

Dodging the Rod

David & Saul Pt.10: Fear of Man pt.3 1 Samuel 18:1-19

Summary: Fear of harm leads to compromise. Fear of loss – being afraid not of God but only of the rod He uses, and trying to beat the rod rather than return to God. We do that by lying to avoid consequences of sin, drowning out consequences with pleasure, ignoring the rod, or trying to undo the work of the rod. Trying to dodge the rod is useless and rebellious. When the rod is a person, we turn against the person instead of turning back to God. So humble yourself under His mighty hand.

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1-7 After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. ² From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return to his father's house. ³ And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. ⁴ Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt. ⁵ Whatever Saul sent him to do, David did it so successfully that Saul gave him a high rank in the army. This pleased all the people, and Saul's officers as well. ⁶ When the men were returning home after David had killed the Philistine, the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with tambourines and lutes. ⁷ As they danced, they sang: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands."

⁸ Saul was very angry; this refrain galled him. "They have credited David with tens of thousands," he thought, "but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?" ⁹ And from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David.

¹⁰ The next day an evil spirit from God came forcefully upon Saul. He was prophesying in his house, while David was playing the harp, as he usually did. Saul had a spear in his hand ¹¹ and he hurled it, saying to himself, "I'll pin David to the wall." But David eluded him twice. ¹² Saul was afraid of David, because the LORD was with David but had left Saul. ¹³ So he sent David away from him and gave him command over a thousand men, and David led the troops in their campaigns.

¹⁴ In everything he did he had great success, because the LORD was with him. ¹⁵ When Saul saw how successful he was, he was afraid of him. ¹⁶ But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he led them in their campaigns.

¹⁷ Saul said to David, "Here is my older daughter Merab. I will give her to you in marriage; only serve me bravely and fight the battles of the LORD." For Saul said to himself, "I will not raise a hand against him. Let the Philistines do that!"

¹⁸ But David said to Saul, "Who am I, and what is my family or my father's clan in Israel, that I should become the king's son-in-law?" ¹⁹ So when the time came for Merab, Saul's daughter, to be given to David, she was given in marriage to Adriel of Meholah.

Review

Walk with God

Last week we talked about the fact that the solution to people-pleasing is God-pleasing. Our goal should be to live to please God, and to desire and delight in God's approval and praise more than human approval and praise. I did not mention it last week, but I should also add that this goes for all people-pleasing, even if the person you are trying to please is yourself. Some people do not really care much at all what everyone else thinks, and their lives are not driven by the impossible slave-driver of popular opinion, but they are driven by an even worse slave-driver – and that is, their own opinion. Sometimes in our pride we imagine that we are far stronger, far more capable, much smarter, and much more righteous than we really are, so we are constantly defeated - not because we fall short of other people's expectations, but because we fall short of our own expectations. Living for human approval is sin and it is idolatry even if that human is yourself. Remember 1 Cor.4:3 – Paul did not even accept his own judgment of himself – only God's. We should not live to impress others, we should not live to impress ourselves, we must always live only to please God, and I gave you a big long list of things the Bible says are pleasing to God. I was tempted to turn that into another whole series on how to please God, but we are already on a bit of a tangent as it is so that study will have to wait, so instead of studying that whole list, let me just give you a three-word summary. The three-word summary of how to please God is found in the life of Enoch.

Heb. 11:5,6 By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. 6 without faith it is impossible to please God

It is interesting, because verse five says Enoch pleased God, but if you look up the OT account, instead of "pleased" it says "walked with." (Gn.5:21-24) The Hebrew says Enoch walked with God and the author of Hebrews¹ takes that to mean he pleased God by faith. So we please God when we walk with Him in faith, and that is exactly what Paul said in 1 Thes. 4.

1 Thes. 4:1 Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to walk in order to please God, as in fact you are walking.... 3 For this is God's will... (and went on to talk about sexual purity)

Pleasing God is a matter of how you walk. You please Him by walking with Him, and walking with God is a matter of trusting Him and seeking His will. So the picture of walking with God means being close by His side as you progress through life - joining Him in His desires so that your heart is right alongside His heart. (There is a huge difference between following rules, and doing what someone in authority desires simply because that person desires it.) We please God when we walk with Him by faith – loving what He loves and hating what He hates. When something that delights God delights you, you are walking with God. When you love someone He loves, you are walking close to God. When the idea of doing His will is delightful to you, and so you seek it – you are walking with God. So the three-word summary of what pleases God is "walk with Him." And God is mostly pleased with Christians because even though we often fail, mostly we walk with Him.

¹ Following the LXX

The solution is not for Jesus to make you feel good about yourself

One other point I should probably make about this before we move on is this – we do not try to please Christ in the same way we used to try to please men. The reason we want to please men is generally for self-glorification. We want to boost our self-esteem. And in today's psychologized Christian culture, some people are teaching that the solution to the problem of people-pleasing is to look to Christ to boost your self-esteem. Instead of looking to people to make you feel good about yourself, look to the Lord to help you feel good about yourself. Realize that you are so important that He died for you. That is how special you are. Jesus loves you and therefore you should feel good about yourself.

Jesus does love you. But if we reduce God's love for us down to some kind of self-esteem boost, we are missing most of what is wonderful about His love for us. Jesus does not love you because you are important. When we think of Christ's death on our behalf, that should not impress us with our own self-importance. What it should do is impress us with how massive our guilt was. What enormous, infinite vileness must there have been in my soul if it took that kind of sacrifice to pay for my sin? If someone has to pay \$100 trillion dollars to cover the damages you have caused, that is not a statement about how important you are - it is a statement about how guilty you were. So again, the goal is not for you to feel good about yourself, the goal is for you to feel good about God.

Fear of harm

So the last two weeks we have examined one particular kind of fear of man, and that is fear of human disapproval, and I told you there are two other kinds that also stand out in these chapters. Fear of human disapproval (which causes people-pleasing) we saw in chapter 15. The second kind we see in chapter 17 (the chapter about Goliath). There we see the fear of *harm*. Saul failed to fight Goliath because he feared defeat (and the humiliation, loss, and physical harm that came with it). This is another kind of man-fearing that is forbidden for the Christian. Not only are we forbidden to fear human disapproval; we are also forbidden to fear physical harm and death.

Lk.12:4 I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more.

That is not to say it is sinful for your pulse to go up if you get surrounded by a bunch of thugs in a dark alley. The point is our fear of harm from man should always be a smaller thing and less of a motivation than our fear of God's chastisement. It is okay to be afraid of pain and death. If you are more afraid of pain and death than of displeasing God you are guilty of fear of man. And the principle applies not just to physical suffering, but to any kind of suffering. Sometimes you are put into a position where you have to either – lie, or lose your job - steal or starve - go along with the crowd in their sin or be rejected - marry an unbeliever, or risk spending your life single - get a sinful divorce, or live in a painful marriage. And when we face those kinds of decisions then we know if we fear God more or man more.

I have had people tell me that they had to commit some sin. They had no choice. If they didn't do it they would starve to death (or some other horrible fate). And Jesus' response to that is, "Don't be afraid of that." What is the worst that can happen? Just suffering and death – that's all. *Compared to God's displeasure that is nothing!* Compared to suffering God's displeasure, suffering and torture and death are nothing. It would be much, much more pleasant to suffer and die with God's favor than to live in luxury under God's anger.

Compromise

Last week we saw how fear of human disapproval leads to compromise. Fear of harm also leads to compromise. The Apostle Peter perverted the gospel and led Barnabas astray because of fear of

disapproval, and he had disowned Christ three times because of fear of harm. It was because of fear of harm that Pilate crucified Jesus. Fear of harm is such a dangerous sin, because once Satan knows you will compromise righteousness to save your hide; once he sees that you are more afraid of injury and death than you are of God's chastisement, he can get you to do anything. All he has to do is threaten your physical safety.

Fear of loss

Saul was dodging the rod

So one kind of man-fearing is fear of people's disapproval (ch.15), a second kind is fear of harm or death (ch.17), and now in chapter 18 we see a third kind – fear of loss. God had already told Saul that He was going to take the kingdom away from Saul and give it to someone who is better, and that is starting to come to pass now with David's popularity.

There used to be a popular TV show called "Everybody Loves Raymond." You could title the opening paragraph of chapter 18 "Everybody Loves David." I really cannot think of a more accurate title for this section. Even Saul loved him at first. The women love him, - the soldiers love him, - the people love him, - the officers love him, - prince Jonathan loves him, - King Saul loves him, - Michal loves him, - all Israel loves him, - all of Judah loves him – everybody loves David. And so it is pretty clear where things are headed – David is going to end up on that throne. And that is what Saul was afraid of. It is not that he thought David was going to come attack him. He was afraid that any rise in David's popularity would move inexorably toward the loss of the throne to David. And he was right.

So I am calling this kind of man-fearing "the fear of loss" because he was afraid that because of David he would lose the kingdom. You could also call it fear of God's judgment, but that would be a little misleading, because it was not fear of God. It was specifically a fear of the instrument God was using to bring about that judgment – not fear of God Himself. Those are two very different things. If Saul had feared God he would have responded by seeking God's favor through repentance and faith. But Saul puts forth no effort at all in that direction. Instead he puts all his effort toward eliminating David. 1 Samuel 18 is the story of how Saul tried to deal with God's rod instead of dealing with God. [Kids – when I talk about God's rod I am talking about the paddle He uses to spank us – when He brings pain into our lives to discipline us. Not a real paddle – but the pain that comes when He is unhappy with you.] Saul was like a child who, instead of obeying his father, just tries to wrest the paddle out of his father's hand. Saul wanted to mitigate the effect of God's judgment, not by getting right with God, but by manipulating the world around him so as to protect himself against God's judgment.

You fear the one you believe holds the keys to your comfort, wellbeing, joy, and Saul thought the one who was in charge of his wellbeing was David. David had the power, in Saul's eyes, to take the kingdom away from him. If you fear God and you believe your wellbeing is determined by Him alone, then when a threat comes along you respond by seeking God's favor. But if you fear man you respond to the threat by trying to eliminate it and seeking God's favor is not even part of the picture in your assessment of the solution to the problem.

Examples of rod-dodging

You have heard of dodging the draft – this is dodging the rod. Saul was a discipline dodger. But unlike the draft, punishment and discipline from God is impossible to dodge, and trying to do so is the epitome of folly, and it is serious rebellion. So take a moment and ask God: *Am I ever guilty of trying to do that? Are there times when I try to escape Your rod by outrunning it instead of by turning back to You?* Let me give you some examples of rod-dodging.

1. Lying to avoid consequences

Sometimes we sin, and rather than face the painful chastisement that comes from being discovered, we lie to cover up the sin. God has some consequences set in place, and we try to dodge them by lying and keeping our sin secret. Lying to avoid trouble or to make yourself look good in someone's eyes is 100% fear of man. When we lie we are saying, "I would rather have God's displeasure than man's displeasure. I would rather have God unhappy with me than face what I would have to face if the truth came out." That kind of fear of man is an effort to out-manuever God's discipline.

2. Drowning out discipline with earthly pleasures

Here's another example: You are down and depressed as a result of failure to seek hard after the presence of God, and you grow distant from God, but instead of repenting and turning to Him wholeheartedly, you try to solve your painful feelings of depression through earthly pleasures – food, recreation, sex, sleep, etc. Or we try to just numb the sting of His rod through distractions – TV, movies, books, friends, news, Internet, games - trying to drown out the pain of His rod. "I'm down in the dumps because I'm far from God, but seeking hard after Him is just too hard – I think I'll just go watch TV." "A few drinks, or a couple anti-depressants, or some sleeping pills, or a bag of potato chips and I can escape the pain of this chastisement without having to repent."

3. Ignoring the rod

Or how about this one - His rod strikes through pangs of conscience, but instead of turning back to Him you try to silence those pangs through rationalization, - comparing yourself to others, - creatively interpreting the Bible, - coming up with some argument for why you deserve this indulgence because you have been doing so well lately, - or just refusing to think about it altogether. You use your mind to try to reason your way out. We try to escape the rod by just ignoring it or pretending it isn't there.

4. Trying to undo the work of His rod

Another way we dodge the rod is by trying to undo the consequences of our sin instead of repenting. I drift from nearness to God, that results in all kinds of problems in my life, and instead of spending more time seeking hard after Him I spend less time in prayer so I can focus on mopping up all the problems my sin has created - trying to undo the work of His rod. You waste hours or days or weeks in some sin, or you spend a whole lot of money on that sin, and now you are trying to make up lost time and make up lost money and get your marriage back on track and get your health back, and you find yourself spending less time seeking God and more time scrambling around trying to undo the damage of your sin. When we focus on the rod rather than the one who holds the rod, we think we can avoid it or outrun it or drown it out or ignore it or undo what it does. One thing that is crystal clear from this chapter is that efforts to dodge the rod are useless. God's chastisement cannot be outrun, overturned, drowned out, ignored, overpowered, destroyed, dodged, resisted, or undone.

Dodging the Rod is Useless

Let's just take a quick look at Saul's effort to beat the rod.

¹⁰ The next day an evil spirit from God came forcefully upon Saul. He was prophesying in his house, while David was playing the harp, as he usually did.

Resisting the rod got him a demon and he starts prophesying. The word "prophesy" in the OT can refer to true prophecy from God or to the uncontrolled, ecstatic, spastic utterances of a false prophet. Here it is the latter. The first time Saul prophesied as a result of receiving the Holy Spirit. This time it is connected with this evil spirit. It is a pathetic picture.

Saul had a spear in his hand ¹¹ and he hurled it, saying to himself, "I'll pin David to the wall." But David eluded him twice.²

David stayed in the room trying to help Saul long enough for Saul to retrieve his spear and try a second time. It obviously was not an easy thing to dodge a spear at close range. If it were, spears would not have been used in battle. Under normal circumstances this would have been the end of David's life. But no matter what would normally happen, what actually happens is dependent upon who has the favor of God and who does not.

¹² Saul was afraid of David, because the LORD was with David but had left Saul. ¹³ So he sent David away from him and gave him command over a thousand men

This was a coveted position (22:7). Blessing on top of blessing for David.

and David led the troops in their campaigns. ¹⁴ In everything he did he had great success, because the LORD was with him. ¹⁵ When Saul saw how successful he was, he was afraid of him. ¹⁶ But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he led them in their campaigns.

Now in verse 17 Saul tries another method of killing David.

17 Saul said to David, "Here is my older daughter Merab. I will give her to you in marriage; only serve me bravely and fight the battles of the LORD." For Saul said to himself, "I will not raise a hand against him. Let the Philistines do that!"³

He has descended so low he is trying to marry off his daughter to David in order to get David killed - with no regard for his daughter whatsoever. And if you just take a step back and look at what an amazing picture this is - normally you would try to marry your daughter off to some greater, stronger, more powerful king so you could gain some political capital.⁴ Here the king is pursuing the shepherd boy to become his son-in-law. It is completely backward.

Not only here, but throughout the entire book you see the fulfillment of what Hannah prayed in her prayer back in chapter 2. Her prayer was all about how God reverses the high and low positions of man. It is God alone who humbles the exalted and exalts the lowly.

1 Sam.2:3-11 Do not keep talking so proudly or let your mouth speak such arrogance, for the LORD is a God who knows, and by him deeds are weighed. 4 "The bows of the warriors are broken, but those who stumbled are armed with strength. (reversal of strong and weak) 5 Those who were full hire themselves out for food, but those who were hungry hunger no more. (reversal of rich and poor) She who was barren has borne seven children, but she who has had many sons pines away. (reversal of the blessed and cursed) 6 "The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up. 7 The LORD sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts. 8 He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor. "For the foundations of the earth are the LORD's; upon them he has set the world. 9 He will guard the feet of his saints, but the wicked will be silenced in darkness. "It is not by strength that one prevails; 10 those who oppose the LORD will be shattered. He will thunder against them from heaven; the LORD will judge the ends of the earth. "He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed."

² Perhaps a reference to the second time this happened later on (19:10), but more likely it refers to two escapes at this very time, since it would be odd to include an escape that had not yet happened. The reader would have no way of understanding the meaning until later chapters.

³ David would later use this same strategy against godly, innocent Uriah. (2 Sam.11)

⁴ (cf. Gen 34:9; 1 Kings 3:1; 2 Chronicles 18:1) *Expositor's Bible Commentary, The*, Pradis CD-ROM:1 and 2 Samuel/Exposition of First Samuel/III. Establishment of Monarchy in Israel (16:1-31:13)/A. The Rise of David (16:1-28:2)/4. The jealousy of Saul (18:1-30), Book Version: 4.0.2

That is what this book is all about – that prayer. It is God, not any amount of human strength or ingenuity or running or striving or planning or conniving or scheming – that determines who is exalted and who is not. So as a result of God being with David and not with Saul, you have this amazing picture of Saul pursuing David to marry his daughter, as though David were some greater, mightier king that was above Saul. David keeps becoming exalted more and more, and he is doing nothing to try to bring that about – it is all God. In fact, look at his response when he has an opportunity of a lifetime – the chance to marry into the royal family.

18 But David said to Saul, "Who am I, and what is my family or my father's clan in Israel, that I should become the king's son-in-law?" 19 So when the time came for Merab, Saul's daughter, to be given to David, she was given in marriage to Adriel of Meholah.

David declines! He is putting forth zero effort to become exalted. It is all coming from God.

Everything Saul does fails and turns out for David's good. And that pattern keeps going all the way to the end of the chapter. It happens again with Saul's second daughter – Michal. Every paragraph in this chapter is devoted to showing that it is useless to try to fight against the rod of God's discipline. God will easily and decisively overpower anyone who tried to do that. The more you try to fight against His rod the worse things will get.

Dodging the rod is rebellion

Not only are attempts to escape His rod useless – they are rebellious. It is like the child who tells his father, "If you send me to my room I'll climb out the window." That is just flat-out rebellion. We need to think carefully about whether we are ever guilty of rebelling against God's discipline in our lives.

When the rod is a person

I gave you four examples of the rod of God's discipline in terms of the natural consequences of sin, but in Saul's case the rod came in the form of a man – David. Let us think through how these principles apply when the rod is a person. How do you tend to respond when God sends a person to oppose you? Do you respond like David or like Saul – with a God-fearing response or a man-fearing response?

The man-fearing response (rebellion)

Saul had the man-fearing response. [When the women were singing about Saul slaying his thousands and David his tens of thousands]

8 Saul was very angry; this refrain galled him. "They have credited David with tens of thousands," he thought, "but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?" 9 And from that time on Saul kept a (jealous) eye⁵ on David.

The term translated "jealous eye" refers to a negative attitude. Every time Saul looked at David he saw him through the lens of this negative attitude, and over time that eventually turned what was love for David in the heart of Saul into such murderous hatred. It all started with the way he started looking at David. This is a very easy sin to fall into. Your heart becomes embittered towards someone, and that goes unresolved (maybe because the person is unrepentant, or maybe because you have not had the courage to even confront the person), but one way or another your heart starts to turn cold toward the person. So now all you have to do is hear that person's name, and you have negative thoughts and feelings.

⁵ The word "jealous" is not in the original. It just says he kept an eye on David. It's hard to say if this should be translated "jealous eye" or "suspicious eye" or "fearful eye." All of those ideas seem to be present in the chapter. However we translate it, it clearly describes a negative attitude of some kind.

If there is a lens like that in your heart toward a certain person – and it is there every time you see or think about that person that means there is a sin just sitting there in your heart 24/7! That is an alarming problem! If Saul had been a godly man he would have taken drastic measures to eliminate that sin from his heart in those early infant stages, when it was nothing but a certain way of looking at David. He could have saved himself a whole life of murderous rage, not to mention the oceans of wrath he is probably enduring even at this very moment in hell, because of the sins that eventually grew out of what started as just an attitude.

Saul was normal

Isn't it scary how similar we are to Saul in a lot of these sins? The reason God gave us so much information about what was happening inside the heart of Saul is because these are sins we are all tempted by. From time to time we all try to out-manuever the rod instead of returning to God. I read yet another commentary this week that wanted to diagnose Saul with paranoid schizophrenia. I think Saul is diagnosed with mental problems by modern readers more often than any other Biblical character. If you want to call what Saul had a disorder, fine. But anyone who thinks there was something abnormal about Saul is probably a little detached from reality themselves. Saul was as normal as they come. This is the natural state of the human heart. If you think it is abnormal to be afraid of a rival who has huge popular support, the support even of your own administration and children, who succeeds at everything he does while you are failing at everything you do, and you are facing losing everything to him - if you think it is abnormal to be afraid in a situation like that then I think the abnormal one may be you. If you think it is abnormal for a person to try to deal with the rod instead of dealing with God Himself, or to try to patch up the damage of his sin without having to repent, you need to think again. Those behaviors are as normal as depravity itself. We all struggle with those things – that is why God gave us these chapters.

The God-fearing response (submission)

So when God uses a human being as a rod to discipline you, the man-fearing response is to turn your heart against that human being. To develop a negative attitude, to start noticing everything they do wrong and nothing they do right, to become hypersensitive to all their drawbacks, then you start interpreting all their facial expressions in a negative way, then you start interpreting all their actions and words in a negative way, and pretty soon you just cannot stand them. That was Saul's man-fearing response. David shows us the God-fearing response in 2 Sam.16. Someone is cursing him and he says,

2 Sam.16:10-12 If he is cursing because the LORD said to him, 'Curse David,' who can ask, 'Why do you do this?'"12 It may be that the LORD will see my distress and repay me with good for the cursing I am receiving today.

When God sends His rod of discipline into your life, submit to it. When people bother you, stop looking so much at them and start looking at the God who sent that person into your life. God could have given you a different husband or different kids or different whoever, but He sent who He sent. And we need to submit to that.

Conclusion: Submit to discipline

1 Peter 5:5-6 ...God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may lift you up in due time.

The phrase **the mighty hand of God** is a concept that comes from the Old Testament and is frequently used for God's awesome acts of judgment or discipline. Peter is saying: "Don't resist that. Humble yourself under it. Submit to it." When we devote ourselves to fighting against the God-given

pain in our lives, and we resist what God is doing instead of accepting it and submitting to it, all that does is make it more painful.

Most scientists believe that gravity is relatively constant, but that is because people like Newton and Einstein did not have small children. Anyone who has raised children knows that a small child, by a sheer act of his will, can make himself twice as heavy as he was a moment ago if he wants to get down. If you have ever tried to hold a rebellious baby, you know what I am talking about. When a kid decides he wants down he will do everything he can to make it hard for you to hold him. And if that happens in a context where you just simply cannot put him down (maybe there is a busy highway or something dangerous), then you have to use your superior strength to keep him in your arms. You just overpower his efforts, and that becomes very uncomfortable for the child because he is resisting you with all his strength – yet he is being overcome. That is what it is like for us when we resist the rod. It is not going to work – God will just increase the power of the trial and clamp down on us all the harder – just like He did with Saul. All our struggling does nothing but make things much more uncomfortable for us.

6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

It will be over in due time - when the work of His mighty hand has accomplished its purpose. And in the mean time...

7 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

You know that the one whose mighty hand is upon you cares for you. Yes, it is painful but it is *never* unnecessarily painful. One of the absolutely marvelous things about God is that for His children His discipline is always, always redemptive, corrective, and healing.

Heb. 12:9-11 We have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! ¹⁰ Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. ¹¹ No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

For the world, God metes out punishment for sin that is strictly punitive. It is just pure punishment and that is all. It does not change them or benefit them. In fact in some cases it harms them. It drives them into even deeper rebellion against God and makes matters worse for them. In many cases God's punishment of unbelievers is designed not to restore them but to destroy them. But for us, 100% of what God does in response to your sin is remedial - corrective. It is never mere punishment. It fixes what is wrong with you. If you are a Christian, God has nothing for you but mercy and grace. NOTHING! Even when He turns His face away from you it is 100% redemptive. It is always discipline – never judgment. In fact, the purpose of God's chastisement is precisely to protect you from His judgment.

1 Cor. 11:32 When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.

The purpose is not to punish for justice's sake, but to restore you, to heal the sickness in you. When God disciplines you, He is trying to produce a harvest of righteousness so you can share in His holiness. Now let me ask you - when God tries to produce a harvest of righteousness in someone, does He succeed? Yes! When someone proves himself to be a horrible sinner, our tendency is to just discard him as worthless. But God is into recycling. He is the great recycler of ruined souls. He not only accepts them but in His accepting He renews them and takes what is worthless and makes it a work of eternal beauty.

And understanding this will give you a joy that continues even when you are crushed in sorrow over your sin, because His purposes in redemption are bigger even than our sin! Your fall is temporary. His

promises are eternal. His eternal, perfect plan cannot be derailed even by our sin. And He has promised that He will restore you.

The rod is excruciating. Do not think of the normal pains of daily life as God's displeasure toward you. When God turns His face away from you in discipline it is acute pain that is so severe that it is to be more frightening to us than any torture or death the world can inflict upon us. In fact, fear of chastisement is the motive that drives us to warn and persuade people to become Christians, because our fear of discipline makes us realize how utterly fearsome hell is.

2 Cor. 5:10-11 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. ¹¹ Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men.

That means the redemptive expression of God's displeasure with us is similar to hell. It is different in purpose, but similar in kind. The discipline that God threatens is so severe that God expects us to be motivated by it.

One of the ways to increase the joy in your life is to delight in the fact that God promises only redemptive chastisement. What a marvelous thing that we can trust Him to give us exactly what we most need, perfectly tailored so that any part that is not absolutely necessary for your good is trimmed off. Even in the moments of your most excruciating pain that results from your sin, you can have 100% certainty that it is all for your good. Not even a little bit of it is mere punishment with no redemptive, restoring effect. What God is doing in your life is restoring and renewing your soul and refreshing you. When we rush headlong into death and destruction He brings new life. He heals us. It is painful to be under His scalpel when deep surgery is needed, but we can delight in the knowledge that when we feel that pain it is always, always the Surgeon's scalpel and never executioner's knife.

So if you are rebelling against the pain God has sent into your life – whether that pain is discipline for sin or some other kind of pain; stop arching your back and trying to squirm out of His arms. When a baby does that and is overpowered, and then finally stops struggling and accepts the parent's will, he finds himself in the most blessed position possible. Have you ever seen a baby snuggled up in his mother's arms when he *wants* to be there? It is the greatest picture of contentment and blessed rest in all the world.

Hannah is a great illustration of this. God had closed her womb (1 Sam.1:5), and the pain in her soul seemed more than she could bear. But in the midst of her distress, she humbled herself under her suffering instead of having a proud, angry response of resistance against God's mighty hand. She vowed that if she did have a child she would give him to the Lord to serve as a priest all his life. She cast all her cares onto the Lord and just gave it all over to Him, and submitted to His will and embraced it.

18 ...Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.

She still was not pregnant, but she had cast her care on the one who cared for her and she trusted Him.

Let us resolve to submit to the mighty hand of God in our lives. Allow it to accomplish its wonderful purpose of turning you back to Him so that you can share in His holiness. Saul could have had a wonderful life if he just would have stopped rebelling. It was too late to salvage his kingship – God already said He would not change His mind on that.

But so what? Saul could have knelt down before David, God's anointed, turned the kingdom over to him, and made a covenant of loyalty with him like Jonathan. He could have sought God's favor and no doubt God would have richly blessed him and David would have treated him with great honor.

**Benediction: 1 Th.5:23 May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through.
May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24
The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.**

Devotionals

Fear of God

1 Samuel 18 Day 1

The solution to fear of man is fear of God. Fearing God involves respect, reverence and awe, as well as actually being afraid of His displeasure and His rod. The being afraid part of that requires two things:

- 1) You must believe that God really does chastise His children, and that it really is severe when He does so.
- 2) You must have awareness of that threat all the time. It does no good to believe there is a threat if you forget about it at the moment of temptation.

Having a constant awareness of the threat of chastisement requires a habit of living under the constant gaze of a Holy and omnipresent God.

Job 31:1-4 I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl. ² For what is man's lot from God above, his heritage from the Almighty on high? ³ Is it not ruin for the wicked, disaster for those who do wrong? ⁴ Does he not see my ways and count my every step?

Job's sexual purity grew out of his awareness of God's seeing and considering his "every step." Scripture describes life as being like a walk, so each thing you do to get from one moment to the next is like taking a step. Every thought is a step in one direction or the other. Every word, every action, every inaction is another step. And the picture is not just of God being aware of each of those steps, but of His actively watching them with a searching, discerning, evaluating, testing, refining eye.

When God's searching gaze turns to a look of displeasure and chastisement, it is exceedingly painful. In times like that the soul desires that God look away (with His harsh, chastising or testing eye) so that He might look again with His gentle, loving eye.

Ps. 39:13 Look away from me, that I may rejoice again before I depart and am no more."

Job 7:17-20 What is man that you make so much of him, that you give him so much attention, ¹⁸ that you examine him every morning and test him every moment? ¹⁹ Will you never look away from me, or let me alone even for an instant? ²⁰ If I have sinned, what have I done to you, O watcher of men? Why have you made me your target? Have I become a burden to you?

Most of the time, however, the examining eye of God is a welcome, desirable thing for the believer. In fact, it is even portrayed as a privilege that believers alone enjoy.

Ps. 11:5 The LORD examines the righteous, but the wicked and those who love violence his soul hates.

Ps. 139:1-12 u have searched me and you know me. ² You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. ³ You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. ⁴ Before a word is on my tongue you know it

completely, O LORD. ⁵ You hem me in-- behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. ⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. ⁷ Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? ⁸ If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. ⁹ If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, ¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. ¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," ¹² even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you. ²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. ²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

There is something wonderful about being thoroughly known and perfectly understood. That's why it's so aggravating when people don't understand you. In times when it seems no one understands you it can cause a profound sense of loneliness. The soul's craving for intimacy cannot be fulfilled by people who do not really know you, or who do not understand you.

Dear Father, You have searched me and You know me. You are my most wonderful companion, and your companionship is all I need to be satisfied. I will seek intimate friendships with people, not because I need something other than You, but because I want to love those You love.

Another reason why the examining eye of the Lord is desirable for a righteous man is because when he is in the right in some conflict God knows that.

Ps. 7:8-9 Judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness, according to my integrity, O Most High. ⁹ O righteous God, who searches minds and hearts,

Ps. 26:2-5 ² Test me, O LORD, and try me, examine my heart and my mind; ³ for your love is ever before me, and I walk continually in your truth. ⁴ I do not sit with deceitful men, nor do I consort with hypocrites; ⁵ I abhor the assembly of evildoers and refuse to sit with the wicked

Jer. 17:10 "I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve."

It is a frustrating thing when your heart is pure but the people around you don't believe you. The wonderful thing about being a child of God is that never happens before Him. When you are innocent in some matter, He always knows.

Another reason God's scrutiny is welcome to the believer is because it is a purifying, sanctifying gaze.

Job 23:10 But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.

Pr. 17:3 The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but the LORD tests the heart.

Your constant watching over my heart is precious to me, dear Lord. It purifies me, vindicates me, comforts me, and keeps me from sin. But it doesn't keep me from sin enough. Please, dear Father, teach me how to be more aware of Your watching eye every moment, and

to really believe the threat of Your chastisement that I might not sin against You as much as I do.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The God who always examines my heart

Promise to trust: He will understand me, give me justice, and watch over me

What will result if I experience this attribute today: fear, intimacy

Fear of Man

1 Samuel 18 Day 2

Psalm 94:9-10 Does he who implanted the ear not hear? Does he who formed the eye not see? ¹⁰ Does he who disciplines nations not punish?

What a spectacularly marvelous thing it is, dear Lord, that You designed perception. It is astonishing what the scientists have figured out with regard to the physical mechanisms that convert sound waves and light into signals to the brain. It would take many years of study (probably more than one lifetime) just to learn all that is known about the amazing functions of the ear and eye. And yet, how superficial is that knowledge! We still have no idea how perception takes place. A person can have a complex idea – an idea so complex that it is far, far beyond anything the most intelligent animal could ever even begin to conceive; and he can convey that idea on the wings of light and sound waves such that after the other person's brain has decoded those signals, the same complex thought is in the heart of the listener.

Sometimes the listener decodes all the communications and still does not understand. And when that happens, the communicator can give additional signals that bring the listener from not understanding to understanding. The thought of building a machine with those kinds of capacities is so far beyond technology that it is an absolute fantasy. And yet You, Oh Lord, are so infinitely wise that You conceived of the entire process out of nothing, and then created it and built it into us so naturally that even young children can do it with ease. How did You do it? Where is the link between the material brain and the immaterial mind? How do electrical signals become intangible thoughts, affections, inclinations, attitudes, beliefs? You have hidden that knowledge from us. It is too lofty for us.

And a God who can create all that can He not perceive and understand? A God who has such expertise in the area of interpreting sights and sounds and reality, a God who knows how to build a soul and brain such that both physical events and intangible ideas can be carried on the wings of natural elements, communicated to the brain, interpreted, and impressed into the heart and soul – what mastery such a God must have over perception and understanding! Dear Father, You see every action, You hear every idle word, You perceive every sinful thought, motive, affection and attitude in my heart with absolute clarity.

And does He who disciplines nations not punish? What a fearful question that is Holy Father. You take the switch to the backs of entire nations. In a moment of displeasure you can bring famine across continents. With a thought you can bring down an army, or an economy. You can remove and grant peace among people across 50 states. You decide if our enemies will succeed or fail; whether they will break through in a new idea for a devastating attack, or be stymied. In a moment You can (and have) brought 300 million people to a standstill, our mouths hanging open. Oh, what terror should rattle my bones at the thought of being punished by the same hand that can bend the greatest superpower in the world over His knee!

How lightly I have taken that threat, dear Father. How cavalier I am toward the threat of Your displeasure. My flesh wants to indulge in some sin, and I dismiss the prospect of discipline from Your hand as though it were a fantasy which I can decide to believe or disbelieve at my leisure. A threat I can afford to pretend doesn't exist during those moments when I want to indulge my flesh. Please, heavenly Father, teach Your servant how to fear You.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The God who disciplines the nations
Promise to trust: He will examine and respond to the truth about my heart
What will result if I experience this attribute today: fear of God, intimacy, motivation, desire to obey, awe.

Fear of Man

1 Samuel 18 Day 3

1 John 4:16-21 And so we know and trust in the love God has in us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. ¹⁷ In this way, love accomplishes it's goal among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love. But accomplished love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears has not been accomplished in love. ¹⁹ We love because he first loved us. ²⁰ If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. ²¹ And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

The many warnings in John about the possibility that we could be lost even while we think we are saved but are lost. They are intended to be very frightening warnings. The prospect of possibly going to hell is the scariest imaginable possibility. But we need not live in constant fear. There is a way to gain confidence that our claim to be saved is indeed true, and that is if the love of God for people is flowing through us. When love achieves its purpose through us toward others, the fear that we might be lost evaporates, because no unbelievers have the love of God flowing through them to others.

There are unbelievers who are extremely friendly and who love being around people, and who give sacrificially to people. Therefore the love of God flowing through you to people must be something more than all that. It is loving people *because* God loves them. It is loving people because you desire the experience of having God's love flow through you (because you deeply desire the experience of *anything* that comes from God). It is the desire for their highest good (knowing God). It is love that is free to give and that does not require gratitude or reciprocation because it finds all it needs in God's love. When that kind of love flows through you it is the accomplishment of God's desire, and it is powerful evidence that you will be safe on Judgment Day.

Good morning, dear Father, Author of love. Thank You for Your great love for me. You command Your love (Ps.42:8). You decide upon whom You will place Your love, and You chose me! As much as I have resisted it and tried to flee from it and have taken it lightly or ignored it, still You have commanded it to overcome all that and find its way into my heart. Oh thank You, dear Lord!

This verse that is intended to cast out fear actually causes a measure of fear because it is conditional. To have the confidence it promises I must love people with Your love. And that is

so weak in my life. And yet, to the degree it is present, I rejoice and have confidence that I do know You, and that Your purposes are being accomplished in my heart.

Accomplish those purposes more and more, dear Father. Teach me how to be the conduit of Your love to others. Show me the balance of delight and commitment. Teach me how to love them with an eye on You, that my delight in them might be delight in You.

And Father, for this promise to cast out fear there must first be fear to be cast out. When I lack love, dear God, let that generate fear that touches the very core of my being.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The God who is worthy of fear, but who also casts out that fear by pouring out His love through us to others.

Promise to trust: He will make it possible for me to be a fire hose of His love

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Love! Confidence, security

Fear of Loss

1 Samuel 18 Day 4

⁸ Saul was very angry; this refrain galled him. "They have credited David with tens of thousands," he thought, "but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?" ⁹ And from that time on Saul kept a [jealous] eye on David. ¹⁰ ... Saul had a spear in his hand ¹¹ and he hurled it, saying to himself, "I'll pin David to the wall." But David eluded him twice. ¹² Saul was afraid of David... ¹³ So he sent David away from ... ¹⁵ When Saul saw how successful he was, he was afraid of him. ¹⁷ ...Saul said to himself, "I will not raise a hand against him. Let the Philistines do that!"

²¹ "I will give her to him," he thought, "so that she may be a snare to him and so that the hand of the Philistines may be against him."

25 ... Saul's plan was to have David fall by the hands of the Philistines.

²⁹ Saul became still more afraid of him, and he remained his enemy the rest of his days.

Fear of man comes in several varieties. The sin that cost Saul the kingship was a fear of human opinion – the idolatry of popularity (15:24). The sin that stymied Israel against Goliath was the fear of defeat (and the humiliation, loss, and physical harm that came with it). In this chapter Saul's fear is a fear of the very judgment God had promised – loss of the kingdom. But it was not a fear of God. It was specifically a fear of the instrument God was using to bring about that judgment. Had it been a fear of God, Saul would have responded by seeking God's favor through repentance and faith. But Saul put forth no effort at all in that direction. Instead he put all his effort toward eliminating David. He was like a child who, instead of obeying his father, just tries to wrest the paddle out of his father's hand. Saul wanted to mitigate the effect of God's judgment, not by getting right with God, but by manipulating the world around him so as to protect himself against God's judgment.

Am I guilty of doing that dear Father? Are there times when I try to escape Your rod by outrunning it instead of by turning back to You? I sin, and rather than face the painful chastisement that comes from being discovered, I lie to cover up the sin – trying to outrun Your rod.

Or I get down and depressed as a result of being far from You – not seeking hard after You and growing distant; and instead of repenting and turning to You with all my heart I try to solve my painful feelings of depression through earthly pleasures – food, recreation, sex, sleep; or I try to just numb the sting of Your rod through distractions – TV, movies, books, people, news, Internet, games... trying to drown out the pain of Your rod.

When Your rod strikes through pangs of conscience, instead of turning back to You I try to silence those pangs through rationalization, comparing myself to others, creatively interpreting the Bible, or just refusing to think about it altogether, turning my mind into mush – hoping to ignore Your rod.

And when the blows of Your rod are delivered through people, instead of responding like David (If he is cursing because the LORD said to him, 'Curse David,' who can ask, 'Why do you do this?'" ...¹² It may be that the LORD will see my distress and repay me with good for the cursing I am receiving today." (2 Samuel 16:10-12), I respond like Saul – by trying to eliminate the threat that person poses to me, as though I could overpower Your rod.

When I drift from nearness to You, and the result is problems in my life, and instead of spending extra time seeking hard after nearness to You I spend less time in prayer so I can focus on mopping up all the problems my sin has created; trying to undo the work of Your rod.

Forgive me, dear Lord, for trying to deal with Your rod instead of with You. Sometimes my rebellious heart would rather do anything than seek You. But Your rod cannot be outrun, drowned out, ignored, overpowered, destroyed, resisted or undone. Teach me, dear Lord, to just submit to it. To allow it to accomplish its wonderful purpose of turning me back to You.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The God whose rod cannot be outrun, drowned out, ignored, overpowered, destroyed, resisted, or undone, and that has the purpose of turning me back to Him.

Promise to trust: He will chastise me that I might share in His holiness.

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Repentance, fear of God

Fear of Loss

1 Samuel 18 Day 5

Good morning Father,

Thank You for giving Your servant breath this morning to rise for another day. Now I stand at the threshold of a new week – another full 7 days of being led by You, being encouraged by You, being sheltered and refreshed by You, being disciplined by You, being forgiven by You, being kept and preserved by You, being sanctified by You, being used by You, ruled by You, being listened to by You, being treasured by You, being exalted and glorified by You, being restored by You, being vindicated by You, being healed by You, being watched by You, being provided for by You, being spoken to by You, being delighted by You, being rewarded by You, being understood by You, being interceded for by You, being thought about by You, being enabled and empowered by You, being quieted and stilled by You, being delivered from evil by You, being repaid by You, being visited by Your presence, and being satisfied by You! I can hardly wait to experience this week!

Lord, let me be aware of as much of that as possible today. Please enable Your servant to commune with You. What a wasted day it will be today if You do all that and I fail to even

realize it or enjoy it all day long. What folly it would be if I were more interested to think about temporal things than about those things. Please help me Father.

When I move through Your creation today, let me see it for what it is. Let me see much of You in the physical emblems You have created – let me see Your power and wisdom and goodness wherever I look. But Father at the same time let me also realize, whenever I see any wonderful thing You have created, how utterly incapable those things are (even at their best) to satisfy my soul. Let me see much of You reflected in them, but let me see nothing but emptiness in them alone. Father if I'm struck with how beautiful some woman is, or how tasty some food is, or how good some warm room feels, or how comfortable some chair is, or how fun some vacation would be, or how exciting some ministry would be – let my first, knee-jerk thought always be, "Oh Lord, how utterly incapable that thing is to satisfy me; and how fully capable Your love is to satisfy me – teach me to prefer You." Lord, let that become a habit, so I say that a hundred times a day. Help me to train my soul to see much of You reflected, but nothing inherently satisfying, in the creation.

Heb.12:9-11 We have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! ¹⁰ Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. ¹¹ No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Ro.8:1 There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

All Chastisement is redemptive for the believer. For the world, God metes out punishment for sin that is strictly punitive. It does not change them. In fact in some cases it drives them into even deeper rebellion against God. It is designed not to restore them but to destroy them. But for us, 100% of what God does in response to your sin is remedial - corrective. It is never mere punishment. It restores and corrects us. If you are a Christian, God has nothing for you but mercy and grace. NOTHING! Even when He turns His face away from you it is 100% redemptive. In fact, the purpose of God's chastisement is precisely to protect you from His judgment.

1 Cor.11:32 When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.

The purpose is not to punish for justice's sake, but to restore you. So when God shows up in the woodshed with a switch in hand, you can be glad. It does you nothing but good – never harm.

When God tries to produce a harvest of righteousness in someone, does He succeed? Yes! God brings his discipline so that the person might share in the very holiness of God and produce a harvest of righteousness.

When a person proves himself to be a horrible sinner our tendency is to just discard him as worthless. But God is the great recycler of ruined souls. He not only accepts them but in His accepting He renews them and takes what is worthless and makes it a work of eternal beauty.

There is a joy that continues even when we are crushed in sorrow over our sin, because His purposes in redemption are bigger even than our sin! Your fall is temporary. His promises are

eternal. His eternal, perfect plan cannot be derailed even by our sin. And He has promised that He will restore you.

The rod is excruciating. It is not the suffering of the normal pains of daily life. It is acute pain that is so severe that it is to be more frightening to us than anything the world can do to us (and the world can inflict tremendous suffering). In fact, fear of chastisement is the motive that drives us to warn persuade people to become Christians, because our fear of discipline makes us realize how utterly fearsome hell is.

2 Cor.5:10-11 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. ¹¹ Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men.

Richard Baxter: “If God’s threatenings be true why do you not fear them? If they be false, why do you needlessly trouble men with them and put them into such freights without a cause?” (The Reformed Pastor)

I bless Your holy name, dear God, for the blessed gift of chastisement. Thank You Lord, that I can trust You to give me exactly what I most need, perfectly tailored so that any part that isn’t absolutely necessary for my good is trimmed off. Thank You that in the moments of my most excruciating pain I can have 100% certainty that it is all for my good. Not even a little bit of it is sheer punishment with no redemptive, restoring effect. Thank You, dear God, that You restore me. You renew my soul and refresh me. When I rush headlong into death and destruction You bring new life and restore my soul. You heal me. It is painful to be under Your scalpel when deep surgery is needed, but I can delight in the knowledge that when I feel that pain it is always, always the Surgeon’s scalpel and never the mugger’s switchblade.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The God whose chastisement is always 100% redemptive, never only punitive

Promise to trust: He will chastise me that I might share in His holiness.

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Repentance, fear of God, hope