

Foundations of Godly Leadership– No Excuses

Last week, we examined the keys to leadership and discovered that there are three keys:

1. Calling (explain if non-believers present)
2. Character – what God looks for and develops in us.
3. Competency – what men look for and we develop in ourselves.

One of the reasons I am focusing on Leadership and Character these past few weeks is because God calls each and every one of us to leadership. Some in subtle ways, like leading your family, influencing your neighbors... and others in more obvious ways such as being called to lead within the church setting to help others grow in Christ.

Some of us balk at the idea that we can lead...and we sound just like some of the leaders that we looked at in the past few weeks...Leaders who heard God call them...who said, “Who me?” Yet God said, “I will use you.”

Our church has grown by over 20% in the past 12 months, and we have our largest outreach events still ahead of us. God is growing our church because He desires men, women and children to become His disciples. I believe that we are committed to growing people into devoted followers of Jesus. As we are faithful, God sends us more people to minister to and to lead them to experience His powerful love and to learn His plan for their lives.

By this fall, we will have many more people who will be new to our church. Children, youth and adults who are hungry to learn about God’s love for them. We will need people to step out on faith and step up to make a difference in these people’s lives. You may feel like one of the people we have looked at these past few weeks...perhaps like Samuel, too young to know better; or Gideon who had never heard God before but once he did, there was no stopping him. Be mindful that God desires to use you to make a difference in someone’s life...and it may be in the next few months that He may be calling you. He will be less concerned about your competency than your character and your calling. God will also grow you as He uses you to build His kingdom.

I hope this sermon series helps you to look inward and then upward at what God might be calling you to be and do.

Let’s Pray:

Lord, you are a Great God, one who amazes us with how You continually use the simple and apparently weak things of this world to shame the great and the wise. You use people like us, people who don’t have it all together...and yet, You change people’s lives through our words and actions! Lord, as we reflect upon how you use us...we can clearly see that you alone deserve the Praise and glory. Take our lives as we offer them to you today, as we listen to your word, and as we seek your will for our lives...so that you can turn the world right side up with us. In Jesus Name. Amen.

No Excuses

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Page 1

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I do have to warn you that I am going to chase a few rabbits in this sermon, primarily because I am doing an exposition of the passage...which means I have to allow the passage to determine the message. I can't force fit my message only, but also have to bring out the other messages that are in it as well. So if it looks like I am wandering...its on purpose.

Our Passage: 1 Samuel 15

1. ¹*One day Samuel said to Saul, "I anointed you king of Israel because the LORD told me to. Now listen to this message from the LORD! ²This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'I have decided to settle accounts with the nation of Amalek for opposing Israel when they came from Egypt. ³Now go and completely destroy the entire Amalekite nation—men, women, children, babies, cattle, sheep, camels, and donkeys.'"*
 - a. Some of us might wonder why God would command the complete destruction of a nation, all the way down to women, children and animals. It seems very harsh. It would have been considered harsh even for that day and age. Only rarely did God command everything to be destroyed.
 - b. A key word we can see in verse two, "*I have decided to settle accounts with the nation of Amalek.*"
 - i. It is reminiscent of the term that Jesus uses to describe the final judgement. Every man will give an account of himself before God.
 - ii. It is as if God is saying, "I have decided it is time for Amalek to face my judgment."
 - iii. Judgment is God's prerogative. He is the only one who can judge. He judges rightly. Every one of us is due to appear before His judgment seat. Some of us may arrive there sooner than others of us, but we will all appear there.
 - iv. In the case of Amalek, this nation brutally attacked the Israelites while they were traveling through the country on their way to the chosen land, even though they had offered to pay for the water they drank from Amalek's wells.
 1. You might say...that is a pretty tough judgment...after all, these are the great grandchildren of Amalek. How can they be guilty for what he did?
 - v. No matter what the reasoning, God is still just. No man may stand before Him righteous. Every man is guilty...the bible says, "All have sinned." All of us deserve the same penalty for our rebellion against God. "the wages of sin is death."
 1. If you stood before God, at your judgment, what would you say to Him when He asks you why you should be allowed to spend eternity with Him? (pause)
 2. You and I have only one reply if we are honest...I deserve the same fate as the Amalakites. Every one of us have rebelled against God, we have done our own thing.
 3. The only answer that would suffice would be, "You sent your son Jesus to die in my place, that is the only reason I am here."
 4. And yes, Jesus died in your and my place and now our sin has been put away, and forgiven, cast as far as the east is from the west.
 - c. Ok, lets get back to the text and see what happens to King Saul:

2. *⁴So Saul mobilized his army at Telaim. There were 200,000 troops in addition to 10,000 men from Judah. ⁵Then Saul went to the city of Amalek and lay in wait in the valley. ⁶Saul sent this message to the Kenites: "Move away from where the Amalekites live or else you will die with them. For you were kind to the people of Israel when they came up from Egypt." So the Kenites packed up and left. ⁷Then Saul slaughtered the Amalekites from Havilah all the way to Shur, east of Egypt. ⁸He captured Agag, the Amalekite king, but completely destroyed everyone else. ⁹Saul and his men spared Agag's life and kept the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs—everything, in fact, that appealed to them. They destroyed only what was worthless or of poor quality.*
 - a. This passage describes what happens. Saul goes out and attacks the Amalekites, but does his own thing. He keeps the best of the animals, the good stuff and he takes their king as his prisoner. In verse 9, it says, “they kept the best of the sheep and cattle, everything that appealed to them.” We will have to look deeper to understand why.
3. *¹⁰Then the LORD said to Samuel, ¹¹"I am sorry that I ever made Saul king, for he has not been loyal to me and has again refused to obey me." Samuel was so deeply moved when he heard this that he cried out to the LORD all night.*
 - a. Did you hear God’s words to Samuel...Saul has failed in the loyalty test and the obedience test (again). This has brought about a series of consequences that will profoundly affect the nation of Israel as well as king Saul.
 - b. I also feel it is necessary to show you a brief picture of a prophet. Samuel was moved so deeply that he CRIED OUT to the Lord all night.
 - i. I don’t believe prophets delight in telling people off or in exposing people’s sin. Here as in many places, prophets are deeply grieved; I believe they express the same grief God has when we turn from Him.
 - ii. Prophets are oftentimes a picture of God as they tell forth the words and sometimes demonstrate the emotions of God, who they represent.
4. *¹²Early the next morning Samuel went to find Saul. Someone told him, "Saul went to Carmel to set up a monument to himself; then he went on to Gilgal." ¹³When Samuel finally found him, Saul greeted him cheerfully. "May the LORD bless you," he said. "I have carried out the LORD's command!" ¹⁴"Then what is all the bleating of sheep and lowing of cattle I hear?" Samuel demanded. ¹⁵"It's true that the army spared the best of the sheep and cattle," Saul admitted. "But they are going to sacrifice them to the LORD your God. We have destroyed everything else."*
 - a. We find Saul has been exposed! There are several issues that are presented here, and every leader must be aware of them.
 - i. First, did you notice“Set up a monument to himself” – this is an act of the kings of the countries around them, and they were essentially attributing a victory to their king.
 1. This monument is symbolic of the pride that has consumed Saul.

- ii. Secondly, Saul sees Samuel coming from afar off and decides to meet him and greets him with a cheerful tone, as an attempt to deflect the coming criticism he might be sensing coming.
 - 1. But Samuel simply points out the “bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the cattle” to which Saul immediately begins his cover-up and excuses.
 - 2. Excuses are often our refusal to own our sin. If we do not own our sin, then it cannot be forgiven.
 - a. Unforgiven sin will drive a WEDGE in our relationship with God. It will leave us prayerless. It will make us miserable.
 - b. One thing I hope you hear today is the importance of acknowledging and confessing our disobedience to God. It will have an enormous effect upon your life and relationship with God.
 - c. Most of us will not openly acknowledge our sin unless it is brought into the light.
 - d. Maybe we will acknowledge it to ourselves...but never to others.
 - e. Perhaps the reason we don't is because of shame, perhaps it is fear of reactions or consequences. Or it may be we don't want to give it up.
 - f. But when light comes on our sin...it is exposed, someone discovers our sin, it SHOULD work as a catalyst for us to ACKNOWLEDGE and TURN from our sin.
 - i. Some of you may say, “oh, well the only reason he repented was because he got caught!”
 - 1. Of course...and if it leads to repentance that is exactly what God wanted. We should never despise someone who repents of their sin! If God exposed it and they responded, then we should receive them as graciously as God received us!
 - ii. Unfortunately, Saul's reaction isn't this way. Saul is not going to admit or acknowledge his sin.
 - 3. Saul starts by saying “but we are going to sacrifice them...” and this could very well be true.
 - a. Was Saul so consumed by his own self-importance, that he figured he knew as much as God did. God was his good luck charm, but not his Lord.

5. ¹⁶Then Samuel said to Saul, *"Stop! Listen to what the LORD told me last night!"* "What was it?" Saul asked. ¹⁷And Samuel told him, *"Although you may think little of yourself, are you not the leader of the tribes of Israel? The LORD has anointed you king of Israel. ¹⁸And the LORD sent you on a mission and told you, 'Go and completely destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, until they are all dead.' ¹⁹Why haven't you obeyed the LORD? Why did you rush for the plunder and do exactly what the LORD said not to do?"*
- a. Samuel is sick of hearing the excuses. He yells stop! He confronts the sin in Saul and does it directly. He even reminds Saul that he once thought little of himself, but now is so proud that he ignores God (and even sets up monuments to himself).
 - i. **Pride is at the root of many sins.**
 1. Sparing the life of Agag probably provides Saul with a trophy of his prowess and power. When Agag sits at Saul's table, he is much like a stuffed moose head, mounted and prominently displayed in a hunter's den.
 2. Pride will catch you and I every time. You think you "know better." You think you have it all together. You think that because you haven't fallen into that old sin in a few weeks that you have it conquered. That is all pride.
 - a. And the only way pride's power is cut is for God to humble you. If you have been humbled by God recently, you know what I mean. You suddenly see all of the lies that you believed about yourself and realize just how self-oriented you have been.
6. ²⁰*"But I did obey the LORD," Saul insisted. "I carried out the mission he gave me. I brought back King Agag, but I destroyed everyone else. ²¹Then my troops brought in the best of the sheep and cattle and plunder to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal."*
- a. Again Saul continues with the excuses. Here are some reasons why we ignore sin (or tolerate disobedience to God) in our lives.
 - i. **Blaming others, by saying it was someone else's fault, is a common excuse.**
 1. He says in the next verse that the people "pressured him" to keep the best. The people get a free meal at God's expense. They are able to share in the sacrificial meal (2:12-17; 9:11-25). And second, they are able to sacrifice these cattle to God in place of their own, thus avoiding any real sacrifice on their part.
 2. Saul's disobedience has a pious veneer, but at its core, it is self-serving sin.
 3. Blame goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden when Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the serpent. Blame is the way that we try to deal with our own shortcomings without facing them. We pass them onto others.

- ii. Sometimes we are simply blind, or deluded, thinking that we “did” do what we were supposed to.
 - 1. Saul happily throws out the garbage. What troubles him is seeing perfectly good things destroyed. He has no trouble killing the Amalekite men and women, and even their little children. He finds it difficult, however, to kill their king, Agag. He has no problem slaughtering all of the marginal cattle, but he can’t stand to throw away the prime USDA Grade A beef and lamb.
 - 2. In Saul’s case you might see why he would be blind...it is evident in his reply to Samuel when he says, “sacrifice to the Lord YOUR God.” Blind spots come from being out of relationship with God.
 - 3. You and I can have blind spots to areas of disobedience in our lives. And we justify it because we simply are blinded by the god of this world to the wretchedness of our disobedience. We are clueless and yet we are offending God.
- iii. And other times we will minimize our sin...it isn’t as bad as others are. We compare our sins to others and excuse ours.
 - 1. Saul even tries to tell Samuel that it really isn’t so bad...that he isn’t doing what others have done, at least they were going to offer the sacrifices to God and not to some idol!
 - 2. Our passage also warns us about the danger of stratifying sins. The heinous sins are those sins which others practice, while we tend to look upon our own sins as much less serious.
 - a. In evangelical churches, it is easy to point out those outside who still have obvious sin in their lives because it isn’t “our” kind of sin.
 - b. Let us be warned that disobedience to God’s Word is looked upon as the worst of sins.
 - c. *To know what God commands us to do (or not to do), and then to disobey, is to willfully rebel against God.*
 - d. We will bear the consequences of God’s discipline in our lives.
- iv. We simply love our sin too much to leave it go.
 - 1. It is unfortunate, but many of us WON’T let go of our areas of disobedience in our lives because we simply enjoy it too much. Do you realize how bad God is offended by such behaviors that we are tolerating in our lives? It isn’t about whether other people know about it. God knows every detail and He doesn’t excuse our excuses. He wants us to be changed. That means we must be willing

to lay the areas of disobedience down because we see them like He sees them. They are sin and we are willing to call them what they are in our lives.

2. God desires to change your character, but you will have to see your sin as such and turn from it or you will leave Him no choice but to expose it and to expose you.
3. I hope you will ask God to lead you to hate your disobedience as much as He does. That you will ask Him to make your sin distasteful to you. When you see sin the same way He sees it, you will learn to hate it.
4. Do you know how God sees sin? Look at the cross and you will see the ugliness of sin. It is what took the life of Jesus, and God had to watch his only son die to pay its penalty.

v. **We will lie and cover up our sin because we don't like exposure.**

1. C.S. Lewis once said that a little lie is like a little pregnancy. Pretty soon everyone knows about it. The truth is sort of like a beach ball in a pool. Have you ever taken a beach ball into a pool, and you push it down under the water and try to keep it under the water? The truth is like that beach ball. Pretty soon it pops up, no matter how many ways we try to disguise that truth.
2. Tony Campolo tells about one time when he was invited to preach in a Baptist church, in of all places Las Vegas. They put him up in one of those casino hotels. And Sunday morning he was told to wait down in the lobby, and a deacon would come by and pick him up and take him to the church to preach.
 - a. So he got down there early, and he was just standing in the lobby kind of fidgeting waiting for this deacon to show up, and he put his hand in his pocket and low and behold, there was one lone quarter in his pocket. Now Campolo is not a gambler, but he thought to himself, 'I may never get back to Las Vegas again, what the heck.' He goes over to a slot machine, puts the quarter in , pulls the arm, and he hits the jackpot, and quarters come pouring out all over the floor.
 - b. Campolo said he shoveled them into his brief case, and when that was full he put them in his pants pockets, and when they were full he began to put them in his suit coat pockets until his suit is hanging down . He gets them all put away, and the Baptist deacon walks in. Campolo said he was jingling and jangling his way to the car and the Baptist deacon says, "You haven't been gambling have you?"
 - c. He doesn't say how he answered that question, but you can see the bind he is in.

- i. Did I “really gamble?” he might rationalize. Or he might excuse what he had done. Or he might minimize it, compare it to the people gambling 100’s of dollars compared to his quarter.
- ii. Most of the excuses noted above are ones that any of us could use when we are caught in our sin and our disobedience is brought to light.
- iii. The only solution, my friends, is to ADMIT and REPENT when we discover a sin of ours is being dealt with by God.
- iv. Some of you today may be struggling with an area in your life where you have been excusing a behavior or a sin or an area of disobedience to God and you have been sitting on the fence, refusing to let go.
- v. Today, I am going to ask you to ADMIT it before God and REPENT of it. That means, to let go of it. Turn away from it.

b. **The bottom line is that Partial obedience equals Disobedience**

- i. Partial obedience is really rebellion against God. Saul was almost right. He accomplished almost everything that God had asked of him.
- ii. The roadsides were covered with the bodies of the slain Amalekites, both young and old. The smoke from their burning cities rose toward the heavens. The countryside was littered with the remnants of Amalekite culture. All that remained of this great nation was its king and some livestock.
- iii. We would probably applaud Saul and his men for a job well done. But not God! God had commanded everything to be destroyed. I can imagine God saying to Saul, “What part of “all” don’t you understand?”

7. *²²But Samuel replied, "What is more pleasing to the LORD: your burnt offerings and sacrifices or your obedience to his voice? Obedience is far better than sacrifice. Listening to him is much better than offering the fat of rams. ²³Rebellion is as bad as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as bad as worshiping idols. So because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you from being king."*

- a. Ouch, that is a pretty strong indictment. He is saying that doing your own thing is the same as setting yourself up as God. That rebellion is the same as witchcraft?
 - i. Saul had eliminated most all of the witches and the mediums from Israel, and yet is told that his actions are as if he were one himself.
 - ii. Later, Saul seeks out a medium to hear from Samuel after Samuel’s death...he engages in the very thing he condemned.

- iii. **Hypocrisy is pride in the disguise of righteousness.** Hypocrisy is believing or acting as if you are righteous when you are in fact hiding sin in your life.
 - 1. Now there is a fact...every human being is a hypocrite. Every one of us is hiding something for one reason or another.
 - 2. The key for each of us is that we must recognize what we are hiding from God and others and bring it to God so that He can free us from its control. As Christians, we have been freed from Sin's power...but you must desire that freedom in order to experience it. If you clutch it and hold it and hide it, you will be held under its power.
- iv. **Saul tries to convince Samuel that going through the motions of religious rituals is the most important thing of all.**
 - 1. **It is no big thing to Saul to disobey God's command, as long as his disobedience enables him to offer a ritualistic sacrifice to God.**
 - 2. **But ritual is no different than mere superstition. It is like saying, that you have God on a string, that he is to obey you instead of the other way around.**
 - a. **“God is more glorified and self more denied by obedience than by sacrifice. It is much easier to bring a bullock or lamb to be burnt upon the altar than to bring every high thought into obedience to God and the will subject to his will.”**
 - 3. **God is not our puppet. Maybe you have heard the song, “Plastic Jesus.”**

Well, I don't care if it rains or freezes,
 Long as I have my plastic Jesus
 Riding on the dashboard of my car

I could go a hundred miles an hour
 Long as I got the Almighty Power
 Glued up there with my pair of fuzzy dice

Plastic Jesus, plastic Jesus
 Riding on the dashboard of my car

- a. Through all trials and tribulations,
 We will travel every nation,
 With my plastic Jesus I'll go far.
 I don't care if it rains or freezes

As long as I've got my Plastic Jesus
Glued to the dashboard of my car.

- b. Going through the spiritual motions will not produce a right relationship with God. Going to church will not make you right with God. Jesus is the only way, and the reality of our relationship with Jesus is demonstrated by the obedience in our lives.
- v. ***To obey God is better than all sacrifices. To disobey God, and then offer sacrifices, is worthless***
 1. **Quote: “Obedience was the law of innocency, but sacrifice supposes sin come into the world, and is but a feeble attempt to take that away which obedience would have prevented.”**
- vi. Looking at Saul’s sin in our text teaches us a valuable lesson about spiritual leadership. Spiritual leadership is not really about giving people what they want as much it is about doing what God wants.
- vii. *Spiritual leaders must first be followers of God.*
 1. Saul is appointed king over Israel. His task is to know God’s commands and obey them and to lead the nation in obedience.
 2. Saul’s words about the pressure applied by the people may be true, but Saul fails to lead in a godly manner.
 - a. His task is not to please men but to please God.
 - b. In our day and time, when leaders are often elected, their election is very often based upon how well they have pleased others.
 - c. This is not the test of a spiritual leader. *The test is how well that person has pleased God by obeying His Word, and by challenging others to follow him as he obeys.*
 - d. You and I are called to be Godly Leaders: What we must learn is how to listen to God’s voice and obey it when we hear Him.
 - e. We must renounce our own agenda’s for life and for ministry and respond in radical obedience to everything God has shown us. When we do the world will be turned right-side up.
 - f. How do we know this can happen? Because that is what the first century Christians did...and the world is STILL talking about it.

8. ²⁴Then Saul finally admitted, "Yes, I have sinned. I have disobeyed your instructions and the LORD's command, for I was afraid of the people and did what they demanded. ²⁵Oh, please, forgive my sin now and go with me to worship the LORD."
9. ²⁶But Samuel replied, "I will not return with you! Since you have rejected the LORD's command, he has rejected you from being the king of Israel." ²⁷As Samuel turned to go, Saul grabbed at him to try to hold him back and tore his robe. ²⁸And Samuel said to him, "See? The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to someone else—one who is better than you. ²⁹And he who is the Glory of Israel will not lie, nor will he change his mind, for he is not human that he should change his mind!" ³⁰Then Saul pleaded again, "I know I have sinned. But please, at least honor me before the leaders and before my people by going with me to worship the LORD your God." ³¹So Samuel finally agreed and went with him, and Saul worshiped the LORD.

I want to ask you to bow your heads for a moment and ask God to show you where you have been ignoring His call to obey Him.

Perhaps He has been speaking to you about obeying Him in a certain area of your life and you have been procrastinating...you don't want to let go of what He is asking you to let go of. But you know you will have no peace until you obey.

Perhaps you have been trying to compensate for disobedience in your life by being religious, by coming to church and you are finding no peace. A plastic Jesus won't substitute for obedience to the real Jesus. Confess your stubbornness or pride to God right now.

Pray with me if this prayer expresses your heart today:

"Lord, I have been doing my own thing, I haven't been listening to you, in fact, I haven't even been trying to listen. It seems so much easier to just figure it out on my own. But Lord, I am not finding any peace this way. I really need you. I confess that I have been disobedient to you in an area of my life. Please forgive me. Thank you for the cross where every one of my sins was paid for and forgiven and forgotten. Thank you that they are cast as far as the east is from the west and that you remember them no more. Oh God, I want to obey you. Show me how. In Jesus Name, Amen.

If you have unfinished business with God right now, you can come forward and use these kneeling rails to settle accounts with Him. He may not be done with you yet. Let him search your heart as we have a time of repentance and prayer. Please remain seated and in a prayerful time. As God touches you, slip out and get on your knees, humble yourself before Him and bring your life into surrender.

Praise team, singing: