

Samuel had a very special role to play in Israel, though he is but a boy here. His mother had long prayed for a child as she had been unable to conceive, and Samuel was the answer to her prayers. He would grow to be the last judge of Israel, a prophet, and the one who anointed the first King of Israel, Saul.

Scripture tells us that the miraculous encounters with God are rare in this time, though God is of course still present. God is simply not speaking from burning bushes or pillars of fire. So it is no wonder that when God calls Samuel audibly the boy is confused and thinks that it is Eli calling for him. If I were napping in my office and suddenly heard someone call my name I promise you God would not be my first guess.

Whatever Eli's fault might've been, he is wise enough to perceive that it is God calling Samuel, and is able to instruct Samuel on how to answer the Lord. Even sinners can speak truth sometimes, and even the demons believe in God and tremble. He instructs the boy to say Speak, Lord, your servant listens, which is an excellent response whenever we feel the tug of the Spirit. This response is appropriate, but as Samuel soon discovers, sometimes dangerous and difficult.

The Lord comes and tells Samuel God is doing anew thing in Israel, but Eli's house will be punished because his sons were blaspheming the Lord and Eli did not restrain them.

People often worry about what is blasphemy, especially as Jesus refers to Blasphemy against the holy spirit as being the unforgivable sin. It is also important to understand exactly what Eli's sons were doing that was so terrible.

If any of you are up with a country granny, you might've been told saying oh my God or God in conjunction with the word we use for those destined to hell which Starts with a D, are forms of blasphemy. As a 90s kid, we said

Oh my G, all the time. That did not translate well to a Baptist College and I spent my sophomore year thinking that d word applied to me.

I also get people who are worried that they have somehow accidentally committed the great unforgivable sin and are now also going to hell with me in my sophomore year.

What Scripture says, however, is a little different. Blasphemy comes from a Greek word that means to injure the reputation of another. It seems to refer to contempt for God, or perverting something sacred. As far as an unforgivable sin, God doesn't send anyone to Hell for accidents. You did not damn yourself that time when you were nine and you said GD it. CS Lewis once wrote that: "the damned are, in one sense, successful, rebels to the end; that the doors of hell are locked on the inside." He reiterates this in the Great divorce when he writes: There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, "Thy will be done", and those to whom God says, in the end, "Thy will be done." All that are in hell choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek, find, to those who knock, it is opened.

Blasphemy is not a curse word. It is looking at God's shining face and spitting on it. It is hating God so much that you rather spend an eternity in hell than another moment in God's presence. It is hating God so much that you would destroy the things that God loves the most, God's children, and dare to do it in God's name. It is standing before God on the last day, when all the pretenses and all the masks and confusion have faded away and God wanting desperately to welcome you into Heaven, but turning and running for Hell instead. That is blasphemy. It is no accident. It is the fruit of hatred and bitterness, of arrogance, of rejecting the very image of God within yourself and others. No one commits this sin accidentally. Hell is, after all, in my opinion, locked from the inside. If you are still seeking after God, moving toward heaven, if you still desire to spend eternity in heaven and not hell, then I am confident you have nothing to worry about.

How did Eli's sons commit blasphemy? It is unknown exactly. It is known that they forced people to give them inappropriate portions of their sacrifices, the parts that were to be burned for God. The priests were a portion of the meat that was sacrificed. One the fat had been separated and burned for God, the rest was boiled. The priests' portion was determined by thrusting a large fork into the pot and whatever came up was their portion. I guess the sons of Eli didn't care so much for boiled meat, because they would, by force if necessary, take the finest cuts of meat before God's portion had been separated out. Can you imagine going to church with your offering and knowing that the portion you were trying to give to God was swiped away.

It is also known that they slept with the women who congregated at the opening of the tent. Most people move past this fast as just a case of sexual immorality. I have a little different view. Imagine being a woman and knowing that the priests are essentially your connection to God at this point in Israel's history. They hold tremendous power. They take your sacrifices so that you might be forgiven. They declare you clean. They play a fundamental and powerful role in your life, more so in the life of a woman than a man due to childbirth and other circumstances in a woman's life. And this priest makes advances toward you. Now ask yourself this. Can you say no? To this person of great power. Of course, you probably can but it's much easier to say no to a nobody than someone who holds your salvation in their hands. Do you want to say no? Perhaps this power imbalance led to misguided desires, as so often happens in cults and other unhealthy power dynamics. God tells us that these men committed blasphemy. God does not just say that they slept with people they shouldn't and stole some meat. There was spiritual dynamics and dimensions to their sins. They were spiting in the face of God with their actions. And Eli did nothing, but allowed this abuse to continue.

Eli did none of these things, but he did stand by ideally and allow others to be harmed when he had the power to stop it. And for that reason, Samuel is told by God that Eli and his sons will be judged. Samuel hesitates to

even say, knowing the news is not good but Eli's response has another great lesson for us.

Eli accepts his fate and says let the Lord do what the Lord see good. Eli recognizes he has sinned, surely, but more importantly, even in his punishment, he trusts that the Lord is good and just and right, even when it hurts, even unto death.

Most of us have experienced things which we feel are unfair. Most of us have had desperate prayers answered with a resounding no. That is common. What is uncommon, is having the faith to say, even when it hurts, Thy will be done. Let the Lord do what the Lord deems right.

This is not to say that it won't hurt, that there won't be tears, but instead it is demonstrating faith in God's justice. It is declaring that God will always act faithfully, and that all things will be made right, just not always in this life. Sometimes what the Lord sees good will make sense to us, other times it will break our hearts, but nevertheless, I trust in a God that so loved the world that God gave God's only son that whoever believed in him would not perish. Whatever happens, may we declare our trust in the Lord, and may the Lord do what the Lord thinks good.

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