

“Corrupt Leaders”  
1 Samuel 2:12-18  
(Preached at Trinity, May 8, 2016)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we entered **1 Samuel** we are introduced to Elkanah and his two wives. His wives were Hannah and Peninnah. Hannah was a Godly woman while Peninnah shows no piety.
  - A. Elkanah was a Godly man whose life was characterized by the consistent worship of God.

**1 Samuel 1:3 NAU** - "Now this man would go up from his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice to the LORD of hosts in Shiloh."

**1 Samuel 1:21 NAU** - "Then the man Elkanah went up with all his household to offer to the LORD the yearly sacrifice and pay his vow."

**1 Samuel 2:19 NAU** - "And his mother would make him a little robe and bring it to him from year to year when she would come up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice."
  - B. He showed respect for Hannah's vow. Samuel was Elkanah's son as well as Hannah's yet he was willing to devote him to God's service.

**1 Samuel 1:23 NAU** - "Elkanah her husband said to her, "Do what seems best to you. Remain until you have weaned him; only may the LORD confirm His word."
  - C. Such piety in a family was rare in those days. They lived in the period of the judges when every man did that which was right in their own eyes.
2. In **1 Samuel 1:3** we are given the names of two of the priests responsible for receiving Elkanah's annual sacrifice, Hophni and Phinehas.
  - A. They were the sons of Eli. Eli was both the high priest and he also served as one of Israel's final judges for 40 years.

**1 Samuel 1:3 NAU** - "And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests to the LORD there."
  - B. These young men were raised around the Tabernacle. The priesthood was a part of their lives from the earliest days of their lives. They had watched the service of their father. And yet they had no regard for the holy things of God. They are identified as worthless men.

**1 Samuel 2:12 NAU** - "Now the sons of Eli were worthless men"
3. There are few things as tragic as God's people in the hands of corrupt leaders. This is the sad reality in the opening pages of **1 Samuel**. The amazing thing is the faithfulness of Elkanah in this environment of corruption.
4. There are characteristics of corrupt leaders in every generation. The focus here is upon religious leaders, although in this period there was little distinction between religious and civil leaders. Eli served as both priest and judge and Hophni and Phinehas had authority to make demands of the people.
5. Today, these leaders would be pastors of churches. What are the characteristics of these corrupt leaders?

I. The chief characteristic is they do not know the Lord – worthless – **Verses 12, 17**

A. **Verse 12** gives us their description

1. They Hebrew for “worthless” is literally translated sons of Belial – (בָנֵי בְלִיאָל) – In the OT it doesn’t carry the idea of a proper name but in the NT it is another name for Satan.
  2. **2 Corinthians 6:15 NAU** - "Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?"
  3. Although all human beings have great value as God’s creation made in His image, sin has left us defiled and forsaken of God. In such a condition there is nothing profitable in us. This is the essence of the word belial.
  4. **Titus 1:16 NAU** - "They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed."
  5. **Romans 3:12 NAS** - "All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not even one."
  6. The ultimate condition of Hophni and Phinehas is their unbelief – they did not know God—from the word יְדַעַת. This word can mean “know” in the cognitive sense or it can mean “know” in the sense of an intimate relationship. The word was used in **Verse 19 of Chapter 1** "And Elkanah had relations with Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her."
  7. They had no relationship with God. The CSV translates it: "they had no regard for the LORD"
- Put plainly, they were unregenerate. They were not driven by a desire to exalt God. Compare with Hannah in **Verse 1**

**1 Samuel 2:1 NAU** - "My heart exults in the LORD"

8. Because they did not know God their greed and lust consumed their heart, even though, sadly, they were priests in God’s holy Tabernacle.

B. Unregenerate men can rise to many positions of preeminence in the church

1. They can become deacons and they can become pastors.
2. In the early church there were unregenerate men claiming to be apostles  
**Revelation 2:2 NAU** - "I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false"
3. **2 Corinthians 11:13-14 NAU** - "For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. <sup>14</sup> No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light."
4. Paul warned the Ephesian elders of the danger  
**Acts 20:29-30 NAU** - "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; <sup>30</sup> and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them."

4. The church must always be on guard. How shall the church protect itself?
  - a. By maintaining a standard of righteousness. This is true of every member, but of leaders particularly. They must be above reproach  
**1 Tim. 3:2** - "An overseer, then, must be above reproach"  
 Hophni and Phinehas made no effort to conceal their debauchery
  - b. They must hold high the name of Christ.  
 The basic question is simple.  
 Is Jesus the object of our greatest love?  
 Is Christ being held high? Is He at the center of our preaching?

II. The second characteristic we see here is they reject God's commands in favor of practices of their own creation – **Verses 13-15**

- A. The Levitical law described the portion of the sacrifice reserved for the priests
  1. The Levites were provided for in the law. A portion of the tithe was designated for their support. Since the Levites were not assigned a territory for their inheritance each tribe was to set aside a portion for them.
  2. In addition, a portion of the burnt offering was set aside for the priest – the breast and the right thigh.  
**Leviticus 7:31-32 NAU** - "The priest shall offer up the fat in smoke on the altar, but the breast shall belong to Aaron and his sons. <sup>32</sup> 'You shall give the right thigh to the priest as a contribution from the sacrifices of your peace offerings."
  3. Hophni and Phinehas devised a "three-pronged fork" to take whatever they wanted from the Israelites. It was a process of human invention.
  4. It is similar to the unlawful incense used by Nadab and Abihu  
**Leviticus 10:1-2 NAU** - "Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. <sup>2</sup> And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD."
  5. It is dangerous when the leaders of God's people begin to devise their own system for how God will be worshipped and served.
- B. There is much going on in churches today that is entirely of human invention
  1. The exchange of preaching for dramatic presentations or concerts often labeled worship – LBC 22:1 - 682
  2. The use of a "sinner's prayer" as the means of making converts. It is a product of a system of decisional regeneration.
  3. There are other things that are commanded by God but dismissed – such as obedience to the Sabbath or paying the tithe.
  4. The bottom line is what is the standard for our faith and practice and will we be obedient to that standard?  
 LBC 1:10 (671) – "The supreme judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinion of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Scripture delivered by the Spirit, into which Scripture so delivered, our faith is finally resolved."

5. Pastors must recognize that their primary duty is to be a teacher of the Scriptures
 

**1 Timothy 3:2 NAU** - "An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach"

**2 Timothy 4:1-2 NAU** - "solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: <sup>2</sup> preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction."

**1 Timothy 4:13 NAU** - "Until I come, give attention to the *public reading of Scripture*, to exhortation and teaching."

**1 Timothy 4:16 NAU** - "Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you."
6. The great Puritan theologian, **John Owen** – "The first and principal duty of a pastor is to feed the flock by diligent preaching of the Word."
7. As soon as a pastor begins to forsake the clear teaching of the Word of God he has entered into the realm of Hophni and Phinehas.

### III. They abuse God's people – **Verse 16**

- A. They were guilty of the abuse of authority
  1. We've already seen that God gave the parameters for the actions of His priests. He provided for their care and support. The priests were given the breast and right thigh of the offering. The fat was to be burned.
  2. Hophni and Phinehas were not satisfied with God's rich provision. They demanded fresh uncooked portions as well. They would not permit any resistance.
 

**1 Samuel 2:15-16 NAU** - "Also, before they burned the fat, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, "Give the priest meat for roasting, as he will not take boiled meat from you, only raw." <sup>16</sup> If the man said to him, "They must surely burn the fat first, and then take as much as you desire," then he would say, "No, but you shall give it to me now; and if not, I will take it by force."
  3. Isaiah described such leaders
 

**Isaiah 56:11 NAU** - "And the dogs are greedy, they are not satisfied. And they are shepherds who have no understanding; They have all turned to their own way, Each one to his unjust gain, to the last one."
  4. There was little regard for God's people who had come for worship. These priests only had regard for themselves and were abusive towards those God had placed under their care. They used the priestly office for personal gain. The text tells us they were even sleeping with the women who served at the entrance to the Tabernacle.
 

**1 Samuel 2:22 NAU** - "Now Eli was very old; and he heard all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting."

- B. The same can happen to the pastoral ministry
  - 1. The focus can easily leave the care of the sheep and focus upon personal advancement. Today the average tenure for a pastor is 4 years.
  - 2. It can become a matter of education, of getting a large church, of becoming well-known. Sacrificial service begins to disappear
  - 3. Richard Philips writes: "How easy it is, and how often seen today, for preachers to use their ministry primarily for personal gain—employing worldly approached that bring large crowds and sizable offerings—rather than seeking the glory of God and the spiritual health of his people."
  - 4. When the priority is turned towards self-advancement pride can turn towards an abuse of authority. There is a great difference between a carefully placed rebuke and the needless abuse of power. The difference is the distinction between the right use and a sinful abuse of authority.

#### IV. They do not receive correction – Verses 23-24, 25

- A. Eli tried to correct them, although it was weak and ineffective.

**1 Samuel 2:23 NAU** - "Why do you do such things, the evil things that I hear from all these people?"

- 1. Hophni and Phinehas were completely unaffected by the rebuke of their father – probably reflecting a lifetime of poor parenting.
  - 2. It was a greater indication of their wicked hearts. Sinful leaders seldom receive correction from others.
  - 3. We find this often in Scripture
    - a. John speaks of Diotrephes
- 3 John 1:9-10 NAU** - "I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. <sup>10</sup> For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, he himself does not receive the brethren, either, and he forbids those who desire to do so and puts them out of the church."
- b. We can see it again in Jude

**Jude 1:8 NAU** - "Yet in the same way these men, also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject authority"

- B. No one is above correction

Humility demands being able to receive correction

This is the great benefit of a plurality of elders. It provides a system of accountability and correction

*Trinity Baptist Church By-laws – Article IV*

There are many reasons why the local church today should seek to maintain a plurality in its eldership.

- (1) It is consistent with the biblical pattern.
- (2) It provides for a combined leadership. Although part of the duty of pastors is that of rule or oversight over the church, there are dangers when this rule is vested in a single individual.
- (3) It provides a system of moral and theological accountability among the elders.

## Conclusion:

1. God is not unmindful of abusive leaders.

**1 Samuel 2:17 NAU** - "Thus the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD, for the men despised the offering of the LORD."

God's message of condemnation to Eli is a warning to every pastor.

2. God blesses individuals with giftedness and then holds us accountable for how we use our gifts.

**James 3:1 NAU** - "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment."

**Hebrews 13:17 NAU** - "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you."

3. There is also a message of great encouragement in this chapter.

In midst of these corrupt priests we find the wonderful contrast of Samuel

**1 Samuel 2:11 NAU** - "But the boy ministered to the LORD before Eli the priest."

**1 Samuel 2:18 NAU** - " Now Samuel was ministering before the LORD"

**1 Samuel 2:26 NAU** - "Now the boy Samuel was growing in stature and in favor both with the LORD and with men."

4. Even during times of great perversion, God has always had His servants faithful serving and caring for His people.