

Hacking Agag To Pieces

“Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.”

1 Samuel 15:2-3

Most of us are familiar with the rest of the story which was a pivotal event in the reign of Saul. We know how king Saul set out to obey the Lord but fell short by bringing back the king of the Amalekites and “the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were unwilling to utterly destroy them” (v. 9). Because of Saul’s disobedience, God rejected him from being king (v. 26). He had sinned before this instance at the sacrifice at Gilgal, and proved cowardly later in the battle with Goliath, but God pointed to this episode as the decisive turning point in Saul’s reign (1 Samuel 15:28).

There are many lessons that we can learn from this inspired historical event. First, we learn that God expects complete obedience. Second, we learn that our schemes, derived through human wisdom are futile. Third, we learn that God demands His commands be carried out as given and that our alterations of the Divine way is nothing less than utter foolishness, and a rejection of what God has revealed. Fourth, we learn that even though our actions are motivated by a desire to worship, there is such a thing as perverted worship — true worship is revealed worship (Matthew 15:7-9; John 4:22; Acts 17:30). Finally, we learn that our motives are certainly important, but motive without humble and contrite obedience profits nothing (Matthew 7:21-27; Revelation 22:14).

However there is another personal application that we can make. This account of Saul’s failure to obey God’s command serves as a great illustration of the Christian’s war with sin. The Amalekites were descendants of Esau (Genesis 36:12), and they attacked Israel in the wilderness (Exodus 17; Deuteronomy 25:17-19). They attacked the weakest, most vulnerable Israelites. Because of this, God commanded Saul to utterly destroy them (v. 3). After a promising start (15:7-8), Saul proved disobedient (15:8-9). Samuel then confronted and condemned him (15:10-11, 26). Then, Samuel took matters into his own hands saying, “Bring ye hither to me Agag the king of the Amalekites. And Agag came unto him delicately. And Agag said, Surely the bitterness of death is past. And Samuel said, As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women. And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal” (1 Samuel 15:32-33).

Like as Saul was commanded to utterly destroy the Amalekites, Christians are commanded to put sin to death — completely! Our conversion is really an execution, the old man of sin put to death in baptism (Romans 6:3-7). But baptism does not end our conflict with sin. True enough all past sins are forgiven in baptism when preceded by faith and repentance, but the devil constantly tries to revive sin and ruin us. In fact his efforts are increased. So, God commands us to put sin to death (Romans 8:12-13;

Colossians 3:5-6). Sin must be dealt with ruthlessly and without mercy, just as Saul was to deal with Agag and the Amalekites. But just like Saul, sometimes Christians refuse to put sin to death, giving Agag a reprieve. How does this happen?

First, it happens by denying it (Saul acted as if he had not sinned, “I have performed the commandment of the Lord” — 1 Samuel 15:13). Others take the extra step of attempting to conceal sin. But be sure of this — your sins will find you out! You will reap what you sow! These are principles that cannot be avoided — even if you deny your sins to the point that they disillusion you — you will not avoid the consequences of sin. Confession and repentance is the only way out; do not deny your sins — confess them, knowing that “he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins” (1 John 1:9).

Second, it happens by trying to justify it (Saul attempted to justify his sin by claiming to offer the spoil as a sacrifice — 1 Samuel 15:14-15). The end does not justify the means. In fact, the means must justify themselves. All kinds of things are practiced today under the pretense of “Look at all the good being done.” Was it good for the Israelites to sacrifice to God? And in fact, would not all of these animals from Amalek allow them to sacrifice a lot more? Oh, the futility of human wisdom: “Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams” (v. 22). So they build their fellowship halls and proclaim — look at all the people that we can reach! All the while they reject God’s method and means of calling people into His kingdom (2 Thessalonians 2:14-15). As Paul declares his confidence in the power of the gospel (Romans 1:16), men today declare their lack of it by their schemes and deceptive ploys — “We’ll slip them a little gospel with their chili supper.”

In the realm of unethical and immoral behavior — our society has gone to every extreme to try and justify things that God has clearly pronounced as being wrong. I was listening to a discussion on the radio entitled, “When is it okay to lie?” The first caller called in and stated, “Never — lying is wrong under every circumstance!” “Way to go,” I thought (cp. Colossians 3:9), but as time went on, caller after caller bashed the man for making those initial statements. The commentator finally pronounced that under certain circumstances it was acceptable to lie. His reasons included protecting yourself, saving your job (after all everybody else does it — including people in high political and industrial places), getting ahead (after all everybody else does it — from teenagers in high school to the President of the United States), and because of “habitual liar” disease (after all you can’t help it). But will any of those reasons actually keep someone from the lake that burns with fire and brimstone — the second death (Revelation 21:8)?

The catch phrase today is, “God would not want me to be unhappy,” thus leading to lying, cheating, stealing, adultery, irresponsibility, etc. “I am unhappy in my marriage, so since God would not want me to be unhappy I can divorce,” thus justifying something God says He hates (Malachi 2:16). “I am sexually attracted to the same gender, and since God would not want me to be unhappy, I can practice homosexuality,” thus justifying something God considers an abomination and will not tolerate in Heaven (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

God does want us to be happy, but true happiness can only be found in humble submission and obedience to the Lord (Matthew 5:3-10; Philippians 4:4); true happiness is never found in iniquity. Saul could of been happy if he had only obeyed the Lord, but instead, sorrow upon sorrow, grief and anguish — and most of all being rejected by the Lord. Sin has its price!

Third, it happens by excusing it (Saul attempted to foist blame on the people — 1 Samuel 15:20-21, 34). The blame game is played a lot of ways today: We either point out the sins of others so that we do not look quite so bad, and if we cannot immediately find any — we quickly resort to manufacturing them. Or we literally try to shift the blame to someone else. From the beginning of the human family there has been a tendency to blame family members. Now we are more sophisticated and blame genetics (not just homosexuality now; “Bad temper runs in my family”). We try to point to circumstances to excuse what we have done: “Life has not been fair to me so that is why I ... killed my parents, shot those students, raped the girl across the street, do drugs, am unfaithful to my spouse, am not a good wife/husband/parent.” Could we go on?

This may work in what we call our justice system, or with our parents, and friends at times — but it will not work with God. Accept responsibility — and stop making excuses for not putting sin to death! David sinned as well, but the gigantic difference between him and Saul is that when David sinned, he did not deny, justify, or excuse it, he simply confessed, “I have sinned against the Lord.” That is why he was a man after God’s own heart. We must recognize how horrible sin is to a holy God. How loudly does the cross proclaim the severity and pain of sin? Can we think of Jesus suspended between heaven and earth on that cruel implement of torture, crying out with what little strength he had left, “My God, My God, Why hast thou forsaken me?” And at the same time make light of sin? How can we ignore the precious gift of salvation from sin? How can those who have knowledge of the truth reject the power to defeat the sin in their lives by refusing to be obedient to the gospel of Christ: “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Galatians 6:14)?

Let us learn to do whatever it takes to avoid sin. Romans 13:14 says, “But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.” If your problem is fornication, never put yourself in a position where you are alone with the opposite sex. Or if it is drinking or gambling, do not go anywhere that serves it or that allows you the opportunity to play it. Jesus once told a man who had a problem with covetousness to sell his goods and give to the poor (Matthew 19:16-22). Extreme? Not in comparison to avoiding Hell (Matthew 5:27-30)! Get busy doing what is right. Put on righteousness (Romans 6:12-13). Go on the offensive against sin by committing yourself to good works (Titus 2:14; 3:14).

Agag was cheerful when he thought he was going to be spared. The devil is always happy to have his devices spared because he knows he will have another opportunity to destroy you. Ironic that in 2 Samuel 1:13 an Amalekite claimed credit for killing Saul. Saul’s decision to spare the Amalekites came back to haunt him. This battle between us

and sin will never end, but the key is that we actively engage in combat, not denying our sins but confessing them (1 John 1:8-9). But if you do not commit yourself to merciless combat against sin, some day, like Saul, it will come back to haunt and destroy you.

Adapted from Don McClain