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THE PERIL OF PERMISSIVENESS

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And the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli. And the word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision. And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see. I Samuel 3: 1

In the days before iron steamships, shipbuilders went through the forest selecting the giant trees best fitted to build the great ships that would carry people and cargo across the seas. In like manner, when the Holy Spirit was preparing the divine ship of Scripture, the Bible, He searched out through human history those persons, places, and events best fitted in carrying the cargo of Truth across the seas of time. No Scripture was written simply for the sake of the people then living, but it was for the enlightenment and feeding of the souls of men throughout all generations. Within the sacred Scriptures is the incident of I Samuel 1-3 that became a historical tragedy in Israel's history and yet is most pertinent for our generation.

THREE NOTABLE FORCES

This classic story took place at the end of the Judges period when the nation Israel was in dark days of apostasy. In those days "the word of the Lord was precious," "there was no open vision," and Eli's "eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see." In days such as these, God begins to withhold light. This withheld light is a lack of the manifested revelation of God's divine Will to which His people had been accustomed through His Word. Inevitably, there will result a spiritual declension and change in God's people. The passage of I Samuel 1-3 presents three notable forces that mark this period of decreasing spiritual light among God's people.

The first force is typified in Samuel, Hannah's young son. He had not become a leader yet. After I Samuel 3, he drops out of public notice for about twenty-five years. He represents a growing, silent remnant which in all ages clings to the true voice of God in a time when the Word of God is otherwise scarce or unpublicized. He represents the elect whom God candidly speaks to during such silent days. Yes, there is always the elect, the remnant in every generation.

The second force is typified in the sons of Eli. They were corrupt in their lives and character. They corrupted the priesthood with not only fleshly cravings for the luxurious life but also the immoral conduct with women, which usually accompanies the idleness of lost spirituality. They represent leadership which lives by the law of the flesh; carnality rather than spirituality is their passion. They represent those who become more open about their manner of living; they could care less about spiritual living in a time when carnality triumphs in the church. They are the growing number of people who have no real concern for doctrinal preaching and maintaining biblical standards. They despise any preaching that strikes the deathblow to the carnal, worldly living of the people. Yes, there are the sons of



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Eli who represent the carnal force within the church. It is the most preeminent force within the institutional church today.

But there is a third force that is represented in Eli himself, the religious leader of his time. He did not have the heart of Samuel, but yet he could not be categorized with his sons either. He was a man given to the peril of permissiveness of the hour. He was aware of the condition of the times, and yet he proceeded not to sanctify the hour or stand up for righteousness. He was led by the people, rather than being a leader of the people. Yes, he is the third force, the failing ecclesiastical leader.

WHY DOES PERMISSIVENESS EXIST?

It is almost impossible for us to understand just why a condition like this goes on unnoticed and unaccounted for. One would think that a godly people would quite naturally discern changes taking place and endeavour to dissolve the evils of Eli's time. However, we can see in our own time a similar condition existing in the institutional church. There is truly an elect-remnant in the visible church that is not in power, but which is behind-the-scenes. As with Samuel, this remnant discerns and desires a true reformation, a true return to biblical doctrines and godly, practical living. They long for it in their church and in the denomination or movement. Yes, they are praying for a spiritual revival to come, one that would cause the Church to return to the biblical spirit it once had.

But within such a changing church there is a significant group represented by the sons of Eli. They consider prosperity, progress, and popularity the evidence of faith and spirituality. They live enjoying luxury and lukewarmness. They share in permissiveness in their attire and in their morals. Divorce and remarriage are tolerated among the clergy; the character and principles of the Pastoral Epistles are almost meaningless among them. Carnality reigns in their hearts, and they enjoy such carnality in every facet of the church.

On the other hand, the average ecclesiastical leader of the institutional church today is so much like Eli. These leaders are not immoral like Eli's sons, but they wink at dealing with such sins. They will take somewhat of a stand in the preaching of a sermon, but they compromise in not pressing the practising of the principle. They make a difference between the policies and the principles of the church or the Christian school. They say policies can change for the situation, and yet the principles of the Bible (which they believe are different than policies to run a church or school), are considered unchangeable. It is amazing how such schizophrenia can be among such leaders of the time. They would not dare preach without a positive spin towards an audience for a good psychological effect, yet they would dare to ignore modesty and holiness. There is a feeling toward a person who is conscientiously endeavouring to be true to Scripture and its practice of living, that he is overbearing, legalistic, and hateful. Yet, they seem to have no feeling against a person who is liberal and worldly as long as he has "love" and does not "rock the boat." They do not seem to realize that all love is not good and all hate is not evil. God rebuked Jehoshaphat in his alliance with Ahab by stating, "Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? Therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord" (II Chronicles 19:2).

When carnal men step forward in fornication and worldliness and flaunt such forces within the church, it is the hour for Christian leaders to step forward and rebuke such forces and



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stand for righteousness. When the music begins to drift from the biblical standard, giving way to the Neo-Evangelical and Charismatic sounds, it is the hour for Christian pastors and music directors to step forward and stop the proclivity of such unholy trends. The church is not losing the battle today because the liberals and the Neo's are invading the congregations; the battle is lost when Christian leaders lie in the peril of permissiveness. Such leaders of permissiveness may privately tell a layman or a concerned pastor that things are not right, that a certain music sound is not good, but they will go no further with their concern. In fact, their lack of actions will permit such things to continue.

Dear reader, this is where the battle is being lost. We may place the failure on the sons of Eli because their sins are obvious. But the permissive ways of Eli are truly the reason carnality and apostasy are mounting in the churches. Leadership that is permissive with wrong, with the sins of the people, and with carnality in leadership is the greatest failure found in churches today. To let the wrong go or to get by without dealing with is the same as permitting it to continue. This is how apostasy takes over a local church or a denomination. Oh that God will deliver pastors, evangelists, music directors, teachers, and the laity from the peril of permissiveness. For if compromise and error are permitted, time will be the only barrier for the inevitable, spiritual collapse. It is most worthy to repeat: may God deliver us from the peril of permissiveness.