

Who's Driving?

What do you think? Who's got the wheel? Or who's steering the ship? Who's in control? Our kiddos studied 1 Samuel 9-15 today. In fact, one of you recently spent time in 1 Samuel 15, and you asked yourself these questions: "Do I set up monuments for myself, and how? Do I offer burnt offerings and sacrifices where God hasn't asked me to? Out of fear of the people? Do I overcomplicate what God has asked of me?" You mentioned a struggle with self-reliance. I appreciate their ability to look inward. Remember last week's discussion on Kingdom Character? This is what a true citizen does: look in the mirror. Such a person sees their "blindness," if you will. As the great physician taught, he can heal those who recognize their own problems. But see - there's an interesting statement. Jesus can heal them. How? Who does the healing? Do we do anything? Have we only to stand still? Or should we "go wash in the pool of Siloam"?

We've got to be honest: this can feel like tricky business. Who gives rain to the just and unjust? And how does the earth benefit? Yes, and so all of God's creation grows and produces. Yet, we can see a brother and sister in need of food and clothing. What shall we say? "Go in peace, be warmed and filled." Or, as we'd say, "I'll be praying for you." I understand many times we can't do anything, yet so many times we can. Or to put it another way: Paul planted. Apollos watered. But who gave the increase? It's good to have a plan, but who should be at the center of it? You can have children (by God's design), but who really builds a home? Should the sluggard pray for food, get to work, or do both? You know the answer to it all.

Let's take this another step further. Who saves you?

- Romans 3:20 For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.
- James 2:19-21 You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?
- Titus 3:4-5 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,
- Acts 2:40 And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation."

How will you be saved?

- *You will be saved by grace through faith.* I don't ever want to complicate the matter. We need to revisit the topic periodically. I think we're just needing to "talk it out," if you will. We typically seek to strike a balance (Matthew 23:23), making it clear what we're saying and not saying, and then proceeding. I want to share some practical advice based on my

observations over time. We (and I say "we" because Christians all over the U.S. are experiencing this) have difficulty feeling secure or being humble.

- *What is the purpose of Saul's monument? Do they offer security?* Saul is very proud of his defeat, but did he really think defeat was always without God's help? Will his monument erase his disobedience? What a foolish mistake. God could clearly see around the monument to his monumental sin. What we do is guided by and blessed by God. His way is right and produces good fruit. He is, ultimately, in control and holds all power. We may obey God, but He blesses us in our doing. We are nothing without him. Saul saw the monument as victory, but to God it was a sign of Saul's own defeat. His pride was hard to miss.
- *Is obedience legalism? Did Saul accidentally sin?* Absolutely not to both. Sincere obedience stems from love and reverence towards God. Give me a man without obedience, and you've given me one without faith. Saul knew what he was doing, and he downplayed his actions. We're not trying to discourage obedience or neglecting responsibility. Remember, for example, that if a man won't work, he shouldn't eat. But as we stress all the time, our motivation and faith all center on God's grace. God gave us His Son, so we turn in faith towards Him, and that faith (which is seen in our obedience) is pleasing to God. Be holy as God is holy. See the goodness in holiness. Be converted by God's righteousness. See it as a gift and not a curse.
- *Are you a nervous person?* I'm not talking about humility or a reasonable fear (like Saul hiding from being King). And we should fear God over people, but there's a difference between fear of punishment and reverence. I'm talking about a person who can't seem to find peace in their relationship and service to God. Maybe your parents were naturally nervous. Perhaps they had a misunderstanding of God's word. Perhaps they overemphasized obedience, leading you to think there is no grace in salvation. Nervous Christians make rigid Christians. "I'm just showing reverence towards God" is what we may tell ourselves, but perfect love casts out fear and nervousness. It's made us bold in our faith. We see Him for who He truly is. God is not your father or mother. Your parents may have lacked patience. God doesn't. They may have been irritable. God isn't. They may have focused on the wrong things. God doesn't. They are not consistent. God is. God is not your parents. God is who you wish your parents were. Your God majors in the minor. Your God is not reasonable. Your God is hyper-focused on your performance to the T, with no nuance. There is a straightforward "absolutely right or absolutely wrong" in everything you do. Everything holds the same weight; therefore, you'd better get it just right. The only problem? This isn't God; it doesn't promote obedience out of love, but instead works of the Law out of fear. There's no relationship in that. If you're like me, it's not the pointing out what God expects that pierces my heart. Is holding a mirror so I can see who I am that helps me change. And brethren, we can change. Ezekiel 18:31 encouraged God's people make new hearts and spirits for themselves. That's true. We should be praying about it, because God also said He would give them a new heart and spirit (Ezekiel 11:19; 36:26-27).