

Devotion 13:

Our Father Punishes To Fit The Crime

II Samuel 1—24

From II Samuel comes another list of attributes we can observe about our Father:

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| 1. He answers prayer. | 2:1; 5:19, 24 |
| 2. When He is with people, they are blessed. | 5:10; 6:11-12 |
| 3. He is angry at irreverence. | 6:7 |
| 4. He gives rest from enemies. | 7:1, 11 |
| 5. He makes covenants with His children. | 7:8-16 |
| 6. He gives victories. | 8:6, 14 |
| 7. He is displeased with wrongdoing. | 11:27 |
| 8. He sends people to deliver messages. | 12:1 |
| 9. He strikes people with illnesses at times. | 12:15 |
| 10. He doesn't always do what we want. | 12:16 |
| 11. He has favorites. | 12:24-25; 23:1 |
| 12. He frustrates good advice to achieve His ends. | 17:14 |

There is, however, another trait of our Father that spans the better part of II Samuel. It is difficult to spot until one sees that II Samuel is different from the other Old Testament books so far in this respect: it contains more killing and murdering.

The bloodbath begins with Saul's murderer relaying the news to David. David proceeds to justly take that young man's life for killing the Lord's anointed. The carnage continues as war ensues between Saul's house and David's. After David prevails, he finishes the job begun by Joshua to conquer the Promised Land. Then, just when it appears that Israel is headed for a time of peace, David commits the sin with Bathsheba. The Lord sends Nathan to chastise David:

"I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own."
II Sam. 12:7-10

And the rest of the book chronicles the above discipline. The sword does not leave David's house as one of his sons, after raping a sister, is killed by a brother; the avenging brother, Absalom, holds war against David and is eventually killed during a battle that claims the lives of 20,000 men.

In the final chapter, David, probably prompted by pride or dependence in his strength rather than in the Lord's, takes a census of the fighting men of Israel:

“David was conscience-stricken after he had counted the fighting men, and he said to the Lord, ‘I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now, O Lord, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing.’ Before David got up the next morning, the word of the Lord had come to Gad the prophet, David’s seer: ‘Go and tell David, ‘This is what the Lord says: I am giving you three options. Choose one of them for me to carry out against you.’ So Gad went to David and said to him, ‘Shall there come upon you three years of famine in your land? Or three months of fleeing from your enemies while they pursue you? Or three days of plague in your land? David said to Gad, ‘I am in deep distress. Let us fall into the hands of the Lord, for his mercy is great; but do not let me fall into the hands of men.’”
II Sam. 24:10-14

The Lord sent a plague on Israel and 70,000 people died. *“The Lord was grieved because of the calamity and said to the angel who was afflicting the people, ‘Enough! Withdraw your hand.’”* (24:16)

This part of God is not fun for us to talk about. The Church today leans heavily toward presenting our Father as purely, but only, love. We easily ignore His other attributes like just and holy. It is true that Scripture declares that *“there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”* (Rom. 8:1) But it also declares, *“The Lord disciplines those he loves and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.”* (Heb. 12:6)

In II Samuel we see that a man after God's own heart, David, was disciplined the latter part of his life for a sin he had committed earlier. In the Church we occasionally hear a brother or sister wonder, “Is God punishing me for some sin?” The ultimate deserved punishment for our sin was taken for us by Jesus on the cross. But hardship is to be endured as discipline for God is treating us as sons. (Heb. 12:7)

Which begs the question: If Jesus has already taken the big spanking in our place, why does our Father discipline us? Hebrews 12:10-11 gives us the answer:

“God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. 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.”

And we can be assured of this: our discipline is very fitting for what we need. It is not too much or too little. Martin Luther is famous for his explanation to the ten commandments: “We are to fear, love, and trust in God above all things.” Many people stumble on the fear part, until they realize that our Father deserves the utmost respect and awe. After all, He punishes to fit the crime.

