

Project Runway

Designer Clothes For Disciples

Saul: Part 3



Written By
 ©Pastor Marty Baker
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My lawn is, in many respects, a living illustration of the maturation process of the Christian life. How so? Allow me to demonstrate.

Because I do not want any weeds in my tall fescue/bluegrass turf, I must constantly address weeds as they either arise out of the soil or germinate around the perimeter of my lawn as they blow over from a neighbor's property. To accomplish this perpetual purpose, which is the result of the Adamic fall (Genesis 3:18-19), I keep multiple bottles of various weed killers readily available to kill the intruder in question. Hence, for spotted spurge, I'll have one particular spray, for crabgrass I'll have another, and so on. After I mow, I typically walk around my lawn looking for weeds which need to be address. Once I identify them, I'll head into the garage, grab the appropriate bottle, and then start spraying.

Can you see the relationship between my lawn and the process of growing up in Jesus Christ? Perhaps a word from Paul will help you connect the dots:

¹¹ Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, ¹³ and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin *as* instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God. ¹⁴ For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace (Romans 6).

At the moment of salvation, God declares you, the former sinner, to be a righteous, holy person because of your faith relationship with Jesus (Romans 5:1-2). Sin (weeds), however, still dwells in your fleshly body (in your soil), and your responsibility now is to kill the sin in question by applying spiritual chemicals like confession, abstinence, radical change and action, prayer, and so forth.

Theologically, this killing of sin is called mortification (Romans 8:13). It is identifying those sins in your turf and dealing with them in a radical fashion lest they germinate, spread, and snuff out the healthy turf. As you can see from Paul's words in Romans 6, this process of spiritual maturation and sanctification is an ongoing, daily, moment by moment process because sin never sleeps, sin is always looking to germinate and multiply, and sin is perpetually laboring to bring forth the wild weeds the deeds of the flesh (2 Peter 3:18). To neglect, therefore, this much needed turf maintenance is to court certain chaos; but to address it in a timely fashion is to court a deeper spirituality.

How are you faring in your pursuit of growing up in Christ? How are you doing in dealing with the sin in your life which hampers your maturation?

King Saul didn't get the memo about this spiritual process, choosing to allow a weed named King Agag to live, when he should have been terminated as God commanded. He'd live to spiritually regret his decision, and so would Israel many years later. All God desired for him to do was eradicate the wicked king and his historically brutal, ruthless empire, but Saul, for selfish, prideful reasons decided, as so many do, to modify God's command and rationalize his behavior later. He should have been more radical and less practical.

To switch metaphors, King Saul willfully chose, as so many disobedient saints do, to wear a cloak of half-hearted obedience to God's clear, concise command. Even when confronted by the prophet Samuel with the evidence of his spiritual departure, he didn't come clean, but dug in by lying about his sin while blaming others for it. Disgusting, isn't it? If you are a wayward believer today, if you have skillfully kept your cloak of disobedience on by clever arguments, I pray this time in the Word will move you toward the feet of your Savior. And if you know a King Saul, a saint who is currently living a compromised life or a life of carnality masquerading as spirituality, then I pray for the Lord to make you a prophet Samuel to them.

To conclude our analysis of this pivotal passage for spiritual living, we must pose the all-familiar question:

Are You Wearing A Coat Called Half-Hearted Obedience? (1 Samuel 15)

Scene 4 (1 Samuel 15:12-19) introduced us to **The Encounter**, or the confrontation between Samuel and Saul. With Scene 5 (1 Samuel 15:20-21), which we call **The Evasion**, we see Saul's prideful techniques, once more, for deflecting the convicting words of the prophet. Sad. He should have faced his sin, but he didn't. Will you?

Seeing the king's willful sin in full, living color pretending to be true obedience, Samuel wasted no time moving to scene six where he brought the sinner up-to-speed regarding what counts for true spirituality in God's kingdom.

Scene 6: The Education (1 Samuel 15:22-23)

You know when you are going soft on sin when you always seek to soften your words toward an obstinate sinner. Sometimes the soft approach works, as with Jesus and the woman caught in adultery (John 8:11); however, sometimes the truth of God needs to bring a flash of radical insight regarding true spirituality. Learn from Samuel's method:

²² Samuel said, "Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD?"

Well-trained questions can act like a metal weed pulling device for breaking up the hardened soil and getting at the weed in question. Samuel dispels and destroys Saul's false spirituality with a simple question. Let me paraphrase it: "Does God desire religious rituals, be what they may, or obedience to His commands?" We all know where Saul stood on this one: Outer observance of religious rituals are just as, or more important than, inner obedience to God. Really? Remember Saul sought to justify his disobedience by saying the Amalekite animals remained alive so the Israelites could sacrifice them to God (1 Samuel 15:20-21). Samuel will utterly destroy this false, deceptive spiritual notion. Makes you wonder, "Lord, have I bought into and defended any false paths to holiness which you need to definitively demolish in my life?"

While Samuel's question made the king quite uncomfortable, and rightly so, the prophet followed it up with an answer:

Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.

The opening word particle, *behold*, is most emphatic in the Hebrew, designed to arrest the attention of the sinner (הִנֵּה שָׁמַעַ מִזִּבְחָ טוֹב לְהִקְשִׁיב מִחֶלֶב אֵילִים). "Obey" is based on the word "to hear" (שָׁמַעַ), a word underscoring the importance of hearing God and then going out and performing what you heard. It's a word Saul heard when God gave him the initial command to eradicate the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15:1), and it's employed strategically and sarcastically in verse 14 when Samuel mocks the disobedient king's full obedience because he "heard" Amalekite animals making a whole lot of noise when they should have been dead.

Saul, like so many, hid behind the outer trappings of religion while running from inner obedience, which is what God desires from all of His children. God didn't repudiate here the sacrificial system He instituted for the cleansing of sin and worship (Leviticus 1-7). On the contrary, he repudiated a saint who thought that God would be satisfied with outer piety and religious actions, even in the face of inner disobedience to the clear commands of God. Several quotes from godly Old Testament scholars substantiate this premise:

"Sacrifice is an external and physical phenomenon that reflects a spiritual reality between God and a human. But if one's motives are impure or ungodly, then the sacrifice itself is meaningless. Worse, it become nauseating to God (Isa. 1:13). Religious rituals always become a burden unless it is accompanied by appropriate heartfelt repentance, love, and adoration of God."¹

¹ Bill T. Arnold, *The New NIV Application Commentary: 1 & 2 Samuel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2003): 225.

Here's another:

The prophetic message is clear and unequivocal: direct and wholehearted obedience to God's commands is the only basis of a devout life ... Obedience will of course include, not eliminate, the proper outward observance of inward piety.²

These words hit home, don't they? How easily and readily we hide behind our outer religious actions. We say memorized prayers, we take time for fasting ... and we let others know about it ..., we offer financial gifts to God, we move through our daily Bible reading and so forth, while obstinately refusing to let the Word to move through our inner man. How skilled we are, at times, of projecting to others that we have our spiritual act together, while, if the truth became known, we'd be ashamed of our deception(s).

While in Israel last month, I couldn't help but see the all too familiar wooden screens rolled ritualistically up in front of the front desk at the hotel on Sabbath. Their purpose? To shield Ultra-orthodox Jews from seeing secular Jews sinning by working on Sabbath. Makes me immediately wonder: Are those who take pride in the placement of the barriers so they can be piously obedient inwardly obedient, or is it all a show? Regardless of who we are as saints of the living God, He desires full, immediate, inner observance of what He commands us? Are you giving it to Him, or are you, like Saul, hiding behind a cloak of false, outer piety?

Sad to say, some sins like this die hard and are handed down from father to son. Seven hundred years later, God still castigated the Israelites for placing more importance on outer religious actions, while neglecting or rejecting, outright, inner obedience to God's mandates. Isaiah is representative of the prophets (Jeremiah 7:22-23; Micah 6:6-8; Amos 5:21-24 ... and Jesus Matthew 23:23); who called Israel to task over their pseudo-spirituality:

¹¹ "What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?" Says the LORD. "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle; And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats. ¹² "When you come to appear before Me, Who requires of you this trampling of My courts? ¹³ "Bring your worthless offerings no longer, Incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies— I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. ¹⁴ "I hate your new moon *festivals* and your appointed feasts, They have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing *them*. ¹⁵ "So when you spread out your hands *in prayer*, I will hide My eyes from you; Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood. ¹⁶ "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, ¹⁷ Learn to do good; Seek justice, Reprove the ruthless, Defend the orphan, Plead for the widow. ¹⁸ "Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD, "Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They will be like wool (Isaiah 1).

Tough, but true and timely words, words we'd all do well to ponder, prayer over, and seek to put into practice. Here's a practical prayer: Lord, show me where in my life I'm engaged in seeking

² David F. Payne, *The Daily Study Bible Series: 1 & 2 Samuel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982): 79-80.

to validate my spiritual maturity by means of outer ritual while I'm inwardly reticent to obey you." Believe me, this is a prayer He will answer in short order. Prepare for some instant insight.

In order to move the stubborn, sinning saint to confess and move away from his sin, Samuel made this bold, jaw-dropping statement:

²³ "For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry.

Failing to obey God's commands, despite how you attempt to defend, portray, or rationalize it, is equivalent in God's mind to divination, or witchcraft.³ Gulp. Additionally, by way of grammatical parallelism, being insubordinate to God's Word is nothing short of sin and the worship at the feet of a false god, a concept clearly forbidden by the first and second of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3-4). Are you getting this? Is this sinking in? What does it mean to be insubordinate? The Hebrew word, *pashar* (פָּצַר) means to so push and/or beat against something you make it dull.⁴ This meaning probably calls for some soul-searching on your part.

³ Aune, D. E. "Divination." Edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised*. Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988. *I. Definition*

Divination may be defined as the art or science of deducing the future or the unknown through the observation and interpretation of some facet of nature or human life, ordinarily of an unpredictable and trivial character. The first systematic treatment of divination in antiquity was Cicero's *De divinatione*, in which the V 1, p 972 Latin concept of *divinatio* and the parallel Greek concept of *mantikē* are discussed at length. Following Posidonios of Apamea, he places all divinatory phenomena in one of two categories, *ars* or *natura* (Cicero *De divinatione* i.6.12). Divination dependent on *ars* (more commonly rendered as "artificial" or "inductive" divination) relies on the technical skill of the diviner to observe and interpret various signs or omens. Divination dependent on *natura* (more commonly rendered as "natural" or "intuitive" divination) receives knowledge of the future or the unknown through the direct inspiration of the diviner through trance, ecstasy, or vision. Although this twofold distinction has been extremely influential in subsequent discussion, it appears to have little heuristic value. In the OT and NT, the emphasis is placed heavily on natural or intuitive divination (see PROPHECY; INSPIRATION). The present discussion of divination is almost exclusively concerned with artificial or inductive divination.

Temple of Apollo, seat of the Delphic oracle. Here the prophetess uttered sounds that the priests translated into hexameter verse, often ambiguous, which they submitted to the pious who awaited the god's answer. (H. D. Betz)

II. Divination in the Bible

The biblical attitude toward divination may be generally characterized as one of disapproval and prohibition, though certain forms of divination are either viewed neutrally or receive tacit approval (e.g., divination by lots and divination by dreams; see below). In biblical passages that prohibit various forms of divination (e.g., Lev. 19:26, 31; 20:27; Dt. 18:9–14; 2 K. 17:17) such practices are closely associated with various forms of magic and sorcery. Nevertheless, magic must be carefully distinguished from divination. While magic in its various forms attempts to influence and manipulate the future (and is frequently both illegal and antisocial), divination primarily seeks to discover or determine what the future holds.

⁴The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-Aramaic Lexicon: 823, פָּצַר S⁶⁴⁸⁴ TWOT¹⁸⁰¹ GK⁷²¹⁰] **vb. push, press** (perhaps related, by transp., to Arabic فَزَعَ (*farāḍa*) appoint, prescribe, Assyrian *paršu*, command, cf. Ba^{xliii} (1889),¹⁸⁸);—**Qal Impf.** 3 ms. וַיִּפְצְרוּ Gn 19:3 +, 3 mpl. וַיִּפְצְרוּ v 9 2 K 2:17;—**push, press**, upon (ב pers.) physically Gn 19:9; = *urge* v 3 33:11 Ju 19:7 2 K 2:17, + inf. 5:16; read also prob. וַיִּפְצְרוּ 2 S 13:25, 27 2 K 5:23 (for וַיִּפְצְרוּ 1 S 28:23 (for וַיִּפְצְרוּ), Tanchum (cf. The), Weir in Dr 1 S 28:23 Kit^{id}. Bu HPS Löhr. **Hiph. Inf.** abs. הִפְצַר 1 S 15:23 to display pushing (i.e. arrogance, presumption; || מָרָה; cf. Dr). הִפְצַר S⁶⁴⁷⁷ TWOT^{1801a} GK⁷²⁰¹ appar. **n.f.** from פָּצַר 1 S 13:21; dub.; prob. incurably crpt.; AV file from פָּצַר Rabb., Ke *bluntness*; both lack philol. ground; v. especially Dr.

Disciples desirous of growing up in the faith would need to ask: “Lord, show me where in my life I am pushing and beating against your commands so hard, I’ve dulled them in my life so I do not think I need to obey them?”

We, who would never think of playing with an Ouija Board, or having our palms read, or attend a séance for the purposes of gaining insight into our lives and the future, engage in this type of secret sin when we act like we know better than God and thereby modify, bend, and twist His commands so we can have a better, nicer, more comfortable future. Right. Better think again. Further, we, who would quickly say we don’t worship idols, ever, just might be guilty of the ancient sin because we’ve shook our fist in the fact of a command or two from the Scriptures we didn’t like or find palatable to our current progressive, loving, accepting culture. Right. Better think again. Disobedience to God’s teachings and ways are spiritually shocking and sinister.

Disobedience is also costly. Samuel develops this point with his next statement to Saul:

Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has also rejected you from being king.”

Saul lost his kingship because he wouldn’t repent. God gave him ample opportunities to get his spiritual act together, as we see here and in previous chapters of 1 Samuel; however, for all the wrong, prideful, selfish reasons he just wouldn’t humble himself before God. So God lowered him through loss. Makes you ponder, What will I lose? What have I lost already? God wants to forgive, restore, and bless because this is His character (Jonah 4:1-2); however, if you chose to hide perpetually behind your outer spirituality, while neglecting inner obedience to God’s truth, you can expect God to eventually move to discipline you in order to wake you up (Hebrews 12).

Samuel’s words were hard to hear, I’m sure. They also stung the sinning Saul. Such is the nature of confrontation. It seeks to awaken the sinning saint so they can move onward and upward in their walk with God; however, if this doesn’t occur then judgment and discipline rests in the hands of a holy, loving God who desires to teach His children the need for unflagging obedience.

Moving now to scene seven, we encounter a king who finally appears to be humbled. I identify this historical narrative in this fashion:

Scene 7: The Effacement (1 Samuel 15:24-31)

At this juncture in the historical narrative, it appears King Saul *finally* came to his spiritual senses and repented of his carefully hidden disobedience to God:

²⁴ Then Saul said to Samuel, “I have sinned; I have indeed transgressed the command of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and listened to their voice. ²⁵ “Now therefore, please pardon my sin and return with me, that I may worship the LORD.”

So far, so good. Sounds like a genuine, heartfelt confession from a “broken” man. Read on and let’s see if this interpretation of valid or vapid. And while you are sifting through the verbal evidence don’t overlook the fact that Saul once more blamed everything on the peer pressure of the people. Smells fishy to me, but keep reading.

²⁶ But Samuel said to Saul, “I will not return with you; for you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel.”

How could Samuel be so terse, abrupt, and cold toward the confessional king? Did he sense something we can’t sense in the exchange because he looked Saul in the eye? Keep reading while looking for illumination:

²⁷ As Samuel turned to go, Saul seized the edge of his robe, and it tore. ²⁸ So Samuel said to him, “The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to your neighbor, who is better than you. ²⁹ “Also the Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind.”

Saul tore the part of the prophet’s robe containing the tassels representing the Law of Moses and commands of God, as required by God (Numbers 15:38-39). How ironic Saul tore this part of the garment in light of his willful departure from God’s specific command. With his robe now ripped and frayed, Samuel turned up the heat on the so-called repentant king. He let him know that in no uncertain terms the kingdom would be ripped from him and given to someone more worthy, someone better than him. Ouch. And then he added God would not, nor ever, change His mind about this decision. Ouch.

After this exchange is when we encounter a most telling statement from the repentant ruler:

³⁰ Then he said, “I have sinned; but please honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and go back with me, that I may worship the LORD your God.” ³¹ So Samuel went back following Saul, and Saul worshiped the LORD.

Did you catch that? Ah, we are finally given the motivation behind the confession. Saul simply desired to look good before the people and the nation. How spiritually sick. He just wanted the prophet next to him to make him look like a broken, contrite, and malleable follower of the living God. What a sham! What a joke! Saul is more sensitive to how he appears before the people than how he appears before Samuel’s God. Disgusting, isn’t it, this false, overly pious looking/sounding confession?

Samuel, tired of the constant spiritual disobedience and games of Saul, I’m sure, eventually caved in and went back to the public setting with the king, but that didn’t change his prophecy on iota. The kingdom would be given to another. Saul, however, in typical fashion, wasted no time in heading back to Israel proper to engage in the worship of God so he could keep his religious façade carefully in place. Tragic. Even in the face of this divinely orchestrated confrontation, replete with divine evidence and information, all the carnal king can do is work overtime to keep his pseudo-religiosity firmly in place.

Is Saul a picture of your life at this point? You've been confronted by a Samuel-type, you know the evidence is true, you know you are guilty of the sin they speak about, but you'll do all kinds of amazing things to make it appear you are confessional, when, in reality, you have no intention of moving away from your sin of disobedience to divine commands you don't find palatable. If this is a snapshot of you, if this is the type of carnal cloak you are wearing right now, realize that Jesus calls you to true, heartfelt confession right now so He can restore and bless you greatly. Will you, then, drop the mask and be honest about your sin before Him? I know He is waiting to hear from you.

Our story closes on a most ominous note with scene eight.

Scene 8: The Eradication (1 Samuel 15:32-33)

The aged prophet now carried out God's original commandment to King Saul. This harsh judicial action toward a ruthless, bloodthirsty, anti-Semitic, anti-God foe merely underscored God's rejection of the King. Had Saul been truly repentant he would have performed this task. The fact he didn't underscored the fallacious nature of his repentance and confession.

Enter Samuel, the obedient saint:

³² Then Samuel said, "Bring me Agag, the king of the Amalekites." And Agag came to him cheerfully. And Agag said, "Surely the bitterness of death is past."

Agag had no idea what was coming because so much time had elapsed. He thought he would live to see many more days on earth. He thought wrong for divine justice had to be rendered for crimes and sins committed against the innocent:

³³ But Samuel said, "As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women." And Samuel hewed Agag to pieces before the LORD at Gilgal.

Before capital punishment fell upon Agag, who had the blood of innocents on his hands, Samuel made sure he knew his impending judgment rested on true divine justice and historical facts of past horrific actions against the less fortunate. With that he terminated the wicked ruler completely, and then he and Saul parted company forever.

³⁴ Then Samuel went to Ramah, but Saul went up to his house at Gibeah of Saul.

³⁵ And Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death; for Samuel grieved over Saul. And the LORD regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel.

Sad. Sin had not only tainted his relationship with God, it had destroyed his relationship with one of the godliest men in the nation, Samuel. I'm sure Samuel's journey to Ramah was anything but joyous, after all, he had seen his share of outright disregard and disloyalty to God and God's holy Word.

What do we learn from this closing scene? God highlights the importance of dealing with our sin in a radical, definitive fashion. Agag was not left alive to create havoc on another day should he break out, and he would have if given an opportunity. No. God's prophet removed the weed from among the people, as King Saul should have.

By way of personal application, this teaches us the utter need to obey God's Word and obliterate a sin in our lives, to stop toying with it, and to move toward eradicating it completely. I'm sure I don't have to give you any ideas right now regarding what sin that may be. You know which one it is.

- It's the one you've kept hidden for years.
- It's the one only a few people in your life know about.
- It's the one you make excuses for when it does surface.
- It's the one you rationalize.
- It's the one you dabble with even after saying you have repented of it.
- It's the one you have redefined so it doesn't appear as a sin, even though God's Word says likewise.
- It's the one you say is just part of your DNA.
- It's the one, well, you can finish the sentence, I'm convinced.

How do you kill it? Good question. Here are a couple of ideas:

- Bring it out in the open, into the light. Tell some godly people about it as you confess it.
- If there are any physical objects related to this sin, destroy ALL of them, and let witnesses see you do it.
- Get some godly people in your life who can, and will, hold you accountable for this sin.
- Don't place yourself in situations where this sin will be overly tempting to you.
- Keep away from people who engage in this sin but don't see it as such.
- Do ask God to fill you daily with the power of His Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18-19).
- Do pray daily for yourself to be victorious over this sin, and challenge other saints to pray with and for you. Believe me, there is power in prayer.
- Lastly, do read the Word and verbally commit yourself to obeying it even if it bothers you, challenges you, runs counter to your culture, and so forth. Obedience brings blessing, so make it your life quest to be known as a doer of the Word (James 1:22, "*But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves*").