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Today if You Hear His Voice - Do Not Harden Your Heart

August 27, 2017

Sermon Text: 1 Samuel 2

Scripture Reading: 1 Samuel 2:22-36

1 Samuel 2:25 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.

This past week I have seen still more examples of anemic, erroneous theology in people who claim to be teachers in Christ's church. It is a repeated refrain – "No one is beyond God's mercy. It is never too late for anyone." These kinds of falsehoods are frequently presented to us when some person who has claimed to be a pious,

model "saint" is found out to be what they really are – a wicked, evil, deceiver guilty of the most horrendous sins.

I want to demonstrate to you this morning that there are indeed people who are beyond God's mercy, for whom it is in fact too late, for whom repentance is now impossible, and I want us to consider *how they ever got to such a point and why their sealed condition serves as a sobering warning to all who are continuing to reject Christ.*

What is a "reprobate"? Esau was a reprobate (as we shall see from Hebrews 6 in a moment). Pharaoh was a reprobate. Eli's sons, Hophni and Phineas, were reprobates. Here is a dictionary definition which is typical but which gets the theological meaning wrong:

1. *An unprincipled person; a rogue, rascal, scoundrel, miscreant, good-for-nothing, villain,*

rake, degenerate, libertine.

2. *CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY* *archaic*
(especially in Calvinism) a sinner who is not of the elect and is predestined to damnation.

As we shall see, the second definition is incomplete. In addition, this dictionary presents the doctrine of the reprobate as “archaic.” I suppose it is and that is a huge part of the problem that we see in the church today – this doctrine is ridiculed and discarded when in fact it is repeatedly taught plainly in Scripture.

Esau, Hophni, Phineas, Pharaoh were not elect, *but they were not actively predestined by God to damnation. In fact, as Scripture makes very clear, each one of them is to blame for their own end in hell.* And there is, as Hebrews says, a serious and sobering warning for everyone today here in their example.

Here is the problem today. People who claim to be, for instance, “biblical counselors,” are insisting that everyone is “fixable.” Everyone is “redeemable.” If you deny this, then you are accused of being unmerciful, unkind, unloving and so on. But let’s go back again to the case of Eli’s wicked sons. Listen again:

1 Samuel 2:25 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.

Many pastors and Christian counselors today would want to “fix” these two wicked men. They would look at their sins. Hophni and Phineas:

1. Were “pastors.” Ministers. Priests. Church leaders of their day
2. They did not know the Lord
3. They stole from the offering plate (by force)
4. They fornicated with women who were at the tabernacle, apparently setting up a kind of temple prostitution ring

And so it was the will of God to put them to death. Not to redeem them. Not to plead with them to repent – in fact Eli’s guilt was *in doing just that!!* Many, many church leaders and professing Christians today are guilty of Eli’s sin. Here is some wicked, evil creep who has crept in among the people of God with the purpose of working his evil on children or others, using Christ’s church as a place of profit and fleshly indulgence, and

when he is found out, Eli meets them:

1 Samuel 2:23-24 And he said to them, "Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all these people. (24) No, my sons; it is no good report that I hear the people of the LORD spreading abroad.

Do those sound to you like the words of a loving, merciful, kind father looking out for his boys? Or the words of some contemporary so-called "biblical" counselor of our day dealing with an unrepentant serial adulterer or pedophile in the church? Well, here is what God thought of Eli's approach:

1 Samuel 2:27-36 And there came a man of God to Eli and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, 'Did I indeed reveal myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt subject to the house of Pharaoh? (28) Did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to go up to my altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? I gave to the house of your father all my offerings by fire from the people of Israel. (29) Why then do you scorn my sacrifices and my offerings that I commanded for my dwelling, and honor your sons above me by fattening yourselves on the choicest parts of every offering of my people Israel?' (30) Therefore the LORD, the God of Israel, declares: 'I promised that your house and the

house of your father should go in and out before me forever,' but now the LORD declares: 'Far be it from me, for those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed. (31) 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. (32) Then in distress you will look with envious eye on all the prosperity that shall be bestowed on Israel, and there shall not be an old man in your house forever. (33) 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. (34) 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. (35) 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. (36) 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.'"

Eli's sin was that he honored his sons above the Lord. He made his sons more important than God's holiness

and glory. Today, these “universal redeemer fixers” are guilty of the very same sin. They honor the wicked above the Lord. They insist on redeeming the wicked that God desires to kill.

Now, the obvious question for us at this point is (you are already asking it in your mind, right?) –

“But how do we discern the reprobate from the sinner to whom God would show mercy”

The answer is really not that difficult. While we cannot know with certainty that a person is reprobate, we can discern enough to know that it is *time to move on and quit trying to fix them*. And let me suggest to you how to know:

When a person has heard the gospel, when they know God’s will is that they repent and believe in Christ, when they have (as Hebrews says) ‘heard His voice,’ and yet they persist in going their own way, in continuing in their evil ways, and ESPECIALLY if they do so while pretending to be a Christian, we should deal with them as if they are reprobates. It is time to shake the dust off our shoes and move on.

Listen to the Apostle to the Hebrews. This is the sin of the reprobate that we are being warned of in this passage. Hearing God’s voice and hardening our heart against Him:

Hebrews 3:7-19 Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice, (8) do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, (9) **where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years.**

(10) Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.' (11) **As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.'**"

(12) Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. (13) But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

(14) For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. (15) As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion." (16) For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not

all those who left Egypt led by Moses? (17) And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? (18) And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? (19) So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

An ENTIRE generation of reprobates! And what was the nature of their sin? It was exactly the same as that of Hophni and Phineas. They heard. They knew. They say. Day after day. Year after year. For 40 years! God's Word came to them and they knew it. But they hardened their hearts against Him. Evil, unbelieving hearts.

And then God's gavel fell and the verdict was pronounced: *They shall not enter My rest*. And that was it. They never made it to Canaan. They died in that desert and ended in hell.

Reprobates, you see, do not perish in their sin because God elected them to damnation. That is not Calvinism. That is not Reformed theology, and it certainly is not the Bible. Reprobates become what they are because they were raised in a Christian church, they were taught the gospel, they knew the Bible is the Word of God, they saw Christ in the ordinances of His church

and in the lives of the saints around them, but day after day, year after year they hardened their hearts against Christ, they refused to believe and obey, they persisted in their sins, until one day in God's wisdom, their fate was sealed – *They shall not enter My rest*.

Listen once more to Hebrews on this very same subject:

Hebrews 6:1-8 Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, (2) and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. (3) And this we will do if God permits.

(4) For it is impossible, in the case of those

who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit,

(5) and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come,

(6) and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. (7) For land that

has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. (8) But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

This is the unpardonable sin, the sin against the Holy Spirit who opens our eyes to the light of Christ, who testifies with our spirits that Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. The reprobate becomes what he is by knowingly rejecting this convincing, convicting work of the Spirit. That is why the unpardonable sin is called the sin against the Holy Spirit:

Matthew 12:31-32 Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. (32) And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

What does the reprobate look like today? Well, let me give you a picture of him:

- He claims to be a Christian
- He has heard the gospel and the truths of Scripture for years and

years

- He is often quite “religious” in appearance
- But behind all of this lies an evil, unbelieving heart as evidenced by his real life of walking in evil, of refusing to repent, of having no fear of the Lord.
- He is, you see, Hophni and Phineas.

It is my conviction that we are dealing with many reprobates today in the church and yet as we have seen, this doctrine is most often rejected as “unkind” and instead we are told that we must be like Eli and plead with people who have walked in their sin, who have played the hypocrite, and have done so for decades and decades!

Did you know that the Bible tells us that we are to stop wasting our energies on certain people?

1 John 5:16-18 If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. (17) All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death. (18) We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he

who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.

The background here is Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 7:13-16 And now, because you have done all these things, declares the LORD, and when I spoke to you persistently you did not listen, and when I called you, you did not answer, (14) therefore I will do to the house that is called by my name, and in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and to your fathers, as I did to Shiloh. (15) And I will cast you out of my sight, as I cast out all your kinsmen, all the offspring of Ephraim. (16) "As for you, do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer for them, and do not intercede with me, for I will not hear you.

(see also the same instruction Jer 11:14 and 14:11). It is the sin of the reprobate you see, the sin of hearing His voice but hardening the heart. It is what lies behind this instruction in Numbers:

Numbers 15:28-31 And the priest shall make atonement before the LORD for the person who makes a mistake, when he sins unintentionally, to make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven. (29) You shall have one law for him who does anything

unintentionally, for him who is native among the people of Israel and for the stranger who sojourns among them. (30) But the person who does anything with a high hand, whether he is native or a sojourner, reviles the LORD, and that person shall be cut off from among his people. (31) Because he has despised the word of the LORD and has broken his commandment, that person shall be utterly cut off; his iniquity shall be on him."

Understand? Hophni and Phineas and Esau like all reprobates despised the word of the Lord, persisted in their flagrant evil, knowing full well that God is God, that His Word is truth. They, in other words, "sinned with a high hand, reviling the Lord all the while."

There are many such people sitting in the pews of Christian churches today. And the church is guilty of the sin of Eli. Honoring the wicked above the Lord, insisting that in our counseling, in our own doings, we can fix them all and help them see the error of their ways. In doing so the church is in fact fighting against the Lord. Don't you be guilty of the same thing.

Jeremiah 14:10-12 Thus says the LORD concerning this people: "They have loved to wander thus; they have not restrained their feet; therefore the

LORD does not accept them; now he will remember their iniquity and punish their sins." (11) The LORD said to me: "Do not pray for the welfare of this people. (12) Though they fast, I will not hear their cry, and though they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. But I will consume them by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence."

So was the end of Hophni and Phineas. And so shall be the end of all who hear the Lord's voice and harden themselves against Him.