

1 Samuel 15:22

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Samuel said, 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.

Analysis

And Samuel said, 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.

Samuel's response contains one of Scripture's most important theological declarations: '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.' This is not rejection of sacrifice (which God commanded) but rejection of sacrifice as substitute for obedience. The Hebrew *to* ('better') establishes priority: obedience comes first; sacrifice follows from obedient hearts. Religious ritual cannot compensate for fundamental disobedience.

Historical Context

This principle echoes throughout prophetic literature (Isaiah 1:11-17; Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8; Amos 5:21-24). The prophets consistently taught that cultic activity divorced from covenant faithfulness was worthless. Samuel establishes the pattern later prophets would develop.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. What religious activities do you rely on that might substitute for fundamental obedience?
2. How does 'to obey is better than sacrifice' apply to contemporary worship and service?

Interlinear Text

וַיֹּאמֶר	לְשִׁמוּאֵל	כִּי פֶזַח	יְהוָה	בְּעֹלֹת	וְזֶבַח
said	And Samuel	as great delight	Hath the LORD	in burnt offerings	and sacrifices
H559	H8050	H2656	H3068	H5930	
וּבָחַ	שְׁמֹעַ	בְּקוֹל	יְהוָה	הִנֵּה	שְׁמֹעַ
and sacrifices	Behold to obey	the voice	Hath the LORD	H2009	Behold to obey
H2077	H8085	H6963	H3068		H8085
וּבָחַ	טוֹב	לְהִקְשֹׁב	מִחֵלֶב	אֵילִים:	
and sacrifices	is better	and to hearken	than the fat	of rams	
H2077	H2896	H7181	H2459	H352	

Additional Cross-References

Hosea 6:6 (Sacrifice): For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

Proverbs 21:3 (Sacrifice): To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.

Mark 12:33 (Sacrifice): And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

Matthew 9:13 (Sacrifice): But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Ecclesiastes 5:1 (Sacrifice): Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil.

Matthew 12:7 (Sacrifice): But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.

Matthew 23:23 (Parallel theme): Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

Matthew 5:24 (Sacrifice): Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

Jeremiah 26:13 (References Lord): Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the LORD your God; and the LORD will repent him of the evil that he hath pronounced against you.

Exodus 19:5 (Parallel theme): Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: