

## Deception

It's as old as the universe itself. Ever since the serpent convinced Eve to partake of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, Satan has been using people to do just the opposite of what God wants them to do. He speaks his own language—a language many of us have picked up over the years. Jesus said in **John 8:44**, talking to a bunch of self-righteous Jews:

**“You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”**

Satan is a deceiver, using lies and half-truths to attempt to make people sin. And he's pretty good at it, considering the number of people on this earth who live their lives for themselves, gratifying the sinful nature Satan is constantly provoking. “It'll be OK this one time, no one will be harmed.” “Go ahead, God wouldn't want you to be unhappy.” “Any way you worship is perfectly fine—as long as what is done satisfies you. After all, worship is for the worshipper, and as long as I feel good about myself and was somehow entertained, God HAS to be happy!

Not once, but twice, did Saul make the mistake of believing that last whopper. In **1 Samuel 13**, Saul, though not a priest like Samuel, offered a burnt offering in an effort to gain God's favor. The effect was just the opposite. Although offering a sacrifice was a good thing, it wasn't done according to God's instructions. Saul would eventually lose his kingdom because of his self-deception.

In **1 Samuel 15**, Satan again convinces Saul to do something contrary to God's direct command (a little like the serpent in the garden) It was commanded that Saul **“totally destroy”** the Amalekites—every man, woman, child and animal. Saul kept the king alive and brought back the best of the animals to sacrifice. Samuel told him in **1 Samuel 15:22**:

**“Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.”**

Obedience to the commands of God and adherence to his plan are far more important things to do than what you think or interpret God's words to mean.

In the First Century, the church was constantly under attack from false teachers. Jesus even warned the people about **“fake Messiahs”** and **“false teachers.”** One statement He made sticks out and is extremely relevant to today as well. In **Matthew 15:18-19**, Jesus is referring again to legalistic hypocrites:

**“These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.”**

To me, the King James Bible says it more plainly. These people were **“teaching for doctrine the commandments of men.”** Not just rules – commandments. And their commandments have become “doctrine,” not merely suggestions.

Sound familiar? If it doesn't, maybe next week's **NEWSLETTER** article will convince you. Stay tuned.

–Johnny Stephens