

"Father's Eyes (Thank You, Amy Grant)"
A sermon preached at Heritage Presbyterian Church
Reverend Henry T.C. Sun, Ph.D.
19 March 2023
1 Samuel 16:1-13
Ephesians 5:8-14

Ephesians 5

⁸For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light— ⁹for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. ¹⁰Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹²For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; ¹³but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, ¹⁴for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, “Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

1 Samuel 16

¹The LORD said to Samuel, “How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.” ²Samuel said, “How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me.” And the LORD said, “Take a heifer with you, and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.’” ³Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you.” ⁴Samuel did what the LORD commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, “Do you come peaceably?” ⁵He said, “Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD; sanctify yourselves and come with me

to the sacrifice.” And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

⁶When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, “Surely the Lord’s anointed is now before the LORD.” ⁷But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.” ⁸Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, “Neither has the LORD chosen this one.” ⁹Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, “Neither has the LORD chosen this one.” ¹⁰Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, “The LORD has not chosen any of these.” ¹¹Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all your sons here?” And he said, “There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.” ¹²He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The LORD said, “Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.” ¹³Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

I. Introduction

As a Chinese-American child raised by very traditional Chinese parents, I was taught from a very early age that several character traits were essential to being a decent human being from an Asian point of view. One of these was that the honor of the family was more important than the honor of the individual. So getting into fights was generally bad, but getting into fights to defend a younger brother or to protect the family honor was generally a highly positive thing.

A second was to always play by the rules as long as you could tilt them in your favor. So I never learned how to speak Chinese as a youngster - something I regret to this day - because my father thought that speaking with a Chinese accent would negatively influence people who were interviewing me for college admission, or for graduate school, or for jobs. But I always signed my formal applications or letters with my full Asian middle name to alert the people staring at a piece of paper that I was Asian. Why? Because back then Asians were considered the model minority, often smarter and harder working than others. Being able to be identified as a Chinese American applicant gave me all those advantages and with no risk of being tarnished by the lie that I couldn't read or write or speak fluent English. The final character trait is one that is widely shared in the Asian world that I have been an abominable failure at, and that is the character trait of inscrutability. In an Asian world, no one is supposed to know how you feel, what you think, or whether you agree or disagree with them just by looking at you. Stacey will tell you that I may be the least inscrutable person in the world. I just never developed the skill of keeping a flat, expression-less, poker face in anything I did.

Of course, there was a reason that inscrutability was so highly valued by my father. If someone could look at you and have no idea whether you were good to go or not, they might offer a little more for the house or pay a little more for tutoring. Or an employer might be willing to overpay for your services if they weren't sure whether you were really interested in working for them or not. My therapist once told me that in every relationship, the one who cares least has the most power. Being inscrutable was supposed to be one way to create the impression that I cared less than you about something, and hence it gained me some power and leverage in the negotiations of life.

I mention the Chinese value of inscrutability because one of the consistent messages of Scripture has to do with the difference between how God sees us and how we see each other. So let's turn to our passage in 1 Samuel to see how that works.

IIA. Pivot to 1 Samuel

(slide2) The Old Testament book of 1 Samuel is part of a larger historical narrative that begins with the book of Deuteronomy and includes the books of Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, and 1-2 Kings. Because these historical books reflect the theological principles and ideals of the book of Deuteronomy, they are commonly referred to as the Deuteronomistic History. In particular, the speeches of the main characters are often crafted by using language found primarily in the book of Deuteronomy. Joshua, in Joshua 24 and Solomon, in 1 Kings 8 are two good examples of this literary phenomenon. The overall idea of the Deuteronomistic History is to show how the children of Israel lived lives that were marked by disobedience to God's Word and compromise with the religious principles and practices of the foreign nations that surrounded them; how trust in God was replaced by trust in foreign political powers; and how despite all that disobedience and lack of faith, God held an open door for their repentance and return back to God (see, e.g., W. Brueggeman and H. W. Wolff, The Vitality of OT Traditions [Atlanta: John Knox Press (1982), 83-100]).

(slide3) What has happened in 1 Samuel 8-15 is an excellent example of this pattern. Early in 1 Samuel, the children of Israel tell Samuel that they want a king to rule over them in 1 Samuel 8:5. When Samuel reports their request to the LORD, the divine response in verses 7-8 is entirely predictable: "Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but *they have rejected me* (כִּי־אַתָּה יִמָּאֲסוּ) from being king over them. ⁸Just

as they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, *forsaking me* (וַיַּעַזְבוּנִי) and *serving other gods* (וַיַּעַבְדוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים)." Did you note that language of rejecting God, forsaking God, and serving other gods? Given that the God they are rejecting and forsaking was the God who saved their ancestors from slavery in Egypt, gave them the law on Mount Sinai, watched over them while they wandered in the wilderness for 40-some years, and then delivered the Promised Land to them, that is an astounding indictment against the children of Israel. Nonetheless, God accepts their request and grants them their first king, King Saul, whose reign (there is a serious textual lacuna in 1 Sam 13:1 which prevents us from knowing how long Saul ruled over Israel; guesses range from 2 years [NJPS translation] to 42 years [NIV, which attempts to harmonize 1 Sam 13:1 with Acts 13:21 ["God gave them Saul son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, who reigned for forty years"]. For discussion, see, e.g., Omanson and Ellington, *UBS Handbook* 252-53; Klein WBC 124-25; McCarter AB 222-23; Tsumura NICOT 331-33; and this blog posting by an Emeritus Professor of OT at Northern Baptist Seminary, <https://claudemariottini.com/2005/12/21/rereading-1-samuel-131-2/>.) does not end well. How badly does it end? In 1 Samuel 15:11, God says, "I regret (נִחַמְתִּי; see below, verse 35) that I made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me, and has not carried out my commands," and God's message is relayed by Samuel to Saul in verse 23, when Samuel says: "Because you have rejected (מָאַסְתָּ) the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you (וַיִּמְאַסֶּנּוּ) from being king." And all that is repeated by the narrator in verse 35: "And the LORD was sorry (וַיִּתְּנָה נֶחֱם); see above verse 11. There is a substantial theological debate on the relationship between these verses [see also Jeremiah 18:8, 10; 26:3, 13, 19; Jonah 3:9, 10] and verses like 1 Sam 15:29 ["Moreover the Glory of Israel will not recant or change his mind; for he is not a mortal, that he should change his mind"]; see, e.g., Kaiser, *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, 209-210; NIDOTTE 3:82 ["The explanation seems to be that God does not capriciously change his intentions or ways of acting ... In many cases the Lord's 'changing' of his mind is a gracious response to human factors ... In other places we are told or are left to infer that the change is due to feelings of compassion for a person or people"]; OManson and Ellington *UBS Handbook* 316-17 ["**I repent.** at various times in the Old Testament, when people do not behave as God had wanted them to, he changes his attitude toward them (for example, Gen 6:6-7; Jer 18:7-10). This may seem to be in direct conflict with verse 29 of this chapter, but the same Hebrew word is used in both cases, and

translators should not attempt to hide the similarities that exist between the two verses"]; Klein WBC 156 ["One needs to know that God can be counted on. But this reaffirmation of theological truth does not smother historical reality: Yahweh's change of heart about Saul is left to stand. How we are to resolve the tension between God's fidelity and his freedom is not suggested. Perhaps the paradox expresses the real truth: He never changes his mind, and yet he does"]; McCarter AB 268 ["This statement (= verse 29) seems intended to discourage further expostulation from Saul; that is, it implies: Yahweh has rejected you, and since Yahweh does not change his mind, there is no reason for further discussion. But the contradiction of v 11 ("I [Yahweh!] repent ...") that this statement ("Israel's Everlasting One ... does not repent ...") contains is so blatant that we must question its originality"]; Brueggemann Interpretation 115 ["Verse 29 ... contradicts verse 10 (and later verse 35, which asserts that Yahweh does repent and change heart, so that Yahweh could both choose and reject Saul at different times"]; Hertzberg OTL 126 ["Here we have the theologically important concept of the repentance of God: God is not slavishly bound by his own decisions, but is almighty to such an extent that he is Lord even of them"]) that he had made Saul king over Israel."

Of course, actions have consequences. Now that God has acceded to the Hebrew demand for a king, and now that God has rejected Saul from being king, what will happen next? Well, a new king will have to be chosen to replace Saul. But not only is Saul still alive, Saul has male children who might claim to be next-in-line to inherit the throne of Israel (we don't know the exact number of sons Saul had. 1 Samuel 14:49 lists three sons [Jonathan, Ishvi, and Malki-Shua; but compare the list in 1 Samuel 31:12 || 1 Chron 10:2 [Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malki-Shua], while 1 Chron 8:33 || 1 Chron 9:39 list four sons [Jonathan, Malki-Shua, Abinadab, and Eshbaal]). So if Saul isn't dead, and if Saul has sons who have legitimate claim to the throne when he dies, exactly how is the next king going to be identified? That's what 1 Samuel 16 is all about.

(slide4) In verse 1, God instructs Samuel to go to "Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons," but Samuel is worried, and rightly so. Saul, the king that God has rejected, is still reigning as Israel's king, and if Samuel anoints someone else to be the King of Israel and Saul hears about it, he would surely execute Samuel as a traitor. That is why Samuel objects to God's instruction and says, "How (כִּי־אֵיךָ) can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me" in verse 2. God tells Samuel to pretend that he is readying a sacrifice to the

Lord and to invite Jesse and presumably his family (see verse 5) to the sacrifice. This appears to be an ad hoc sacrifice, not something that was prescribed in the laws of Samuel's day (and as such, some wonder whether God is instructing Samuel to lie about his reasons for visiting Saul; see, e.g., Smith ICC 144 ["Hence the subterfuge"]; Brueggeman Interpretation 121 ["This may not have been a blatant lie authorized by Yahweh but this is clearly an authorized deception"]). Samuel does exactly what God tells him to do. Samuel arrives at Bethlehem and tells the predictably nervous elders that he has come "to sacrifice to the LORD" and invites them to come to the sacrifice along with Jesse and his sons.

Now, none of the elders know the real reason why Samuel is in Bethlehem, and Jesse certainly does not know either. But as Jesse's sons arrive at the sacrifice, Samuel cannot help but wonder which one of Jesse's sons is the one that God has appointed for himself to be Israel's next king (verse 1). So Eliab passes by and Samuel thinks "Surely the LORD's anointed is now before the LORD" in verse 6. But Samuel is wrong, and God tells him as much in verse 7: "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him (מֵאַסְתִּירָהוּ); for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." The same thing happens with the next six of Jesse's sons: Abinadab? "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." Shammah? "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." Five more unnamed sons? "The LORD has not chosen any of these" (verse 8-10). The logic of the narrative implies that Samuel has told Jesse of God's intentions even though that is nowhere stated in the text (notice that in verses 8-10 "Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. ... Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. ... Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel"; see, e.g., Tsumura NICOT 420 ["it is possible that Samuel might have told Jesse his real purpose in coming"]) because Samuel (the Hebrew sentences do not explicitly name the subject, but most think that Samuel is the one speaking; see e.g., Omanson and Ellington UBS Handbook 339 ["that is, Samuel said"]; Klein WBC 161 ["each time the prophet remarked that the son in question had not been chosen by Yahweh"]; McCarter AB 273; Tsumura NICOT 420; Hertzberg OTL 135) tells Jesse that none of these seven sons is the one that the Lord has

chosen. Samuel asks Jesse if there are any more sons, and Jesse answers that there is one more - "the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep" - and Jesse sends for that youngest son. This one turns out to be the one that God has chosen, and God says to Samuel "Rise and anoint him for this is the one" in verse 12. Everyone present will know that David is the one because "the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward" (verse 13).

IIB. Pivot to Ephesians

(slide5) Perhaps the fact that God looks on the heart and not on the outward appearance is part of the reason why the New Testament is so adamant about our proper character, our Christian virtues, and our commitment to love one another. Ephesians 5 is just another example of that consistent New Testament counsel. It doesn't matter that we were once "darkness" (σκότος) because we are now light (φῶς). The second affirmation reminds us of a saying of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount - "You are the light of the world" (Matt 5:14), and the first may be an allusion to a different saying in that same sermon - "if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! (Matt 6:23 || Luke 11:34-36; see also John 3:19). In any event, the contrast between darkness and light is one that is regularly found in the OT and in the Judaism of the first century. And since we are no longer darkness but are now light, we have a new responsibility to "**Live** as children of light (ὡς τέκνα φωτός *περιπατεῖτε*)."

(slide6) What exactly does Paul mean by the imperative to live as children of light? He tells us that in verse 10-11 when he writes, "Try (δοκιμάζοντες; the translation of the participle δοκιμάζοντες is most likely due to the imperatives that surround it [*περιπατεῖτε*, μὴ συγκοινωνεῖτε, and ἐλέγχετε]) to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹Take no part (καὶ μὴ συγκοινωνεῖτε) in the unfruitful works of darkness,

but instead expose them." Because we are children of the light and no longer children of darkness, it is our job as followers of Jesus to discern what is pleasing to the Lord - which is what we are supposed to do - and to stay far, far away from "the unfruitful works of darkness (τοῖς ἔργοις τοῖς ἀκάρποις τοῦ σκότους)." That language of Paul's isn't an accident; in verse 9 he contrasts these unfruitful works of darkness with "the fruit of the light" that "is found in all that is good and right and true." Both the darkness and the light bear fruit in this world; it is our job to bear fruit by pursuing what is good and right and true.

But it isn't just our job to be children of the light who bear the good fruit of the light by pursuing what is good and right and true. We are not only to avoid the evil works of darkness like the plague. We are also called to expose them (ἐλέγχετε). When we see evil being done, it is our job as Christians to expose the evil that is being done. Some of you may know about or may have heard of Grace Community Church in southern California, whose lead pastor is John MacArthur. In a sermon snippet from his church in 1987, these words were preached: "when someone comes to bring a formal, public accusation against an elder or a pastor, we are not to listen to that. We are not to entertain that. We are not to investigate that" (see image below; sermon dated January 18, 1987 per this link: [Restoring Biblical Eldership, Part 2](#), accessed 17 March 2023). It's hard for me to think of something so diametrically opposed to what Paul is commanding us to do in Ephesians 5. Obviously, there will be some room for people of faith to agree or to disagree as to whether an act is truly evil or not. When I was at Northgate, there was a guy who would hug everyone he could. While it never bothered me, and while I always returned his hugs, it did bother some of the people at that church, so the pastoral leadership asked him to stop hugging people in the lobby. And to his credit, he did stop hugging people. Was his hugging others evil? When I was

younger, I loved listening to secular hard rock music, despite being told that such music was a sin against God and therefore listening to that kind of music was sinful, and as everyone in the church knows all too well, I still love listening to it. Was and is my listening to hard rock and heavy metal music evil? On both of those questions, people of good faith might disagree.

On the other hand, there are other things that I hope no one would try to defend as being OK instead of evil. If I embezzle money from this church, that's evil no matter how much someone might think I'm underpaid and no matter how much someone might think I deserve what I've embezzled. If I am verbally abusive, threaten violence, or sexually harass someone in the congregation, I hope that no one will defend my actions as being anything other than evil, and I hope that Session will act to sever my pastoral relationship with this church. If I come to church on Sunday morning drunk out of my mind or stoned out on weed, I hope that no one will try to excuse that situation by saying, "Oh that's just Pastor Henry being Pastor Henry, and he's just having a bad day." That's not what Paul is about. As much as some pastors and other famous people think that they are never wrong, that they are always right and blameless and not responsible for any wrongdoing, and that any criticism of them is solely because other people want to bring them down, Paul's view is that we are all capable of doing the wrong thing even though we are all followers of Jesus. Those wrong deeds need to be called out because the consistent pursuit of the "evil fruit of darkness" does great harm and great damage to the church. It doesn't matter whether those evil fruits are financial, verbal, physical, psychological, emotional, or sexual. Evil fruit is evil. Period. Those who pursue evil fruit must be called to account for their behavior. It is utterly wrong to hide it, minimize it, blame, shame, or ignore

the accuser, or otherwise sweep evil behavior under the rug. That's not what God wants, and it shouldn't be what we want either.

III. Pivot to Today

I trust that the application of these two passages isn't the most difficult thing in the world to predict. Ephesians 5 tells us what to do and 1 Samuel 16 why doing what we are doing is so important. One of the problems with the modern church is that we've become more like a business and less like a community of faith. Our first priority seems to be our financial situation and our second priority seems to be our reputation in the public eye. Anything that damages our financial situation or diminishes our reputation in the public eye is to be kept as hidden and as quiet as it can be for as long as it can be. We've seen how that worked out with the Roman Catholic Church and we are seeing how that is working out with the Southern Baptist Church, in part at least because they seemed to follow the advice of Grace Community Church: we are not to listen to any accusations, we are not to entertain any accusation, we are not to investigate any accusations.


But what's true of the church can also be true of its Christian members. So the passage in Ephesians 5 forces us to ask hard questions of ourselves: Are we living as children of the light who are pursuing the fruit of the light? Are we living our lives as though we really believed that we are the light of the world whose job it is to point others to Jesus before it is too late? Or are we living our lives as children of the darkness, pursuing whatever evil fruit catches our attention in the moment and hoping that no one will ever catch us doing the wrong and evil thing? Even worse, are we acting one way when in the presence of our church family and quite a different way when we are with our family, our work colleagues, or are separate from anyone

who might know us? That is when the counsel "God looks on the heart" is most important. God cares about what we do because in God's eyes what we do on the outside is a reflection of what our hearts are like on the inside. If God were here to give us a 3rd quarter grade on that, I wonder how we'd all do.

So as we leave this place of worship, after we celebrate Charlie and Cheryl's wedding in a few minutes, after we enjoy our fellowship time during the reception, and after we give the bride and groom our best wishes for their future together, let's take a moment to reflect on whether our primary Christian focus is on our inward heart or our outward reputation, on whether our primary Christian mission is pursuing the good fruit of the light or the evil fruit of darkness, on whether we are willing to call out the evil that we see or not, especially when it happens within the church as the kingdom of God on earth.

My parents told me often that we children are a reflection of our parents. That's not a bad summary of the Bible's proclamation that as children of the light we are reflections of our Father, the God who created the heavens and the earth. As such, how would our lives differ if we looked at each other with our Father's eyes, and if we looked at ourselves with our Father's eyes? Hallelujah! And Amen.

Image of Facebook post cited above:



Rick Pidcock

Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time

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Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time

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It is standard approach of the enemy to discredit. You see, men's ministries can be brought to a halt due to no fault of their own, but due to the fault of people who will listen to a false accusation. And so that discrediting of that man comes totally unrelated to reality in his own life. The word accusation, by the way, katēgoria – sounds like category – it comes from two words, agora which – it's the word for Agoura, down the road here, the town – it means a meeting place, a public place, a marketplace and kata is against. So it is to say something against a person in a public meeting place. That is to bring a formal accusation. And when someone comes to bring a formal public accusation against an elder or a pastor, we are not to listen to that. We are not to entertain that. We are not to investigate that.


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Still think John MacArthur is a trustworthy preacher? Here's he is using the Greek language to justify a warning against listening to or even investigating accusations against elders.