### Warm Springs Church Logo June 25

# Petrification

**1 Samuel 10:9-10 NIV**

**As Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul's heart, and all these signs were fulfilled that day.**

Do You Change Your Mind Easily?

One of the most embarrassing parts of my childhood is my refusal to wear glasses. When I was in sixth or seventh grade I found out I needed glasses and wore them for a year. They would look quite stylish now, sort of Superfly glasses you see on NBA players when they are goofing around but back then they weren’t cool and so after a year of humiliation I took them off and never put them back on again. In high school I started noticing that I was suffering from headaches a lot and because I was a big reader, it became clear that I needed to have glasses yet still I refused to get any. Looking at pictures from that time I can see that I started to develop dark circles under my eyes because of the strain and they were constantly bloodshot but I would not go for an eye evaluation. If it were just near sightedness that were the problem, it would not have been so bad but I had astigmatism which meant my eyes had a tough time focusing. In fast pitch softball I had trouble picking up the ball when I was hitting because of the astigmatism and games at night under the lights were brutal for me because playing the outfield, it was hard for me to pick up the spin of the ball as it came off the bat and get my mitt to precisely where it would fall. In college the increased reading made it nearly unbearable at times to get my work done. The headaches kept getting worse and more frequent and the red lines in my eyes grew more pronounced. I still could not bring myself to get my eyes checked though. I knew I would have to wear glasses all the time and I just would not do it. Finally, when I went to graduate school, my vanity had been weakened enough and my fear of what others thought of me lessened to the point that, to relieve the near constant headaches, I got glasses.

It is not easy to change one’s mind, particularly when the decision has been made with lots of thought and weighing of pros and cons. Are you flexible when it comes to the types of foods you like and don’t like? Are you willing to try something you have never liked before? How flexible are you when it comes to people? Do you have a difficult time changing your opinion of someone? Are you settled in your opinion politically…would you say you are always a Republican, always a Democrat, always a Libertarian? Have you settled on your view of Global Warming or of Abortion or are you flexible in your take on either of the two issues? Are there certain actors or actresses that you always like in whatever they do or do you never want to see movies where particular actors or actresses play a part? Is there a certain translation of the Bible you always use? How do you feel about your job or your school? Is your opinion of it fixed? You always like it or never do? Do you always go to the same place for your vacation or when you go out to eat? Have you decided never to go to certain fast-food restaurants? What is your opinion of God? Is it unchanging, inflexible? Have you decided without wavering in any way whether or not the Bible came from God or is written by men? How flexible are you when it comes to your opinion of things? Are you open to suggestions or pretty sure you know what is best?

There is quite a bit of debate over whether or not God is petrified in His thinking or open to suggestions. When the Lord indicated to Abraham that He was about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham started badgering the Lord about what He was going to do. Finally God acquiesced to Abraham’s pleading not to destroy the people of the plain of Sodom if just ten righteous souls were found there. **Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?" He answered, "For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it."** (Genesis 18:32 NIV) Now it can be contended that Abraham never changed the Lord’s mind on the matter but still he got a concession from God that he didn’t have before. On the other hand, Moses’ encounter with God following the Lord’s pronouncement that He was about to wipe out the Israelites feels a bit more like something akin to God changing His mind. **But Moses sought the favor of the Lord his God. "O Lord," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand?…Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people…Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.** (Exodus 32:11-14 NIV)

And yet He was certainly not going to be talked out of flooding the earth when He told Noah what He was going to do. **So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. So make yourself an ark…** (Gen 6:13-14 NIV) And when God decided to give Sarah, the wife of Abraham a son, He was none too happy about Sarah’s doubts that He would do as He said but not even Sarah’s lack of faith deterred God from His determination to give her a son. **Then the Lord said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son." Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?" Then the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son." Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I did not laugh." But he said, "Yes, you did laugh."** (Genesis 18:10-15 NIV)

When God decided to destroy Jerusalem through the Babylonian army, He did not flinch at the verdict despite the prayers and cries of prophets, priests and others, righteous and not, who saw what was coming. **I fell facedown, crying out, "Ah, Sovereign Lord! Are you going to destroy the entire remnant of Israel in this outpouring of your wrath on Jerusalem?" He answered me, "The sin of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great; the land is full of bloodshed and the city is full of injustice. They say, 'The Lord has forsaken the land; the Lord does not see.' So I will not look on them with pity or spare them, but I will bring down on their own heads what they have done."** (Ezekiel 9:8-10 NIV) And when we think of Jesus, His determination to go to Jerusalem, regardless of the opposition He knew was there, did not waver. **As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem**. (Luke 9:51-52 NIV) His disciples could not talk Him out of it despite the grave danger they saw in returning to Jerusalem. When they realized it was hopeless trying to change His mind, they glumly chose to die with Him rather than abandon Christ to suffer alone. **Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."** (John 11:16 NIV)

When the Church during the time of the Apostles had to decide what was absolutely forbidden as far as behavior and what was permitted, there was quite a bit of discussion about rules Christians had to obey. Finally it was settled that the Church would provide four limitations on the behavior of new Christians. **…abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood.** (Acts 15:19-21 NIV) Once this was decided, there was no longer any debating whether Christians had to be circumcised or not, had to keep from eating shrimp and pork or keep all the Sabbath laws. Just this short list of four rules would suffice for the Church. What took place is rather astounding. The Christian community decided the matter of Jewish regulations once and for all and it became a petrified standard that was not altered. That doesn’t mean that individuals always lived up to what was settled but for the Church, there was no longer a debate about the rightness or wrongness of sexual immorality nor whether new Christians had to be circumcised to have eternal life.

There is in 1 Corinthians 8: 9 a most important limitation to our behavior, one that is universally true for the Christian living in Mongolia as well as the one in South Africa, for the Christian in China and the one in India, for the believer in England as well as in the U.S. And it has not changed whether you lived during the Middle Ages, were born in the 1950’s or are of the Post-Modern era. Every Christian is to live by this over-arching value that trumps any want or desire that may suddenly come upon you. It is the plumb line for you if you love the Lord at McDonalds or as you buy tickets to see a movie. It is your guide for what you shall do when you are at work or school, while fishing or heading for the golf course. This one value is unchanging and never to be ignored or rejected. It is the standard for your behavior wherever you go or whatever day it is. It is petrified…set in stone for you.

Let us refer to it as the Block Head Rule. It reads like this in scripture. **Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ**. (1 Corinthians 8:9-12 NIV) The Block Head Rule is quite simple. If you do something that causes someone else to turn away from God and weakens that person’s faith, you have acted like a block head and sinned against God. Sure you are free to drink but if by following your example, someone drinks and it leads to a car wreck or a broken home, you have been a block head. If you go to a movie and someone goes to the same movie because they followed your example and it weakens their devotion to Christ or leads to a movement away from sexual purity, then you have been a block head. If you don’t put money in the offering plate and another Christian follows your example or wonders what good Christianity is if Christians don’t even support it, then you have been a block head. If you use bad language and someone in your family starts too also and does not see the value of Christianity because your language is no different than prostitutes and thieves, then you have been a block head. If you lose your temper and another Christian follows your lead and lashes out at her children, or your children develop an even worse temper because of your blow ups with them, then you have been a block head.

Immorality, deceit, contempt for authority, selfishness, lack of respect for the scriptures, the denial of God and His Lordship all originate within a social system; they do not rise up within a vacuum. Cain killed his brother after His parents ate the fruit forbidden by God. Absalom slept with his father’s concubines after David slept with Uriah’s wife. Ham became the father of pagan nations after he found his father Noah drunk and naked. It is a lie to believe that what you do in your freedom doesn’t impact those around you. You are the most important Christian some people know and watch and what you do impacts them in big and small ways and if your behavior pushes them into sin or away from God, then you have sinned against Christ and been a block head. The block head rule in its simplest form is this. Whatever you do, pay attention to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and stop as soon as He tells you to stop. Do not justify your actions by claiming they are no big deal. You don’t know if it is a big deal but the Lord does and when He gives you the stop sign, quickly give up your plan. And if the Holy Spirit tells you something is good to do and fine, then trust Him in it. We have great freedom as Christians to do whatever is good and fine. With the Holy Spirit living within us, we are kings and queens. But we must never be block heads. We must never do something just because we can without regard for the faith of others.

Determine this week to focus on God and ask Him to guide you in what you do and don’t do. Nothing is as simple as it seems and we are used either by God to draw people into righteousness and faithfulness or by Satan to tear those same lives apart and away from the Lord. It is critical that we pay attention to what the Holy Spirit is saying and live such good lives that we will be used by God to bless each person near us. We are the highway of God, the road by which many either come to Him or leave Him behind.