

# PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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## The Anatomy of Rebellion, Part 3

In Genesis 4, God warned Cain after this man was reprimanded for his false worship.

Genesis 4:7, “If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.”

This is such an interesting warning. Personifying sin, God says that it ever and always is lying at the door of our heart, waiting to pounce upon us. Sin’s passion is to control us and so make us its slave.

And what are we to do about it?

We must master sin. We must not allow it to work its devices in our lives. We must ever and always squelch it before it can rise.

Yet how do we do this? How do you squelch sin?

We must understand it. How it works. Where does sin attacks? What feeds sin? That is why we are continuing our study into the “Anatomy of Rebellion.”

There is a distinction to be made between sin and rebellion. Sin is the broader category encompassing both accidental and purposed violations of God's word. On the other hand rebellion, as I am using it, refers to the sinful act of willingly violating God's law.

Now of the two, it is the latter that is evidenced here. Recall that for many years the concept of a king in Israel festered in the hearts and minds of God's people.<sup>1</sup> Though God ordained the government evidenced during the Judges, nevertheless God's people longed for the life afforded in the secular cultures surrounding them. And thus when the opportunity presented itself, the elders of this text acted quickly. They opposed the ordinance of God whereby they verbally cast off Samuel, and begged for a king.

From this action we find these three characteristics of rebellion. First it begins with an excuse.<sup>2</sup> Secondly it is reinforced by the opinions of others.<sup>3</sup> And it is driven by a passion.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 17:14-17 and Judges 8:22; 9:2

<sup>2</sup> 1 Samuel 8:1-3

<sup>3</sup> 1 Samuel 8:4

<sup>4</sup> 1 Samuel 8:5

What is the passion of rebellion?

The passion of rebellion is to be like and enjoy the world. The Christian who willfully sins against God does so in order to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin without its consequences.

## Rebellion is Mis-Taken

This brings us to a fourth characteristic of rebellion, it is generally mis-taken.

1 Samuel 8:6, “**But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us.** And Samuel prayed unto the LORD.”

The word *displeased* is rendered from the Hebrew word *yara'*.<sup>5</sup> This Hebrew word can be translated *evil* or *bad*. And a glance at its usage in Scripture reveals that it is used very broadly. For example it is used in Genesis 2:17 in contrast to the word *good*.<sup>6</sup> In this case, both words are used in a moral sense, as that which is righteous vs. that which is unrighteous \*or\* morally good vs. that which is evil. And yet in other contexts it refers to something that is bad in relation to the health of an individual, specifically experiences which entail these elements”

- Physical pain (Numbers 16:15; 1 Chronicles 16:22; Psalm 105:15).
- Emotional pain (Genesis 43:6; Numbers 11:10-11).
- In the case of Naomi, the loss of family (Ruth 1:21; cf. 1 Kings 17:20).

Each of the above examples references something that is bad but not necessarily sinful.

Another use of this term rendered *displeased* carries a more relative connotation referencing that which is deemed bad from the perspective of an individual. In this case, the term usually is accompanied with the phrase, “in one's sight.” *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* put it this way:

“Since the decision that something is bad depends subjectively on one's taste, the root frequently occurs with the formula 'in the eyes of.'”<sup>7</sup>

In light of this when we read here that Samuel considered the request of the elders to be “displeasing IN HIS SIGHT” we do not interpret this as Samuel declaring the elders to be in sin, even though they were. Rather, we interpret this as a declaration that Samuel was personally offended!

When the elders approached Samuel with their request, Samuel deemed it personally unfavorable. He saw this as a bad thing when it came to himself. In other words, what we read here are the words of an offended individual who is smarting over the rejection.

And well we understand. Think about it with me. Samuel has done much for the people of God; he's given all. As a small boy he was taken from his home and placed in the temple. He did not have an ordinary childhood. But he knew that this was ok for the kingdom of God, the people of God, needed it! He was raised by a man who was seriously lacking skills when it came to parenting. Just look at Hophni and

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<sup>5</sup> יָרָע *yara'*

<sup>6</sup> תּוֹב *towb*

<sup>7</sup> *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (TWOT), Volume 2, page 854*

Phinehas. Once again, this was ok for the kingdom of God, the people of God were in need.

He obviously as a parent himself was so busy with service and riding the circuit that his own parenting suffered. But listen, the people of God were in need!

As a judge he lived to help, befriend, encourage, love, and care for the people of God. Truly, Samuel's was a selfless life. He expended his life for the welfare and benefit of the people of God.

So what do you give a man who has given so much? An award? A trophy with a golden scroll on it and a statement of appreciation? Maybe you put his image on the cover of the local newspaper.

Yet, listen to the reward that Samuel received after so many years of selfless service.

1 Samuel 8:4-5, "Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations."

In other words, the elders rewarded him by saying "away with you, give us a king." After a life-time of service to the people of God, after losing so much including his children, it would be expected that Samuel would have been shown a little more gratitude. Instead, Israel abandoned him, his office, and his children rather quickly. Talk about a disposable judge!

Brothers and sisters, if you are going to be in the service of people, expect to be hurt! Paul was hurt by many.<sup>8</sup> Moses endured many a stinging blow at the hands of his countrymen.<sup>9</sup> Abel was betrayed by his brother.<sup>10</sup>

Which prophet didn't experience rebellion?

- Isaiah was sawn in two, Hebrews 11:37.
- Jeremiah spent many nights at the bottom of a cistern, Jeremiah 38:6.
- Micaiah was put in prison, 1 Kings 22:27.
- Daniel faced a lion's den, Daniel 6:16.

The ultimate indignity was suffered by Christ! He was:

- Betrayed by a devil that walked with Him for three years, Matthew 26:45, 49!
- Crucified by those whom He came to save, Acts 2:36; 4:10!

The history of redemption reveals a universal disregard for the servant of Christ. Christ Himself was persecuted when He did only that which was good! Then we ought also to expect nothing less in our lives.

What manner of "pay back" are you anticipating when it comes to:

- Service in the body of Christ?

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<sup>8</sup> Compare 2 Timothy 4:14

<sup>9</sup> Compare Numbers 16:3

<sup>10</sup> Compare Genesis 4:8

- Parenting?
- Your marriage?
- Selflessly caring for an ailing parent?

If you have any expectation besides being disregarded in the end, you are setting yourself up for grief! Remember, your true reward comes from the Lord!

In this regard let me share with you a rather peculiar contradiction. I dare say that there is not a one listening to me this day who would not profess the need to minister in love without expectations and with an unconditional, God-centered passion which says, “I am not serving to get; all that I am doing I am doing because I love God!” All of us would profess this. And yet the moment we sense any kind of disregard or oversight, out come the strong emotions of

- Resentment.
- Anger.
- Frustration.
- Disillusionment.
- Bitterness.

Isn't this amazing?

Based on our words you'd think that we were the most godly people in the world. But then you look at our actions and clearly it can be demonstrated that, to a degree, we are serving for temporal reward.

From all of this I hope you see that Samuel, this godly prophet, was so much like us. After over sixty years of selfless service in the kingdom of God, walking with Christ and serving the Lord when the people of God rejected him, he did not simply “entrust his soul to a faithful Creator in doing what was right” (1 Peter 4:19).<sup>11</sup> Rather, he deeply felt the pain and injustice of it all.

## Samuel's Response

And yet that brings us to an important response, from which we learn much.

1 Samuel 8:6, “But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. **And Samuel prayed unto the LORD.**”

Family of God, here we must learn a valuable lesson. Here we see the path of true godliness! When Samuel found himself offended by the ones to whom he was called to minister, notice that his response was not the approach we so often take. He did not write anyone off, rather he went to the Lord in prayer, confession, and communion.

From this I hope you see the essence of true Godliness. Don't miss it! Godliness is measured NOT by how little we sin (I dare say that the Pharisees could boast of fewer sins than any of us here)<sup>12</sup> BUT by what we do when we sin or are sinned against!

Speak with any man or woman whom you might deem to be godly and, if they were willing to be open

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<sup>11</sup> At least he did not do this at first, but later he turns to God in prayer.

<sup>12</sup> Compare Matthew 5:20

with you, you'll discover a legion of sin that would cause you to blush. Ah! But then ask them what they do with their sin, when they themselves are offended by other people, and that is where you will behold true godliness.

When an impious man or woman is sinned against, the response is one of

- More sin — “You don't care about me; well I won't care about you!”
- Resentment — “This is how you pay me!”
- Abandonment — “As far as I'm concerned, they're on their own.”
- Ridicule — “That's to be expected. I always thought they were losers!”
- Anger.
- Plans for revenge.

Brothers and sisters, you cannot lance a boil without an unsightly mess. But when a godly man or woman is sinned against, what is the response? They go to the Lord!

This was the case in the life of Samuel! Samuel here is smarting on account of the people's incredible disregard for him. But what does this man of God do? We read that he “prayed to the Lord.” He took all his struggles, anger, bitterness, resentment, and more to the Lord. He didn't play games seeking to hide his true feelings so that he might feel or appear holy. NO! He opened up to God bringing to Him all his pain and misery.

Clearly Samuel did not fear being real with God, telling Him how much he hurt. No! Samuel enjoyed an intimate relationship with Christ such that when he stung, he ran to the arms of his Savior! And it is this that is the essence of godliness!

We have much to learn here from Samuel. I have often heard it said from one's struggling, and thought myself when I have been in the “depths of despair,” but God is so intangible. With Him there are no hugs, or wiping of tears.

May I point out to you that God was just as intangible to Samuel as He is to us; and yet that didn't stop Samuel from pouring his heart out to God. He cried on his knees. He sought consolation from the Lord.

You say, “Wait a minute. God spoke to Samuel!”

Yes and He speaks to us as well in His word! Toward this end let me debunk a false notion that continues to circulate throughout the Kingdom of God today. This notion is that the difference between our generation and Samuel's, Abraham's, Daniel's, Paul's, Korah's, Asaph's, Jeremiah's and the like who never personally or physically touched God or got a hug from Christ is NOT divine communication or a message, BUT simply the route that God took in giving His word!

Instead of giving it in a dream or vision as in the days of Samuel, Abraham, and the like today, God gives us His word in written form- a form which is deemed far superior than a dream.<sup>13</sup>

Do you see it?!

The majority of the saints of old who communed so intimately with God did so not physically but through

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<sup>13</sup> Compare 2 Peter 2:16-21

the inferior form of dreams and visions which at best were infrequent. Because of the word, we have access to communion with God at any time. As such it isn't the manner of fellowship with God that is distinct. No! If there is any distinction to be made it will be in the realm of passion! The difference between say Korah's walk with God and ours is not light, but heat! He longed to commune with God!

Psalm 42:1-2, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?"

But see that's the issue and the root behind the problem! Do we really want the Lord? Do we really want to know His consolation and love? Is the knowledge of His grace and mercy enough?

In most cases in our lives, if we are honest, we'd say, "No!" I want revenge. I want vindication. I want the person who hurt me to hurt as bad if not worse. These are the sinful passions that blind us to Christ and distance us from Him in our walks.<sup>14</sup>

Oh may God grant us the gift of godliness such that "while being reviled, [we would] not revile in return; while suffering, [we would] utter no threats, but [entrust ourselves] to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:23).

## **Samuel's Mistake**

Now this brings us to Samuel's mistake and the fourth characteristic we learn about rebellion.

1 Samuel 8:7, "And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them."

God says two things here that no doubt shook Samuel to his core. First, he was to listen to and so placate the people and their wish!

Do you understand what this means?

With this allowance on the part of God the era of the Judges was over. Samuel knew that there would come a time in redemptive history when God would rule His people through an earthly monarchy. One cannot read Deuteronomy 17:14-10 and conclude otherwise. Yet, to his amazement, that time was now!

Indeed, God's redemptive plan was taking a huge step forward here. He now was ready to reveal more of the nature of His own kingdom and glory as He would prefigure the role of Christ in an earthly king. And this indeed would be shocking to Samuel.

Now, the rest of the books of Samuel and the Kings contain the outworking of this divine plan. In the coming chapters we will see the outworking of this surprising revelation in our study.

Secondly, the people of God's rejection ultimately had as its object NOT Samuel, BUT God! The positioning of the pronouns make them emphatic: "They have not rejected YOU, they have rejected ME!"

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<sup>14</sup> As long as we are in the business of self, we will never see the Lord. As long as we demand the divine prerogatives of respect, honor, praise, or glory we will never know the loving arms of the Savior; His comforts always will seem intangible.

Now brothers and sisters, this is as shocking as the first revelation, The sinful and loveless rebellion of the people of God ultimately was not directed at Samuel, even though the attack was aimed at him. Indeed! The disdain that Samuel felt, the rejection and lack of appreciation, had but one object and one only: The Lord Jesus Christ!

And this is a huge point we must never forget, especially when it comes to ministry among people who at times actively rebel against God. All that is occurring in this life ultimately, directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously revolves around Christ, NOT US! When you are in the right and you suffer the brunt of rejection, attack, neglect, or abuse the one being aimed at is not you, but it is Christ.

This is the mis-take most servants make when it comes to the Kingdom of God. They tirelessly minister, receive rejection, and then take it personally. They study long and hard, give a message, it falls on deaf ears, and then wonder what they did wrong. They serve their spouse who responds by lashing out, and then they lament their marriage. They seek to bless a co-worker who eventually stabs them in the back, and then they shrink back vowing never to put themselves in a vulnerable position again.

Yet in and through it all they fail to see that every attack leveled against them ultimately is intended for Christ!

Recall the life of the Apostle Paul. Prior to his name being changed, Saul went around Palestine and wreaked havoc among the people of God. Though his passion was directed at Christians, nevertheless listen to the voice of Christ, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (Acts 9:4).

Is this not consistent with the words of Christ.

John 15:20-21, "Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me."

Behind every attack against you is the passion to crucify Christ! And that is why when Peter and the early disciples were persecuted, beaten, and threatened, they spoke as follows:

Acts 4:26-28, "The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done."

There is a war going on in this life whose object ultimately is Christ. Thus even when we do nothing at all and yet are attacked, we are being attacked in place of Christ.

Again consider Samuel. This man of God suffered at the hands of God's people here not because he had done something wrong but rather it was that the people had a problem with God. Robert Bergen put it this way:

"Samuel was stung by the people's rejection of his efforts, but the source of their demand was not to be found in their relationship with him or his sons. Instead, it lay in their troubled relationship

with God.”<sup>15</sup>

How can we live on this earth, suffer abuse, and yet not shrink back or shrivel up? How is it that countless children of God have undergone persecution without becoming embittered?

In closing I want you to consider with me the answer as given in Revelation 12:11-12. This passage describes the time when Satan was cast out of heaven and Christ was born and then taken up to God after a lifetime of service. The Devil then turned his focus on the church to placate his evil lust to destroy Christ. Now as bad as this news may be, nevertheless we are informed here how God's people are to overcome the evil one.

Revelation 12:11-13, “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time. And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child.”

While this passage easily could be a multi-part sermon such that I am not going to deal with it in much detail here, nevertheless notice that it gives five ways by which we overcome!

First, when the pressure is on and we are suffering under blows meant for Christ, we are to rely upon the blood of the Lamb. This should be our satisfaction, significance, and sustenance. “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 12:11). Rejoice that though someone so important to you may have just ripped your insides out, nevertheless the One with whom we have to do loves, accepts, and will never harm you.

Secondly, stand firm upon the truth of God's word, the word of our testimony. “And they overcame him... because of the word of their testimony” (Revelation 12:11). When we are attacked, it doesn't take long before we begin to question the character and will of God. Don't do this! God is true though every man is a liar.<sup>16</sup> The same Lord who loved you enough to save you will continue to keep you unto your wedding day!

Thirdly, get out of the business of self. “And they overcame him because... they did not love their life even to death” (Revelation 12:11). Honestly, you know that which is most detrimental to our walks with Christ is not how others treat us but self-love. We must not love our life, our pleasures, our wealth, our families, our reputations, etc more than Christ. The love of self is something that is ingrained in our sin nature. And an active part of our prayer life for each other must include, “Oh God! Grant us the grace not to love our life more than You!”

Fourthly, as bad and as hurtful as it may be to be attacked, nevertheless know that Satan's regency is for only a short time, “...knowing that he has only a short time” (Revelation 12:12). Brothers and sisters if you will but gaze upon eternity you will see how silly the things which burden us in this life are. Soon Satan and his followers will be cast into the Lake of Fire to suffer for an eternity. There they will never again touch us. And soon we shall enter into eternity where we shall forever be with the Lord! As this is true, with Paul we confess that all tribulation and distress is but momentary and light.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Robert Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, page 116

<sup>16</sup> Compare Romans 3:4

<sup>17</sup> Compare 2 Corinthians 4:17



Fifthly, when you are slighted or persecuted and yet have done nothing wrong, be comforted in knowing that you have just received a blow intended for Christ. “And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child” (Revelation 12:13).

On multiple occasions, in the context of the Secret Service, I have read and heard of the prize and honor associated with taking a bullet for the president. Well brothers and sisters it is not just in Hollywood that these things happen. When the early church suffered under sever persecution, listen to that which encouraged them:

Acts 5:41, “And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.”

So it ought to be with us! When you are the brunt of any attack, having done nothing wrong, you are taking a bullet for the Lord. Christ loved you enough to die for you. Do you love Him enough to die in return?

I know you do, so do not be embittered or Mis-Taken when others hurt you in their rebellion against God. Count it an honor and rejoice!

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## **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on August 20, 2006. Greg is the Preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.