

Worship and Integrity

The following story of King Saul relates a tension we might experience in our worship of God. Saul was appointed by God to be the first king over Israel. Outward appearances would make one think Saul would make a wonderful king, however, inner character flaws worked against what God had called him to do.

King Saul was commanded by God to destroy the Amalekite nation (all people and animals) as God's act of judgment against them. Saul did as he was told except that he brought back their king alive along with the best of the sheep and cattle.

Read the rest of the story and consider the worship tension that is revealed.

1 Samuel 15:12-31 (NIV)

¹² Early in the morning Samuel got up and went to meet Saul, but he was told, "Saul has gone to Carmel. There he has set up a monument in his own honor and has turned and gone on down to Gilgal."

¹³ When Samuel reached him, Saul said, "The Lord bless you! I have carried out the Lord's instructions."

¹⁴ But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?"

¹⁵ Saul answered, "The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the Lord your God, but we totally destroyed the rest."

¹⁶ "Stop!" Samuel said to Saul. "Let me tell you what the Lord said to me last night." "Tell me," Saul replied.

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; make war on 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, in order 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 voice of 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."

²⁴ Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned. I violated the Lord's command and your instructions. I was afraid of the people and so I gave in to them. ²⁵ Now I beg you, forgive my sin and come back with me, so that I may worship the Lord."

²⁶ But Samuel said to him, "I will not go back with you. You have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you as king over Israel!"

²⁷ As Samuel turned to leave, Saul caught hold of the hem of his robe, and it tore. ²⁸ Samuel said to him, "The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to one of your neighbors--to one

better than you. ²⁹ He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind."

³⁰ Saul replied, "I have sinned. But please honor me before the elders of my people and before Israel; come back with me, so that I may worship the Lord your God." ³¹ So Samuel went back with Saul, and Saul worshiped the Lord.

What worship tension do you see in this story?

How would you define the word "integrity"?

One of the definitions for integrity from Dictionary.com is *"the state of being whole, entire, or undiminished."* For the sake of this study we will define integrity as being "undivided" in character.

Explain how integrity could be understood as being "undivided"?

If someone has integrity, we understand them to be who they say they are all the time. They don't act one way in one situation and differently in another. Wherever they go you always see the same person with the same values. They are consistent. The only way this is possible is if the person acts as a whole all the time. For someone to only present a certain aspect of their character is to lack honesty and integrity. It creates in those around them a sense of relational distrust. An undivided person is one who is consistent in their character.

In what ways does Saul reveal that he lacks integrity? In what ways is he divided in his character?

What internal struggle is Saul experiencing? What are some evidences of this?

Saul is insecure. He is always afraid of what other people will think of him and his performance. This drives him to seek respect and affirmation in various ways.

- setting up a statue in honour of himself (vs. 12)
- appeasing the soldiers by letting them keep the best animals (vs. 15)
- bringing the defeated king back alive as evidence of his victory (vs. 20)
- insincere repentance (vs. 24)
- desire to be honoured before the elders (vs. 30)

Other previous examples revealing Saul's insecurity. (1Samuel 10:20-22; 10:27; 13:11-13)

What is Saul's greatest concern in verse 30?

Saul is more concerned with himself being lifted up than God. He poses as someone who wants to live as God wants, but his actions betray him. Though he desires to "worship" God, he is more concerned with how he is perceived.

Matthew 22:37-38 (NIV)

³⁷ Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."

³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment.

How does integrity relate to our ability to worship God?

God desires that we love him with ALL our heart, ALL our soul and ALL our mind. Anything less and we are coming to him with a divided heart. Part of us wants to worship God, but another part wants to glorify self.

Have you ever discovered that while singing a worship song you were more preoccupied with how you were sounding to the people around you than you were declaring the content of the song to God?

Provide some additional examples of times when a divided heart prevents us from worshipping God in spirit and truth. Don't just focus on "worship services" as worship is so much more.

Possible examples:

Any time we hold on to sin and refuse to repent

Unforgiveness

Pride in our worship (singers, instrumentalists)

This may happen when one is more concerned about the professional quality of the music than the heart attitude God values.

Preachers concerned with how well they preached

Unethical business practices through the week

Anger, Judgment

Un-reconciled relationships

There were many times in the Old Testament when God was frustrated with the worship of the Israelites. What was the source of frustration in the following passages?

Amos 5:21-27 (NIV)

²¹ "I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. ²² Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. ²³ Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. ²⁴ But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream! ²⁵ "Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the desert, O house of Israel? ²⁶ You have lifted up the shrine of your king, the pedestal of your idols, the star of your god-- which you made for yourselves. ²⁷ Therefore I will send you into exile beyond Damascus," says the Lord, whose name is God Almighty.

Though they worshipped on the Sabbath, they were unrighteous in how they lived through the week. They embraced and worshipped the false Gods of the surrounding nations. They were divided in their hearts.

Malachi 1:6-14 (NIV)

⁶ "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?" says the Lord Almighty. "It is you, O priests, who show contempt for my name. "But you ask, 'How have we shown contempt for your name?'

⁷ "You place defiled food on my altar. "But you ask, 'How have we defiled you?' "By saying that the Lord's table is contemptible. ⁸ When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?" says the Lord Almighty.

⁹ "Now implore God to be gracious to us. With such offerings from your hands, will he accept you?"--says the Lord Almighty.

¹⁰ "Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you," says the Lord Almighty, "and I will accept no offering from your hands. ¹¹ My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations," says the Lord Almighty.

¹² "But you profane it by saying of the Lord's table, 'It is defiled,' and of its food, 'It is contemptible.' ¹³ And you say, 'What a burden!' and you sniff at it contemptuously," says the Lord Almighty.

"When you bring injured, crippled or diseased animals and offer them as sacrifices, should I accept them from your hands?" says the Lord. ¹⁴ "Cursed is the cheat who has an acceptable male in his flock and vows to give it, but then sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord. For I am a great king," says the Lord Almighty, "and my name is to be feared among the nations.

How would you summarize the above tension?

The Israelites were to bring the best of their flock as a gift to God. The animal was to be spotless, without defects of any kind.



Leviticus 22:19-22 (NIV)

¹⁹ you must present a male without defect from the cattle, sheep or goats in order that it may be accepted on your behalf. ²⁰ Do not bring anything with a defect, because it will not be accepted on your behalf. ²¹ When anyone brings from the herd or flock a fellowship offering to the Lord to fulfill a special vow or as a freewill offering, it must be without defect or blemish to be acceptable. ²² Do not offer to the Lord the blind, the injured or the maimed, or anything with warts or festering or running sores. Do not place any of these on the altar as an offering made to the Lord by fire.

The tension for the Israelites was purely economics. Good animals were worth the most money, blemished/defective animals were worth the least. They rationalized that if the animal was simply going to be slaughtered anyway, they might as well give the poor animals and keep the good ones for more personal income. Instead of giving their best to God, they prioritized getting the best for themselves.

In what ways might we struggle with a divided heart on this issue? When are we tempted to not give God our best?

What was the original purpose of offering the sacrifice and what perspectives did the Israelites forget?

Sacrifices were a substitute death payment for their sin. God was communicating that they really deserved to be the ones paying the death price, but he devised a plan where a substitute could be provided in their place. When one realizes that they are to pay the death penalty, the option of offering an animal without blemish instead would evoke pure joy and excitement. Who wouldn't be willing, with joy, to offer a perfect lamb in their place on the altar?

The fact that the Israelites were bringing blemished animals meant they had:

- Lost sight of the reason for the sacrifice and had gotten into a legalistic routine of worship
- Become blind to their own sinfulness
- Forgotten they truly deserved the death penalty
- Forgotten that offering a lamb in their place was a wonderful trade-off
- Forgotten who God was and the worship he deserved

What perspectives are we sometimes guilty of forgetting?

In what ways might neglecting the Lord's Table create a similar tension?

Not seeing the celebration of the Lord's Table as a priority may place us in a very similar situation as these Jewish worshippers. The point of the Lord's Table is to remember the incredible cost paid on our behalf by Jesus Christ to give us life. Sometimes our schedules and busyness of life may hinder us from prioritizing this time of reflection in our lives – it becomes an inconvenience. Or, when we do celebrate it, it may simply become routine and we forget the significance of what we are celebrating.

The sacrifices looked at the cost to be paid, the Lord's Table looks back at the cost that was paid. Both have the same sense of priority but from opposite sides of the crucifixion.

***Note:** Churches celebrate the Lord's Table with varying frequency. No one timing is more "righteous" or "spiritual" than another. Scripture does not define how frequently the Lord's Table should be celebrated but simply states that when we celebrate it, it is to be done remembering Jesus.*

Isaiah 29:13 (NIV)

The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men."

Why does God so detest people going through the motions in their life of worship?**What are some ways Jesus revealed peoples' divided heart?****Examples:**

- The rich young man challenged to give up his wealth (Matthew 19:16-22)
- When Jesus declared the cost of following him (Matthew 8:18-22)
- The disciples who were not willing to fully accept Jesus' teachings (John 6:65-66)
- When Jesus allowed the woman to pour expensive perfume on his feet the disciples were indignant and it prompted Judas to betray him (Matthew 26:8-16)
- When Jesus healed the man's withered hand on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:13)
- Etc.

Philippians 4:6-7 (NIV)

⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

1 John 4:18 (NIV)

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

In what ways does fear and anxiety reveal a divided heart?

Fear and anxiety ultimately reveal distrust in God's love and provision. It attacks the very nature of God himself viewing him as neither loving nor good. When one embraces fear and anxiety they create their own defenses to protect them from a God who does not care and take matters into their own hands. We say we believe in God, yet we react to crises as if there is no God. We become divided in our minds and emotions.

When we do this, we live in tension between what we believe with our heads and value in our hearts. How might this affect how we worship God?

It is difficult to worship in spirit and truth when we distrust God.

On a practical level, it affects how we relate with others, work at our jobs, care for our families, minister in church and step out in faith. A lack of personal wholeness means we live daily with a lack of personal integrity.

How can we begin to be people of integrity, free to worship God in spirit and truth?

- 1) We need to begin to distinguish those areas where our behaviour and reactions contradict what we claim to believe.
- 2) We need to repent of areas of sin in our lives.
- 3) We need to affirm the truths about God that will set us free in those areas of fear and anxiety.
- 4) We need to act on God's truth and not on our deceptive feelings.
- 5) We need to be consistent and honest before God and others.

Are there some areas where you know that you have lacked personal integrity and it has interfered with living a life of true worship to God?

Can you see how living a life of integrity and worship will strengthen your relationship with others?

Are there some steps you can take this week to become a person of greater integrity?

What are some barriers you can anticipate facing?

Are there some ways this week you can joyfully offer your lives as living sacrifices to God?