

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"?

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

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?

What is Saul's greatest concern in verse 30?

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?

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.

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.

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?



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.

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?

What perspectives are we sometimes guilty of forgetting?

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

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?

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?

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?

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

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?