping himself.
 - (3) Saul's rejection of God had resulted in God's rejection of Saul (v. 23b). This statement finally got Saul's attention because he recognized his personal loss.
- d. Self-centered conviction (1 Samuel 15:24-25 and 30-31). Ask members to determine how we can know that Saul's conviction was not genuine, that it was self-centered rather than God-centered.
- (1) Saul admitted that he had sinned but he continued to blame the people (v. 24).
 - (2) Saul asked for Samuel's forgiveness, not God's, and his reason for asking was so that he would not lose his throne (v. 25).
 - (3) Saul admitted his sin but only so that he could get Samuel to appear with him in front of the people (v. 30-31). He was only interested in "saving face" in front of the people.

Then lead members to identify the results of Saul's self-centered conviction (1 Samuel 15:26-35).

- a. Rejection by God (v. 26).
- b. God selected another to be king (v. 27-28).
- c. This decision by God was irreversible (v. 29). V. 11 speaks of God changing his mind. This was really a reference to God changing his heart. Here we see that neither God's mind nor his heart would be changed with regard to Saul.
- d. Samuel completed what Saul had failed to do (v. 30-33).
- e. Samuel never saw Saul again (34-35).

Encourage Application: Share with members that self-centeredness was at the core of Saul's problems. Read the following from Dr. Denison: "This tendency toward self-sufficiency is common to us all. Friedrich Nietzsche, the German philosopher was right to claim that the will to power is the basic drive in human nature. Christopher Morley claimed, 'There is only one success—to be able to spend your life in your own way.' Humility runs against the grain. It is an affront to the exalted glory of man. It wounds our flesh and hurts our pride. It is the most

unnatural of all human traits. Two responses follow: we are to live for his glory, and we are to trust in His strength. Let's consider the first. It seems egotistical for God to seek His own glory, but if he seeks to glorify any other than himself, he commits idolatry. There is nothing in the universe as worthy of honor as He. Additionally, because He made us to worship Him, our greatest joy and significance is found when we live for his glory." Now we can better understand the significance of Saul's sin.

Ask members, "We have seen the result of self-centered conviction. What would the result have been if Saul had expressed God-centered conviction?" (Forgiveness and restoration of fellowship.) Challenge members to recall a recent experience with conviction. Ask them to determine if they responded with self-centered or God-centered conviction? Lead them to summarize ways to tell the difference between these two types of conviction. For example:

1. Self-centered conviction seeks to justify our actions. God-centered conviction accepts the blame.
2. Self-centered conviction seeks to blame others for our disobedience. God-centered conviction accepts the blame.
3. Self-centered conviction is primarily concerned about personal loss. God-centered conviction is concerned about God's loss and the loss of our loved ones.
4. Self-centered conviction is primarily concerned about how we look to others. God-centered conviction is primarily concerned with how we look to God.
5. Self-centered conviction is more concerned with outward acts of worship rather than inner peace with God.
6. Self-centered conviction is interested in results. God-centered conviction is interested in obedience.

Ask members to recall the three case studies read at the beginning of this study. Then ask them to re-write these as they would read based on God-centered conviction. Challenge members to re-write their own experiences this week with conviction to insure forgiveness and restored fellowship.