

May 13

Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. 1Sam 15:22

OUR heavenly Father wishes us to be very attentive to His Word, and not to think

SM438 "It is written that "obedience is better than sacrifice"; and this being recognized, how careful it should make us to inquire what the will of the Lord is; to search the Scriptures, that we may there ascertain the Divine Program, and be found in harmony therewith!"

(Joh 14:23 KJV) "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

THE JOY OF OBEDIENCE

E462 "Let it not be misunderstood that God *compelled* the just one to die for the unjust. Justice could not inflict the punishment of the guilty upon the innocent unless the innocent one *freely gave himself* as a substitute for the guilty. This our Lord Jesus did. The Scriptures declare that he laid down his life of himself; not for fear of divine wrath; not because compelled; but "for the joy that was set before him [the joy of obedience to the Father, the joy of redeeming and restoring mankind, and of bringing many sons to glory] he endured the cross." Heb. 12:2

Psa 40:8 KJV I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.

R1543 "Some inquire, Is it *necessary* for me to be immersed in water, if I am confident that I am fully consecrated—immersed into Christ?...

The present age is not one of commands and compulsions. God does not command and compel the obedience of his Church. This is a time in which, as a great favor, believers are *privileged* to offer their wills and their all in *self-sacrifice* to God...

True sons...need not to be commanded and threatened; for such, both by word and deed, and in matters both small and great, declare, "*I delight to do thy will, O my God.*" For such, no self-denial is too great, and no act of respect and obedience too small; and, ignoring pride and all human philosophies and expediences as unworthy to be weighed at all in opposition to the Father's wisdom, these learn that *to obey* is the best of sacrifice.—1 Sam. 15:22.

No, God will not compel you to be immersed, either really or symbolically. These opportunities to sacrifice convenience, worldly opinion, etc., are privileges which we should highly esteem and covet, because by these we are able to show the Lord the depth and sincerity of our love and the reality of our consecration. It is on the basis of this and hundreds of other *little* things that we are now being *tried*—to see if we are as earnest as we have professed to be. If we are ashamed to confess Christ before men by the very simple way which

for a moment that we can improve thereon, or that times and circumstances will alter the propriety of our obedience to Him....Let us hearken to the Word of the Lord and keep close to it, not fearing the results, but

he arranged, we may well expect that he would be ashamed to call us overcomers and joint-heirs, and to confess us as faithful followers... If, after we see how much our Lord has done for us—first, in our redemption, and, secondly, in the great offer of the crown and divine nature—we allow a trifling sacrifice of contemptible pride to hinder us from a small act of obedience which our Redeemer and benefactor requested, our own self-contempt and shame should prevent our taking crowns and places (even if offered them) with the little band of faithful overcomers who valiantly sacrificed much, and thus *proved* that they loved much.

While therefore we do not say that none will be of the "little flock" except those who have been *immersed into water*, as well as into the death of Christ, which it so beautifully symbolizes, we do say, that we do not expect to find in that "little flock" a single one who has *seen* water immersion to be the will of God, and who has refused to obey. Let us remember that obedience in a small matter may be a closer test than in a large one. Had Satan attempted to get Eve into the sin of blaspheming the Creator, he would have failed; had he attempted to induce her to murder Adam he would have failed; hence the test of obedience in a very small matter was a much more crucial test. So now God tests our professions of love and devotion and obedience most thoroughly by some of the smallest matters, of which the symbolic immersion is one. God's decision is, He that is *faithful* in that which is least will be faithful also in that which is greater."

R1802 "KNOWING AND DOING....It is not enough simply to resolve or determine to do right or to obey God. We may sing:

"I want to touch lightly the things of this earth, Esteeming them only of trifling worth!

From sin and its bondage I would be set free, And live, my dear Savior, live only for thee!"

But unless we go further, and actually make advancement in character, we will prove failures, and finally be completely shipwrecked.

"If ye *know* these things, happy are ye if ye *do* them." (John 13:17.) Our Lord, here, as in other places, lays special stress on obedience... Alas! how many there are who stop with a knowledge of God's plan, as it is now revealed and understood, seemingly unmindful of the latter clause of this text. Their lives are not conformed to the Word, nor to the likeness of Christ. (See Rom. 6:17, *Diaglott*; Rom. 8:29; 12:1,2.) It would seem at first that they really desire to be moulded and fashioned into the image of God's dear Son, but they go no further. They

having faith that He who keeps us never slumbers nor sleeps, and is too wise to err, as well as competent to meet every emergency that could possibly come upon us as a result of our obedience. R3224:2

are not willing to pay the price: *obedience* is the price. They are not willing to endure the self-sacrifice and self-denial required by their covenant; for the "High Calling" costs all we have, though it is also worth all it costs. But these forget, or disregard, our Lord's words: "Happy are ye, *if ye do them!*"--James A. West

AFTER BEING ACCEPTED INTO VINE, WORKS ARE REQUIRED, EVEN THOUGH WE CANNOT DO PERFECTLY

R4494 "This grace, this forgiveness, this reconciliation, is what we Scripturally term "justification by faith"—not by works! However, after being justified by faith, *after* being reckoned of God as freed from Adam-ic imperfection, through the applied merit of our Redeemer, we are on a new footing entirely, where we may do works acceptable to God, and, more than this, where we are required to do those works...

Everyone who thus becomes a branch in the True Vine obtains a possession without works, without merit of his own; but, having become a branch, it is required of him that he should bring forth fruit. Did not our Lord explain this matter, saying, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away (cuts it off from fellowship in the Vine); and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." (John 15:1,2)"

(Rom 6:17 KJV) "Ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered unto you."

(Joh 15:8-11 KJV) "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. (9) As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. (10) If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. (11) These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."

R2466 "These things have I spoken unto you that my joy might be in you, and that your joy might be filled-full."...The most fruitful branches well know, obedience to the Lord's words, and the privilege thus obtained of abiding in him and his love, is the greatest joy—a joy which wholly outweighs all the trifling pleasures which the world has to offer. It is the joy and peace that passeth all understanding, which rules in the heart, and which brings with it the promise, the assurance, not only of the life which now is, but also of that which is to come."

R5430 (From Harvest Truth Database V10)

JUSTICE—RIGHTEOUSNESS—THE FOUNDATION OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

"To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice."

"Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."—Proverbs 21:3; 1 Samuel 15:22

THESE words were addressed to God's chosen people, the Jews. The nation of Israel had come into special relationship with

God. At Mt. Sinai, they had entered into a Covenant with Him and had pledged themselves to do justice and judgment. This was a re-

quirement of Jehovah. But there seemed to be a tendency to think of sacrifices as being especially pleasing to the Lord. Some seemed inclined to feel that no matter how unjust they had been, they could offer a sacrifice and make it all right. But Jehovah pointed out that this would not do. His Law was a *requirement*, and must come before all else; whereas these special sacrifices of thanksgiving for victories, etc., were *privileges*, voluntary offerings. The Law demanded full allegiance to God.

The relationship of Israel to God as His people was based upon the Law. This Law comprised *justice* and *judgment*. The Israelites were to do according to its commands—first Godward, then manward. They were not to steal, not to kill, not to covet, etc. The essence and substance of the Golden Rule was there embodied.

To do justice is to do that which is just, right, equitable; to do judgment would be to render righteous decisions in the mind, to decide justly. One might be very just in his business dealings with his fellows. He might be very careful not to cheat any one out of a cent; and yet in his mind he might have unkind, uncharitable views of others, and perhaps say things about them that would be very unrighteous. This counsel of the Wise Man seemed to guard not only against the *doing* of injustice, but against having wrong *thoughts*. The decisions of our minds, as well as our actions, should be in harmony with the principles of righteousness.

OUR INABILITY TO JUDGE OTHERS

We are not to judge, decide, in an unfavorable manner in the case of any with whom we have to do, without indubitable proof. If they claim to be trying to do right, we should give them credit for sincerity wherever possible. We are not to call them hypocrites, for we cannot judge their hearts. Our Lord called some hypocrites in His day; but He had a superior power of discerning the heart, and we have not that power. We are not to judge the motives of others. We are not to go beyond their declaration, for we are not competent to do so.

We may at times judge the outward action as wrong or improper, but we are not to attempt to judge the heart, where there is possibility of misjudgment. We have pledged ourselves to strive to observe the Golden Rule in our every action and word and thought, and we are to remember that God would be more pleased with us if we did not sacrifice and merely maintained our relationship to the Golden Rule, than that we should manifest ever so much zeal in *sacrifice* and yet violate the rule of *justice*. This rule requires love for our neighbor as for ourself. As the Apostle Paul reminds us in that matchless chapter on *Love*—1 Cor. 13: "Though I give all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not *love*, it profiteth me *nothing*."

The proper course for us as disciples of Christ is that we observe the Golden Rule in our conduct, watching over our thoughts and our lips; and also that we present continually all that we have and are in sacrifice to the Lord. But obedience, justice, *must come first*, for this is demanded by the Law of God. Before we can make much development in the cultivation of sacrificial love, we must learn to have a love of justice, righteousness. There is a trite and true proverb that a man must be just before he is generous. It behooves the children of God, as members of the New Creation, to study with diligence this subject of strict justice toward all, and to put into practice day by day this quality of character which is absolutely essential if we would be acceptable to God; for it lies at the foundation of all Christian character.

We are not able while still in the fallen flesh, to keep perfectly this Law of strict justice in act, word and thought. But it should be our prayerful endeavor to do so as far as possible. The merit of Christ will then make up for all unintentional and unavoidable deficiencies. Those only who have this foundation of character well laid can make proper progress. A love which is built on a foundation of injustice, or wrong ideas of righteousness, is delusive, and is not the love which the Lord's Word enjoins and which He will require as a test of true discipleship. Obedience to God demands that we strive to be just in deed and word and thought.

OBEDIENCE A TEST OF LOYALTY

The lesson taught in the Lord's rebuke to Saul at the mouth of the Prophet Samuel, given in our second text, applies with much force to Spiritual Israel. How often today we see the need for this counsel amongst the professed followers of Christ! Many of these are Christian workers in the various denominations of Christendom, and many are their sacrifices of time, strength and money; but inasmuch as they are not obedient to the Lord they fail of the blessing they might have, and indeed cut themselves off from greater privileges and opportunities. Yea, many of them, we fear, are cutting themselves off from the Kingdom—from glory and joint-heirship with the Master in that Kingdom. We should learn from this lesson

given us in the experience of Saul that our Heavenly Father wishes us to be very attentive to His Word, and not to think for a moment that we can improve upon it, nor that any circumstance or condition will excuse us from obedience to Him.

Had King Saul obeyed God, and the results had seemed to prove disastrous, he would have had a clear conscience. He would have been *obedient*, and could have left the results with the Lord. God would have been responsible for the results. How many of the Lord's people in Babylon would be blessed by following the instructions in this lesson!

Many have said to themselves again and again: I see that present arrangements and conditions in the churches are contrary to the simplicity of the Gospel of Christ and the practise of the early Church. I see that much is practised and taught that is not sanctioned in the Scriptures. But what can I do? I am identified with this system and am engaged in sacrificing for its upbuilding. If I now withdraw myself, it will mean more or less disaster or loss to it as well as to myself. I wish I were free from human institutions and that I had my hands filled with the Lord's work along the lines of His Word, but I cannot let go; necessity seems laid upon me. This seems to be the most convenient place for me to work and to sacrifice.

The Lord is not pleased with such arguments. His message to us is that to *obey* is better than *sacrifice*, however active and busy we may be. He tells us plainly that no sacrifice we can offer will be acceptable to Him unless we are first obedient to His Word. He calls now to all the followers of Christ who are still in Babylon: "Come out of her, My people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues; for her sins have reached unto Heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities."—Revelation 18:4,5.

THE FRUITS OF DISOBEDIENCE

We remember that Saul's error was his failure to carry out the command of the Lord in every particular. He slew all the Amalekites, old and young, except the king, whom he kept alive, possibly thinking to exhibit him in some kind of triumphal display. As for the flocks and herds, he consented that his people spare all that were goodly and desirable, but everything that was vile and refuse he destroyed utterly.

As we study the narrative and note the indignation of Samuel, and the Lord's positive declaration of His displeasure and of the punishment to be meted out to Saul, we see clearly that the king had not misunderstood his instructions, but with considerable deliberation had violated them. Consequently we must understand his words of explanation to Samuel to have been to a considerable extent hypocritical. He first saluted the Prophet with blessings and assurances that he had performed the command of the Lord. But Samuel replied: "What means, then, this bleating of sheep and lowing of oxen which I hear?" He understood at once that the destruction had not been complete, that Saul had only partially obeyed the Lord.

Saul, noting the displeasure of the Prophet of the Lord, began hypocritically to assure him that these fine sheep and oxen had been preserved that they might be sacrificed to the Lord. Alas, how fallen human nature ever seeks to justify itself in its course of perversity and disobedience to the commands of God! How much wiser and better would it be to obey under all circumstances! Saul reaped the result of his disobedience in being rejected as king of Israel. How bitter are the fruits of following our own course, of compromising our conscience, of seeking to evade the responsibility which rests upon us as professed children of God! It is sure to bring trouble and spiritual disaster to the Lord's people, and the hiding of our Father's face.

Ordinarily considered, sacrifice is a step beyond mere obedience. Obedience is a *duty* toward God. We ought to obey God. To His creatures God's will is *Law*. This is duty of the very highest type. But the privilege of sacrifice granted to the people of God goes beyond duty, beyond obligation. We may *give* unto the Lord what He has not *required* of us; but what we give in sacrifice is voluntary, not commanded.

The question now arises, How can we apply these texts to ourselves? In the first place, we find some who desire to be the Lord's people, who seem to grasp the thought that there is a privilege of sacrifice in the present time, but who fail to note that the Lord has given some direct commands which must be considered first. Such should come to perceive that obedience is a prime requisite. No one can perfectly keep the Law of God, but he must exhibit the true spirit of obedience, the earnest endeavor to be in harmony with that Law. Then consecration to sacrifice is in order. For all who have met these conditions full satisfaction has been made, and they are accepted in Christ. And "if any man be in Christ, he is a New Creature; old things have passed away, and all things have become new."—2 Cor. 5:17.

St. Paul says of these, "The righteousness of the Law is fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." (Romans 8:4.) If we are not thus walking after the Spirit, we are not hearkening to the Lord; and while we are in that condition, He does not take pleasure in what we do. Even though we sacrifice some of our time for the Colporteur work, the Pilgrim work, etc., we shall not be pleasing to God if we do not keep His requirements of justice toward others.

If when one decides to make a consecration of himself to God he realizes that he has been unjust to another, restitution must be made. No one has a right to be generous with the money of another—to take another man's money and offer it in service to God. This is a form of injustice which must be very offensive to the Father—one which He would disdain altogether as a sacrifice. Yet we see that this is very largely practised. There are a great many who have gotten money in a way not altogether right, and who, to quiet conscience, give some of it to religious work. This class are overlooking the weightier matters of the Law of God. They have taken from others unjustly; then they desire to give to the Lord that which belongs to another. God's Law demands justice, and it is no wonder that He is not pleased with this course of action.

Coming down to the ordinary affairs of life, we see that justice should be the very foundation of everything—between husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters, teachers and pupils, employers and employees, etc. The lesson of our text is a very important one to us of the Church. In Christian character justice, obedience to God's Law, comes first; mercy and benevolence come afterwards. We do not know of a principle that the Lord's people need to learn more particularly than this one of *justice*.

Injustice seems to crop out in many ways in the fallen human nature. Little injustices are daily practised in respect to trifles. These are thought not worth considering. But whoever cultivates injustice in even a small way is building up a character which will be unfit for the Kingdom. As justice is the foundation of God's Throne and of God's character, so justice must be the foundation principle governing the lives of His people.

THE OBEDIENCE OF THE CHRIST

The lesson of obedience is one which should be deeply engraved upon the hearts of all the sanctified in Christ Jesus. It is necessary, too, that we have the *spirit* of obedience and not obey merely the letter. Whoever has the true spirit of obedience will not only obey the expressed commands of the Lord, given in His Word, but will seek to know the Divine will in everything. He will seek to note the providences of his life, that he may be guided in the way the Lord would have him go. It is such faithful, obedient children of God who exclaim in the language of the Prophet: "Thy words were found, and I did eat them, and Thy Word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart!" (Jeremiah 15:16.) These can say with our dear Master: "Lo I come! I delight to do Thy will, O my God!" Let all, then, who would be wholly acceptable to our Father in Heaven be very diligent to build character in harmony with His Law, having justice in thought, in word and in deed at the foundation, justice in our relationship to God, to the brethren and to all, and then building thereupon all the various qualities of love, that thus we may grow up into Christ our living Head in all things, and be able to render up our account at last with joy and not with grief.

R3224 (From Harvest Truth Database V5.0)

"TO OBEY IS BETTER THAN SACRIFICE"

--1 SAM. 15:13-23.--JULY 26.--

THE words of our caption, the Golden Text of this lesson, are the Lord's rebuke to King Saul by the prophet Samuel, in connection with the announcement that Saul, by disobedience to the heavenly King, had forfeited his privilege of representing him on the throne of Israel. The rending of the kingdom from the hands of Saul meant more than his own displacement: it meant that his son and successive heirs should not continue the Lord's representatives in the kingdom.

For a number of years Saul seems to have prospered fairly on the throne, and the people of Israel prospered with him. It was several years after his coronation, noted in our last lesson, that his first severe testing in respect to his obedience to the heavenly king came to him. At that time a war was instituted against the Philistines, who had been encroaching upon the Israelites to the east. Saul waited several days for Samuel to come to offer the sacrifices of the Lord previous to the beginning of the battle. Samuel was providentially hindered, and Saul, after waiting for a time, offered the sacrifices to the Lord himself, contrary to the arrangement, and then proceeded to battle, the result being a considerable defeat to his forces. Apparently he was not evilly intentioned, but lacked proper respect and reverence for the Lord and his arrangements. This may be said to have been the beginning of Saul's rejection by the Lord. Samuel's words were, "Thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord...now thy kingdom shall not continue. The Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart."

The lesson of this incident is as applicable to spiritual Israel today as it was to Saul and natural Israel in their day--"Obedience is better than sacrifice." In how many ways we may see expressions of this same condition amongst many who profess the Lord's name today! Many are "workers" in the Lord's cause in the various denominations of Christendom, and many are their sacrifices of time and money; but inasmuch as they are not obedient to the Lord, they fail of the blessing they would have, and, indeed, in a considerable measure cut themselves off from greater privileges and opportunities. Yea, many of them, we fear, are cutting themselves off from the kingdom, from glory, and from joint-heirship with the Lord in that Kingdom. We should learn from this lesson, given us in Saul's experience, that our heavenly Father wishes us to be very attentive to his Word, and not to think for a moment that we can improve thereon, or that times and circumstances will alter the propriety of our obedience to him. Had Saul been obedient and the results disastrous, he would at least have had a clear conscience; he could have said that he had been obedient to God and was not responsible for the results. But if he had been obedient God would have been responsi-

ble for the results, and we know that divine power would have brought about the proper results. Let us apply the lesson to ourselves in respect to our daily conduct in every matter of life: ^[1] let us hearken to the Word of the Lord and keep close to it, not fearing the results, but having faith that he who keeps us never slumbers nor sleeps and is too wise to err, as well as competent to meet every emergency that could possibly come upon us as a result of our obedience. How many of the Lord's people in Babylon would be blessed by following the instructions of this lesson. They have said to themselves, time and again, "I see that present institutions and arrangements are contrary to the simplicity of the Gospel of Christ and the practice of the early Church, but what can I do? I am identified with this system and am engaged in sacrificing for its upbuilding; if now I withdraw my hand it will mean more or less disaster. I wish I were free from human institutions and that I had my hands filled with the Lord's work along the lines of his Word, but I cannot let go, for necessity seems to be upon me. I must perform a sacrifice and this seems to be my most convenient place for so doing." The Lord is not pleased with such argument. His message to us is that to obey is better than sacrifice: leave the matter of your sacrifice in my hands;--it will amount to nothing anyway unless I accept it, and I accept sacrifices only from those who are first obedient. "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and receive not of her plagues."

Although the Lord announced the rejection of Saul, the prediction was evidently not executed for several years after; perhaps ten years the decree stood, as it were a dead letter, for quite possibly Saul was properly exercised by the rejection and became more attentive and more obedient to the divine will, and David, who was probably anointed about this time, was not yet sufficiently developed to be the Lord's representative in Saul's stead.

Saul's next severe trial was in connection with the Amalekites--a nomadic and fierce people who, on several occasions, had done injury to the people of Israel. In sending the message the Lord gave special instructions that the Amalekites should be destroyed, saying, "Utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." Without mentioning other of Amalek's transgressions, he specifies here that the destruction is on account of Amalek's opposition to Israel in the way when they came up out of the land of Egypt several centuries previously.

This narrative is seized upon by sceptics to prove either one or the other of two things: (1) That God sent no such message; that it was either the imagination of Samuel or Saul or of some one writing

[1] ½ May 13 Manna, 1 Sam. 15:22

[2] ½ May 13 Manna

fictitiously in their names. (2) If it were accepted as being the command of the Lord, it would prove him to be a monster--lacking in justice, pity, sympathy and love --that he should thus command the wholesale slaughter of human creatures and dumb animals. There is but one answer to make to this matter, and it should be and is satisfactory to all who understand it. It is this:--

First, the slaughter of the Amalekites did not mean, as is usually inferred, that they, being admittedly wicked, went forth to eternal torture. Death had the same meaning to the Amalekites that it had to their cattle--a termination of whatever was desirable in the present life, and the desirable things in the present life were probably not more to the Amalekites than to their herds. The Amalekites suffered far less, slaughtered by the sword, than if they had been made the subjects of famine or a pestilence, and had died of hunger or disease--the ending of life with little pain to themselves or trouble to others--the ending of comparatively uneventful lives anyway. They all went down to the great prison-house of death--*sheol, hades*--the tomb. God foreknew and had already arranged a great redemption not only for them but for all mankind, and that redemption, secured by the great sacrifice of Christ centuries after their death--will by and by secure to them release from their imprisonment, an awakening from the sleep of death. They will be amongst the class mentioned by our Lord, saying, "All that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of man and shall come forth." They will come forth under much more favorable conditions, to learn of the grace of God in Christ and to be amongst the families of the earth who shall be blessed by the seed of Abraham, spiritual Israel. They will not be in the chief or life resurrection, but will be awakened unto the privileges of restitution by judgments, corrections in righteousness.

Second, it is quite true of the Amalekites, as it was true of the Amorites, that they would have been cut off sooner but that their iniquity was not yet come to the full. One lesson to be learned from this is that even though those nations may not be under special covenant relationship with God, there is a certain divine supervision--that their iniquities go not too far, and that, when they have reached their full, punishment is to be expected. We know not the particulars respecting the Amalekites, but, knowing the character of God and his justice and mercy, we may be sure that, in some particular sense of the word, their iniquities had come to the full and running-over measure before this order for their execution was committed to King Saul.

Saul's error in this trial was his failure to carry out the command of the Lord explicitly. He slew all the Amalekites, old and young, except the king, whom he kept alive, possibly thinking to exhibit him in some kind of a triumphal display; but as for the flocks and herds, he consented with his people to spare all that were goodly and desirable--"The best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fatlings and of the lambs, and all that was good,...but everything that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly." (Vs. 9.)

It is at this juncture that the Prophet Samuel came to him and the colloquy of our lesson ensued. The general narrative--the indignation of Samuel and the Lord's positive announcement--clearly indicates that Saul had not misunderstood his instructions, but had with considerable deliberation violated them. Consequently we must understand his words addressed to Samuel to have been to a considerable extent hypocritical. He first salutes the Prophet with blessings, and assurances that he had performed the commandment of the Lord successfully. But immediately the prophet replies, "What means, then, this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" The prophet understood at once that the work of destruction had not been complete, that Saul and the people of Israel were anxious to take a spoil. This was wholly contrary to the Lord's direction. They were not to destroy their enemies to their own advantage, but simply to act as the agents of the Lord in thus executing his decree, the sentence of justice. They were not to take booty and thus to become like the nations about them--a robber nation, profiting by the troubles they inflicted upon the enemies of the Lord. This is in full accord with the Lord's character and the foregoing explanation of it.

Saul, seeing that the prophet was not likely to sympathize in any measure with his violation of the command, began hypocritically to represent that all those fine sheep and oxen had been captured from the enemy to be sacrificed to the Lord, and incidentally this would have meant a great feast for the Israelites, because the flesh of animals so sacrificed was eaten by them. Samuel stopped the king in his explanation and told him of the Lord's words of the night preceding (which, in Jewish counting, would be "this night," because their day began in the evening). The message of the Lord calls attention

to the fact that Saul was humble when he was chosen as the Lord's representative upon the throne, and at that time he was very willing to give strict obedience to the heavenly voice, but the intimation is that now he had grown more self-confident and therefore less reliant upon the Lord and less attentive to the Lord's commands; getting into the wrong attitude of heart, he had failed to properly execute a very plain specific direction. Knowingly and in violation of the Lord's command he had the spoil separated, and spared the best when the Lord had commanded the reverse.

If, in applying the principles of this to the Lord's people of to-day, we think of the Amalekites as representing sins and of how the Lord's command comes to us to put away sin entirely, utterly destroying everything that is related to it, we may get a good lesson. Like Saul, many are disposed to destroy the vilest things connected with sin, but to save alive the king sin, merely making him a prisoner. Many are disposed, too, to seek out the things which they realize to be condemned of the Lord to destruction--such things as would be choice and desirable to their taste-- and frequently, like Saul, they claim that even these sins of the less obnoxious kind are held on to for the purpose of sacrificing them and thus honoring God. How deceitful above all things is the heart! How necessary it is that all who would be in accord with the Lord should be thoroughly true-hearted, thoroughly sincere, and that under the Lord's direction we should seek to take away the life of every sinful principle, evil teaching, evil doctrines, evil engagements, unholy words and thoughts and deeds.

Saul sought to defend his course, to put as good a face upon the matter as possible and to lay the responsibility for the saving of the spoil for the sacrifice upon the hosts of Israel, who, with himself, were so desirous of offering sacrifices to the Lord. Samuel's answer is the pith of this lesson and contains its Golden Text. He clearly points out to Saul what the latter should have known, and what all should recognize, namely, that offering sacrifices is far less pleasing to the Lord than obedience to his Word. No one could offer an acceptable sacrifice to the Lord unless obedient in his heart and unless the sacrifice represented that obedience. So with the Lord's people today. It is not so much of ill-gotten wealth that we may sacrifice to the Lord; it is not so much the proceeds acquired directly or indirectly by wrong doing that we may sacrifice acceptably. Our sacrifice must be from the heart, and, first of all, must be the will. [3] He who gives his will, his heart, to the Lord, gives all; he who gives not his will, who comes not in obedience of heart unto the Lord, can offer no sacrifice to the Lord that could be acceptable. "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice," is a lesson which should be deeply engraved upon the hearts of all the sanctified in Christ Jesus. To have the spirit of obedience is necessary, too, and whoever has the spirit of obedience will not only obey the divine will, but will seek to know the divine will more and more that he may obey it. It is of this class that the Scriptures declare, "His word was found and I did eat it;" and again, in the words of our Lord, "I delight to do thy will, oh my God; thy law is written in my heart."

Saul had been very diligent in his opposition to witchcraft and idolatry throughout the land of Israel, and in so doing was accomplishing a good work in accord with the divine plan, the divine will; but the prophet calls his attention to the fact that his energy in such matters would not prove an offset to his deliberate wilful neglect of the divine injunction. The Lord's commands against sin and every evil thing are to be executed to the very letter, no matter how highly exalted the sin may be in dignity and place, and no matter how precious or valuable or desirable or toothsome the sin may be to our fallen natures. Though it be as dear as a right hand or as a right eye, there is no course open to the Lord's followers but to be obedient--even unto death.

Although fully rejected, Saul's removal was not yet due. Samuel associated himself with him in a public sacrifice, commemorating the victory over the Amalekites, and on this occasion he slew Agag with his own hand--departing then to his own home. He never afterward saw Saul, yet the Scriptures declare, "Nevertheless, Samuel mourned for Saul"--thus again showing us the beauty and strength of his character. He was ready to do the command of the Lord in any and every particular, yet was not without a feeling of compassion for those who were out of the way;--not a compassion which would make them his friends and lead him to cooperate with them in their wrong course, but a compassion which would have been glad to have cooperated with them at any time in a righteous course.

[3] Sept. 3 Manna, Hos. 6:6