

## To Be 'Light' on Church is to be 'Low' on God

As Christians and patriots, the state of our country is on our minds more and more these days. It's hard to focus on any single problem; everywhere you look it seems like our society is unraveling. Confidence in the government is at an all-time low. Race relations haven't been this bad since the civil unrest of the sixties. Our culture is so debauched and rank it couldn't be any filthier if hell itself had vomited upon us. I think in many people's mind there is an aching sense of dread that calamity could strike at any minute and the whole nation could implode and come crashing down like the twin towers on 9/11. How did we get here? How did the alabaster city shining on a hill wind up in the dung heap? How have we come to the place that we don't even know what a family or a marriage is any more and where those in positions of leadership and responsibility feel free to thumb their nose in God's face? Some say, "It's Obama's fault. He's responsible!" But no, I think our problems started before he came along. Others say, "it's the schools and the media; they're undermining the foundation of our civilization." Indeed they are; but that's just a symptom. I've heard people on the radio say, "every problem in this country started in the sixties with their radical anti-authority attitude". But again, what led to that? I submit that in back of all those there's a deeper problem – a 'root' that ties them all together. Not surprisingly, that 'root' is unearthed in Scripture in 1 Samuel 2. Chronologically, of course, 1 Samuel comes on the heels of events described near the end of the book of Judges – events that were eerily similar to the ones we face today. As today, idolatry then was rampant and blatant in Israel.<sup>1</sup> Sodomy and other depraved forms of sexual licentiousness abounded.<sup>2</sup> The country was on the brink of civil war and was being torn apart culturally.<sup>3</sup> What in the world was going on? How did a country founded on the Word of God whose original leaders walked with the Lord and revered the Ten Commandments end up so far away from Him in just a few hundred years? How could a nation that had enjoyed so many blessings and had experienced one providential victory after another get that far off track?

An oft-overlooked figure of speech in 2:31 gives profound insight into the problem; God promised to '*cut off thine [Eli's] arm*'. This threat is without parallel elsewhere in Old Testament literature. It's not found in any other judgment pronouncements; it's not mentioned in any other books; this is the only place it appears – except one. Although the expression is *metaphorical* when applied to Eli, in chapter 5 this exact judgment was *literally* enforced upon the idolatrous statue of Dagon. It's subtle but the author is drawing an unmistakable and very significant parallel between the two incidents. "Both involve God bringing about the downfall of the central figures related to their respective sanctuaries following a time when His own reputation was in doubt. By literarily paralleling the judgments, the narrator is, in effect, equating Shiloh's condition under Eli with that of a pagan house of worship."<sup>4</sup> Under Eli's leadership and example, things had gotten so bad that the house of God was essentially no different than the abominable temples in which the Philistines worshipped. It was scandalous! The question remains, however, why did he allow it to be this way? The text is clear; Eli "*despised*" God (v. 30). Obviously he wasn't dripping with contempt and anger at the mention of God's name; but he had the wrong view of God. He had a low view. He failed to hold the Lord in the proper esteem and that led him into wrong beliefs and wrong priorities. It led him to believe that his personal comfort and the honor and prestige of his sons were more important than God.<sup>5</sup> And what Eli allowed in moderation his sons and eventually the whole nation excused in excess. It's easy to see how Israel sunk so far so fast. The nation came to mirror its spiritual leadership. "The iniquity of the leaders was reflected in the conduct of those who looked to them for guidance."<sup>6</sup> That was the 'root' problem then and that's exactly where we are again. A. W. Tozer, once observed, "The most important thing you can know about a man is what comes into his mind when he hears the word 'God'".<sup>7</sup> In the minds of most Americans, if they think of anything at all, God is thought of as sort of a cosmic Santa Claus – a non-threatening old man far away who exists to make us happy and bring unexpected goodies into our life. His chief attribute is tolerance and although He knows it isn't good for us, for the most part, He just indulges our selfish appetites. Where did America get such a pathetic view of God? Obviously not from Obama! They didn't get it from the schools or the news media. They got it from their churches. The cultural rot in our society is a symptom that stems from a spiritual cancer in the pulpit. The reason so many members have a *light* view of church is because they have a *low* view of God. It follows that before Sunday can recover its place of primacy in their schedule, God will have to recover a place of preeminence in their mind. May God help those of us in positions of spiritual leadership to instill such an exalted view both in and out of the pulpit!

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<sup>1</sup>Judges 17-18

<sup>2</sup>Judges 19

<sup>3</sup>Judges 20-21

<sup>4</sup>Cf. footnote <sup>42</sup> in Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, New American Commentary ; ([Nashville, Tenn.]: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 83.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. 1 Samuel 2:29

<sup>6</sup>William John Dean and Thomas Kirk, *Studies in First Samuel* (Minneapolis, MN: Klock & Klock, 1983).

<sup>7</sup>A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, Special ed. (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1982).