

## Aligning Ourselves With God's Standards

### Faithfulness Under Pressure

1 Samuel 2:11-36

By DAve Urbanski

Pastor Scott this past Sunday took us through the rest of the second chapter of 1 Samuel, verses 11 through 36, and we examined very big issues with eternal significance — namely the stark facts of good and evil in the world and how we can be who God wants us to be despite all kinds of obstacles.

We saw the wickedness of Eli's sons. As we saw the previous week, Eli is the priest who's training and teaching a very young Samuel. The giant contrast between Samuel and Eli's own sons is remarkable. One might assume that because Eli is a priest that his sons therefore would be righteous, but the Bible doesn't shy away from the difficult truth that just because parents do their jobs and love their children, that doesn't mean their kids turn out well.

Indeed, Eli's sons were "worthless men" and "did not know the Lord" (v. 12); verse 17 adds, "Thus the sin of the young men was very great in the sight of the Lord, for the men treated the offering of the Lord with contempt."

Samuel, on the other hand, "was ministering before the Lord." (v. 18) It's a rather incredible outcome given that he's a young boy who's come from difficult circumstances in a family Pastor Scott described as "dysfunctional."

Certainly an imperfect family is something all of us can relate to, since no human is perfect, and we all sin, and we all sin against each other — often in painful ways. We carry "father wounds" and "mother wounds" despite the lengths to which our fathers and mothers try and have tried; and we go on to repeat those wounds as parents ourselves despite our best efforts.

Eli probably could have done a better job with his sons, and now he's dealing with them in ways that no dad ever wants.

“Now Eli was very old, and he kept hearing all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting. And he said to them, ‘Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all these people. No, my sons; it is no good report that I hear the people of the Lord spreading abroad. If someone sins against a man, God will mediate for him, but if someone sins against the Lord, who can intercede for him?’ But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the Lord to put them to death.” (vv. 22-25)

Pastor Scott emphasized to us that despite this sin, God’s master plan flourishes on — he gives us opportunities, and he uses who he wants to usher in his will on this planet. But even when those whom he chooses fail him, God even works out his will amid the natural consequences of our sin. Amazing.

(But isn’t it so much better when we’re obedient to the Lord when it comes to accomplishing his will? It’s hard to imagine Eli not thinking that very thing in those moments when he rebukes his sons.)

Then, once again in striking contrast. Verse 26 says, “Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and also with man.”

Unfortunately, Eli learns that the Lord has rejected his household due to his scorning of God’s sacrifices and offerings — and putting his sons above the Lord “by fattening yourselves on the choicest parts of every offering of my people Israel.”

Let’s look again at God’s sad declaration to Eli — and let it be a reminder for us all:

“... those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed. Behold, the days are coming when I will cut off your strength and the strength of your father's house, so that there will not be an old man in your house. Then in distress you will look with envious eyes on all the prosperity that shall be bestowed on Israel, and there shall not be an old man in your house forever. The only one of you whom I shall not cut off from my altar shall be spared to weep his eyes out to grieve his heart, and all the descendants of your house shall die by the sword of men. And this that shall come upon your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, shall be the sign to you: both of them shall die on the same day. And I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind. And I will build him a sure house, and he shall go in and out before my anointed forever. And everyone who is left in your house shall come to implore him for a piece of silver or a loaf of bread and shall say, ‘Please put me in one of the priests' places, that I may eat a morsel of bread.’”

That's a terrible future presented to Eli, who must have been filled with regret over his foolishness and poor parenting.

Pastor Scott outlined for us six truths to bear in mind in this regard:

1. Parents are imperfect, just as we're all imperfect. No parent can fill the parent-sized hole in our hearts and lives — only Jesus can do that!
2. Even the best parents can have children who go astray. Even Jesus' disciple Judas went in a very bad direction. God's first human creations, Adam and Eve, go astray and miss the mark.
3. Conversely, we also see that children who turn out great (like Samuel) can come from the very worst parents and family situations.
4. Every child has a free will and is ultimately responsible for their own actions.
5. Despite terrible setbacks, every parent can still find more wisdom.

All of us — whether we're parents or children or in many cases, both — must come to grips with justice awaits us in one way or another when we do wrong.

If we are in that place of coming judgment, the GOOD NEWS is that God has provided a solution. We can confess our sins to the Lord and ask his forgiveness, and the Bible says God remains faithful and just to indeed forgive our sins. Then we can start over fresh and resume walking with the Lord.

What else can we do? Pastor Scott said it's imperative that as believers we must make every effort to live in fellowship and community with other Christians. For the closer we are to each other, the more often others will help us more clearly see our godliest paths.

Let us trust in the Lord with all of our hearts. Let us serve him with all of our minds and souls and strength.

As Pastor Scott said, all families have problems. But despite those problems, all of us can still be like Samuel and overcome them.

“Blessed is everyone that fears the Lord, that walks in his ways.” — Psalm 128:1