



LIFEgroup Study Guide

June 14

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This study guide follows along with LBF Church's current Sunday message series, and is intended to be a supplement in your daily passionate pursuit of Jesus.

- *Watch last Sunday's message video:*
[www.lbf.church/messages]

Is your group stumped? Did you come to a question that you feel needs clarification? Our church isn't too big. Contact Pastor Dan with your questions.

- *Contact Pastor Dan:*
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Lesson 7: What's Better Than Religion?

1 Samuel 15:17-23 • Pg. 5-7 • June 14



What's Better Than Religion?

Lesson 7 • June 14 • by Dan Franklin

Main Point

God values obedience over ritual.

Getting Started

1. What are some excuses that people—including Christians—use to explain why they disobeyed God's commands?

2. In the Old Testament, God's people had rituals that included sacrifices and offerings. What are some rituals that Christians have today?

Embracing The Bigger Picture

In this series through 1 Samuel, we will not cover every passage in detail, so we will take a moment to get the bigger picture before digging into the passage on which we will focus. The larger section

for this lesson is 1 Samuel 13:16-15:34.

In the first part of chapter 13, Samuel told Saul that the kingdom would be taken away from him and that God was raising up a new king, a man after God's own heart. In the aftermath of this sad event, Saul and the armies of Israel find themselves in danger. They are without weapons and pinned in by the Philistines. But Saul's son Jonathan makes a bold and courageous move. He and his armor-bearer, at the Lord's direction, attack a group of Philistine soldiers. Jonathan and his armor-bearer are miraculously victorious. This bold victory sends the Philistines into a panic, emboldening the Israelites to win a great victory. In this victory, Jonathan is set in contrast to his father, Saul. Saul makes an unwise vow that almost leads to Jonathan's death, while Jonathan courageously follows the Lord and puts himself in danger on behalf of the nation. As the story continues, we see more and more signs that Saul is not devoted to the Lord and that his reign will unravel into disaster.

That brings us to chapter 15. Samuel tells Saul that he is to be God's instrument of judgment on the Amalekites, who were constant enemies and antagonists to the nation of Israel. To punish the Amalekites, God orders Saul to attack them and completely to wipe them out, both people and animals. For many of us, this command is deeply

troubling. However, this command underscores some core realities about God: (1) He is the judge, and he is always well within his rights to execute judgment by himself or through someone else, (2) He is holy, and our sin and rebellion against him brings about fierce (and righteous) wrath. Jesus Christ ultimately suffered this wrath on the cross. All of us—not just the Amalekites—are deserving of God's harsh judgment, but God showed his mercy in sending Jesus for us.

Although Saul is told to be God's agent of judgment against the Amalekites, Saul chooses to spare their king and the best of their animals. Samuel confronts Saul on his disobedience. At first, Saul makes excuses, saying that he kept the animals so that he could sacrifice them to God. However, when pushed, Saul admits that he disobeyed God because he feared his soldiers, who wanted to keep the animals. The passage ends with Samuel prophesying the end of Saul's reign and then leaving, never to be seen by Saul again in his lifetime. In the middle of chapter 15, however, Samuel makes clear that while God may value rituals and sacrifices, there is something that he values much more than that.

Digging In

Read 1 Samuel 15:17-23.

"17 Samuel said, "Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel. 18 And he sent you on a mission, saying, 'Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; wage war against them until you have wiped them out.' 19 Why did you not obey the LORD? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the

eyes of the LORD?" 20 "But I did obey the LORD," Saul said. "I went on the mission the LORD assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag, their king. 21 The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, to sacrifice them to the LORD your God at Gilgal." 22 But Samuel replied: "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. 23 For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king."

3. What did you hear that stood out to you? Feel free to share something significant that you heard in the sermon if you listened to the sermon on this passage.

4. What do you think is Samuel's purpose for what he asks Saul in verse 17?

5. In verse 21, what is Saul's reason that he did not destroy all the animals? Look at verse 24, what was the real reason?

6. Use one sentence to summarize the central message of verses 22-23.

7. What words does Samuel use in verse 23 to describe Saul's disobedience in this simple matter of bringing back the animals?

11. Give one specific way that you believe God is calling you—in action or attitude—to respond to this passage of Scripture.

Wrestling With Big Ideas

8. Saul disobeyed because he was afraid that obeying God would make him lose the approval of his men. What are some ways that fear keeps you from obeying God?

Connecting With The Gospel

9. The gospel of Jesus is not an invitation for us to perform rituals to get God's approval but to receive his gift of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. What does this tell you about God's character?

Applying The Passage

10. What are some rituals that you are tempted to make more important than simple obedience to God?