

John Bevere: Partial Obedience Is Disobedience

King Saul's life exemplifies this concept. God sent Saul a command through the prophet Samuel. Saul was instructed to gather his army and attack Amalek, utterly destroying everything that breathed—every man, woman, child, and animal.

Saul didn't refuse Samuel's instructions with, "Absolutely not!" and stomp off in the opposite direction. That would be obvious disobedience. Rather, Saul listened, gathered his army, and attacked Amalek. In this attack, tens of thousands of men, women, and children were killed. Saul spared only the Amalekite king. Perhaps he wanted another king as a trophy to serve in his palace.

Most likely thousands of animals were killed as well. Saul saved only a few of the best sheep, lambs, and oxen. He reasoned that the people could sacrifice these to the Lord, and even that it was "scriptural." To an observer who had not heard the prophet's word, Saul might have appeared to be a godly king. "Look, he sacrifices only the very best to the Lord!"

After this campaign God spoke to Samuel: "I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments" (1 Sam. 15:11). The next day Samuel went to confront Saul.

When Saul saw Samuel coming, he greeted him excitedly with the salutation, "Blessed are you of the Lord! I have performed the commandment of the Lord" (v. 13).

Wait a minute! That was definitely not God's impression! We just read His opinion. What has happened here? How could there be such differing views of the same incident? Saul really believed he obeyed God. How could there be such a

variance? James explains it: But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. –James 1:22

When we hear God's Word and do not do it, we deceive our own hearts! This is how someone can really believe they are obedient to God when in reality they are acting in disobedience.

This is both a fearful and sobering revelation! Deception veils the heart and obstructs the truth. The more a person disobeys, the thicker and more obstructive the veil becomes, making it harder to remove.

Allow me to reiterate some important points. First, Saul did not stomp off and refuse to do as he was told. He went. Second, he killed tens of thousands of people, sparing only one. He killed all but a few of the thousands of animals.

He probably did 99 percent of what he was told to do. Yet God called his nearly complete obedience–rebellion (1 Sam. 15:23)!

Today we would say, "That's all right; it was a good effort." We may even defend Saul, pointing out, "After all, he did do almost everything. Give him credit for what he did do right! Why point out the one thing he didn't do? Look at all he did! Don't be so hard on poor Saul!"

In God's eyes, partial or selective obedience is the same as rebellion to His authority. It is the evidence of a lack of the fear of God!

Once I was in Canada preparing to minister. We were in the middle of praise and worship when the Spirit of the Lord posed this question: "Do you know what a religious spirit is?"

Although I have written and preached on religious spirits and how they operate, I knew right away that my information must have been limited at best. I have learned that anytime God asks a question, He is not looking for information. I

answered, "No, Lord—please tell me."

He quickly responded, "A person with a religious spirit is one who uses My Word to execute his own will!" In other words, it is when we take what the Lord has said and work our own desires into it.

I stood in awe of the wisdom imparted by the Spirit of God. I applied this to the situation with Saul. I could see how Saul had done what he was told, yet worked his own desires into it.

God's heart was not his focus. Saul had seen an opportunity to benefit himself and strengthen his position with the people, and he seized it. Is that lordship? Is that trembling at God's Word?

The fear of the Lord will keep us from compromising God's truth for the pursuit of personal gain. Then we will obey God's Word, no matter the cost.

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