

But - Sunday 16th August, 2015

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 6:23

Beloved in The Lord,

Partial obedience is disobedience. We see this very clearly in the life of Israel’s first king – King Saul. God gave Saul a very clear order to fight against the king of the Amalekites and to totally destroy all that was associated with them. He was not to spare anybody or anything. Saul obeyed God and fought against the Amalekites, but he did not fully obey God, because he spared the life of Agag the king of the Amalekites.

We read: ***“But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were not willing to destroy them utterly; but everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed.” (1.Sam.15:9).***

Did you notice the first word in this verse? It is “but”. But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best sheep.... This “but” was the downfall of Saul. God had given him very clear orders.

² Thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he set himself against him on the way while he was coming up from Egypt. ³ Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has, and do not spare him; but put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.’”

The next verse tells us that Saul summoned the people to come and fight and some translations emphasise that he told the people what their mission was. There is no doubt that Saul knew what God had told him to do, but, he failed to fully obey God. He spared the best of the sheep and oxen as well as the life of the King.

We read now how God viewed this. God was not happy:

“Then the word of the Lord came to Samuel, saying, ¹¹ “I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following Me and has not carried out My commands.” And Samuel was distressed and cried out to the Lord all night.” (1.Sam.15:10-11)

Saul’s downward fall was threefold. He turned away from God; stopped following God and disobeyed God’s command. It all began with a “but”. God told him to do thus and so, but he decided to do it his way.

This is exactly what has happened to the majority of Christian Churches today. God has clear commandments in His Word, but the Church has decided to ignore them and go with the popular thinking of the masses.

We must understand that Saul didn’t willfully set out to disobey God. He set out with the right intention and I believe was intending to do as God had told him. But what happened?

Saul gave into the pressure that came from the people. He listened to them. When Samuel confronted Saul we get a clear picture of what happened:

“The Lord sent you on a mission, and said, ‘Go and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are exterminated.’¹⁹ Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord, but rushed upon the spoil and did what was evil in the sight of the Lord?”

²⁰ Then Saul said to Samuel, “I did obey the voice of the Lord, and went on the mission on which the Lord sent me, and have brought back Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites.²¹ But the people took some of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the choicest of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the Lord your God at Gilgal.”

²² Samuel said, “Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices As in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams.²³ “For rebellion is as the sin of divination, And insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being king.”

²⁴ Then Saul said to Samuel, “I have sinned; I have indeed transgressed the command of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and listened to their voice. “ (1.Sam.15:18-24)

Saul reveals that he was more concerned with listening to the voice of the people rather than the voice of the Lord. Herein is a lesson for all of us. When we are more concerned about what people think than what God says, we are headed for trouble and sin.

This is why the Apostles said: ***“But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men.” (Acts 5:29)***

Oh, how we need to make this our aim. That includes me, We must obey God rather than men. So often, we like Saul, clearly know what we are meant to do, but we allow a “but”. We are afraid of what people may think or say, we are afraid of being criticised or made fun of.

It is interesting, that when we have allowed a “but” we strive to cover our sin with religious language. Saul tried to convince Samuel that he spared the best of the sheep and oxen so that he could sacrifice them to the Lord! Samuel did not mince his words in replying to Saul:

“Samuel said, “Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices As in obeying the voice of the Lord?

Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams.

²³ “For rebellion is as the sin of divination, And insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being king.” (1.Sam.15:22-23)

Obedience and heeding God’s Word brings us blessing. God shows us this through His Son Jesus. Jesus was obedient to His Father and He surrendered all to Him. Through His obedience He was exalted to the highest position in Heaven and on Earth and has been

given the name that is above every name. Through His obedience, all who turn to Him can be saved from sin and death.

Paul wrote: ***“So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.***

¹⁹ For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.” (Romans 5:18-19)

This brings us to a good “but”. We find this in our foundation text:

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:23)

Adams disobedience opened the door to sin and death, but Jesus obedience opened the way to forgiveness and life. Here we have the best “but” in all of the Scripture. This “but” reveals to us the tremendous love of God. It reveals His amazing grace.

Through our disobedience, through our sin, we deserve eternal punishment, but God grants us eternal life instead if we turn to Him. Even though we deserve to be punished, God says we can have forgiveness and life.

This is only possible because Jesus was totally obedient to His Father. He was obedient unto death, even death on the cross. It is by virtue of His love and obedience that we have the but in our verse. The wages of sin is death, **but** the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

To receive this free gift from God, we need to admit our sin, confess it, and turn away from it. When we do, we receive forgiveness.

We read in 1 John:

⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.” (1.John 1:9-10)

Verse 9 can correctly be translated as starting with a “But” But if we confess our sin....This is a good “but”.

We must learn to distinguish between the good “buts” and the bad “buts”. The good “but” is confess our sin, when we have sinned. We should never try to cover sin or to rationalize it away. Best to confess and turn away from it. We can never fool God or convince Him of our rational thinking.

Remember to obey is better than sacrifice.

When we have to decide between what God says, and what the world thinks, or what our sinful nature is telling us, then may we respond:

“But we must obey God rather than men.”

Amen

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.