

spoil. The motive was undoubtedly self-centred and the act a defiance of the divine will. But when Samuel appears, the temporizing spirit on Saul's part shows itself in a degree of hypocritical self-justification. The old prophet is greeted with a pious phrase, as if the divine will had been fully carried out, v. 13. When challenged to account for the sounds of bleating and lowing (v. 14), Saul claims that what has been spared is reserved for sacrifice, v. 15. When reminded of the providences of his whole career, which aggravate the sinfulness of disregarding explicit instructions (vs. 17-19), he still claims credit for himself and the people, not only as having obeyed instructions, but even improved upon them, by sparing the best for a religious use, vs. 20, 21. Then comes the great lesson, "To obey is better".

Bring in your application. Young people to-day debate, like Saul, the questions, "What's the use?" "What's the harm?" Illustrate freely. To obey the laws of steam or electricity is of great use. Disobey, and you may be scalded or electrocuted. It is "better" to obey every law of God in regard to health, purity, spiritual effort and Christian service. In Saul's case disobedience involved such "harm" that it affected his whole subsequent position as demonstrated in:

4. *The execution of the divine will*, vs. 23-28. Joseph Parker once described sin as "a raised hand, a clenched fist, and a blow in the face of God". The spirit of disobedience which practically says, "I know better and shall resist!" amounts to rebellion, not to be tolerated, v. 23. Saul's remorse (vs. 24, 25), was unavailing, vs. 26-28. Let us, on our part, not resist the divine will in Christ, Heb. 1 : 1-3 ; Heb. 2 : 3.

For Teachers of the Boys and Girls

A sad, sad story : nothing sadder until we come to the actual ending of Saul's life. This is the ending of his right to be king.

He comes down to this by steps, as one almost always comes to the great sins—step by step, down, down, down. For one of these wayward steps, see ch. 13 : 8, etc., where Saul presumes to offer sacrifice at God's altar, which only a priest had the right

to do. His sinful folly in condemning his own son Jonathan to death, ch. 14, was another step.

As to the story of the Lesson, perhaps the following divisions may help :

1. *A command from God* : utterly destroy Amalek, v. 3. Saul knew what that meant, for such complete extermination was a frequent feature of the warfare of the time. Why did God give such a command? The answer is, it was a punishment such as a judge inflicts on a criminal. It was not for revenge, but because Amalek was a wicked nation, corrupting others, and therefore, by divine judgment, to be swept out of the way.

2. *Direct disobedience*. Saul obeyed in part, vs. 4, 5, 7. But he as clearly disobeyed, vs. 8, 9. Have the scholars note also, that what the king did, the people also hastened to do. Fashion travels downward. Has God noticed it? Is there anything God does not see? (Heb. 4 : 13). He sends Samuel to bring Saul to account, vs. 10, 11.

3. *A hypocritical defence*. An uneasy conscience is apt to hurry us to speak. That explains Saul's haste in v. 13. Follow Saul in his crooked excuses, etc. He is a coward, blames the people, not himself, v. 15. He is a hypocrite,—to sacrifice to God, he says, we spared the sheep and oxen (same verse).

4. *A second chance*. Before he delivers his terrible message Samuel gives the wretched king another chance (get the substance out of vs. 16-19). The hypocrisy is repeated. One sin leads to another, oh ! so readily.

5. *The sentence of doom*. Saul is to be rejected ; but Samuel will first tell him precisely why. God reasons with us, shows us why His judgments fall. The substance of the reasoning here, is, "To obey is better than sacrifice". Work this out with the scholars. No form of worship, no toil or labor or self-denial in God's name, is of any use, unless we obey God's commands. To do as God says, that is essential ; the rest will follow. Illustrate this from family and school and civic life.

Then, the sentence falls, v. 23 (last clause). Show how fair this was. Saul had had fair warning, ch. 12 : 14, 15. God's judgments are severe, for sin is a dreadful thing ; but