

**“Through the Bible in a Year with Pastor Don and the FBC Family”
July 8, 2016**

1 Samuel 15:1–35. God’s repudiation of King Saul.

James 3:13–18. The ugly evil and disorder of narcissism.

Psalms 119:121–136. The surety of God.

COMMENTS:

1 Samuel 15:1–35. This is a pivotal chapter in the story of Saul. The Lord gave him another opportunity to actualize virtue in his life, but he failed again, lied about it, and was judged. Saul developed his evil character by habitually substituting saying for doing and making excuses instead of recognizing his habitual sinful mindset for what it was. No matter what happened, it was always somebody else’s fault. He was more concerned about *looking good* before the people than *being good* (spiritual virtue) before God. Consider five stages in this chapter that cost Saul the kingdom and eventually his life: **(1) Saul’s disobedience of God (15:1-11).** As a Realist, it is easy to spot the statement in verse **11** that the Lord “repented” as a figure of speech and as such is not in contradiction to verse **29** which says that God does not repent. We understand the simplicity of God and that when the Bible speaks about the Lord “changing His mind” or “repenting,” it is using human language to describe *appearances*. God knows the future, including all future responses to His commands, and God is never at a loss to know what to do. From the human point of view, God seemed to change His mind (just as when He judges as it looks like He is angry, but God is never angry; He does not lose control, get upset, or throw temper tantrums!). God is always true to His nature and consistent with Himself. Nothing catches Him by surprise. In sum, this is language of accommodation. God had given Saul another chance and he had failed miserably. No wonder his mentor Samuel was angry and brokenhearted. Saul was God’s choice for king and Samuel wanted him to succeed. In the end, Saul’s failure to exterminate all the Amalekites resulted in his own death (2 Sam. 1:1–10). **(2) Saul lies to Samuel (15:12-15).** Saul’s greeting was sheer hypocrisy. He had no blessings to give Samuel and he had not performed the will of the Lord. First he lied to himself in thinking he could get away with the deception, and then he lied to Samuel who already knew the truth. He even tried to lie to God by saying he would use the spared animals for sacrifices! Saul blamed the soldiers for sparing the spoils, but surely as their commander-in-chief, he could have controlled them. “They” spared the best, but “we” utterly destroyed the rest! With Saul, it was always somebody else’s fault. It is wicked to blame others for one’s own shortcomings. **(3) Saul argues with Samuel (1 Sam. 15:16-23).** Saul had once been a modest young man (9:21), but now for the second time he had willfully disobeyed the Lord’s will and even erected a monument in honor of the event. He was to annihilate a nation that for centuries had done evil, but he ended up doing evil himself. Confronted with this accusation, Saul began to argue with God’s servant and deny that he had done wrong. For the second time he lied when he said, “I have obeyed” (**15:13, 20**); for the second time he blamed his army (**15, 21**); and for the second time he used the feeble excuse of dedicating the spared animals as sacrifices for the Lord (**15, 21**). The prophet rejected all three lies and explained why God couldn’t accept the animals as legitimate sacrifices: the Lord wants living obedience from the heart, not dead animals on the altar. God doesn’t need or want man’s meaningless offerings/bribes (Ps. 50:7–15), and the sacrifice He desires is a broken

and contrite heart (Psa. 51:16–17). **(4) Saul is rejected by God (1 Sam. 15:24–29).** King Saul now moves from “I have obeyed the voice of the Lord” (15:20) to “I have sinned” (24). However, this was not a true expression of biblical confession, it was but lip service, which may work in a conduit “spiritual” system, but not in realism and virtue building. Note how he later added said, “*Honor me now ... before the elders of my people.*” Other examples of superficial, trite confessions include Pharaoh who twice said “I have sinned” (Ex. 9:27; 10:16), but his words were also empty: As soon as the situation improved in Egypt, he went right back to opposing Moses and God—there was no change. Balaam also said, “I have sinned” (Num. 22:34) but continued to be an enemy of Israel. Contrast this with the realism of David in Psalm 32 and 51, which is anything but mechanical meaningless reciting of sins from some *conduit list*. **(5) Saul is rejected by Samuel (15:30-35).** Why Samuel changed his mind and decided to worship with Saul is puzzling, but the prophet’s actions after that left no doubt where Samuel stood with reference to the king. Samuel publicly butchered King Agag and in that way let it be known that the king had failed to fulfill his commission. When the kingdom was introduced in Israel, Samuel was replaced by a leader who was inferior to him in every way. Samuel did his best to advise the king and strengthen the kingdom, but Saul insisted on having his own way, which is the essence of all sin. Each time Saul was assigned a task, he failed, and when he was confronted, he lied and blamed others. When Israel experienced victories, it was usually Jonathan who led the way. It was a difficult time for Samuel, but God was still in control and had His true king waiting to be anointed. King Saul had lost his dynasty, his character, and his throne and crown. He had also lost a godly friend. When David appears on the scene, Saul will lose his self-control and his good sense, and eventually he will lose his last battle—and his life. What a great start (he even had the added benefit of supernatural ministry of the Holy Spirit) only to end in total disgrace and failure. The root problem comes down to vice, which destroys the believer’s ability to think rightly, wish rightly, and feel rightly. With every act of disobedience, the believer actualizes more vice in his life, and apart from reversing the trend by actualizing the good, virtue, he will be a dirty vessel that the Lord can no longer use for “honor”: 2 Timothy 2:20 *But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor.* ²¹ *Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.* What kind of vessel are you becoming daily?

James 3:13–18. Note the connection between virtue and works in verse **13**. Also note that true wisdom is always marked by meekness and compliance before the Lord. It is impossible to be wise and arrogant; no matter how much one may know in a certain area, he does not really understand reality as such and his place in it. Note the result of envy and self-seeking: lying against truth (**3:14**). The more arrogant a person is, the more narcissistic, the more they will oppose truth. Note other results of narcissism in verse **16**: confusion and evil deeds. Note how the contrasting characteristics of wisdom from above are free from the contamination of egotism and selfishness and evil in **3:17-18** *But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.* What a beautiful list of virtues! The point is obvious: those who live in divine wisdom live in peace with their circumstances, regardless of how challenging they are, and therefore can enjoy the good/blessed life. It is the arrogant, regardless of their brilliance, that are always living in discord and possessing anything but a compliant spirit before the Lord. If you find yourself complaining a lot, you are only demonstrating arrogance in your own soul and lack of virtue, lack of power of goodness to overcome evil of your difficult circumstances. You cannot live the good life in this evil world without power for goodness, which just is spiritual virtue.

Psalms 119:121–136. The first section (**121-136**) of this alphabetic acrostic psalm is *Ayin* (א). The theme is assurance in God: the Lord is rewarder (**121**), a surety (**122**), Master (**123-125**), an final Judge (**126-128**). In the second section, the *Pe* (פ) section of this reading (**129-136**), there is a chain reaction of thoughts and feelings. This section begins with the wonder of God's Word and ends with the weeping of the writer because the arrogant disobey the Word. Just as love and hate (**127–128**) and joy and affliction can exist in the same heart (**111, 107**), so can awe and anguish. We see the same mixed experiences in the Lord Jesus Christ and in believers of the New Testament (1 Pet. 1:6-8). The conflict of thoughts and feelings do not replace each other, they are just different aspects due to different objects. One most certainly can have joy in the Lord and at the same time sorrow at the state of our country; moreover, not to have both of these thoughts and feelings would indicate false views of God and/or modern America.

Romans 11:36 For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

Pastor Don