

Follow Through – 1 Samuel 15

I. INTRODUCTION – Reading: Romans 8:1-8

A. *The Importance of Following Through*

1. One of the fundamentals sports coaches remind their players of is the importance of *follow through*.
 - a. When throwing or hitting a baseball, shooting free throws or throwing a pass; follow through is crucial.
 - b. In martial arts, the follow through is key.
 - c. In golf, follow through can be the difference between a birdie & a bogie.
2. But “follow through” doesn’t apply just to sports; it’s an important part of *all* of life.
 - a. We need to follow through on projects & promises.
 - b. Most importantly, we need to follow through in our walk with God.
3. Today we take a look at the importance of *spiritual* follow-through.

B. *Setting the Scene*

1. King Saul has been ruling Israel for several years.
2. His first years were marked by *hesitation & uncertainty* when it came to battle with Israel’s enemies.
 - a. But his son’s faith & courage had shown him the way,
 - b. And Saul kept the ball rolling with numerous victories.
3. In terms of *character*, Saul began with a wonderful *humility*.
4. But his years as king have taught him to enjoy the fame & wealth the throne brought him. Now he *revels* in the power & perks of being ruler.

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 1-3

¹Samuel also said to Saul, “The LORD sent me to anoint you king over His people, over Israel. Now therefore, heed the voice of the words of the LORD.

1. Years have passed since Samuel left his public life of leading Israel as the last of the Judges.
 - a. Leadership had been passed on to Saul whom he had appointed & anointed.
 - c. And he’d done so because God had told him to.
2. Samuel reminds Saul of how he’d come to the throne because Saul’s *perspective* has become a *distorted*.
 - a. He began in a place of *total dependence* on God,
 - b. But now was *self-sufficient*.
3. Though Samuel had resigned his role as ruler, he was still a *prophet*.
 - a. His task was to remind the King he was an agent of God’s will.
 - b. *Prophets speak* God’s Word –they give direction.
 - c. *Kings* are supposed to *follow that direction*; to carry it out.
4. Samuel reminds Saul who’s *really* in charge: Saul may be king, but God is higher & calls the shots. → And God has a mission for him.

²Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘I will punish Amalek for what he did

to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt. ³Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.”

5. The assignment Saul was to perform was to assemble an army & attack Amalek.
 - a. The reason was because Amalek had attacked Israel during her journey thru the wilderness. [Exo. 17]
 - b. In Deut. 25, Moses had given the command that once Israel was safely settled in the Promised Land, they were to mount a campaign & blot out their name.
 - c. The Amalekites had ruthlessly attacked Israel's rear ranks.
 - 1) They preyed upon the frail & weak who lagged behind.
 - 2) They nipped round the edges of the camp, ripping off & killing the unsuspecting.
6. For this, they would be judged.
7. Now that Israel was at peace under the reign of Saul, God said it was time to make an end of Amalek. Every living thing was to be put to death!

8. This sounds so brutal, so cruel. What's going on here?
9. It's passages like this that arm critics of the Bible with their best ammo.
10. The God who ordered the extermination of the Amalekites seems *very different* from the loving Heavenly Father we find in the NT Who sends His only Son to die so the world can be saved.
 - a. In fact, *so different* does *this* God seem from the Christian God that it led to one of the earliest heresies in the Church.
 - b. Marcion said the Jewish God of the OT was angry & hateful, while the Christian God of the NT was loving & merciful.
11. But Marcion's heresy was short lived as believers realized the Old & New Testament Gods are one & the same.
 - a. In fact, it's the perfect love & justice of God that draws forth the drastic action called for here.
 - b. You see—Amalek **HAD** to be wiped out; *in light of God's love & justice*, there was *no alternative*.
12. Let me explain. The Amalekites were an exceedingly evil people.
 - a. Theirs was a culture *literally* upside down as far as morality is concerned.
 - b. Amalekite society was a cesspool of treachery, crime, violence, abuse, addiction, & perversion.
 - c. *Vice* was consider *virtue* – while *virtue* was despised as *weak*.
 - d. The Amalekites became so cruel & warped that in the worship of their gods they would gather in huge public gatherings where they would offer sacrifices of their children.
 - e. Sexual perversion was not only accepted, it was *preferred & promoted* – publicly!
 - f. Bestiality was common; it's why God commanded even the animals be put to the sword.
 - 1) They were not to be taken as spoils of war.

- 2) No one knew what animal might have been the object of the Amalekite perversions,
- 3) So they were *all* to be slain.
- g. But why would God demand the death of innocent women & children – many of whom had been *victims* of abuse? Why execute *them*? The answer lies in knowing how deep the corruption of Amalekite culture went.
- 1st – Because they considered *brutality* a *virtue*, *Revenge* was seen as an *obligation*, and had even been turned into a perverse art-form.
- The members of a family held it as a solemn duty to take vengeance on anyone who'd brought harm to a relative.
 - They'd honed the exacting of revenge to an art & would sometimes take years to lay a trap for someone.
 - Revenge & treachery was one of the main themes for story-telling among them;
 - Their heroes were those who set up their victims, maneuvering them into a place of trust, then they'd betray & kill them.
 - So, if Israel slew *just* the men of Amalek, they'd only be planting thousands of seeds of treachery in the soil of tomorrow.
 - All those Amalekite women & children would rise up in days to come to exact a heavy price in revenge.
- 2nd – It's well-documented that children who are molested & abused often grow up to *be* molesters & abusers.
- Amalek was a culture on a collision course with destruction.
 - They'd given themselves so completely to sin their senses & sensibilities were numb; the worst forms of evil were considered *normal*.
 - There was no reference point left for a return to God. They were way past the point of Spiritual No-Return.
 - Theirs was a culture shaped by demonic influences & molded to the devil's image.
 - There was no hope for Amalek. But as they rushed head-long toward oblivion, they could take along a lot of others with them.
 - There's no hope for a dog with rabies – it's going to die.
 - But it can inflict a lot of harm on it's way out if it's left to run around, biting the innocent.
 - There's only one thing to be done with a rabid dog – it has to be put down.
 - The Amalekites were *spiritually rabid*.
 - Their example & practices could poison the minds of others.
 - Engineers of social change know that one of the ways to get a culture to accept massive change, is to *expose it to the shocking & bizarre*.
 - Find someone whose behavior is *universally rejected*, & put them in the spotlight.

- At first nearly everyone is sickened & appalled. But a *few* find it *enticing* & begin to do the same.
 - By drawing *repeated* attention to the bizarre, the public *eventually* is no longer *shocked*.
 - What was once repellent & evil is accepted as normal.
 - Perversion that is seen or heard plants a hook in our soul that prods our thoughts.
 - A spiritual infection begins, then grows.
 - This is *precisely* why God told Israel to remove the Canaanites from the Promised Land & to *erase all evidence* of their sinful practices.
 - He didn't want these things around to *infect* them.
 - The Amalekites were the *epitome* of bizarre, perverse, & wicked.
 - Those women & children weren't innocent at all; they carried a *spiritual plague* that threatened, not just Israel, but all their other neighbors; Moab, Edom, Ammon, & Egypt.
13. So, it may sound cruel that God ordered the annihilation of Amalek, but ***He knew*** it was the *only course*.

B. Vs. 4-6 (Summarize)

1. Saul mobilized the army & went out against Amalek.
2. Far from this just being an indiscriminate slaughter – he sent messengers to the Kenites, a nomadic tribe that happened to be in the area, & told them to move on lest they get caught up in the coming battle.
3. Apparently the Barbieites had already left.

C. Vs. 7-9

⁷And Saul attacked the Amalekites, from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is east of Egypt. ⁸He also took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. ⁹But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all *that was good*, and were unwilling to utterly destroy them. But everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed.

1. They were supposed to kill *everything* that drew breath.
2. But they couldn't bring themselves to slay the gold-ribbon livestock.
3. V. 9 says they were "*unwilling*" to kill the good but had no qualms about offing the weak & sickly.
4. This proves it *wasn't compassion* that moved them – it was *greed*.
5. They were more than willing to obey God when it was in sync with their own desires.
6. But the obedience ended when desire dictated a different course.

D. Vs. 10-11

¹⁰Now the word of the LORD came to Samuel, saying, ¹¹"I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments." And it

grieved Samuel, and he cried out to the LORD all night.

1. God brought Samuel an update—Saul had *not done* what he'd been told & God was *not happy* about it.
2. Samuel was *devastated* knowing what Saul's failure meant, & spent the night in tears.

E. V. 12

¹²So when Samuel rose early in the morning to meet Saul, it was told Samuel, saying, "Saul went to Carmel, and indeed, he set up a monument for himself; and he has gone on around, passed by, and gone down to Gilgal."

1. After Saul's first great victory over the Philistines years before, he'd built an altar to worship & give thanks to God.
2. But now, following the example of other victorious kings, he set up a monument to himself!
3. When the elders of the tribes first went to Samuel to demand a king, they said they wanted a king *like all the other nations*. Well—*now* they have one.
4. Behold how power corrupts the heart of one not surrendered completely to God!
5. After setting up his monument, Saul led the army with all their plunder to Gilgal.

F. V. 13

¹³Then Samuel went to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed are you of the LORD! I have performed the commandment of the LORD."

1. In the Bible, the *lesser* is always blessed *by the greater*.
2. Here, Saul gets it *backward*, for the prophet is the one who *gives the king* direction from God.
3. This is proof Saul has lost *all spiritual perception*.
4. Then he makes the outrageous claim to having done what God said.
5. He hadn't! The Amalekite king was alive & well.
 - a. *Why* had Saul preserved him? The answer is clear once we know the practice of that time.
 - b. It was common to take an enemy ruler *hostage* & require his people to pay a hefty ransom for his release.
 - c. But what Amalekites were left to ransom Agag? Hadn't they *all* been killed? It turns out they *hadn't*.
 - d. V, 7 tells us that Saul had only conquered a *portion* of Amalek.
 - e. And while v. 8 says they slew *all the people*, that means—all the people they *encountered*.
 - f. There were other cities left untouched & refugees they hadn't pursued.
 - g. They didn't complete the assignment to annihilate Amalek because they were so loaded down with the herds & flocks they'd been told NOT to take, they couldn't fight anymore.
 - h. It was a choice between finishing the job or taking their spoils home. Greed beat out obedience.

G. V. 14

14But Samuel said, “What then *is* this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?”

1. Samuel’s being a tad sarcastic.
 - a. “Really, you kept the command? Well – what’s the meaning of all this livestock?
 - b. You using them as some kind of weapon? Are they your new, elite troop?
2. That Saul could stand in front of the army, with all these animals wandering around & say he’d obeyed *proves* → Sin makes you stupid!
3. To see just *how* stupid . . .

H. V. 15

15And Saul said, “They have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep and the oxen, to sacrifice to the LORD your God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed.”

1. With his back against the wall & the smoking gun in his hand, Saul tries to duck & get out from under the blame for failing to do what he’d been commanded.
2. It wasn’t *his* fault – the *people* did it!
3. And besides, they only kept the herds & flocks so they could offer them as sacrifices – to whom?
 - a. To Yahweh – *YOUR* God. He’s Samuel’s God – not Saul’s.
 - b. Which is the **ONLY** thing he gets right in all this.
4. Saul’s mindset throughout this story is that *he’s the king, he’s the ONE in charge!*
 - a. So blaming the taking of plunder on the people doesn’t wash.
 - b. They would have done whatever he told them to do.
 - c. The fact is – Saul knew the people *wanted* it & he didn’t want to disappoint them, so he consented.
5. God’s instructions were clear – *everything* was to be put to the sword.
 - a. The sacrifices were to be made *on the battlefield* in Amalek, not on altars in Israel.
 - b. The only reason Saul says this is because he’s been caught & can’t admit he’s erred, so he tries to put a *religious spin* on it.
6. This is like the young man who’s caught looking at a skin mag who says he’s just doing some “research” so he could be a better witness to his unsaved friends. Right!
7. Samuel wasn’t fooled by Saul’s lame excuses.

I. V. 16-19

16Then Samuel said to Saul, “Be quiet! And I will tell you what the LORD said to me last night.” And he said to him, “Speak on.” 17So Samuel said, “When you were little in your own eyes, were you not head of the tribes of Israel? And did not the LORD anoint you king over Israel?”

1. Here’s confirmation Saul *was* humble at first.

18Now the LORD sent you on a mission, and said, ‘Go, and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they

are consumed.’ ¹⁹Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you swoop down on the spoil, and do evil in the sight of the LORD?”

2. There was no ambiguity or room for misunderstanding the command – it was to be the utter annihilation of Amalek.
3. But Israel’s motivation in *going against* Amalek had not been pure.
4. They went to war motivated, not by a desire to obey God, but to get rich.
5. Saul blew it & Samuel will not soften his rebuke.

J. Vs. 20-21

²⁰And Saul said to Samuel, “But I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me, and brought back Agag king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites.

²¹But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal.”

1. Mark it well – for this is the tactic of *most* who’re caught in disobedience but refuse to confess & repent.
2. Saul just *repeats* his previous excuses.
 - a. He insists *he* hasn’t done anything wrong. *Others* are to blame.
 - b. And once more he tries to turn it into a religious thing, as though by throwing God a bone, that will make everything okay.

K. Vs. 22-23

²²So Samuel said: “Has 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 heed than the fat of rams. ²³For rebellion *is* as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness *is* as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from *being* king.”

1. Saul thought God’s command could be negotiated & adapted.
 - a. He had no real concern to honor or obey.
 - b. He went along as long as doing so advanced *his* plans & desires.
 - c. Attacking Amalek jived with his plans because it meant more power & prestige.
 - d. But when those aims were accomplished, his obedience ended.
2. Samuel spells it out for Saul – Obedience is better than offerings.
 - a. And if there’s obedience, there’s *no need* for sacrifices.
 - b. The whole purpose of sacrifice is to *atone for sin*. Obedience does away with the need for sacrifice.
3. Here’s the problem – Saul’s failure with Amalek wasn’t an isolated case.
 - a. He’d shown a *habit of disobedience*, a failure to submit to God was *normal*.
 - b. Saul had moved from *disobedience into rebellion*.
4. No one is perfect. No one walks in *perfect* obedience to God.
 - a. Even the best *saint* blows it occasionally.
 - b. What proves they’re a genuine believer is that they don’t make excuses for

- or rationalize their sin.
- c. They admit it & desire to be free of it.
 5. The *rebel* doesn't care about obedience. In fact, the whole idea of submitting to God *annoys* him.
 6. When confronted with the guilt of sin, the rebel dismisses & excuses it. He says, "So what?"
 7. Saul has proven himself to be in rebellion here.
 8. So Samuel tells him just where he is, *spiritually*
 - a. Saul is in the same place as those who practice the occult;
 - b. The word *witchcraft* here is also translated *divination* – it refers to people who commune with demons.
 - c. It referred to the *priests* of Amalek– the very people who'd opened the door to the judgment God commanded because of their evil
 - d. Samuel was saying that Saul, the man who fancied himself the glorious ruler of the people of God, was *in fact* leading them down the same path to ruin Amalek had followed.
 9. And because Saul had rejected God, God rejected him from being king.

L. Vs. 24-31 [Summarize]

1. Hearing he'd lost the throne, Saul got desperate & tried another round of excuses.
2. When Samuel refused to bite – he pleaded with Samuel to at least fake it & play nice before the people, so they'd not catch on that anything was wrong.
3. The man who began not caring about public acceptance ended up so desperate for it he was willing to sell his soul for it.
4. How far the mighty have fallen!

M. Vs. 32-33

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

1. Diced Agag,
2. This is a tough passage. Bloody, brutal, messy. I'm sure Samuel took no delight in this – but it had to be done.
3. Why? Why did Agag have to be executed & why like this?
4. Because the people needed to understand what God had *wanted them to do to all Amalek*.
5. You see, Amalek proved to be a *mortal threat* to Israel in later times.
6. Already in Exodus 17 they'd attacked the weak & struggling among God's people.
7. After this decimation by Saul, they recouped & attacked the city of Ziklag where David & his men & their families were based.
 - a. When David led the men off to battle, the Amalekites attacked & carried away all the women & children. [ch. 30]

- b. In 2 Samuel 1, an Amalekite claims responsibility for *killing Saul*.
- c. But in the biggest threat of all, it was an Amalekite during the time of Esther who came close to pulling off a holocaust that would have rivaled Hitler's *Final Solution* that saw some 6 million Jews put to death during WWII. His name was Haman – & he was an *Amalekite*.

III. CONCLUSION

A. Amalekite Flesh

1. For generations, believers have recognized in the Amalekites a picture of the flesh.
2. Before we're born again, our lives are *dominated* by the appetites & desires of the body.
3. When we get to heaven – our entire existence will be an uninterrupted, unhindered flow of the Spirit.
4. But in between, that is – *after* we're born again but *before* going to heaven – We *choose* where we'll live – in the flesh or the Spirit.
5. If we walk in the Spirit, we enjoy communion with God & life is as it should be.
6. If we walk in the flesh, then we get into all kinds of trouble.
7. In Romans 7, Paul tells us of the struggle between the flesh & Spirit common to all believers.
8. In ch. 8 he tells *how* to resolve the conflict. In v. 13 he says -
For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.
9. The flesh dominated life is a mortal threat to the believer. It'll wipe us out.
 - a. There's only one thing to be done with the flesh.
 - b. Just as God told Saul to *wipe out Amalek*, we need to be *done* with the flesh.
 - c. We need to *put it down* as Samuel did Agag.
 - d. We need to take the Sword of the Spirit to it again & again until it's *finished*.

B. Saul's Failure to Follow Through

1. Saul gives us a poignant picture of the trap many believers fall into when dealing with the Amalek of their flesh.
2. They put *some of the flesh* to death but come short of *finishing* the job.
3. They don't *follow through* & go all the way.
4. They hang on to something like Israel held on to the best of the spoils because they think it's going to add something to their lives; pleasure, comfort, power – whatever.
5. Deep down, they know it's not right, so they keep it quiet, private; but just as Samuel could hear the bleating of the sheep, the sins of the flesh cannot be kept hidden. They will always – out.
6. And when they are, Saul again provides the template for how we often react – we make excuses, shift blame, & try to put a religious spin on it.
 - a. We claim that because we aren't under Law, we have *liberty* to do it.
 - b. But the truth is, it's not faith that's moving us – it's the flesh keeping a toe-

hold.

7. Haman's near destruction of the Jews in the Book of Esther ought to warn us that the *little sin* we tolerate, coddle, & excuse today becomes the monster that will rip us apart tomorrow.

8. Don't be a Saul – be a Samuel. Don't compromise with sin; don't negotiate with the flesh.
 9. Take the Sword of the Spirit & go after your Agag.