

1 Samuel 15:22 (NIV) *Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.*

Samuel was directing this at King Saul who had disobeyed God's instruction to him. Earlier in the chapter, Samuel had told King Saul God's instruction to him to go and attack the Amalekites and totally destroy them, men, women, children, infants and all animals. God's instruction in verse 3 was "Do not spare them." But what did King Saul do?

King Saul attacked the Amalekites as instructed and destroyed everything they had, but he spared and kept the best of the sheep and cattle. He also spared and took their king Agag captive.

Now when Samuel confronted him, the first thing King Saul **did** was to put the blame on his soldiers. In verse 15: "The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the Lord your God, but we totally destroyed the rest."

Later in verse 23, Samuel told Saul, "Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king."

All of us have been disobedient especially when we were young and when growing up. We disobeyed our parents and our teachers. When I was in Primary school, I used to write lines as a punishment for **being** disobedient. The teacher would ask me to write 100 lines on "I must not talk in class" or "I must not eat in class." Very often I **could** not finish writing the 100 lines and I **had** to write another 100 lines on "I must finish my work on time."

From **a** very young **age** we have been taught to be good and obedient children and must listen to our parents and teachers. Do you realize that we do not need to be taught to be disobedient? Somehow, it seems to come naturally. This is because of the downfall of man. In giving in to temptation, Adam and Eve had disobeyed God's command not to eat the forbidden fruit. This was the very first act of disobedience. Sin **had** entered man.

Why is it easier to disobey than to obey? Is it because we do not like others to tell us what to do and to place restrictions on our lives?

After months of lockdown and the Recovery MCO (Movement Control Order), the number of cases had dropped to single digit, but only for a short while. Recently, this has spiked to almost 700 cases as at 6 October 2020. The government keeps reminding everyone to practise the SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) and be vigilant and be safe but we find **that** many people do not follow the SOP.

Some returning from overseas are supposed to be on self-quarantine but do not stay at home. They venture out even with their pink **wristband** on. Some of them went out and infected many people. Because of such irresponsible behavior, the authorities had to impose **harsh** sentencing on those who flout the law and the SOP.

Why are the authorities taking such stern actions?

Firstly, because people have become complacent and tend to have short memory of what has happened. When things get better, people tend to forget very easily the challenges they went through. Even **some of** the frontliners did not **practise** the SOP strictly and have spread the virus among themselves.

Secondly, it is because of disobedience. We know the things we must do and follow the SOP, but some chose not to obey. Nowadays, many people do not follow the SOP fully. Some do not wear face mask when in public, do not practise social distancing and do not wash their hands regularly.

Disobedience is a big problem in crime prevention and it is a big problem in our Christian life as it causes us to sin against God.

When children are naughty and disobey, they get punished and sometimes get **caned** as well. When we punish them, **it** hurt us as parents more than it may hurt them because of their disobedience and rebellion against us.

When Saul disobeyed, God said he is grieved. (verse 11). When we sin against God, we too grieve the Holy Spirit. Just like Saul we must bear the consequences of our sin and disobedience.

In the Bible we can see so many cases of disobedience and also obedience.

The first case of disobedience is of course when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit. The consequence of rebellion and disobedience leads to punishment. Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden and they **could not** enjoy the presence of God anymore. They even **had** to hide from God.

We see how Jonah disobeyed God and tried to run away. We see kings, like Saul, who disobeyed God's command and how their kingdom were stripped away from them.

God knows his people will quickly forget what he has done for them when he brought them out of Egypt and they tend to rebel. Before entering the **Promised Land**, Moses reminded the Israelites to obey the laws and the commands that God **had** given them. The most important one is to love the Lord their God with all their hearts, with all their souls and with all their strength and to have no other gods before them.

When he was speaking to the whole assembly of Israelites, he kept telling them: “Hear O’ Israel.” He kept reminding them “Do not forget” and to “Remember” and to “Obey” and follow the laws and commands that the Lord **had** given them.

So often we too are guilty of disobedience. Hearing in one ear and let it go out the other ear. We know what is the right thing to do but we don’t obey. Sometimes we don’t obey because we forget. We forget what the Lord has done for us. How he has saved us and how he has led us out of the land of slavery and set us free.

Disobedience comes with a heavy price in punishment. After entering the **Promised Land**, God’s people eventually sinned against God as they started to marry foreigners from neighbouring countries and follow and worship their gods and idols. They even **started** their despicable practice of child sacrifice.

God in his mercy kept sending prophets to warn **His** people. His prophets kept telling the people to turn away from their wicked ways and evil practices and return to worshipping their true God but they ignored warning after warning. Eventually, God allowed them to be conquered by foreign powers like the Assyrians and the Babylonians and taken as captives and slaves and exiled in a foreign land for a period of over 70 years.

Why did God allow **His** people to suffer? It was because of disobedience. God has promised His many blessings as recorded in Deuteronomy 28. All the people **needed** to do was to keep His command and obey His word. But they chose not to, and in the end had to suffer the consequences of their disobedience. Our God is a God of many chances but we ignore **His** warnings time and time again.

Obedience is so important. God prefers obedience to sacrifice.

Noah obeyed when God told him to build the ark. He and his family were saved from the great flood. Abraham was considered righteous by God because he obeyed God’s instruction to go. Joseph obeyed and took Mary as his wife even though she had conceived.

The first disciples of Jesus obeyed. When Jesus asked them to lower their nets for a catch again, (Luke 5:5) “Simon answered, *Master, we have worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down my nets.*” When Jesus asked them to follow him, they left everything and followed Jesus.

Our Lord Jesus is the best example of obedience; obedience unto death for our sake.

If we disobey the laws of the country, we get punished if caught. We get fined or may even go to jail or face the death penalty depending on the seriousness of the crime committed.

If we disobey God, His judgement is the same for all of us and we cannot get away with it no matter how far we run from Him. But if we walk in obedience to God’s will and obey his word and command, we receive the fullness of His love and grace and the abundant life He promised us.

Why is obedience so important especially in our walk with God? Our faith in him and our love for him compel us to obey him.

1. Obedience is better than sacrifice. But Samuel replied, “*What is more pleasing to the Lord: your burnt offering and sacrifices or your obedience to his voice? Listen! Obedience is better than sacrifice, and submission is better than offering the fat of rams. Rebellion is as sinful as witchcraft, and stubbornness as bad as worshiping idols.*” 1 Samuel 15:22-23 (NLT)
2. Disobedience leads to sin and separation from God.
3. God rewards Obedience. God told Abraham “*And through your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed – all because you have obeyed me.*” Genesis 22:18 (NLT)
4. In Jesus Christ we have the perfect example of obedience. We are to follow his example and his command. Jesus calls us to obey him. Our motivation for obedience is Love. Jesus said, “*If you love me, obey my commandments.*” John 14:15 (NLT)
5. Obedience is an act of worship. It is not like the law you must obey or a duty to follow. True Christian obedience flows from a heart of gratitude for the Grace we have received from the Lord. Romans 12:1.
6. Through obedience we experience Blessings of Holy living and the promise of abundant life. When we allow the Holy Spirit to transform us from within, we grow in holiness. (This spiritual growth is the sanctification process).

Our Lord Jesus tells us to take up our cross and follow Him; to follow his example and be his disciple. All this means we are to be like Him and be obedient to His commands.

Do we obey what our Lord has commanded us to do? To love and to forgive one another. To love our neighbour as ourselves. To show mercy and compassion. To care for the hungry, the destitute and the lost. To deny ourselves. To make disciples of all nations.

How many of these instructions have we followed or obeyed? Are we obedient or are we disobedient?

Jesus said, “*But even more blessed are all who hear the Word of God and put it into practice.*” Luke 11:28. (NLT) *If you love me, obey my commandments.* John 14:15. (NLT)