

TO OBEY IS BETTER THAN SACRIFICE

The phrase, “to obey is better than sacrifice”, is used in 1 Samuel by a prophet talking to Saul, referring to his disobedience.

1 Samuel 15:22

“And 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.’”

This is an interesting scripture, because it goes against people’s natural tendency to avoid dealing with their sin issues. If a person can make up for their sin habits or rebellion by doing good things, giving more money to the Lord’s kingdom, or getting more involved in church programs, then maybe everything will be OK. However, we cannot get around God’s desire for our hearts to be right towards Him (Matthew 22:37), measured with our outward obedience (John 14:15).

In the New Testament, this is clearly stated in Mark 12 where Jesus and a scribe are having a conversation. Notice it says that love is desired more than sacrifice, but as love equates to obedience (John 14:15), it really says the same thing as 1 Samuel 15:22.

Mark 12:33

“and to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as himself, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

A living example of this principle was King David. In 2 Samuel 6, he decides to bring the ark of the Lord into Jerusalem, which was a good thing. He had the ark loaded on a cart and wheeled it towards Jerusalem with a multitude of instruments playing and much singing, shouting and dancing taking place in the streets – much celebration and praise.

2 Samuel 6:5

“Meanwhile, David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the LORD with all kinds of {instruments made of} fir wood, and with lyres, harps, tambourines, castanets and cymbals.”

However, the cart started to teeter and one man steadied it with his hand; and he was struck dead. David was appalled and was afraid of God that day. However, he soon realized that he had not obeyed the direction of the Lord. The Law of Moses specifically stated that the ark was to be moved only on the shoulders of the priests (not on a cart) – a symbol of man’s effort and works.

The lesson is that God demands obedience over sacrifice – and no matter how much one praises, dances, or gives, it can be for naught in the midst of disobedience.