

“The Fall of Saul, Part 3: Sin Regarding the World”

1 Samuel 15

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Faith Presbyterian Church – Evening Service

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Our text this evening is from First Samuel, chapter fifteen.

To give a brief refresher and recap, Saul was selected as the king of Israel, and has served as Israel’s king, but over the past chapters he has been taking one step after another to turn away from the Lord.

In chapter thirteen Saul was given a direct command from the prophet Samuel not to sacrifice to God, to Yahweh, until Samuel had arrived. And instead of listening to the word of the Lord, Saul took things into his own hands, performing the offerings without Samuel, and then, when he was confronted, he refused to repent and ask for forgiveness.

Saul’s first sin is directly against God and his word.

Then, in chapter fourteen we saw how Saul’s sin against God began to move outwards to sin against God’s people. He sinned against his soldiers by placing an undue burden on them, and then he sinned against Jonathan, his son, sentencing him to death for breaking an oath that Jonathan had not even known about. Saul is beginning to reveal himself as a selfish tyrant in regard to God’s people.

His sin began directed at God, it grew outwards into sin regarding God’s people, and in tonight’s chapter it will grow further into sin regarding the world. From God, to God’s people, to the world.

Throughout each stage though, a consistent theme will be Saul’s failure, his refusal really, to listen to God’s word.

Now – our text begins with a command from God that will be alarming to some of you. You’ll have questions.

So, let me say ahead of time that we are doing two things tonight ... which is not usually recommended in homiletics ... but I couldn’t think of a better way to do it this week. The proper interpretation of the command is not really the focus of our text ... but we can’t really get to the focus of our text until we deal with the proper interpretation of that command. So, we’ll just have to do both.

When we hear God’s command regarding the Amalekites, a number of questions are going to rush onto the field. And so, our first task will be to clear the field again by addressing those questions. And then, once that is done, we will turn our attention positively to what this text tells us about Saul, and therefore what it has to say to you and me.

So, when questions emerge as we read the text, I’d urge you to hold onto them, put a pin in them, and try to be attentive to the rest of the passage. And we will address those questions shortly.

With all that in mind, we turn now to First Samuel fifteen. Please do listen carefully, for this is God’s word for us this evening:

^{15:1}And Samuel said to Saul, “Yahweh sent me to anoint you king over his people Israel; now therefore listen to the words of Yahweh. ² Thus says Yahweh of hosts, ‘I have noted what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way when they came up out of Egypt. ³ Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.’”

⁴ So Saul summoned the people and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand men on foot, and ten thousand men of Judah. ⁵ And Saul came to the city of Amalek and lay in wait in the valley. ⁶ Then Saul said to the Kenites, “Go, depart; go down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them. For you showed kindness to all the people of Israel when they came up out of Egypt.” So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites. ⁷ And Saul defeated the Amalekites from Havilah as far as Shur, which is east of Egypt. ⁸ And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive and devoted to destruction all the people with the edge of the sword. ⁹ But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fattened calves and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them. All that was despised and worthless they devoted to destruction.

¹⁰ The word of Yahweh came to Samuel: ¹¹ “I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments.” And Samuel was angry, and he cried to Yahweh all night. ¹² And Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning. And it was told Samuel, “Saul came to Carmel, and behold, he set up a monument for himself and turned and passed on and went down to Gilgal.” ¹³ And Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, “Blessed be you to Yahweh. I have performed the commandment of Yahweh.” ¹⁴ And Samuel said, “What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear?” ¹⁵ Saul said, “They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen to sacrifice to Yahweh your God, and the rest we have devoted to destruction.” ¹⁶ Then Samuel said to Saul, “Stop! I will tell you what Yahweh said to me this night.” And he said to him, “Speak.”

¹⁷ And Samuel said, “Though you are little in your own eyes, are you not the head of the tribes of Israel? Yahweh anointed you king over Israel. ¹⁸ And Yahweh sent you on a mission and said, ‘Go, devote to destruction the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.’ ¹⁹ Why then did you not obey the voice of Yahweh? Why did you pounce on the spoil and do what was evil in the sight of Yahweh?” ²⁰ And Saul said to Samuel, “I have obeyed the voice of Yahweh. I have gone on the mission on which Yahweh sent me. I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have devoted the Amalekites to destruction. ²¹ But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to Yahweh your God in Gilgal.” ²² And Samuel said,

“Has Yahweh as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,
as in obeying the voice of Yahweh?
Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,
and to listen than the fat of rams.

²³ For rebellion is as the sin of divination,
and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry.
Because you have rejected the word of Yahweh,
he has also rejected you from being king.”

²⁴ Saul said to Samuel, “I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of Yahweh and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice. ²⁵ Now therefore, please pardon my sin and return with me that I may bow before Yahweh.” ²⁶ And Samuel said to Saul, “I will not return with you. For you have rejected the word of Yahweh, and Yahweh has rejected you from being king over Israel.” ²⁷ As Samuel turned to go away, Saul seized the skirt of his robe, and it tore. ²⁸ And Samuel said to him, “Yahweh has torn the kingdom of Israel from you

this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you. ²⁹ And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret.” ³⁰ Then he said, “I have sinned; yet honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may bow before Yahweh your God.”³¹ So Samuel turned back after Saul, and Saul bowed before Yahweh.

³² Then Samuel said, “Bring here to me Agag the king of the Amalekites.” And Agag came to him cheerfully. Agag said, “Surely the bitterness of death is past.” ³³ And Samuel said, “As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women.” And Samuel hacked Agag to pieces before Yahweh in Gilgal.

³⁴ Then Samuel went to Ramah, and Saul went up to his house in Gibeah of Saul. ³⁵ And Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death, but Samuel grieved over Saul. And Yahweh regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Let’s pray ...

Lord, your testimonies are wonderful;
therefore our souls cling to them.
The unfolding of your words gives light;
it imparts understanding to the simple.
Therefore we long for your word
and your commandments.
Turn to us now and be gracious to us,
as is your way with those who love your name.
Keep our steps steady according to your promise,
and let no iniquity have dominion over us.
Redeem us from the oppression of the world,
that we may keep your precepts.
Make your face to shine upon us, your servants,
and teach us your statutes.
Grant all of this, we ask, for Jesus’s sake. Amen.
[Based on Psalm 119:129-135]

So, the question that jumps off the page and troubles most modern people comes in verse three. But before we even get there, we need to consider verses one and two.

In verse one, God, through Samuel, calls on Saul to fulfill his duty to serve as Yahweh’s king. And that initial call is important. God is calling on Saul here not to act on Saul’s behalf, or even on Israel’s behalf. But God is calling on Saul to act as his, as Yahweh’s representative, and to act as Yahweh’s instrument on Yahweh’s behalf. That is important, and we will come back to that.

Then, in verse two God recounts the sin that the Amalekites committed. What was that sin? In Exodus seventeen we read of how Amalek came out and attacked Israel, without provocation. It was a difficult battle. By Yahweh’s help Israel prevailed, though not without some losses. And after the battle Yahweh declared to Moses his judgment, he said: “I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.” Since this people have done this to Israel, to God’s people, God declares that he will judge them, and blot them out. That is what verse two of our text refers to.

And then we get to verse three, and we read Samuel, the prophet of the Lord saying to Saul: “Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.”

And we ask: What is going on with that? This sounds like an approach to one’s enemies that we would decry. This sounds, some would say, like the kind of horrors that ISIS performs. This sounds like the shedding of innocent infants that we fight against in our own culture. How could God call on Saul to do this?

To answer those questions, we need to back up and be very careful and intentional in how we interpret this verse, and verses like it in general.

Because this is not the only place where commands like this come up. Most famously, similar commands appear in how Israel was to deal with the Canaanites, earlier in the Old Testament. So, what is going on with these verses?

To answer that question, I am drawing heavily from a book by Paul Copan, titled *Is God a Moral Monster?: Making Sense of the Old Testament God*. This book addresses a number of topics that trouble people about God in the Old Testament, and among them it deals with commands like this one. This topic in particular is discussed over three chapters, or about forty pages. So, it handles in forty pages what I’m going to try to handle in under fifteen minutes – so if you’d like to dig deeper into this question, or others like it, I’d recommend taking a look at Paul Copan’s book. [Capon, 158-197 is drawn from in what follows.]

Copan helpfully points out a number of things, which I will handle as a sort-of list, and which, when brought together give us a fuller picture of what is going on here.

First, the call to wage war with the goal of total destruction, signified by the Hebrew word *herem*, was limited to a specific period of redemptive history. It is only invoked in relation to the conquest of Canaan. It’s important to remember that while the substance of God’s work and the covenant of grace is *consistent* throughout the history of God’s work in the world, we see also in the Bible that some elements and means of how God works from one period of redemptive history to another can vary quite a bit. One of those is this call to *herem* warfare. It is limited to a specific period of redemptive history.

Second, *herem* warfare is limited to a specific people. Israel was not normally to wage *herem*-style war. It was not the typical way Israel waged war. It was an approach that was only permitted against enemies of God’s people whom God specified. Different rules applied to the more conventional wars Israel engaged in throughout its history.

Third, the method of *herem*-style warfare was limited to direct divine decision and commands and was in effect an act of God. No human was ever allowed to make the decision that Israel would carry out a *herem* form of attack. Only God was able to make such a call, and in those instances, it was God who was bringing judgment on a people and Israel was merely his instrument. This is why we noted in verse one that God stresses Saul’s role as God’s king. Saul was not to carry out *herem* warfare as an individual or even as Israel’s political leader. He had no right to do that. The only calling he could have for that was as God’s representative, and therefore at God’s direction. And that is the role that is invoked in the first verse.

The fact that God was the only one who could direct such an attack is key. It reminds us that God gives life and God has the right to take it away. He does just that every day – in his sovereignty throughout the world, God gives life and he takes it away. What makes *herem* warfare unique is that God directs someone to carry that out on his behalf – he uses a different means than normal, but the underlying concept is the same.

Along similar lines, God is a God who brings judgment on people. He has a right to judge his creatures. And he does. He does it in this life and he does it in the next. Again, the unique feature of *herem* warfare is the directive and revealed use of other people in that process.

So, third, *herem* warfare was limited to direct divine decision and commands and was therefore an act of God's sovereignty and justice.

Fourth, *herem* warfare was often directed at military installations. We see this, for instance, in the more famous incidents in the book of Joshua. Given all that we know about Canaan in general, and from archeological evidence in particular, Copan and others conclude that places like Jericho and Ai were military strongholds. In fact, there is no archeological evidence of civilian populations at Jericho or Ai. And similarly, David Firth argues that the City of Amalek described here in First Samuel was probably a fortified or semi-permanent military encampment. In other words, what's being described here and in those other cases are strikes on military strongholds, not attacks on cities and towns filled with non-combatants.

And that claim should raise some questions in light of the wording of verse three of our text, which leads us to our *fifth* point regarding this verse, that the language used to describe *herem* warfare was not as extreme or thorough as it sounds to us today. And we learn this from both the study of Ancient Near-East rhetoric and the Bible itself.

First, as our knowledge of Ancient Near-East warfare rhetoric has improved, we've learned that language along the lines of "we killed everyone" was not meant to be taken literally, and the original readers of such claims would not have taken them literally. This was simply how people talked about warfare in the Ancient Near-East. It wasn't a lie because everyone knew these were phrases meant to indicate a decisive military defeat, and that they were generally not meant to indicate the actual extermination of everyone. So, we have many examples of kings in the Ancient Near-East recording how they killed everyone in a certain place ... and we know from other evidence that they did not. This was the common idiom of their time and place.

And the Bible shows us the same thing. So: in Joshua 11:21-22 we read that "Joshua came at that time and cut off the Anakim from the hill country. [...] Joshua devoted them to destruction" – that's that Hebrew word *herem* – he "devoted them to destruction with their cities. There was none of the Anakim left in the land of these people of Israel. Only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod did some remain." But then if we move a few chapters later, in chapters fourteen and fifteen, Caleb asks for permission to drive the Anakites out of the hill country! What is going on here? Was the narrator lying in chapter eleven? Is the book the result of different contradictory texts being sloppily pasted together? No! The language of Joshua eleven indicated a decisive defeat, not a total extermination in the region – and the original readers knew that. No one read it as saying that they had actually killed everyone.

And the same thing happens with the Amalekites in our text. A wooden reading of this chapter would lead us to believe that no more Amalekites must exist. But the Book of Samuel itself denies that reading. In chapter 27 of First Samuel we find David fighting the Amalekites. They show up

again in chapter thirty. They show up 250 years later under the reign of King Hezekiah in First Chronicles chapter four. And they show up *again* two hundred years after Hezekiah in Esther chapter three. The author of First Samuel clearly did not mean to communicate that everyone was actually killed, and other Old Testament authors did not read him that way.

Old Testament scholar Richard Hess has written about this topic in more detail, and he argues that the *herem* warfare described in the Old Testament was warfare targeted at the destruction of political leaders and their armies rather than noncombatants. The inclusion of women, children, and infants in a few of the texts, like First Samuel fifteen, is not meant to be a list of the types of people killed, but these were merely stereotypical phrases used to describe all the inhabitants of a location. And so, when an original reader in the Ancient Near-East read accounts like this, they would not have assumed anything about the actual ages or genders of those who were there. That's why such phrases could be used to describe a military installation – not because they expected to find women, children, or infants in a military encampment in the Ancient Near-East, but because the phrase just meant “everyone there” – and in this case it meant all the political leaders and warriors. [Capon, 175]

Now, I think there are two kinds of people who have trouble with this kind of argument. The first are skeptics who think that the Bible must be more violent than that and that this argument is just an attempt to wiggle out of that fact. The second are Christians who take a more fundamentalist reading of the text and who suspect these arguments are just a reflection of an unwillingness to accept the hard realities of what the text obviously says.

And I want to dwell a bit longer on this, because this is an important point on *how* we are to read the Bible.

Our calling when we read anything is to cooperate with the author – to understand what the author really meant by what they said. Words do not just exist in a vacuum, and so they cannot be interpreted in a vacuum. Words are always found in relationship between people. An author writes for an audience. And the way we are good readers is that we seek to understand what the original author *meant*, and we do this in part by reading his words in the context of what he would have expected the original audience to have understood by his words. That includes reading idioms and rhetorical devices as idioms and rhetorical devices, and not insisting on reading them in a wooden way that would have been foreign to the original author or audience.

Think of it like this: Imagine that three-thousand years from now archeologists uncovered a high-school football player's smartphone. And most of the data is unreadable, but they were able to retrieve a short video that the student had recorded of his football coach giving a pep talk to his players in the locker room during half-time at one of their games.

And in that video the coach says “Look, you guys can win this game, and I think you can win it by a lot. I want you to really wipe the floor with these guys. I want you to hit them hard, smack them around, knock the snot out of them. I want you to go out there and crush them – alright!?”

And these archeologists three thousand years in the future get together and begin to write a paper. And they say, “Wow, sports in the 21st century were brutal. Apparently, it was typical in a high school football game for the winners to drag their opponents back and forth over the ground in a wiping motion. They would smack them in the face to humiliate them. They would hit them until their noses were completely depleted of mucus, and then they would crush them to death – and they did this all while the players' parents watched!”

The researchers, of course, would be missing a lot by interpreting the words that way. And if someone else suggested that these phrases were not meant to be taken literally, *they* would be the better interpreters. The most literal interpreter is not always the truest. What matters is what the original author meant and what the original audience was expected to hear.

That is in many ways what we have here.

So, taken altogether, what is going on in verse three?

In this unique time in redemptive history, God (and God only) has declared judgment specifically on the Amalekites, and he has called on Israel to carry that out. The form of the judgment is an attack on a military stronghold in which the political leaders and the warriors are to be decisively beat and killed. And since this is a divine action, it is not something that Israel or Saul are to profit from personally, and so the livestock there are to be immediately destroyed and devoted to God, and not taken for the Israelites themselves. That is what God calls Saul and Israel to in verse three.

Now ... maybe you still have issues with God issuing a command like that. If so, stay tuned, because that will be relevant to the point that this text as a whole has for us.

And now that we have addressed that initial hurdle of the *herem* warfare called for in verse three, what does this text tell us about Saul, and what does it have to say to you and to me?

Our text tonight points us to the fact that like Saul, we too often wage war as the world does, and not as our God calls us to.

We too often wage war as the world does, and not as our God has called us to.

This shouldn't have to be said, but to make sure we are perfectly clear, *we* are not called to *herem* warfare the same way Saul or Joshua were.

But the Bible is still very clear that we are called to spiritual warfare.

In Philippians 2:25 and Philemon 1:2 the Apostle Paul refers to those who serve alongside him as "fellow soldiers." In Second Timothy 2 Paul urges Timothy to be a good "soldier of Christ" and in First Timothy 1:18 he calls on him to "wage the good warfare." In Ephesians 6 he talks about the need for Christians to put on the full "armor of God."

What does Paul mean by all this? Well he tells us in Second Corinthians 10:3-5 – there he says: "3 For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. 4 For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. 5 We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,"

The spiritual warfare we are called to in the world, the warfare that Paul's fellow ministers were called to, and which requires the full armor of God is one that fights all that stands in the way of the knowledge of God in this world.

And how do we fight that war with the unbelieving world? Well the Bible both tells and shows us a lot regarding this, but a good summary may be found in Ephesians 4 – it is fought, more often

than not, by “speaking the truth in love.” It is fought in accordance with God’s directions for us to proclaim the gospel both by our declarations of the truth and our sacrificial love for others.

That is what God calls his people to. That is the kind of spiritual warfare we see Christ live out, that we see in the life of Paul, and which we too are meant to participate in.

But instead, we often wage war as the world does.

There are a lot of ways we might do this. But two of the more popular ways to wage spiritual and cultural wars in the world right now are to try to discard one of the two elements of speaking the truth in love.

So, on the one end we have those who see themselves as bold proclaimers of the truth and who discard the idea of loving your opponents as weak or sentimental. This is the person who sees themselves as a truth warrior. They come out guns blazing. They seem to enjoy dropping bombs into conversations and posting things online in the hopes it will upset and distress people. Their goal is provocation, and not the good of others.

This is how an increasing number of non-Christians in our society fight their culture war with other non-Christians in our society. It is culture and spiritual war as the world fights it. And at least as I overhear conversations and especially as I watch my social media newsfeed, it is a worldly form of warfare that an increasing number of Christians have decided to adopt.

A second popular form of cultural and spiritual warfare in our society is the one that downplays truth and plays up a certain conception of love. This is a view that says that to love someone, we have to accept their views on life, the universe, and everything, and that no one has the right to proclaim a truth or a way of life that is binding on anyone but themselves. This view approaches the world by embracing inclusion and sensitivity to such an extent that it makes peace with things that God has *not* made peace with.

It is how many non-Christians approach other people in this world, and an increasing number of Christians have embraced this approach as well.

Both are worldly ways of approaching the world.

And that is relevant to our text because that is what we see Saul doing as well.

Saul was called to confront the Amalekites one way, but he approached them another way. He approached them in a worldly way. He approached them as any pagan army in his day would have approached them. And he approached them in a way that was fundamentally self-serving.

He approached them in a way aimed at seeing what *he* could gain. Saul approached the war with the Amalekites as a way of enriching himself.

This comes out most obviously with the livestock. The herds of the Amalekites were to be devoted solely to Yahweh, but in verse nine we read that Saul and Israel devoted to God the livestock that was “despised and worthless” but kept the good livestock for themselves. Later on, after being confronted, Saul claims in verse fifteen that his intention was to eventually sacrifice these animals to Yahweh ... but even there Saul makes a clever change. Saul was supposed to dedicate all the livestock completely to God. But when he tells of his revised plans to sacrifice them in verse

fifteen, he uses a Hebrew word that usually indicates the kind of sacrifice known as a peace offering – this was a sacrifice in which the animal was offered to God, but then those bringing the sacrifice were still able to eat and enjoy the meat of the animal. This is quite different from the devotion God had called for, where the whole animal was to be offered to God alone. [Leithart, 95; Firth, 175]

As for Agag, we are not told explicitly why Saul spared him. It may have been to increase his image by having a king as his prisoner. More interestingly, one commentator suggests it may have been because Saul hoped to extract money or something else from Agag in exchange for his release [Alter, 89].

In any case, what we see in this chapter is that Saul adopts a worldly approach to war, and he does it for self-serving reasons.

And in the same way, when we adopt a worldly way of relating to the world around us, we too do it for self-serving reasons.

The truth warrior who mocks and provokes others might like to talk about all the persecution they are receiving for their boldness, but they are neither bold nor sacrificial. It is usually clear to others that they enjoy the hostile responses they provoke, and they enjoy even more the praise they receive from others in their political tribe. They do not do what they do for God but for themselves.

Now if you cornered a Christian who acts this way and pressed them, they might pull out a number of arguments about how their motives and methods really are right. They might make the kind of arguments that Saul does in our passage. But God knows the heart ... and many other people can see it too.

On the other end, those who embrace the world and refuse to challenge its ways might portray themselves as compassionate and sacrificial, but again we can often see self-serving motives just under the surface. Affirming the ways of the world doesn't cost much, and it comes with many benefits. And again, Christians who do this might have many arguments to defend themselves ... but as with Saul, God knows the heart.

Here is the question for us: When you interact with the non-Christian world, which of these approaches most tempt you? Are you more tempted to blast those who disagree with you or to affirm or endorse things that God has denied? Or maybe it's another option. Maybe you wall yourself off and ignore the world. Either way, what worldly approach are you tempted towards?

In any case, you need to recognize two things. First, that like Saul, your worldly approach to the world is ultimately self-serving. And second, that none of those worldly options look much like Jesus.

Jesus, who ate with tax collectors and sinners, doesn't look much like the harsh, insulting truth warrior. He also doesn't look like the feckless affirmer-of-all-things, as we see him proclaim the truth regardless of what it costs him. And he certainly did not wall himself off from the world. In Jesus, in word and deed, we see the truth proclaimed in love. That's what he did for those around him. That's what he did for us.

And that is the form of spiritual warfare we are called to as well.

It's a costly form of warfare. We don't seem to gain much by it personally. That was, after all, what made *herem* warfare tough for Saul – no personal gain to show for it. It was a sacrificial war, in that sense, fought for Yahweh's purposes and not one's own gain. *And so, it is with Christian spiritual warfare. Usually, if you're doing it right, it will cost you something.*

But along with that, it is also a transforming form of warfare. Worldly warfare leaves so much unchanged. It might change who has their hands on the levers of power, but at the end of the day the world can feel like a self-serving war of all against all, with each working for their own gain.

Those who promote affirmation of all choices intentionally leave the world unchanged. And those who brashly provoke others change few minds or hearts.

But Christian spiritual warfare refuses to let the world stay as it is. Its aim is to devote *everything* to God.

There *is* a striking parallel there between *herem* warfare and Christian spiritual warfare. Because Christian spiritual warfare also aims to destroy what is. Conversion, in the Bible's view, is always a death. The old man is put to death when a person comes to Christ. They are slain, and they are reborn as a new creation.

The world wants to obliterate or pacify or simply ignore its enemies. God calls his people to work for spiritual death and resurrection – God calls his people to work for the total devotion of others to God through conversion.

Why are we not as committed to this as we should be?

The issue for Saul was that he failed to listen to God's word. As with the previous chapters, that is what is at the heart of Saul's failure once more. And it is often at the heart of our failures as well.

And if that is the root of the failure, then that should be the root of the solution as well.

Do you want to learn how to do this better? Do you want to stop waging war after the image of the world, and instead wage it according to God's calling? Immerse yourself in the word of God and work hard at taking it in.

Watch how Jesus relates to others, and let his ways sink into your heart. Watch how Paul relates to others and compare his patterns with yours. Listen to the *whole* range of commands that the Bible gives us regarding how we relate to the world and ask yourself what living in obedience to them would look like.

Saul waged war in the same patterns that the world around him did, and he did it by ignoring the word of God and caring more about his own personal gain.

Let us be people who wage our spiritual war according to Christ's spirit, listening to the word of God and caring most for the good of his kingdom.

Let us be people not anxious to pounce on the spoils of world for our own benefit, but people who are anxious to offer everything in this world up to God.

Let us be people who long to take every thought, every argument, and every person, captive, not for ourselves – but for devotion to Christ.

Amen.

This sermon draws on material from:

- Alter, Robert. *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999.
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