

Bethel



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The Anatomy of Rebellion, Part 1

I don't know about you, but one of my greatest disappointments when it comes to the Christian life is NOT that I haven't gotten this or that thing for which I have prayed. Nor is it the failures of the people of God, you know what I'm talking about, at times feeling unloved and uncared for by the body. Neither is it the discovering that some of the greatest gifts of God will not be enjoyed in this life, but in the next. NO! My greatest disappointment when it comes to God's Kingdom... is my own sin!

Listen to the following quotes. See if they do not reflect your own struggle:

“Thou art good beyond all thought, but I am vile, wretched, miserable, blind; my lips are ready to confess, but my heart is slow to feel... Thy loving Spirit strives within me, brings me Scripture warnings, speaks in startling providences, allures by secret whispers, yet I choose devices and desires to my own hurt, impiously resent, grieve, and provoke him to abandon me.”¹

“My mind is a bucket without a bottom, with no spiritual understanding, no desire for the Lord's Day, ever learning but never reaching the truth, always at the gospel-well but never holding water. My conscience is without conviction or contrition, with nothing to repent of. My will is without power of decision or resolution. My heart is without affection, and full of leaks.”

“My every sense, member, faculty, affection, is a snare to me. I can scarce open my eyes but I envy those above me, or despise those below. I covet honour and riches of the mighty, and am proud and unmerciful to the rags of others; if I behold beauty it is a bait to lust, or see deformity, it stirs up loathing and disdain.”

Oh often I have spoken the words of Paul, “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?” (Romans 7:24). And while I am grateful that my hope and confidence is Christ, nevertheless like a dog, it isn't but moments after confession that I can be found returning to my vomit.²

And yet, what if I told you that the word of God contains insight when it comes to this battle, and observations as to why we sometimes sin? Would you be interested in knowing how sin works? Are you interested in sins place of attack?

¹ The following quotes are from, The Valley of Vision, pages 70, 72, 74

² Compare Proverbs 26:22

As we begin this series entitled *The Anatomy of Rebellion* we are looking at that time in redemptive history when God's people went from living under Judges to living under a King. In fact, it is our text where we read of the impetus, indeed the sinful impetus, behind the change.

1 Samuel 8:7-8, "And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee."

Based on this passage, the assumption we make throughout this text is that the leadership is in sin! And thus as we gaze upon their actions, we gaze upon the actions of a sinful people rebelling against God.

Now while this passage is not exhaustive in its description of the elder's rebellion, nevertheless it gives us enough to sink our teeth into that we might better able "fight the good fight of faith" (1 Timothy 6:12).

The Occasion

1 Samuel 8:1-2, "And it came to pass, when Samuel was old, that he made his sons judges over Israel. Now the name of his firstborn was Joel; and the name of his second, Abiah³: they were judges in Beersheba."

Time has elapsed between chapters 7 and 8. And we are left to assume as the reader that the state of affairs in chapter 7 was that which characterized the span between the 2 chapters. And so, what was life like during this time?

First notice that God's people lived in reliance upon God in which they continued to lament after the Lord.⁴ And they endeavored to serve Christ.⁵

Secondly the Philistines, though a regional power, did not harass Israel.⁶

Finally during this time, Samuel served the people of God such that they routinely worshipped the Lord in spirit and truth.⁷

Now advance the clock about thirty years and we find that Samuel has aged. The yearly circuit ride described in 1 Samuel 7:16 (a sample of the multiple trips Samuel no doubt took throughout Israel during this time) had now become quite difficult. And so Samuel, in accordance with Deuteronomy 16:18, commissioned his sons unto the pastoral work that they might serve the Lord and His people in the southern part of Israel, Beersheba.

Recall that Beersheba was the place Abraham settled in Genesis 21 and 22. It was located in the Negev, which was a wilderness/desert located in the southern part of Judah about 57 miles south of Ramah. And yet of all locations in this area, it was the most hospitable.

It was here that Joel and Abijah were stationed. It was here that they assumed the office of Judge and

³ Other translations spell his name Abijah

⁴ Compare 1 Samuel 7:2

⁵ Compare 1 Samuel 7:4

⁶ Compare 1 Samuel 7:13

⁷ Compare 1 Samuel 7:15-16

took responsibility for the welfare of the people of God living in the southern half of Israel. And yet there was a flaw in both Joel and Abijah's character, a flaw which their new-found office revealed.

1 Samuel 7:3, “And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment.”

It is clear that the character flaw in both Joel and Abijah was not manifest until AFTER they assumed the pastoral office. Though called to be a servant of God's people, nevertheless these two boys were tempted by the power that is inherent in all divine oversight.

We know that the authority housed in any office in the Kingdom of God at best is ministerial and declarative. Leadership in the Kingdom of God is a position of service by which the minister is to declare and so uphold the will of the Lord.

And yet by virtue of the One by whose authority a minister rules, the ministerial office can be abused by any who might be hungry for power, prestige, honor, or respect. For example God speaking to His appointed judges said, “Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High” (Psalm 82:6).

By this statement God is not saying that a judge/elder/ruler became divine. Rather, God is saying that intrinsic in any office in the body of Christ comes the wielding of divine authority.

Romans 13:1-2, “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.”

As such abuse is always a sin away for the leader. Speaking of the Pharisees, Christ said this:

Matthew 23:5-7, “But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.”

Sadly Joel and Abijah fell into the sin of many a minister. Rather than shepherding God's people unto their spiritual good, they perverted the office of Judge unto their personal gain by- look again at 1 Samuel 8:3.

- turning aside to dishonest gain
- taking bribes
- perverting justice

Now it is this that served as the occasion for the rebellion of this chapter. From this I want you to notice that when it comes to intentional acts of rebellion against God there typically is a reason that can be referenced for our rebellion. It may be irrational, as when Adam and Eve took of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.⁸ A talking animal told them that eating it would make them like God. And they listened?!

It may be a genuine concern. For example, the time when Saul's army was fleeing and he took matters in

⁸ Compare Genesis 3:1-7

his own hand and offered the sacrifice in order to maintain order.⁹ It may even sound holy, as when Judas rebuked the woman for wasting her costly perfume on Jesus when there was so much need around them/¹⁰

Regardless purposed acts of rebellion do not arise in a vacuum. Typically there is a reason, a basis, and an excuse. And thus, look hard and long enough and you will always find a reason to justify your sin.

If you have hatred in your heart, you won't need to look long at another sinner before you find a reason to vent it. If you have lust in your heart, just live a couple of good days filled with devotion unto Christ and that will "earn you the right" to appease your desire. If you think you are better than someone else just watch and wait; you'll gather enough data to look down on another person.

- Husbands and dads, you deserve the night out away from your family.
- And brothers and sisters, it is not gossip... it's an opportunity for prayer.
- And besides you're not angry. You're just frustrated on account of what another has done.

I think we all can identify with these excuses. Truly, as Jeremiah taught so long ago, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9).

The mind has an infinite capacity to rationalize. And if we are not careful we will find ourselves opposing God in the name of a "righteous" act.

You say, "But the elders here are in the right! Samuel's sons were in rebellion!"

This is true and so demonstrates that the fodder for rebellion also can be something valid. But let us not be deceived! The elders here care little more about the compromise of Joel and Abijah than they did when Hophni and Phinehas raped the land. No during the era of the Judges, an era overlapped by the first 7 chapters of 1 Samuel, we notice that there was an underlying impulse toward a monarchy in Israel.

Remember that right before God's people entered the promised land Moses detailed the process involved in selecting and installing a King in Israel.¹¹ Maybe it was this that instilled the thought; we cannot tell. But whatever it was when Gideon defeated the enemy and proved himself a man of God¹² we read this:

Judges 8:22, "Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian."

And then years later, listen to the words of Abimelech who eventually served as a King over Shechem (an Israeli city).

Judges 9:2, "Speak, I pray you, in the ears of all the men of Shechem, Whether is better for you, either that all the sons of Jerubbaal, which are threescore and ten persons, reign over you, or that one reign over you? remember also that I am your bone and your flesh."

And so a push toward a monarchy clearly was in the back of the minds of God's people during this time.

⁹ Compare 1 Samuel 13:8-9

¹⁰ Compare Matthew 26:6-13

¹¹ Compare Deuteronomy 17:14-17

¹² Compare Judges 7:8-21

Thus in our text, when it was seen that the last Judge was aged and his children bound in compromise, the elders used the situation as the means to fulfill a passion that was on their corporate heart and mind for years. Robert Gordon put it this way:

“Unintentionally, therefore, Samuel had given a handle to those in Israel who were hankering after the prestige and security that institutionalized leadership seemed to promise... The elders had a pretext in the malpractices at Beer-sheba, but the real motivation behind their request was an aspiration to nationhood on the same basis as Israel's neighbours.”¹³

So take heed. Watch over your heart.¹⁴ Rebellion is crouching at the door and its desire is for you! And if you make allowance, it will use any means, rationale, or avenue to sin with impunity.

You have heard it said, “Every heretic has a verse.” Well from our text this morning we conclude that every sinner has an excuse.

- If it wasn't for this, I wouldn't have gotten angry.
- If my parent's were more understanding.
- I'm conforming to the “spirit of the law.”

In contrast listen to the description of what a healthy Christian looks like. Christ gave Himself for us so that “he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14). Fidelity in our walks with Christ has the child of God NOT looking for any and all excuse to sin that is the occasion for rebellion.

No! The healthy Christian is one who is looking for any and all opportunities to serve Christ faithfully. In fact you could say that he is “zealous for good deeds.” And so must we be.

And yet there is more. While every sinner has a reason for his sin we also learn here that they typically seek “Reinforcement” for it as well.

The Reinforcement

1 Samuel 8:4, “Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah.”

At the outset it is easy to read this text and imagine Matthew 18. Here the elders of Israel are burdened by the sin of Samuel's children. And so, as Matthew 18 might imply, they come to Samuel who at this time was the lead shepherd of the church. And what a godly thing this would be. However, it is not so cut and dry. Listen to Matthew 18.

Matthew 18:15-17, “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.”

¹³ Robert Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, page 110

¹⁴ Compare Proverbs 4:23

Now you compare this passage with the elder's response and you will see two glaring mistakes. First, as we have seen they do not go to the sinning party, Joel and Abijah, like they ought. Secondly and more damaging, when one of the elders heard or saw what these boys were doing, this text indicates that they sought out the opinion and support of the other elders in the land. In other words, they neither went to the offending party or the church. Again, notice the text.

1 Samuel 8:4, “Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and [THEN] came to Samuel unto Ramah.”

Whether you realize it or not, this is the first elder assembly since the time of Moses in Deuteronomy 31:28.¹⁵ Why are they assembled?

First they want to talk about the sin of Joel and Abijah. They want all to be aware of it. Then they want to formulate a strategy on how they intend to utilize these boys's sin unto the fulfillment of their evil plan. Finally, they want unanimity. All must speak with one voice (which is exactly what we read in verse 4).

What an incredible, unfortunate, and yet typical error. Rather than bearing the burdens of one another (Galatians 6:2), the implication is that the elders gathered together and began to talk.

- Did you hear about Joel and Abijah? They're taking bribes!
- NO! Not Samuel's boys. I knew them when they were young; they had such a solid upbringing.
- Ask Ruel or Jonathan, they'll tell you.
- The many elders gathered chime in together, “Yes! It's true!”
- So what are we going to do about it?
- Well, we've always talked about casting off the judges and electing a king... now's the time!

Don't miss it! Overt acts of Rebellion typically do not occur spontaneously. They are the result of gossip. They need the approval of others. They are observations inappropriately shared. They are the beginnings of what we might term, “Mob Rule.”

The man or woman who boldly sins almost always does so with the support and approval of others.

And that is why more than anything we must be men and women who strive to be moved and controlled by God.

In the Fear of Christ

In Ephesians 5:21 Paul gives the foundation upon which the exhortations of Ephesians 5:22 – 6:9 rest. He lays down general principles for kingdom living. Notice one of them.

Ephesians 5:21, “And be subject to one another [literally “rank yourself beneath another”] in the fear of Christ.”

An important ethic in the Kingdom of God is the ranking of ourselves — our wants, desires, preferences, needs, and well being — beneath those around us. And yet I love the qualification that Paul gives because it is so important: “in the fear of Christ” (Ephesians 5:21).

¹⁵ Compare Robert Bergen's commentary, 1, 2 Samuel, footnote #7 page 114

When it comes to serving others that which must impel us is NOT another person's gratitude, kind acts, or his ability to repay. We are not to submit in the fear of man. That which impels us must be our reverence for Christ!

Now why do you suppose Paul added the qualification, "in the fear of Christ"?

Because in our sinfulness we are enslaved to the opinions, valuations, and approval of man! This is why there are so many passages in Scripture calling upon us NOT to fear man!

And thus as we consider 1 Samuel and its teaching that rebellion oft-times is reinforced by the opinions of man, we see all the more the greater need to live "in the fear of Christ."

Oh family of God, beware not only of your sinful heart but also of the opinions of man. Very few sins are committed in a vacuum.

Romans 1:32, "Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them."

Yes, you have worked hard. And most everyone around you thinks that you deserve... IT. But the question of the hour is NOT, "What do other's think?", BUT, "What does God think?"

And so again knowing of our propensity to fuel a sinful passion with the encouragement of others and by seeking the endorsement of others, we must all the more strive to be moved, bound, and governed by the will and thus the word of God.

Now brothers and sisters let me tell you- THIS WILL NOT BE EASY!

One of my greatest struggles in life is being moved not by man, but God. I am a man-pleaser through and through. Man's opinions are so important to me. It is rare that I have sported a sinful attitude or act without the approval of someone.

What are we to do?

Let us begin with prayer. Let us ask God to be that which moves us in all that we do.

Let us also endeavor to be students of God's word whereby we might not only fellowship with God but also learn of His mind.

Let us be quick to confess and repent of living in the "fear of man." Don't ever forget that God knows our propensity and that He already has forgiven us on account of it. And so when we find ourselves living for the praises and good opinions of man, let us be quick to repent.

And let us ever and always take it as a bad sign if we have the support and endorsement of man when we cannot root and ground our attitude or actions in the word of God.

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About the Preacher

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