

## The Greatness of an Uncompromising God

1 Samuel 15:1-23

*“Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams...”*

**Introduction:** We like the idea of something or someone being *uncompromising*...fixed, unchangeable, unwilling to make concessions, especially in the midst of hard circumstances or in the midst of fear. Advertisers will use the word to tout their commitment to their values, be it *uncompromising integrity* (Agilent Technologies), *uncompromising ethical standards* (TA Loving contractors), or *uncompromising standards when it comes to form, function, and fashion* (IMPAK totes, pouches, and cases). But perhaps the organization that displays the greatest promise and fulfillment to uncompromising standards is our very own Marine Corp, the few and the proud:

*Our Core Values are **Honor, Courage and Commitment**, and if you are to become one of us, they will be the values you live by and fight with as well. They are the building blocks that will aid you in making the right decisions at the right time, both on the battlefield and in our Nation’s communities.*

***Honor guides Marines** to exemplify the ultimate in ethical and moral behavior. Never lie, never cheat or steal; **abide by an uncompromising code of integrity**; respect human dignity and respect others. Honor compels Marines to act responsibly, to fulfill our obligations and to hold ourselves and others accountable for every action.*

These are high standards, perhaps the highest of human created standards, that soldiers exemplify. However, there are two problems that we can and maybe should have with the idea of being **uncompromising** that connect with our passage this morning. 1) Though we may desire to be uncompromising and put it forward as a value, no one can truly live up to it perfectly. It’s a great goal but a terrible master, since compromise is part and parcel to the human condition. 2) Being SO FIXED and immovable is problematic, since someone who never moves his position or decision will remain distant and seemingly without empathy, compassion, or grace.

As we come to this last section of Saul’s authorized kingship before turning the focus to David, we are confronted with the reality of God’s nature that inevitably cause good questions. We will cover His **wrath, regret and delight**, each revealing who He is and gives us an opportunity to know, thank, and worship Him. He both listens to His people and responds yet always fulfills His predetermined purpose. He is angry and vengeful and merciful. He is holy and gracious. It’s important that we never try to separate the separate attributes of God into parts since that causes us to see certain attributes as greater than others, i.e. love over wrath. The theological term is the **simplicity of God**, which does not mean slow but rather NOT a compound: *Simplicity means God is not made up of parts; he is not composite or a compounded being. He is simple; all that is in God is God.*

**Kevin DeYoung** sums up God’s simplicity this way:

*“The simplicity of God not only prevents us from ranking certain attributes higher than others, it allows God to have “a distinct and infinite life of his own within himself”. He is not an abstract Absolute Idea who happens to have love, wisdom, and holiness, as if we first conceive of a being called God and then relate qualities to him. Rather, **God in his very essence**—within himself and by himself—is **love, wisdom, and holiness. God is whatever he has.** He is not the composite of his attributes, some in greater and*

*some in lesser amounts. God is a simple being without parts or pieces. His attributes do not stick to him; he is what they are.”<sup>1</sup>*

Again, this is important to understand as we face **paradox**, two seemingly incongruous ideas that are both simultaneously true, which keeps us in the proper tension of understanding God who is wholly other than us, yet allows us to see, know, and understand Him. We will look at chapter 15 for the next 2 weeks, first looking at the unchanging God and then to Saul who refused to change. We will see God showing regret that affirmed His compassion and Saul falling short of repentance, leaving Him unchanged before God. Suffice to say, we will have to think hard about these things, but like anything we work at, the payoff should be glorious.

### **The WRATH of our uncompromising God displays His GLORY (1-9)**

*“Now go and strike Amalek and **devote to destruction** all that they have. **Do not spare them**, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel, and donkey.”*

This chapter opens with Samuel coming to Saul with **the Words of the LORD**, a theme of the chapter. We see this emphasized in v. 10, 23, and 26, with the **voice of the LORD** seen as well in v. 19, 20, and 22. Samuel had credibility with Saul since he was there at the beginning of his kingship to anoint him, but it was the Word of the LORD that had authority. It is still the same today. You can disagree with the messenger, but to disagree with the Word of the LORD means you are putting yourself at odds with Him.

Samuel presented Saul with a divine task that was both part of divine judgment AND a test for Saul. He was to seek out the nomadic nation of Amalek and **devote them to destruction**, meaning all men, women, children, infants, and livestock would be given over to God and therefore no longer accessible for common use. In other words, all these listed were to be utterly destroyed and wiped out by the command of God and for the glory of God.

Yikes! This is always hard to wrestle with, comprehend, and explain. The most normal question is “WHY”, followed by “how can a good and loving God do this?” These are good questions that we’ll try to answer, but it was also a clear command to Saul. Here is what we have to understand:

- **This was God’s command alone – no one else can give it – and was exactly what He commanded Israel to do coming into the Promised Land** (Deuteronomy 7, 20) – Israel was to battle with seven nations in the land (Deut. 7:1) that were more numerous and mightier than they, but they would trust the Lord to be with them. In *devoting these nations to destruction*, they were to 1) **make no covenant with them**; 2) **show them no mercy** (*original Cobra Kai*); 3) **and not intermarry with them** (7:2-3). **Why?** Because God knew that the nations would turn their hearts away to serve other gods, and that would lead Him to judge Israel instead. God is a Jealous God, and He chose Israel to be His treasured possession, to love, bless, and multiply them, but not to share or compete with other gods.
- **The nations were deserving of wrath** – These nations, but particularly the **Amalekites, were wicked**. According to Deut. 25:17-19, when Israel came into the land, the Amalekites fought a dirty war against them, attacking “*on the way when you were **faint and weary**, and **cut off your tail, those who were lagging behind**, and he did not fear God*” (18). You’ll remember the story of Israel doing battle with Amalek, and as long as Moses held up his arms they would succeed,

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/theological-primer-the-simplicity-of-god/>

and when he lowered them they would be defeated, so Aaron and Hur helped hold them up (Exodus 17:8-13). In both passages, God **cursed Amalek**, vowing to utterly blot out their memory (Ex. 17:14) and not forget (Deut. 25:19). Saul was to fulfill this vow and promise of the Lord, and the time was at hand. It was also clear that generations had not changed, since Agag's sword "had made women childless" (1 Sam. 15:33), meaning this nation was still blood thirsty and wicked.

Saul knew exactly what needed to be done, since he gave the Kenites the heads up to skip town before the bloodshed started (1 Sam. 15:6). Saul rallied 200,000 men of Israel and 10,000 men of Judah and wiped out all the people.....except for the king named Agag...and except for the **best of the sheep**, lambs, oxen, and fat calves, but instead devoted the **worthless and despised things to the LORD**. We will come back to this thought next week when we look at Saul, but for now, let's finish the thought on God's wrath.

It is in God's wrath and judgement that **God's people find comfort**. He will always mete out justice, and evil will always be punished. The whole of the gospel is summed up in **Isaiah 61:1-2**, where the good news and liberty stated and later proclaimed by Jesus (Luke 4:18-19) and fulfilled in Him ALSO came with a message of future vengeance of God (v. 2), to the comfort of all who mourn. The righteous wrath of God is stored up because of our sin, but His own will find satisfaction in Jesus Christ (Rom. 2:1-5; 1 John 2:1-2), while His wrath will be poured out on those whose hearts are hard and impenitent. God will pour out justice one day on the wicked (Rev. 19:15) and answer the prayer of the suffering saints who will be persecuted and martyred (Rev. 6:9-10). God cannot **compromise** so His wrath has to be satisfied, and we know that for those that believe that is found in the finished work of Jesus Christ, who became a curse and bore our sins on Himself. The truth and reality is this: **we are all under God's wrath because we are all sinful**. God is just to pour out His wrath, now and forever. Knowing this, it enhances our joy and thankfulness knowing Christ took God's wrath for us.

### **The REGRET of our uncompromising God displays His COMPASSION (10-16)**

*"The word of the LORD came to Samuel: 'I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments.'"*

Not to be outdone in the brain cramp department, the text says that "God regretted" making Saul king, since he had turned his back on following God's commands. Before tackling that issue, let's do a quick survey of how and where Saul fell short which led to this conclusion, which included making Samuel **angry, crying out to God all night** (15:11).

- **Saul should have known the entirety of the law, including God's curse to the Amalekites and devoting the Canaanite nations to destruction, because of Deut. 17** – The rules for Israel's kings were explicitly laid out by God, which included the king writing a copy of the law for himself (17:18), to read it, keep it, and do it all his life – and if so, his kingdom would continue. Saul, like us, had NO EXCUSE for ignorance. We will look at this again next week, but **ignorance of God's Word for a believer is really ARROGANCE on display**.
- **Saul was NOT IGNORANT, since he knew what was at stake for the Kenites**
- **Saul blame shifted like his father's Adam and Aaron** – It is clear in the text that both Saul AND the people left Agag alive AND the best of the animals. But he was totally willing to throw the people under the bus when confronted (v. 15, 21). This was just like Aaron, Moses' brother, who when Moses had gone up the mountain to get the 10 commandments, gave into the

people's wishes and made a Golden Calf to worship. When confronted, he said, *"So I said to them, 'Let any who have gold take it off.' So they gave it me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!"* (Exodus 32:24).

- **Saul praised himself for the victory, building a monument to himself at Carmel** (15:12)
- **Saul doubled down on his ignorant arrogance** – *"I have performed the commandment of the LORD!"* (15:13; 20). Finally, in the midst of his many words (Prov. 10:19), Samuel had to simply say "STOP!"

So this begs the question: in what way did God *"regret"* making Saul king? Does this mean He made a mistake? Does it mean He didn't know the outcome? Did Saul's disobedience somehow catch God off guard or thwart His plan? Let's answer this according to the text and all that we know of God's simplicity.

1. The word used for "regret" here is the Hebrew word (*nhm*) which has a translation range or sorrow, regret, repentance, grief, and compassion.
2. In his book, Bruce Ware noted that statements like God's regret indicate that God is aware of and involved in changes to the human situation and responds in appropriate ways. Thus, when Saul persistently fails to obey, God responds by repents of Saul as Israel's king.<sup>2</sup>
3. God often relates to us (though He is never like us) in language we can understand. He knows the beginning from the end, but He still is not a piece of concrete when making decisions. Anthropomorphism and anthropopathism, which give human characteristics and emotions to non-human items, are ways that God uses as accommodations to us, helping us understand Him more. In Genesis 6:6, it says ***"and the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to His heart."*** This is beautiful. Though he knew exactly what was to happen, and though it still happened, God had compassion on mankind
4. God and man regret differently. This was the conclusion Samuel came to. After wrestling through his own anger at the situation all night, he finally concluded, ***"And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that He should have regret"*** (15:29). When we regret, we think of what we would have done differently, made a different decision, chosen a different path based on results. But not God. He does not make commands non-chalantly. He does not consider do-overs. His will is perfect:

*"Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, remember the former things of old; for I am God, there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish ALL my purpose, calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it'"* (Isaiah 46:8-11)

God is wholly other than us, and that sets Him apart. I think about His regret like I thought about disciplining my kids. I had regret that I had to inflict pain, knowing the inevitable outcome. But I did it anyway because it was the most loving and right thing to do. They could have said, "If you regret it, why would you do it?!!?" The answer is, because it is part of the overall plan God has for our life and our greatest good. The fact that God allows us to see His regret shows us how much He cares, how He has compassion on us, that He wants what is best for us, which IS our obedience and satisfaction in Christ alone. He is not like us, but He has compassion on us and our human condition.

<sup>2</sup> Bruce A. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory*, p. 91.

## The DELIGHT of our uncompromising God displays His REDEPTIVE LOVE (17-23)

*"Has the LORD as great **delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD?** Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as inquiry and idolatry. Because you have rejected the **word of the LORD**, he has rejected you from being king."*

Saul did not yield easily. Like a stubborn child that will not get the hint or come to grips with the situation at hand, Saul continued to profess his goodness (*"I HAVE obeyed the voice of the LORD. I HAVE gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me. I HAVE brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I HAVE devoted the Amalekites to destruction"*), and throwing his own people under the bus. Then he tried to **sanitize their sin**: their motive was simply to *sacrifice to the LORD!* See! **We did it all for God! We were thinking of God's glory the whole time! It was never about us!!!!** This kind of self-delusion is a clear revealer of a hard, selfish heart (Heb. 3:13). Born again believers are aware of their own propensity to sin, will confess when confronted, and will desire to turn from it. Saul demonstrated none of these – which we'll dig into next week. But Samuel's response tells us **two majorly important issues that every person must know that God delights in:**

1. **God wants our heart, not sacrifices** – God did not create sinners so that they could offer sacrifices, as if the actual sacrifices are His goal, but He created a people for His glory who would be satisfied in Him, worship Him alone, and live in faith driven obedience. He created sacrifices as a means to deal with sin! So when we mix this up, we misunderstand the heart of God. This is the person who belittles God and thinks that doing *external worship practices* (I showed up at church, I served at the event, I participated in the \_\_\_\_\_) somehow makes up for NOT loving and knowing God with our whole being. This is exactly the problem Israel butted up against in the OT and Jesus warned about in the NT:

Hear the word of the LORD,  
you rulers of <sup>2</sup>Sodom!  
Give ear to the teaching of our God,  
you people of Gomorrah!  
11 "What to me is the multitude of your  
sacrifices?  
says the LORD;  
I have had enough of burnt offerings of  
rams  
and the fat of well-fed beasts;  
I do not delight in the blood of bulls,  
or of lambs, or of goats.

12 "When you come to appear before me,  
who has required of you  
this trampling of my courts?

13 Bring no more vain offerings;  
incense is an abomination to me.  
New moon and Sabbath and the calling of  
convocations—  
I cannot endure iniquity and solemn  
assembly.  
Your new moons and appointed feasts  
my soul hates;  
they have become a burden to me;  
I am weary of bearing them.  
15 When you spread out your hands,  
I will hide my eyes from you;  
even though you make many prayers,  
I will not listen;  
your hands are full of blood.  
16 Wash yourselves; make yourselves  
clean;

*remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.*

Jesus said something similar Matthew 15:8-9, where the Pharisees focused on **tradition** rather than what God's Word said, *"This people honor me with their lips, but their **heart is far from me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.**"* In both these passages it is clear that God does not want **vain attempts to please Him when our hearts are disconnected from trusting Him, dealing with our sin, or simply going through the motions.** That is why God delights in obedience, NOT sacrifice. When we do it our own way, it is prideful rebellion, which is equivalent to the pagan practice of divination in God's sight, and expresses presuming on God which is idolatry, which God hates.

God **DELLIGHTS** in **grace fueled, faith driven obedience that seeks to please Him.** The problem is that we all fall short in this. That is why there are two **beautiful references that speak to this issue from this passage**, the first from David in **Psalm 40:6-8**:

*In **sacrifice and offering you have not delighted**, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required. Then I said, "Behold, I have come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me: **I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart***

Perhaps dwelling on this account about Saul, David clearly understood what pleased the LORD, a desire from the inside out to do God's will, NOT pointing merely to external acts. Sacrifices certainly had their place, but were not ultimate. Like someone reading their Bible alone is NOT enough, if it does not translate to active obedience and a growing love of Christ. No one is loved when someone merely goes through the motions with a detached heart and affection. God wants all of us. And that is why Jesus is the ONE who brought the **greatest delight to the FATHER!** Note **Hebrews 10:4-10**, quoting from **Psalm 40**:

For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

<sup>5</sup> Consequently, **when Christ came into the world**, he said,

*"Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,  
but a body have you prepared for me;*

*<sup>6</sup> in burnt offerings and sin offerings  
you have taken no pleasure.*

*<sup>7</sup> Then I said, '**Behold, I have come to do your will, O God,**  
as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.'*"

<sup>8</sup> When he said above, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), <sup>9</sup> then he added, "Behold, I have come to do your will." He does away with the first in order to establish the second. <sup>10</sup> **And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.**

Jesus Christ was the ultimate fulfillment of the sacrificial law by becoming perfectly obedient and making the FINAL and FULL sacrifice on our behalf! Through His once for all death, he sanctified us, meaning we were **made holy in a positional way.** He paid the price on the cross NOT to give us nominal obedience and access to menial sacrifices. No, He died to give us NEW HEARTS with NEW DESIRES and NEW OPPORTUNITIES to worship. This is the **GREAT COMFORT in the midst of hard realities:** Though God is perfectly holy and wrathful, He desires that all people would come to salvation (1 Tim. 2:4) and makes a way for that by providing a perfect, obedient, delightful sacrifice in Christ. What does He call us

to do? Yield to Him, repent of our sin, turn from our wicked ways, confess our sin, ask for forgiveness, and live for His glory! When we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ we will be saved! Saved from wrath in our sin, and saved to a full, obedient, joyful life in Him! This was the promise He gave and gives to Israel and offers to all in **Isaiah 1:18-20**:

*Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD:*

*though your sins are like scarlet,*

*they shall be as white as snow;*

*though they are red like crimson,*

*they shall become like wool.*

<sup>19</sup> *If you are willing and obedient,  
you shall eat the good of the land;*

<sup>20</sup> *but if you refuse and rebel,  
you shall be eaten by the sword;*

*for the mouth of the LORD has spoken*