"Then said Samuel, Bring ye hither to me Agag, the king of the Amalekites. And Agag came unto him delicately. And Agag said, Surely the bitterness of death is past. And Samuel said, As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women. And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord at Gilgal." (1 Sam. 15: 32, 33).

WE HAVE already referred to this passage as an illustration of the character of Saul. There is still a deeper type of the subtleties of the self life in the picture of Agag which the Holy Ghost has framed into the narrative of this solemn history. Saul and Agag both teach the same great lesson and warning, namely, the peril of a self-centered life, but they teach it in somewhat different ways, and the story of Agag is worthy of our prayerful and heart-searching consideration.

1. His Race. He belonged to the race of Amalek and the family of Esau, who represent through their entire genealogy the life of the flesh. From the very beginning of the human race God has drawn the line of demarcation between two races -- the fleshly and the spiritual man. Just outside the gate of Eden the division began. The family of Seth called themselves by the name of the Lord, and the race of Cain went off and built their city of culture and pride and became the pioneers of the worldliness and wickedness adorned and ameliorated by all the grace of human culture and all the attractions of earthly delight. The separation, alas, soon began to disappear and in the days of Noah the two races had mingled and intermarried, and the progeny was a generation of monsters of iniquity so degenerate and depraved that God turned with loathing from the whole race and pronounced the awful sentence, "The end of all flesh is come before me; I will destroy them with the earth."

After the flood God chose a separate family, the line of Abraham, and again endeavored to keep the chosen people separate. All along that line we see the earthly off-shoots of the family-tree separating from the central trunk and going out into the world. The first of these was Ishmael, the type of the spirit of bondage and sin. The next of these was Esau, the progenitor of a whole race who inherited the earthly spirit of their father, who, for a morsel of meat, sold his birthright and afterwards married with the daughters of Canaan and became as corrupt and polluted as they. In the same line were the descendants of Lot's unnatural daughters, the Moabites and the Ammonites.

Above all these, the race of Esau and Amalek were the representatives of the spirit of the flesh and the world. This was the reason that God pronounced the decree of their extermination. We find that when Israel went out of Egypt and started on their journey through the wilderness on their way to the Land of Promise, Amalek was the first to attack them. It is not difficult to see in this the foreshadowing of the fact that the first adversary that we have to contend with when we leave our sinful past of bondage and iniquity is the carnal nature in our own hearts, which soon asserts itself and tries to force us back to "the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." This is what Agag represents and this is what each of us has found to our cost to be a very real element in the experience of a Christian life.

2. The name of Agag is next significant. It is from the root "Hak," which is a generic form denoting, like Pharaoh, a ruler. It literally means ruler, and represents the spirit of self-will, self-assertion and independence in the human heart. Its prototype is Lucifer, the prince of light and glory, who, being lifted up with pride and refusing to be controlled, turned from an angel to a fiend, and has become the desperate leader of the rebellious hosts of hell. We see it next in the supreme temptation of the Fall -- "Ye shall be as gods" -- the desire for supremacy. We see it in the spirit of human ambition, in the Oriental despot, in the world conqueror, in the society belle and the political "boss." All belong to the same family. They are of the race of Amalek and the house of Agag. Their cry is like the prodigal, "Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me" and let me go away from parental control and do as I please.

There is no country where it is so rampant as our own. It appears to us as young manliness and calls itself liberty, but its end is license, lawlessness and Anti-Christ, that Lawless one who is yet to embody the elements of human wickedness and pride, and end the present dispensation by defying God and man and perishing, like his father, the devil, in his presumptuous pride. This spirit is found in every human heart. It may be disguised in many insidious forms. It may call itself by illustrious names and ape the highest ambitions and the noblest pretensions, but it is Agag and Satan every time. The thing in you that wants to rule, wants to have its own way, to be independent, refuse control, to despise reproof, is wrong in its very nature. The very first thing you need in order to be of any use anywhere is to be thoroughly broken, completely subjected and utterly crucified in the very core and center of your will. Then you will accept discipline and learn to yield and obey in matters in themselves indifferent and your will, will be so merged in His that He can use you as a flexible and perfectly
adjusted instrument, and henceforth you shall will only what God wills and choose only what God chooses for you.

This is the real battleground of human salvation; this is the Waterloo of every soul; this is the test question of every redeemed life. This was the point where Saul lost his kingdom and Agag lost his life, and where still the eternal destinies are lost or won as we learn the lesson or refuse to be led in triumph by our conquering Lord.

Beloved, let us mark it well. Let us not miss the warning. Let us remember forever that no man can rule others until he himself is absolutely led of God, that no man can conquer foes till he first is conquered, that no man can lead in triumph the hosts of evil or the hearts of men until he himself is led in triumph the willing captive of the Savior's love and the Master's will.

3. The Decree of Extermination. God has determined that the race of Amalek and the house of Agag should be utterly exterminated. They were not to be spared, but to be destroyed. It was a case of no compromise. There was nothing good in them. The least element of Agagism was destructive and the whole community, with all their goods and belongings, must be put out of existence. Now, this is God's decree against the flesh in us. It cannot be cleansed. It cannot be improved. It cannot be cultivated. It cannot be educated into ideas and principles. It must be exterminated. Now, what is the flesh? Is it the bad principle in man? Is it some outward or inward evil which can be cut away like a tumor by a surgical operation? Listen, "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." There is the uncompromising decree of the total depravity and the hopeless condition of the flesh. But now what is the flesh? Listen again: "But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you." There is the distinction clear as a ray of celestial light. Every man who has not the spirit of God is in the flesh, therefore, everything outside the spirit of God is flesh. Therefore, the flesh is not simply the sinful part of human nature, but the whole of human nature. It is the Adamic race. It is the natural man. It is the whole creature, and the whole thing is corrupt and polluted. The tree is so crooked you cannot straighten it without cutting it in two. The tumor is so interwoven with the flesh that you cannot cut it without killing the man. There is no remedy, There is no hope. The old life must be laid down and the new creation, wholly born out of heaven and baptized with the Spirit of God, must take its place as a resurrected life, as a new creation, as an experience so supernatural and Divine that its possessor can truly say, "I am no longer the former man, I have died and Christ has taken my place. It is no longer I, but Christ that liveth in me."

Don't try to sanctify the flesh. Don't attempt to evolve the kingdom of heaven out of the kingdom of hell. It is not evolution, it is creation. It is not morals or manners, it is a miracle of grace and power. Take no risks upon the old man. He will fail you every time. You may think your trained hawk is a dove, but in an unsuspecting moment its beak will be buried in your flesh. Your little wolf may have all the manners of the lamb, but in an evil hour it will destroy all your lambs and perhaps rend you limb from limb. It is hopelessly, eternally corrupt. It cannot please God. It must be utterly dethroned, renounced and crucified with Christ.

4. We see next the attempt of man to compromise with the flesh and to disregard this Divine decree of its extermination. Saul spared Agag that he might grace his triumph, and he kept the best of the spoil that he might sacrifice unto the Lord his God. He obeyed the commandment of the Lord to a certain extent. He defeated Amalek and destroyed the nation in a sense. He did all God told him as far as it was agreeable, and he took his own way just where it was pleasant. His obedience, therefore, was not really obedience to God, but truly self-will. He retained just enough of the flesh to destroy the whole service. The very essence of the disobedience was compromise. The very worst thing about it was that he tried to put the evil to a good use. It was a very insult in the face of heaven to bring the forbidden thing and offer it to the God he had defied. Now this is just the spirit of modern religious culture. Don't go too far. Don't be extreme. Don't be puritanical. Go easy. Be liberal. Meet the world half way. Marry that scoundrel to save him. Take that saloon keeper into the church because you can make good use of his money. Put that brazen-faced woman up in the choir because she will draw her theatrical set to hear her sing. Go to the theater and the play with your husband to get him to go to church with you on Sunday.

Nonsense. In the first place, in such an unequal contest on the enemy's ground the devil will always get the best of you, and instead of being saved the husband will drag to his level the woman that ventured on forbidden ground. The operatic singer, instead of bringing her set under the influence of religion, will bring the church to the level of her set and turn it into a clubhouse and a concert-room. The saloon keeper's money will moderate the tone of the preaching so that it will be a comfort unto Sodom, and vice and sin can sit unchecked, and even count itself the very buttress and pillar of the cause of the holy Christ.

Think you that God will accept such service? Will He who owns the treasures of the universe and could create a
mountain or a mine of gold in a moment, and send a thousand angels to sing in His sanctuaries, will He accept
the money that is stained with the blood of souls and polluted with the filth of dethroned purity and honor? Will
He accept the meretricious service that is sold for sordid gain? Will He go begging to the devil's shrine, and
asking his permission to let go his captives that they may be saved? Shame upon our unfaithfulness and our
compromise! Oh, for the sword of a Samuel to hew in pieces the compromises that are an offence to heaven
and a disgrace to the Bride of the Lamb.

5. We see the fawning pleading of the flesh for indulgence. Agag came forth, walking delicately, mincing like a
silly, coquetish girl, smiling, seeking by his blandishments to disarm opposition, to win favor, looking like an
incarnation of gentleness and innocence. A perfect gentleman! Surely, he could not harm a child! Surely, no
one could dream of doing him harm! Ah, that is the old flesh pleading for his life, pointing out its refinement, its
culture, its graces, the good that it is doing and wants to do, its claim upon your consideration and regard. It
will decorate your church with the finest taste; it will sing in your choirs with all the harmonies of classical
music and attract crowds; it will bring society to your church; it will give you a bright and liberal theology. It is
full of humanitarian plans for the relief of the suffering and the uplifting of degradation, and it offers you a
Pullman palace car prepaid to the gates of heaven.

Surely, such a beautiful gentle creature should not be rudely slain. But back of all its disguises and fawning, the
Holy Ghost will show you, if you will let Him, the serpent's coil, the dragon's voice and the festering corpse of
the charnel house.

Death is not always repulsive at the first sight. The daughter of Jairus was beautiful in her shroud, and a flush
of life still lingered on her cheek, but she was as dead as Lazarus festering in his tomb. And so that sweet-faced
girl, with her fawning charms, that brilliant minister with his intellectual sophistries, that voice that sings like an
angel in the choir, are as corrupt and polluted as that poor creature that lies in yonder hospital dropping to
pieces in the last stages of corruption, or that red-handed assassin reeking with the blood of his victim. They
are both flesh, only at different stages of their moral putrefaction.

6. We see in Agag the flesh feigning death. "Surely," said Agag, "the bitterness of death is past." And so you
will find plenty of people in pulpits and pews, on platforms and in obscure corners, who would make you
believe that they are utterly dead, and yet who remind you when you get a good look at them of corpses walking
around in their grave clothes. They are so conscious of their deadness that you know they are alive. They are
so proud of their humility that you would rather they were proud than humble. They are so constantly in their
own shadow that they try you by their religious egotism. Surely, dead people don't know it, don't think about it,
are unostentatious, unobtrusive, modest, simple, natural, free, and, like good water, without taste, color or
consciousness. Oh, for this blessed simplicity and this place of self-forgetting rest! Oh, for this fulfillment of the
prayer, "Lord, let me die so dead that I won't know it."

Beloved, there is no danger so great, especially among Christians somewhat advanced, as that of counting
ourselves in a place where we really do not live. There is nothing so hardening to the heart as to take the place
of self-surrender and then live a life of self-indulgence, self-will and adding to it the greater fault of
self-complacency; calling things holy which are not, bringing the standard down to our own experience and
filling ourselves with a self-complacent dream. Truly, we are to reckon that we are dead indeed. We are not to
reckon that we are reckoned dead, but we are to reckon on a reality, and we are to insist upon it and take
nothing less from God or from ourselves. Oh, that we would dare to call things by their right names and have no
counterfeit, even from ourselves.

7. We see self exposed and slain. Agag could not deceive Samuel. The old man pierces him through with one
glance of the Holy Ghost, and looking at his mincing, fawning figure, we can imagine him saying, "I know you
with all your fawning. You are an old murderer. You are a selfish, cruel tyrant. Your sword has made many a
mother childless, many an innocent victim has been crushed beneath your lust or hate, and back of all your
smiles there is a skeleton and a serpent's sting." And then with that sharp sword he cut through his
blandishments and hewed him to pieces before the Lord.

Sin never stops till it reaches its worst, and God shows us in a single sample the possibilities of the evil to
which the tiniest seed and fairest bud of selfishness may yet ripen.

Beloved, let us ask God to expose it in our hearts. Let us open our being to the sword of Samuel, which is just
the sword of the Holy Ghost. It is described in the Epistle to the Hebrews in these solemn, searching, but
blessed words: "The Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even
to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and
intents of the heart."

All that we need to be delivered from any form of self and sin is to really be willing to see it, to recognize it, to call it by its right name, to throw off its disguise, to brand it with its true character, to pass sentence of death upon it, to stand to the sentence without compromise, to consent to no reprieve, to give God the right to slay it, and then there is power enough in the sword of the Spirit, in the fire of the Holy Ghost, in the blood of Calvary, in the faithfulness and love and grace of God to make us dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.