

HONOURING GOD

One major challenge facing the church in our generation, is a change in the way people read Scripture and question the authority of Scripture in regard to different issues. Biblical scholars who try to be faithful to the text, use interpretation principles, where where they allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. We must derive our ethics and applications 'out' of the text (ie 'exegesis'), rather than starting with a particular view, which we then try to read 'into' the text (ie 'eisegesis') to justify our cultural biases, presuppositions and life choices. This week, we look at the topic of '**Honouring God's Words**'. God has given us instructions about the way we should live. Honouring God's words is predicated on us practising radical obedience.

GETTING STARTED: One conflict that Christians have, is whether the requirements of the 'law' books in the Old Testament apply to Christians. We are saved by grace, through faith and Christ has fulfilled the law. Some see that the law is completely redundant and that any requirement to keep commands is 'legalism'. A different way of reading Rom 6, though, is that here, "Paul clarified what Jesus had taught: the Law shows us what God wants (holiness), and grace gives us the desire and power to be holy."¹

- Read the following verses. Why is there such a big emphasis in Scripture, that we need to heed/listen to and obey God's words – and why do you think this is reiterated in Jesus' teaching?

Walk in obedience to all that the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess. (Deut 5:33)

If you do not listen, and if you do not resolve to honour my name," says the LORD Almighty, "I will send a curse on you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have already cursed them, because you have not resolved to honour me. (Mal 2:2)

Jesus replied, "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. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. (John 14:23-24)

READ: GENESIS 2:15-17, 3:1 (Below) JAMES 1:22-25

The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

- Compare these two passages. What are the differences between:
 - How God is identified – by the writer vs by the serpent?
 - What God actually said vs how the serpent bent what God said?
- What was being asked, when the serpent said: "Did God really say ...?" What was the serpent implying about the character and nature of God?

Consider the following quote by the late Rachel Held Evans:

"The truth is, you can bend Scripture to say just about anything you want it to say. You can bend it until it breaks. For those who count the Bible as sacred, interpretation is not a matter of whether to pick and choose, but how to pick and choose. We're all selective. We all wrestle with how to interpret and apply the Bible to our lives. We all go to the text looking for something, and we all have a tendency to find it. So the question we have to ask ourselves is this: are we reading with the prejudice of love, with Christ as our model, or are we reading with the prejudices of judgement and power, self-interest and greed? Are we seeking to enslave or liberate, burden or set free?"²

This writer states that her 'filter' in applying Scripture is based on her image of Christ (and of God), as being all-inclusive, all-loving and non-judgemental of people. In Ex 20, God prohibited the making of images / idols, that replicate the forms of created things and beings, that we then worship. It then goes without saying, that we must not worship a God, that we have shaped into our own desired mental image (including minimising God, to make him fit into our mental 'boxes' of what we think he should be like).

- As a group, brainstorm some of the attributes and actions of God. i.e. What are some names that the Bible uses to describe God? What are some things that the Bible tells us that God does? Which ones do you (personally) feel uncomfortable with and wish that God was not like that?

¹ "Law vs. grace - why is there so much conflict among Christians on the issue?" <https://www.gotquestions.org/law-vs-grace.html>

² Evans, Rachel Held. (2018) *Inspired: Slaying Giants, Walking on Water, and Loving the Bible Again*. Nashville, TX: Thomas Nelson Publishers. <https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/58318491-inspired-slaying-giants-walking-on-water-and-loving-the-bible-again>

READ: 1 SAMUEL 15:1-3, 7-26

Samuel, as a prophet of God, relayed specific instructions from God, to King Saul. In 1 Sam 15, we read that Saul decided to 'use his own discretion' about the extent to which he would obey these instructions. It was one thing to eradicate a nation of pagan Amalekites. However, he thought it would be much better to capture their king as a 'trophy' and rescue their livestock. Saul had figured: Why waste good meat? Some of it could be sacrificed to God, and some of which could be shared around and be eaten.

- What was the instruction that Saul was given in 1 Sam 15:3,18?
- What did Saul claim to have done? (1 Sam 15:13)
- By contrast, what did Saul actually do? What excuse did he give? (1 Sam 15:9,14-15,20-21)
- What does Samuel's response, in 1 Sam 15:19, indicate about Saul's underlying motives?

The words in 1 Sam 15:22-23 are a damning condemnation of Saul's contempt for God's words. Sacrifices were an important part of Israel's worship, but, ultimately, that wasn't the worship that God demanded.

"Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obedience to the voice of the LORD?"

Surely, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.

For rebellion is no less a sin than divination, and stubbornness is like iniquity and idolatry.

Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king."

- Highlight or circle all the words that relate to 'obedience'.
- Highlight or circle the words that relate to 'disobedience'.

Samuel highlights that disobedience is a sin, on the same level as stubbornness and the sin of divination. In OT times, divination involved seeking guidance from spiritual sources other than the God. [Prohibited practices included fortune-telling / reading omens (Lev 19:26), contacting the dead (Deut 18:10-11), consulting astrologers, consulting other 'gods', reading animal livers and reading patterns of arrows].

- Why is rebellion a sin? What was the penalty for rebellion? (Deut 9:23-24, Josh 1:18)
- God has told us (ie given specific guidance/ instructions) as to what he requires of us to live a life that pleases him. In James 2:14-26, we read that "faith without works is dead". The way we live is an indicator of our level of faith. Deut 9:23 links disobedience and rebellion with lack of faith? Why?

In 1 Sam 15:35, we read that Samuel cut his relationship with Saul, as a result of Saul's disobedience. This relational distance between the prophet and the king, reflected the rejection by God of Saul as king, because of his willful sin.

Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death, but Samuel grieved over Saul.

- We all need good Christian friends who are willing to speak truth into our lives and challenge us if we are doing something that dishonours God. Is there ever a place for 'cutting off' a friendship, when a person continues, nonetheless, to engage in behaviour that goes against Scripture?

In 1978, Keith Green penned the following song, based on 1 Sam 15:22-23.

*"To obey is better than sacrifice, I don't need your money, I want your life
And I hear you say that I'm coming back soon, But you act like I'll never return
Well you speak of grace and my love so sweet, How you thrive on milk, but reject My meat
And I can't help weeping of how it will be, If you keep on ignoring My words
Well you pray to prosper and succeed, But your flesh is something I just can't feed
To obey is better than sacrifice, I want more than Sunday and Wednesday nights
Cause if you can't come to Me every day, Then don't bother coming at all
To obey is better than sacrifice, I want hearts of fire, Not your prayers of ice
And I'm coming quickly, To give back to you, According to what you have done ..."³*

- What do you think about the words of this song? What points is Green making?

REFLECT & SHARE: What are the benefits of memorising God's words? Why is this discipline important?

How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Praise be to you, LORD; teach me your decrees. With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth. I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word. (Ps 119:9-16)

³ Green, Keith Gordon. (1978) *To Obey Is Better Than Sacrifice* lyrics © Universal Music Publishing Group
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TzWYzXlwGKl>