

Project Runway

Designer Clothes For Disciples

Saul: Part 2



Written By
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In 1972, I traveled to Spain for a month with my uncle, Tony Sanchez, his wife, Roberta, my cousin Steven and my uncle's father, whom we called "Papa," and a cousin named Dee. I had a wonderful, memorable time for one month in the country of my uncle's birth, and his financial status guaranteed us a true adventure of a lifetime.

While in Torremolinos on the southern Mediterranean coast, Steve, twelve years old, and I talked to my uncle into letting us rent a small paddle boat for a couple of hours. After he paid the fee and we secured the boat, we eagerly headed toward the waiting, glistening ocean. I'll never forget his last command to us, "You boys don't go out very far. Stay close to the coast." "Oh, we'll make sure we don't go out very far," we replied in unison.

As we paddled out to sea, we turned back occasionally to make sure our little boat remained somewhat near the big red umbrella where Tony sat waiting for our return. In time, however, the sea just seemed to draw us out farther and farther as we paddled. At one point we look backed and couldn't see the umbrella, and a little later we had to wait until we crested a large swell so we could see any land at all.

And then it happened.

A massive oceanic vessel sailed by us, and we could see the people clearly on deck and make out things in the windows. Obviously, we had paddled way beyond the safety of the coast. Obviously, we had to paddle hard to also get prepared for the wake of a ship of this size.

Realizing we were in deep trouble, we charted a course for our return to land. Steve grabbed the rudder, and as we crested those rolling waves we looked for land and then paddled

like mad. For a while, we didn't think we had the strength to make it back; however, after paddling as hard as we could for a good deal of time, we eventually reached land to a very concerned Uncle Tony. Believe me, after that paddle boat excursion, I think we should have been put up against any Olympic rowing team. Looking back forty-two years later, I'll be the first to tell you, "We could have died out there. What were we thinking?" I'll also be the first to tell you, "Obedience matters and disobedience is costly."

King Saul draped his spiritual body in the same cloak Steve and I wore that day, a cloak called half-hearted obedience. God's **edict** summoned him to be his instrument of righteous judgment against Israel's bloodthirsty and ancient foe, the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15:1-3), and, at first, it appeared the king intended to listen to God as he **engaged** the enemy (1 Samuel 15:4-9). However, after the battle, God gave the prophet, Samuel, inside **enlightenment** regarding the true activity of the king. He had obeyed only to a point, choosing to keep the Amalekite king, Agag, as a trophy/captive, along with assorted financially costly animals (1 Samuel 15:10-11).

Hitting the play button on our DVR, we jump back into the episode of **Project Runway: Designer Clothes For Disciples** where we left off. We'll also take another look at the question posed by the historical show:

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

Well, are you? Do you hear God's voice? Has a command from the Word jumped out at you lately? Did you obey it fully, or think of reasons and rationalizations to modify it to your cultural and personal comfort level? Maturing disciples achieve maturity (and demonstrate their love of Jesus, "If you love me, you will keep My commandments," John 14:15) by being convicted of their selective obedience to Christ, and choosing to drape themselves in the cloak called unwavering obedience. Their radical obedience also enables them to deal with entrenched Amalekites in their lives, with sins which easily trip them up (Hebrews 12:1, "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God").

Let's see how King Saul fared with this modified version of obedience to God's clear command:

Scene 4 (1 Samuel 15:12-19): The Encounter

The biblical author does a great job recalling Samuel's confrontation with the errant King. As we move through this portion of divinely inspired Scripture, we'll read the text and then offer salient, practical observations.

¹² Samuel rose early in the morning to meet Saul; and it was told Samuel, saying, "Saul came to Carmel, and behold, he set up a monument for himself, then turned and proceeded on down to Gilgal."

Why did Samuel go to King Saul at daybreak? Because the sin of disobedience is so dangerous and destructive personally/corporately/nationally it should not be given any additional time to breathe. Sin blinds (Isaiah 6:9-10). Sin pollutes (Romans 8:19-22). Sin results in tempting others to sin (1 Kings 16:2; Proverbs 1:10-13). No wonder Samuel rose early.

Why did Samuel go to King Saul? He went to admonish him, to confront him for his half-hearted, modified obedience to the command of God. What does it mean to admonish? It means you lovingly and clearly address a known sin in someone's life in order to move them away from disobedience and toward obedience. Paul articulates this notion in places like 1 Thessalonians 5:14,

¹⁴ We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.

The word rendered “admonish” in Greek, *noutheteo* (νουθετέω) originally meant “to counsel about avoidance or cessation of an improper course of conduct,”¹ and it's a concept woven throughout Pauline teaching (Acts 20:31; Romans 15:14; 1 Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:28; 3:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:12; 2 Thessalonians 3:15). Here Paul weds the command to “the unruly,” which referred to a person who lived a life on the edge, a life in constant opposition to the clear commands of God or the laws and rules of society.² Anymore, our culture is unruly and its unruly nature is spilling over big-time into the local church as more and more disciples question God's Word and chose to live openly in defiance of it. In order to keep sin in check within the Church, we'll most certainly need more saints with the love and courage of Samuel, people who know of the danger of disobedience and the need to address it quickly. Along these lines, I have to ask, “Is there a King Saul in your life you need to admonish in love?” “Is a saint you know living fast and loose with God's Word, while thinking they are spiritually on track?” Perhaps it's time for you to get up early and make a house call.

¹ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of The New Testament And Other Early Christian Literature*, 679: νουθετέω fut. νουθετήσω; 1 aor. ἐνουθέτησα. Pass.: aor. ptc. νουθετηθέντες Wsd 12:26; pf. 2 sg. νενουθέτησαι Job 38:18 (s. prec. entry; Trag. et al.; PGrenf II 93, 3; LXX; pseudepigr.; Philo; Jos., Ant. 4, 260; 20, 162; Did.) to counsel about avoidance or cessation of an improper course of conduct, *admonish, warn, instruct* w. acc. of pers. (Dio Chrys. 56 [73], 10; Sb 6263, 26) Ac 20:31; 1 Cor 4:14 (Wsd 11:10 τούτους ὡς πατήρ νουθετῶν; PsSol 13:9; Jos., Bell. 1, 481, Ant. 3, 311); Col 1:28; 3:16 (in the last two pass. w. διδάσκειν, as Pla., Leg. 8, 84b; Philo, Decal.); 1 Th 5:12; 2 Th 3:15; Tit 1:11 v.l.; 1 Cl 7:1; 2 Cl 19:2. ἀλλήλους Ro 15:14; 2 Cl 17:2. τοὺς ἀτάκτους warn the idle 1 Th 5:14 (punish, as Plut., Sertor. 578 [19, 11] πληγαῖς v., probably overstates). τὸν οἶκον Hv 1, 3, 1; also τὰ τέκνα 1, 3, 2. τὰς χήρας καὶ τοὺς ὀρφανούς 2, 4, 3. ἀμαρτάνοντας m 8:10. Pass. νουθετεῖσθαι ὑπὸ τινος (Philo, Deus Imm. 134; Jos., Ant. 20, 162a) 2 Cl 17:3; Hv 3, 5, 4.—DELG s.v. νόος. M-M. TW. Spicq.¹

² Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of The New Testament And Other Early Christian Literature*, 148: ἄτακτος, ον (s. ἀτακτέω) gener. ‘not in the proper order’ (3 Macc 1:19; TestNapht 2:9; Philo; Jos., Bell. 2, 517; 649, Ant. 15, 152; Ath. 25:3 [ἀταξία ibid. 3:2]; loanw. in rabb.)

① of volitional state, **pert. to being out of step and going one's own way, disorderly, insubordinate** (Hdt., Thu. et al.; Sb 6152, 13; 6153, 16; PFlor 332, 4; Philo, Sacr. Abel. 32) 1 Th 5:14 (cp. SEG XXVII, 261 B, 99; s. CSpicq, *Studia Theologica* 10, '56, 1–13); but some prefer the sense *idle, indolent* (s. ἀτακτέω and ἀτάκτως; also the orator Lycurgus 39 ἄτακτος=‘not at one's post’).—GHolland, *SBLSP* 24, '85, 327–41.

② of affective state **pert. to being without socially recognized constraint, undisciplined** φορὰ impulse Dg 9:1 (cp. Pla., Leg. 2 p. 660b ἄτακτοι ἡδοναί; Plut., Mor. 5a likew.).—M-M. TW. Spicq.²

When you show up, don't be shocked by activity of the disciple and do have the facts, please, not emotionally charged hearsay. God gave Samuel the word that King Saul had arrogantly set up a monument to himself in Carmel, a site in southern Israel. Interestingly enough, the Hebrew word for monument here is *yad*, which literally means "a hand." Why isn't it translated this way? In their ancient culture, the *yad* denoted a clinched fist which spoke of a person's power which brought them victory. The Hebrew sentence structure purposefully showcases the audacity of the King by placing a particle (*hinneh*) with a waw disjunctive (וְהִנֵּה) first in the sentence instead verb:

וְהִנֵּה מַצֵּיב לֹא יָד

It's as if God said emphatically, "Can you believe Saul took the time to construct a fist statue to his so-called victory?" Imagine the arrogance of this monument. It's additional evidence that King Saul's obedience wasn't obedience at all, but a thin veneer of righteousness covering the rot of self-glorification before his troops and his people. Thomas Carlyle's words about pride are certainly applicable at this juncture: "The greatest fault is to be conscious of none."³ What about you? Are you guilty of boasting about a victory God gave you when, in fact, you were not totally obedient to Him? Are you guilty of pointing other disciples to your "fist monument" of a spiritual victory when, in fact, you are still walking in hidden disobedience? You had better reconsider for your sin will not just blind you; it will move you toward divine discipline (Hebrews 12).

You'll see the blinding nature of the willful sin of half-hearted obedience with Saul's first words to Samuel:

¹³ Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed are you of the LORD! I have carried out the command of the LORD."

We all know this had LIE written all over it. Again, I must ask a personal question: Are you purposefully lying to other saints ... like your wife, your husband, your father, your mother and so forth ... about your obedience to God, when in reality you are a living example of compromise and modification of God's Word?

Samuel, armed with the truth about King Saul, wasted no time admonishing him:

¹⁴ But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?"

Talk about a touch of sarcasm. It's as if he said, "Say, Saul, if you obeyed God to the letter, then what's up with all those animal noises in the background? Where'd you get them?" Once more, remember in your admonishment to have the facts. Facts will hopefully be used by the Spirit to plough the hardened heart so there can be repentance and growth.

Like any clever, carnal sinner, Saul went into the diversion mode to cover his spiritual tracks:

³ Mark Water, Compiler, *The New Encyclopedia Of Christian Quotations* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984): 825.

¹⁵ Saul said, “They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and oxen, to sacrifice to the LORD your God; but the rest we have utterly destroyed.”

Underscore the plural pronoun “they.” “They” who? The people, or more precisely Saul’s crack troops. The spiritually sick King sought to deflect the admonishment by passing blame to the people. Put differently, to save spiritual face he threw his soldiers under the proverbial bus. Sound familiar? Not that you have ever done this. This is a technique to keep from coming clean from sin as old as God’s encounter with mankind’s fall in the Garden of Eden.

When God confronted Adam after he willingly ate the forbidden fruit and then his eyes were opened, revealing his nakedness, the exchange is as astonishing as it is embarrassing:

¹¹ And He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” ¹² The man said, “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate” (Genesis 3).

Adam didn’t just throw his wife, Eve, under the bus, he threw God under the bus when he said, “The woman whom You gave to be with me.” Translated, “Had you not given her to me, I would have been spiritually obedient and fine.” Right. I hope this little historical episode from Genesis helps you stop blaming others for your half-hearted, sinful disobedience to God. I hope it moves you from always claiming you are an innocent victim, to seeing yourself as the willful victimizer. I hope it moves you from trying to hide your sin, to coming clean from your sin so you can move onto wearing clothes more fitting of a disciple of Jesus.

Perpetual victimhood is just a sly, sneaky way of keeping you from feeling guilt, and if you don’t feel guilt then why in the world would you see the need to be confessional (1 John 1:9)? Do you have a drinking problem? How about a pornographic problem? How about an anger problem? How about a flirting problem as or with a married person? Are you quite skilled at hiding your sin behind the cultural concept that it is not really sin, per se, but a disease, a psychological disorder you can’t help? Are your children undisciplined and disruptive but they remain that way because you blame anyone and everyone else for what happens to them? You know, chances are good, unfortunately, you are continuing in your sin, even when admonished in a variety of venues, because you are, well, just a victim. And if everyone is just a victim, then no one really needs to accept responsibility for their godless, sinful actions, which results, logically, in the social disintegration of society.

I think Solomon’s advice in Proverbs 28 is a pattern for the new clothes some might desperately need to put on:

¹³ He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion.

It’s time to come clean, wouldn’t you say? It’s time to stop playing the victim and blaming everyone else for your spiritual half-hearted behavior toward Christ. But be real. Coming clean, as we see from King Saul’s life, might not be super easy. Read on and you’ll see what I mean.

Samuel, like a godly man, responded openly and candidly to rationalization and excuse of King Saul:

¹⁶ Then Samuel said to Saul, “Wait, and let me tell you what the LORD said to me last night.” And he said to him, “Speak!”

I'm sure King Saul lived to regret that reply.

Wasting no time in his effort to show the King just how detestable his clothing was to the living, holy God, Samuel continued his verbal confrontation with the facts:

¹⁷ Samuel said, “Is it not true, though you were little in your own eyes, you were made the head of the tribes of Israel? And the LORD anointed you king over Israel,
¹⁸ and the LORD sent you on a mission, and said, ‘Go and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are exterminated.’”

Samuel gave Saul a brief history lesson. A Marty paraphrase might sound like this, “You were a nobody, from a small tribe, and God Himself picked you and made the king over all the tribes. Your skills and persona didn’t acquire this unique position for yourself. No, God bequeathed it upon you, pure and simple. And He, who made you the first king of Israel, told you specifically and clearly what to do with your ancient foes, the Amalekites: Eradicate them. You, Saul, the leader, didn’t obey God. You, Saul, the leader, modified what God said; therefore, don’t you dare stand there and blame others for your sinful activity. You are THE leader, man which means you, and you alone, are responsible for your actions.”

Got anyone in your life that needs to be told basically the same message? Who knows? It might even be you.

- You lost a job because you played the victim when you were the victimizer.
- You don’t talk to your parents anymore because of what they did to you, when, if the truth be known, the severed relationship rest squarely on your shoulders.
- You’ve trashed a dating relationship because you made some really bad choices and chose to deal with their nasty outcome by blaming others.
- You’ve got yourself in a financial pickle because of your choices, not because others forced you. I know a man whose wife inherited a large sum of money from her mother. Within one year all the money was gone while he, who knew virtually nothing about the stock market, played the volatile futures market. Now, he has no financial future.
- You left a volunteer position at another church because of what “they” did to you, when in reality, it is what “you” did to them.
- You are living in the basement of your home and not the master bedroom because you, as the leader of your marriage, made some really bad choices with who you spoke to on Facebook and how you spoke to them.

You get the point of Samuel. I do. It’s time to stop blaming others for results of our sinful choice of disobeying God, and start stepping up to the plate with the uniform called honesty,

authenticity, and transparency. It's time to start asking ourselves a pointed, practical question about our true motivation for living a sub-prime spiritual life. That's what Samuel directed King Saul to do and it's great advice:

¹⁹ “Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD, but rushed upon the spoil and did what was evil in the sight of the LORD?”

Why, indeed? I can think of several reasons. How about self-exaltation and pride? Isn't modifying and altering God's Word and commands an overt expression of your arrogance in thinking you are smarter than God? Additionally, what better way to showcase your military prowess than parading King Agag around every now and then before cheering crowds. How about greed? That one is easy to spot when you bump into all the loot King Saul ... along with the soldiers ... decided to keep for themselves. Of the Ten Commandments, number ten, involving not coveting anything your neighbor owns (Exodus 20:17), is the only commandments focused intently on inner sin, and to commit this sin was to break all the others ones, by default (James is quite clear on this: “*For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all,*” James 5:10).

So far, Samuel's confrontation with the King probably didn't go to well. Why? Because the King wouldn't be honest, he wouldn't be real, and he wouldn't accept responsibility for his willful disobedience of God's command. Learn from Samuel if you have to confront a saint in sin. Be prepared for obfuscation, rationalization, victimization, excuses, and so forth. And get prepared, emotionally, spiritually, and psychologically for more of what you've seen before from the person in question. Scene 5 shows us this in bold relief.

Scene 5 (1 Samuel 15:20-21): The Evasion

King Saul's defense of his offense leaves your jaw on the proverbial floor:

²⁰ Then Saul said to Samuel, “I did obey the voice of the LORD, and went on the mission on which the LORD sent me, and have brought back Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. ²¹ “But the people took *some* of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the choicest of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the LORD your God at Gilgal.”

Hold it right there. Let's analyze this. Why? We need further observation because, well, there is Saul in each of us.

First, King Saul lied, again, to the prophet by emphatically underscoring his supposed obedience. Years ago a Christian couple in our church approached me with a thorny marriage issue. The wife, we'll call Suzie, claimed her husband, “Larry,” stayed up and served triple x-rated television sights. She said she knew he did because she could see into the family den, where the wide-screen TV was located, from their bedroom. After multiple confrontations and conversations, followed by vehement denials by Larry, eventually the couple got divorced. His argument always was that Suzie was just too controlling and too suspicious as a person.

About a year after their divorce, Larry came to my office. He said he had something to tell me: “Pastor, I'm sorry I flat-out lied to you all that time. Yes, I did everything Suzie said I

did.” Larry, unlike Saul, at least finally embraced his sin and became an obedient follower of Christ, but there was that rough patch where he lied right to my face repeatedly. Is that your method? Who are you lying to?

Two, King Saul told a half-truth. He had attempted to fulfill God’s command, but it was only partial. He went so far and then stopped. What about you? Are you telling brothers and sisters in Christ close to you that you are finally dealing with a certain sin, while, in reality, you are still playing with it?

Three, King Saul threw the people, or the soldiers under the bus, again. Even when confronted with the cold, hard facts, he defaulted to using evasion and deflecting techniques. Far easier to blame someone else, than to have to be a man and accept responsibility for one’s mis-steps. If this is a snapshot of you, I’d dare say it’s time to embrace your sin before a God who is full of forgiveness and mercy.

Four, King Saul’s slide into further sin is evidenced by the fact he didn’t call God, his God, but Samuel’s God, viz., “your God.” This is like saying, “He’s not my God, but your God.” Mark this well. The sin of half-hearted obedience will cause you to say and do the most shocking things, and it will, without a doubt, destroy your intimacy with Jesus to the point even your language makes you sound far from him ... without you even knowing it.

From a modern psychological perspective, King Saul suffered from what some would label as “illusory superiority.” This describes a person who arrogantly exaggerates their own positive characteristics and abilities when all evidence speaks to the contrary.

A recent study validates the “condition:”

Recently (2014), a team of British researchers tested this common “better-than-average” tendency by surveying 85 convicts at a prison in South East England about their pro-social traits. The inmates were aged 18 to 34 and the majority had been jailed for acts of violence and robbery. The inmates completed questionnaires anonymously and in relative privacy. Here’s what the study concluded:

Compared with “an average prisoner” the [convicts] rated themselves as more moral, kinder to others, more self-controlled, more law-abiding, more compassionate, more generous, more dependable, more trustworthy, and more honest. Remarkably, they also rated themselves as higher on all these traits than “an average member of the community,” with one exception—law-abiding. The prisoners rated themselves as equivalent on this trait relative to an average community member.⁴

Funny, isn’t it? While they are wearing prison clothes in their minds they are some of those most morally well-dressed people in town. Shocking, but so insightful into man’s heart. Could it be a picture of the spiritual clothes you have on right now? If so, I challenge you to lay them down at the cross of Christ, while asking Him to not only forgive you, but to give you clothes fitting for a disciple. Who will be the first to take the challenge?

⁴ Inmates Think They Are More Moral, *Preachingtoday.com*, accessed May 20, 2015.