

STRENGTHENING YOUR GRIP

HOW TO BE GROUNDED IN A CHAOTIC WORLD

STUDY FIFTEEN

Strengthening Your Grip on Authority

1 Samuel 15

King Saul's willful defiance against God's commands cost him dearly. He developed a deceitful technique of hiding his disobedience behind the masks of lies and rationalization and blame. Let's not go there! The very best proof of our love for the Lord is our obedience to Him—nothing more and nothing less.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

LIONS crouch low in the grass. They lurk in the shadows. They stalk their prey, waiting for the ideal moment to pounce on their unsuspecting victim.

Like a hungry lion, sin stalked Cain after he offered an unacceptable sacrifice to the Lord. “Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you,” the Lord warned him (Genesis 4:7). Cain could have escaped the lion’s claws if he simply did what God said to do. “You will be accepted if you do what is right,” the Lord advised (4:7). But Cain had a rebellious nature, and the lion could sense it.

Tragically, rather than offer the right sacrifice like Abel had done, envious Cain “attacked his brother, Abel, and killed him” (4:8). In defiance, Cain snuffed out a human life instead of bending his knee to God, and the lion had its kill.

We can feel the lurking force of rebellion when we are tempted to ignore God and go our own way. We know the urge to turn a blind eye to God’s warnings. We can admit to flirting with desires that defy God’s will and flaunt our independence. The wild beast stalks us all, but we can *choose to resist!*

In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we’ll explore how another person from Bible history, King Saul, allowed rebellion to wreck his life and forfeit his kingdom. We’ll gather warning signs of rebellion’s stalking presence and glean some principles on how to say no to sin when the rebel in us wants to say yes.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

God's guidance is essential to study, understand, and apply Scripture.

*Guide my steps by your word,
so I will not be overcome by evil. (Psalm 119:133)*

Echo the psalmist's plea. Write your own prayer asking the Holy Spirit to help your heart heed God's will.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The prophet Samuel anointed Saul king of Israel while Saul was searching for his father's donkeys (*1 Samuel 9–10*). The confluence of events—God telling Samuel the day before; Kish, Saul's father, asking Saul to search for his lost donkeys; Saul's servant insisting they visit Samuel—underscored God's perfect timing and detailed plan.

However, it wasn't long before Saul started doing things *his* way instead of God's way. He impatiently offered a sacrifice at Gilgal rather than wait for Samuel to offer the sacrifice, showing total disregard for the priestly office (*1 Samuel 13*). This was the first strike against Saul. Then, he made a rash vow and would have executed his own son, Jonathan, for ignorantly breaking the king's command if the people hadn't come to Jonathan's rescue (*1 Samuel 14*). Strike two!

In *1 Samuel 15*, God gave Saul one more chance to submit to His authority. The command was to annihilate Amalek—the most ancient of all the heathen tribes that savagely attacked Israel after they escaped from Egypt. Let's open the curtain and see Saul's reaction. Strike three?



Observation: King Saul Defies God's Will

To begin, read *1 Samuel 15* carefully and note your initial observations.

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Our careful observation of Saul's actions reveals four characteristics of rebellion.

Defiance against Authority to Fulfill Our Desires—1 Samuel 15:1–9

Observe [1 Samuel 15:1–9](#) again and note how God's instructions to King Saul were clear and specific. How did Saul's rebellion manifest itself?

The rebel says, "I don't want to hear what you have to say. I don't want to do what you told me to do," whether the rebel is aged 4 or aged 40 or aged 84. "I don't want to do it! I take issue with it because I have other desires! And if I do what you say, I can't get my desire fulfilled." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Rationalization and Cover-up to Excuse Sinful Actions—1 Samuel 15:10–13

Saul obeyed some of God's commands but not all. He captured Agag rather than kill him, and he spared the best livestock. *Strike three!* God sent Samuel, who was grieved over the king's disobedience, to confront him. Reread [1 Samuel 15:10–13](#). How would you compare Saul's assessment of his own actions and God's evaluation?

Saul was saying, "I did what the Lord wanted me to do! Actually, I didn't do it quite the way He said it, but I'm doing what He had in mind. I just interpreted it differently." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Defensiveness When Confronted with the Truth—1 Samuel 15:14–15

"I have carried out the Lord's command!" Saul boasted, hoping *mostly* would be *good enough* (1 Samuel 15:13). How did Samuel respond to Saul in [1 Samuel 15:14–15](#)? How did Saul react? To whom did he shift the blame?

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Resistance to Accountability When Wrong Has Been Committed—1 Samuel 15:16–35

Saul twisted God's command to fit his own agenda. Reread [1 Samuel 15:16–23](#). How does God look at rebellion?

Finally, what are King Saul's words in [1 Samuel 15:24–35](#)? What were Saul's reasons for doing God's will halfway? Contrast Saul's disobedience with Samuel's complete obedience.

Saul elevated people over God. He altered God's will to accomplish his own desires. When confronted, he rationalized his disobedience, excused them, and shifted the blame. Rebellious and stubborn hearts do not have God on their throne.



Interpretation: Unveiling the Mask of Rebellion

Let's *interpret* this passage by using available resources to unveil rebellion.¹ In [1 Samuel 15:23](#), God explained rebellion and stubbornness to be as sinful as idolatry and divination. Look up [idolatry](#) and [divination](#) in a Bible dictionary. Access *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary* freely at biblestudytools.com. How would you explain the way God views rebellion?

We observed the four characteristics of Saul's rebellion: defiance, rationalization, defensiveness, and resistance to accountability. Find the definition of the word [rationalization](#) in *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary*. How would you use your own words to describe rationalization?

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The rebellious mentality will never run out of ways to excuse wrong. To live with yourself, you have to rewrite the rule book to get rid of the guilt.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

What is your definition of *authority*? What does it mean when you place yourself under God's authority?

The prophet Samuel completely obeyed God's command. What did Samuel mean when he said, "Obedience is better than sacrifice" (1 Samuel 15:22)? How important is it for us to obey God completely? Why does God want and deserve obedience?

A rebellious heart is no less grievous to God than demonic involvement.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: God's Authority, Established Authorities, and Obedience

Correlating our passage with other biblical texts helps us understand God's counsel. His signposts have both permissions and prohibitions for our well-being. In the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve could eat fruit from all the trees except one (*Genesis 2:15–17; 3:1–24*). How did the tempter appeal to Adam and Eve's desires?

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Read *John 14:21; Romans 6:11–13; Galatians 5:16–25; and Ephesians 4:30*. What war takes place within every believer? How can we resist choosing our desires over God's? What happens to the Holy Spirit when we rebel against His authority?

We are not victims of our passion. We are victors. There is sufficient control to hold back, to resist that nature. There is all the power that's needed to say no when the rebel in us wants to say yes. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

God forgives rebellion when we confess it. Saul rationalized and gave excuses before admitting his stubbornness. Read *Psalm 32*, David's intimate confession. Explain the misery that accompanies us when we hide our disobedience and the joy that comes from acknowledging our wrongs.

In *Ephesians 6:1–3*, children are instructed to obey their parents because children belong to the Lord. Read *Proverbs 29:17; Ephesians 6:4; and Colossians 3:21*. What are parents' responsibilities toward their children?



Application: Choose to Resist Rebellion!

The home is where respect for authority must be cultivated. Here are some suggestions for believers in three life stages: childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.

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Children need the loving limits of guidelines and boundaries. What do parents communicate to their children through discipline? Why are boundaries essential for children?

Peer pressure is a powerful influence among adolescents. Remember the struggles you faced as a teen? Think of ways you can be more empathetic to your teen. Do you feel like Saul sometimes? Do you fear what people think of you and try to please them rather than obey the Lord?

Adults need to remember that obedience demonstrates our love for God and that a rebellious life is crushed by God when He regains control. What are some practical ways you can remind yourself that the commands of Scripture come from your loving, sovereign, and perfect Father? How can you better yield to the Holy Spirit?

Like Cain, Saul disregarded God's authority by not obeying Him fully. He thought that God would overlook his sin if he placated the Lord with a sacrifice. He tossed God a religious gesture, like we might toss a dog a bone. But God wants our hearts, not our handouts—hearts yielded to the Holy Spirit and willing to set our desires aside to do what God says.

Cain's rebellion ran through Saul's bloodstream, and it runs through ours. Submit afresh your will to the Lord's authority today and find in Him the security and love you can find in no one else.

God's heart is broken when we break His command. I read of the grieving of the Holy Spirit. I read that my Father's heart is soft and tender toward me, that He tells me what is for my own good. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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A FINAL PRAYER

Compassionate Father, I realize how precious Your Word is to my life. Your signposts are for my abundant life. Forgive any rebellion in my heart. Help me understand how deep is Your love for me. Help me find the joy of obedience by looking at Your Son on the cross. After all that You've done for me, help my obedience to come from a grateful heart. In Jesus' name.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"

For the 2025 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Mirlenda Noëlliste in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 1981, 2025 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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