

## **A Lord's Day Snippet!**

### **Biblical And Southern Studies**

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476

1 Oh, that the Lord would guide my ways  
To keep His statutes still!  
Oh, that my God would grant me grace  
To know and do His will!

2 Order my footsteps by Thy Word  
And make my heart sincere;  
Let sin have no dominion, Lord,  
But keep my conscience clear.

3 Assist my soul, too apt to stray,  
A stricter watch to keep;  
And should I e'er forget Thy way,  
Restore Thy wand'ring sheep.

4 Make me to walk in Thy commands--  
'Tis a delightful road--  
Nor let my head or heart or hands  
Offend against my God.

Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

### **Obedience or Ritual?**

**“Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to harken than the fat of rams.”**

1 Samuel 15:22

When we come before our God in work or worship, He must dictate the criteria by which we do so. We are not given *carte blanche* on how this is accomplished. Fallen humanity wants to do things their own way and then compel God to accept it, but that betrays the fact that such people do not know God. They think they are important enough to facilitate worship on their own terms and the god they know acquiesces. However, the God who rules heaven and earth is transcendent and supreme. But the flaw in man was described by the Lord to the Psalmist, “Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee” (50:21). The proper attitude toward our God is, “Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all” (1 Chron. 29:11-12). Fickle mankind needs to know this, God is in control, total control! Bow down!

Our title asked the question: “Obedience or Ritual?” based on the words the Lord gave Samuel for Saul, “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to harken than the fat of rams.” All of this led to the rejection of Saul as king and his fallacies about worship. This brings before us false worship—which is a going through motions. We need to contrast that to real worship—which is obedience to God’s revealed way for us to worship in spirit and in truth.

How did this false worship come about? Jehovah spoke to Samuel about this when He said He repented making Saul king for he forsook the Lord. This concerned Samuel to the point where he cried out to the Lord all night, and the next morning he rose early to confront Saul. He was told that Saul had gone to Carmel to set up for himself a monument. Samuel went after Saul which resulted in his hearing the bleating of sheep and lowing of oxen. Saul told him the best critters were taken from the Amalekites by the people for a sacrifice to the LORD your God. He did not own Jehovah as his God. Samuel replied in essence, “Stop talking, here is what the LORD said.” Saul told him to keep talking and Samuel did, “When you were small in your own eyes you were anointed king over Israel.” The LORD just sent you on a mission to utterly destroy the Amalekites till they were exterminated, so why did you not obey? Why did you plunder them and do evil in Jehovah’s sight? Saul insisted that he had been obedient to the Lord having utterly destroyed the Amalekites but keeping back Agag their king and the people taking the plunder of the best animals to make a sacrifice to the LORD your God.

The preservation of the king and the best animals, when they were to be totally annihilated, was imposed as a ruse of worshipping Jehovah with them. The message of Jehovah through Samuel was, “Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD?” And the answer given was, “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to harken than the fat of rams.” So, what does Jehovah think of what you did? And here was declared, “For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.” What he did was considered by the Lord as from the devil and idolatrous, which actually deserved the death penalty, but was evidence of their lostness. How? “Because thou hast rejected the Word of the LORD, He hath also rejected thee from being king.” Saul confessed that he had sinned in violating Jehovah’s commandment because he feared the people and obeyed their voices. He asked for a pardon based on this lie for he was the king, and the people had no authority to persuade him. Because of this he was rejected as king, and his kingdom was taken from him. Again, Saul repented and “worshipped the LORD.” The kingdom was not restored to him. Samuel did not come to see Saul again until the day of his death. Jehovah regretted having made Saul king.

Rituals were rejected as false worship, and real worship is pictured as obeying the Lord. B. H. Carroll puts this all in perspective, “The doctrine here is not against the use of the God-appointed sacrifices, but it shows that mere external conformity with the law of types as embodied in sacrifices, and the observance of rituals without faith and the spirit of true worship, is as empty as a blasted nut. The doctrine does not undervalue the form of godliness, but it does show the superiority of the power of godliness. The truth lies, not in denying the need of the form, but in relying upon the form only. This doctrine magnifies the thing signified above the sign, and magnifies the spirit above the letter. The tendency of the priesthood—the types and the rituals—throughout the monarchy was a reliance upon mere empty ceremonies.”

C. H. Spurgeon proclaimed, “‘To obey,’ even in the slightest and smallest thing, ‘is better than sacrifice,’ and to hearken diligently to the Lord’s commands is better than the fat of rams.... Ah! God cares nothing for this rams’ fat of yours; He asks not for these sacrifices which you intend to make. ‘To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.’ ... The right way for a Christian to walk in is to do what his Master bids him, leaving all consequences to the Almighty. You have nothing to do with your own usefulness further than to keep your Master’s commands, at all hazards and under all risks. ‘I counsel thee to keep the King’s commandments,’ and ‘whatsoever He saith unto thee, do it.’ Sit at His feet with Mary, and learn of Him, and when thou riseth up from that reverent posture, let it be with the prayer for help.”