

## **Gram Seed Testimony Alpha Episode 13: How Can I resist Evil**

What an amazing story and testimony to God's transforming love and man's obedience. Two young Christian men stand out in Gram's story because they obediently went to the hospital with God's prophetic Word of healing and asked to pray it over a 'dead man'. They prayed "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth give this man new life." Then the man, Gram Seed, comes to life. They then tell Gram to go on the Alpha Course and in obedience Gram does. Two months later on the Alpha Holy Spirit Weekend Gram fully accepts Christ as his Saviour and is filled with the Spirit. With God's love came the call and Gram was immediately obedient. Gram said at that moment "I know who I was, and knew what I had to do." Out on to the streets of Middlesbrough that night he went to share Jesus Christ and in obedience has continued this ministry for the last 19 years. In contrast we have a story from the Old Testament now. Listen and read along in your bible if you want to.

**Scripture Reading 1 Samuel 15:1-26...** then Hymn Trust & Obey

### **To obey is better than sacrifice, than anything! Why?...**

Picking up from last week's message it has been said that the greatest visible evidence of the fear of God is obedience to God and such Obedience to God is an expression of our love for God. The Word says that God delights in such reverential and loving obedience and not in what we think we can sacrifice or offer him by our own strength and vain imaginations, for, to obey is better than sacrifice, than any thing, we think we can humanly do to worship and honour God with our lives.

The Lord delighted in those two young Christian lads who obediently went to the hospital to pray for the dead man Gram Seed and then direct him once alive to an Alpha Course. And on reception of Jesus Christ as his Saviour and Lord all Gram Seed wanted to do was what he was told- the LORD absolutely delights in such obedience, which was not fully the case in our Bible reading this morning. God delights in Samuel the Israelite prophet's eventual obedience when he goes as directed to confront the one whom he has anointed as Israel's first King, Saul.

It is interesting to note that the aged prophet Samuel was initially angered at God's turn in attitude toward Saul and his reaction is to

cry out to God all night long v.11 for him. His night of prayer, however, results in a firm resolve to do what God says. So he gets up early in the morning to go and meet Saul and finds out v.12 that Saul has gone to Carmel, set up a monument for himself, and has proceeded then to Gilgal where he was first made king (11:15).

So Samuel goes to find and meet Saul, in v.13 Saul speaks first, *"The LORD Bless you! I have carried out the Lord's instructions."* To which Samuel asks (v.14) what the sound of bleating sheep and lowing cattle means if Saul really has destroyed everything the way God said. (v.15) To which Saul is very quick to blame it on the people: *"They have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep."*

But nothing Saul says will work now. He has disobeyed the commandment of the Lord to which he eventually admits to in verse 24 *"I have sinned; I have violated the LORD's command and your instructions."* He gave in to his fear of the people choosing to please them rather than fear and be obedient to God's will.

And it is in the midst of this scathing indictment against King Saul's presumption and arrogance, that the prophet Samuel utters these famous words,

*"To obey is better than sacrifice,  
and to heed is better than the fat of rams."*

This statement does not mean that Sacrifice is unimportant. What it does suggest is that sacrifice is only acceptable when brought with an attitude of obedience and devotion to the Lord.

Saul had been commanded to slay all the Amalekites and their cattle. He was to utterly destroy the lot in obedient reverence to God. Instead of doing so, he had spared King Agag, and allowed his people to take the best of the Amalekite's cattle and sheep. When called to account for this, King Saul declared that he did it with a view of offering sacrifice to God; but Samuel met him at once with the assurance that such sacrifices were no excuse for an act of direct rebellion, and in so doing he altered his sentence, which is worthy to be written down, framed, hung up as a reminder or placed on the screen before the eyes of the present generation: *"To obey is better than sacrifice,  
and to heed is better than the fat of rams."*

Saul had heard the word of the Lord, but thought he had a better idea. He was supposed to destroy the Amalekites, taking no plunder, but instead he made the decision as King of Israel to spare the best of the sheep and cattle “to sacrifice to the Lord.” Now this might seem to us like a noble gesture on Saul’s part, wanting to sacrifice to the Lord... so why does Samuel make such a big deal out of this?

### **Why is obedience so much better than sacrifice?**

...Answer... Sacrifice means independence from God. Sacrifice in this sense is actually an attempt to gain independence from God. If we sacrifice for him, then we have put God in our debt. If we sacrifice for God, he owes us something so we think. Sacrifice is a way of “buying” whatever we want to get from God, which could be in the form of protection, deliverance, provision, or favour, while at the same time remaining independent from him. “God, look at all I’ve done for you! You owe me this, it’s only fair!” we say. We demand our goodies from God, but we retain our right to do what we want with our lives. We just need to make sure we throw a few sacrifices God’s way every once in awhile to keep him at bay. This is the attitude of sacrifice that Saul personified. Sacrifice means independence from God, whereas...

### **Obedience is dependent trust in God**

Obedience is the response of someone who is in a relationship of trust with God. We trust God, we depend on him, we are interactive with him, but it is the Lord who takes the lead. Obedience is better than sacrifice because we are letting God be God and staying in our proper place with him, the place of dependence and surrender to his goodness.

There was a woman who once said to her minister, upon understanding the gospel for the first time,  
 “I know why I want my morality to save me. If I am saved by my good works, then like a taxpayer, I have rights. I’ve paid into the system and God owes me a good and decent life. And there is a limit to what the Father can ask of me. But if I’m saved by sheer grace, then my life belongs entirely to the Father, he owes me nothing and there is no limit to what he can ask of me.”

It’s a theme repeated over and over again throughout Scripture, Two examples are: “For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings” **Hosea 6:6**; &

*To love God with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices. Mark 12:33.*

Therefore, **Obedience is better than sacrifice**

The life of sacrifice is a life of demanding my rights and living as I wish. The life of obedience, though, is a response to God's gracious invitation and is lived as an upward spiral of dependence and intimacy. This is why Jesus did not say, "If you love me, sacrifice for me." Instead, he said, "*Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.*" This kind of obedience as a response to divine love always leads to intimacy and dependence. This is why obedience is better than sacrifice.

A man really wanted to help his son understand the importance of making right choices. So, if his son made a bad decision, he would give him a nail, send him to a post in the back yard, and have him hammer the nail into the post. Whenever he went through the whole day making good decisions, he would let him go out and remove one of those nails.

From about eight years old until about fifteen, there were always 2 or 3 nails in the post. He was nailing them in and pulling them out. But as he matured, finally all the nails were removed. He felt pretty good. Then his dad took him out and said, "I want you to notice something about this post." The boy suddenly realized that all the nail holes in the post were still there. His dad said, "I want to tell you something about bad choices, son. You may be completely forgiven; there are no nails left, but you do have the remaining effects. That post will never be the same again."

Gram seed got to remove all the nails from his post and yet he had to live with his violent past reflected in all the wounds and deformities on his body. Saul on the other hand, even as King, never got to remove all the nails from his post due to his sinful disobedience.

**Disobedience Is the Sin of Divination and Idolatry**

This is what Samuel says in the second half of verse 23:  
*For rebellion is like the sin of divination,  
and arrogance like the evil of idolatry.*

When God says one thing and we consult the little wizard of our own wisdom and then stubbornly choose to go our own way, we are idolaters. We have not only chosen to consult ourselves as an alternative to God, and thus become guilty of divination, but we go beyond that and actually value more highly the direction of our own mind over God's direction and become guilty of idolatry. And worst of all, the idol is our own self. So, it stands to reason that God will be displeased with disobedience because at every point it is an attack on his glory. But obedience, being the exact opposite, in all these things enthrones and honors God. And therefore, God has pleasure in obedience.

To finish:

God loves us unconditionally. I believe that with all my heart. I also believe that there isn't anything we can do to make Him love us more or anything that we can do to make Him love us less.

Obedience therefore is a natural out flowing from a heart that loves unconditionally. It is not possible to love and not obey. Loving God means, we want to please Him, and pleasing God requires obedience. Jesus said, "*If you love Me keep My commandments.*" His commandments are for our benefit. They protect us from heartaches and misery. Obedience is better than sacrifice!