

The Supreme Test.

1 Sam. 15: 10-26

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Texts 1 Sam. 15: 22-28.

What does obedience to God imply? This is the difficult and sometimes agonizing question every Christian faces and should face. This was the difficult question which Saul had to face in his role over Israel - and which Israel as people had to face in submitting to his rule. This was not the first time in S's life that the question of obedience arose in his reign as king; it had previously arisen in 1 Sam. 13: 8-14 when Samuel had commanded Saul to go down to Gilgal and wait there for 7 days until Samuel should arrive to conduct the offering. When Samuel did not arrive soon enough to Saul's liking, Saul simply took over the function of the priest and did the offering the moment before Samuel arrived. - whereupon (1 Sam. 13: 13-14) Samuel had to announce God's judgment on Saul because of his disobedience.

Surely, Saul should have learnt from this - but it is clear that he wilfully blinded himself to this deed of disobedience because we again find the same action undertaken by Saul 1 Sam 15: the command of God through Samuel that the king and tribe of the Amalekites should be destroyed with all their property - a command which Saul ~~part~~ executed in part & neglected in part. I do not now go into the difficult but valid question of how a righteous and loving God could give such a command that a whole nation should be exterminated - the relevant issue here is the one of Saul's obedience to God as both he, Samuel & the people of Israel clearly understood it.

- We know what Saul did - and what he left undone. What we should ask is: why did Saul not obey Samuel in full?

Answer: ① Saul first of all ~~for~~ tries to exonerate himself by pointing out the seeming goodness of what the people had done and he had allowed (vs 21) by arguing that the people had kept the oxen & sheep with a view to ~~sacrifice~~ ^{offer} these as sacrifice to God.

② When Samuel then expresses Saul's ^{disob-} ~~obedi-~~ ^{edience} and pronounces God's ultimate judgment on Saul (vs 23b) ~~Saul~~ this shock forces Saul to a revelation of honest confession which brings one still to admire him when he says: (vs. 24): "I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and thy words: because I feared the people and obeyed their voice." Here, therefore, you have a ruler of his people who ~~was~~ was deeply concerned (as we all are) to obtain & maintain the goodwill and support of his people, his whole nation. And in his bidding to do so, he feared losing ~~this~~ ^{his} popularity and their support so that when the crucial moment of testing came he, through fear, obeyed the voice of the people rather than the voice of God.

→ The difficult, agonizing decision of every leader - especially a political leader - popularity & expediency, or the voice of conscience ^{calling} ~~speaking~~ ^{about} righteousness, truth and mercy.

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Saul's ~~pronouncement~~ ^{to utterance}: lays down a standard
& pronounces a judgment:

① Obedience is better than sacrifice

Why? - The meaning of sacrifice: outward symbol of a deep love, an honest commitment, a merging of private interest into that of the larger group. (E.g. Church memberships, worship, Christian service, deeds of loving care to people in need)

The meaning of obedience:

Can anyone put me and my family together again?

SIR,—Will you come to my rescue? On this planet we have three characteristics of laws. The law of the state, the law of the church and the law of the jungle.

As a Christian, I would like to be ruled by the law of the church or the law of the state.

Under the laws of the state, laws are made by men and they should be administered by men with sympathy and understanding. I am a typical African, to crown it, coming right from the heart of Zululand. I am a married man with one child. I am only here in Durban as a migrant labourer.

Whenever anybody surveys our economic and social position in towns, he has to face the evils of influx control.

I have been working in Durban for 10 years. I was married by Christian rites. I love my wife and my child. But under the influx control I am entirely separated from my wife who is in the reserve.

I only see her and my family once a year when I get my annual leave. I cannot see my wife or my family whenever I want to see them.

Being separated from my wife, I am too often tempted to fall into adultery, a sin which I have to confess to my priest. And worst of it all are the venereal diseases that a man like me could possibly carry back to his wife if he succumbed.

Definitely, I would not mind joining my family in Zululand. But the big question is how can I live there?

What employment is there for raising money? Recently I have been up there looking for a job, but in vain. I could not find a suitable job. Here in town I am employed as a salesman.

As far as I know South Africa is the only country in the world where it can be a criminal offence for a wife to live with her husband.

I have contacted the Bantu housing authorities so many times but in each and every office I was told I do not qualify to own a house. Is there anybody who can help me?

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