

Ammons urges total obedience over presumption

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MCALLEN—Listening to God and practicing total obedience are keys to remaining people of influence, Pastor Greg Ammons of First Baptist Church in Garland, told Texas Baptists' Family Gathering in McAllen.

"Sometimes the crowd is wrong," Ammons said. "Just because there is a groundswell saying to do this, doesn't mean it's right."

Ammons drew on the story of King Saul found in 1 Samuel 15, focusing on verses 22-23. In that passage, the prophet Samuel chastises the king for his partial obedience.

Saul had been told to attack the Amalekites for their rebellion against God, and the instructions were clear: All the people and animals must be killed.

As Ammons explained, Saul had a problem with the Lord's command and decided to interpret it on his own. He gathered the troops, headed to the valley and waited. He ambushed the Amalekites but spared King Agag and some of the choice sheep and oxen, later explaining they were for sacrifice to God.

Partial obedience is disobedience

"He didn't obey totally but partially, and the criteria he used to bring judgment was not what God said but his own," Ammons said. "Sometimes we can respond how we think a Christian should respond."

God rejected Saul due to his disobedience, and God instructed Samuel to deliver that message to the king. At that point, Saul claimed he had obeyed

God, but Samuel likened his presumption to idolatry, because Saul took it upon himself to presume to know what God intended.

“Saul began to confess but gave himself away. He used the word oversight instead of sin. But he was told 10 times in the narrative what to do,” Ammons noted. “God called it sin, because he didn’t do what God asked him to do.”

The king then admitted he feared the voice of the people, so he followed his own ideas. Saul pleaded with Samuel not to leave, grabbing his garment and ripping a corner off. Then Samuel prophesied that instance was a picture of his kingdom, to be ripped away by God.

“What he feared the most, he lost—the influence of the people—because he did not obey,” Ammons said. “I want to continue to have influence as a pastor and as a Christian, and I don’t want to be holding a torn corner of a robe with nobody noticing me. We can have influence, but not by listening to them. We do it by listening to God.”

Ammons encouraged Texas Baptists to remain firmly planted in the word of God and hold fast to its truth, regardless of the cultural norm.

“As Baptists, we’ve always been people of the book. On the Texas Baptists website, it says the Bible will remain the supreme standard,” Ammons said. “As we obey exactly as God commanded and not presuming, God will uphold our influence and bless our land, bless our people, bless our churches.”

Texas WMU and TBM bring reports

The worship service also included reports from Woman’s Missionary Union of Texas and Texas Baptist Men.

Teri Ussery, missional lifestyle strategist with Texas WMU, thanked

churches for their support of the state's Mary Hill Davis Offering, which exceeded its \$3.6 million goal and was able to respond to 80 ministry requests for funding.

She spotlighted the women's build projects, where groups since 2010 have gathered to construct a home for families in need in the Rio Grande Valley while engaging with the community during the project.

She also mentioned the growth in other ministries, including the now 42 sites of Christian Women's Job Corps that saw 51 professions of faith in 2022.

"The ministry of WMU of Texas continues to thrive as well. Our values remain the same, but our methods are ever-evolving," Ussery noted. "As we look toward the future, we are excited about the young adults God is calling out to serve."

Rand Jenkins, director of the ministry advancement team with TBM, noted the increased presence of the organization as disasters have struck all over the state this year. He highlighted work being done around the globe in the name of Christ by TBM and its ministry partners.

A few days after the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, TBM volunteers were on-site building beds, repairing churches and supporting pastors and refugees. One such woman had fled her home with her daughter, driving and walking to the border of Poland. There, she asked what to do for help, and the border officer responded, "Go find the Baptists." She did and found refuge and help among TBM workers.

"After disasters, we are the presence of Christ. Beyond responding, we are actively seeking what God would have us do to meet needs," Jenkins said.

"We partner internationally with churches there and enable Christians to have a deep impact all around the globe. God made you for this moment to

be used by the Spirit. So be ye doers of the word.”