

I Samuel

Lesson 12 - Chapter 8

Last week we began a bit of a detour that will circle back and intercept Samuel chapter 8 the next time we meet. Please be patient; this detour is a needed one that revolves around how to deal with a sticky theological issue that is at the core of the remainder of 1st Samuel, 2nd Samuel and then the 2 books of the Kings. The issue is: how are we to understand that God (up to now) supposedly has warned Israel against the prospects of having a king over them (which is seen as a rejection of Him) but that God will soon not only appoint Israel a king, but even make having a king at the heart of His plan for mankind's redemption from this point forward (even after the end of history as we know it)? The problem is that this issue has tentacles that stretch in many directions depending on how we decide to deal with it. As a result, most times, it is glossed over because (as I said last week) when we pull back the covers on it, a major can of worms is exposed.

As we have together examined the Torah and then moved well into the establishment and progress of Israel, we've seen many changes and misadventures of the Hebrew people. And one of the several themes that we see playing out in Israel's history is this perpetual revolving door of periods of faithfulness to God, followed by apostasy, then God permitting Israel's enemies to oppress them, then Israel recognizing that the cause of their oppression is both a natural and divine result of their idolatry and rebellion. So following their confession and repentance Yehoveh demonstrates His mercy by rescuing and delivering them and thus they are once again operating in harmony with the God of Israel (at least for a little while).

It seems that Israel was always in denial about their spiritual condition and didn't want to hear about it, so in the midst of they're idolatry they couldn't see themselves as idolatrous. They never stopped loving the Lord (as far as they were concerned) even though they did adopt questionable practices into their society and worship that were modeled after their gentile neighbors; things that the Lord has warned repeatedly that He found offensive and so should be shunned. I told you last week that from a biblical perspective idolatry wasn't so much about pagans as it was about God's set-apart people...

I am, thankfully, part of our Savior's church as are most of you listening to me. Yet I find myself in an ironic and somewhat uncomfortable situation in that as one who is as equally guilty as those to whom I have no choice but to admonish, the Lord has made it clear to me that as much as I love the church and I am a member of Christ's *ecclesia*, I must speak a word of warning that we are not immune from the same perpetual cycle from which the Israelites could never seem to extricate themselves; that cycle of a period of faithfulness to God, followed by apostasy, then oppression, then repentance, and finally deliverance. The question for us as Believers is NOT whether we as the congregation of God are currently caught within one of those cycles, but rather whether or not this is the final one before Messiah comes again.

While I don't know if this is the final cycle I do have no doubt that we are in and nearing the end of the apostasy stage of our current cycle and that we're about to enter into the oppression stage. "Apostasy", some you will exclaim! "Apostasy, I don't see any apostasy. Whatever is happening, it is too strong to use the word apostasy. And even if I do see some amount of apostasy I am certainly not involved in it in any way, it's those other Christians, not me". That, my friends, was every Israelite's position and attitude until the enemy's oppression bore down upon them with greater and greater intensity and calamity finally struck. And I'll tell you what is so odd about it all: it is our human nature that we'll deny and defend our personal role and responsibility and involvement until full-blown catastrophe strikes us and then instantly we'll recognize it for what it is and our hearts will sink because we'll know what we've done. Our defense will grow mute, and our denial will turn to confession but it will be too late. Not too late to repent, but too late to avoid the serious consequences of our actions.

What enables us as Believers to be such adept and professional deniers? There are a number of ingredients that goes into our natural ability to deny the obvious and I'm not about to try and address them all because I probably don't even know them all. However the one that is pertinent to today's lesson is the combination of false doctrines and error-filled traditions that have arisen from men's minds and have served to push out and replace God's Word as the source of truth.

We spoke at length last week about 2 major innovations within Christianity that had a profound effect on the progress and nature of the Church over the past 2000 years: the creation of the notion of orthodoxy versus heresy, and the evolution of modern Systematic Theology. Both of these innovations are similar to most manmade institutions: they can be used for evil or for good. So there is nothing inherently wrong with the notion of orthodoxy and heresy or of Christian Systematic Theology; in fact both of these innovations can be traced to the church's response to some kind of threat to its existence and viability and had we lived in those times we would likely have responded in a similar manner.

Recall that orthodoxy (as applied to Christianity) is but a set of non-negotiable beliefs (doctrines) that a particular denomination or branch of the church has established for itself. Heresy is to strongly question or perhaps even reject one or more of those beliefs. So if a member of one of those congregations violates or otherwise rebels against the orthodoxy, then they become a heretic. The consequences can range from admonishment, to re-education that leads to repentance, to excommunication. In days of old it could lead to execution.

There is today (depending on whose count you use) about 3000 Christian denominations or sects worldwide, each having a somewhat different orthodoxy. Of course at times those differences can be miniscule and nearly impossible to detect from what we hold dear, and at other times the differences form an impassable gulf. And so I left us with the question last week of how we Believers are to determine which (if any) of those 3000 sets of church doctrines (orthodoxies) is correct. But I also left us with the thought that perhaps the question itself (of finding the one Christian congregation with the one and only true orthodoxy) is based on some false assumptions born out of the way we tend to read and assimilate the Bible and the way these orthodoxies and doctrines were actually arrived at in the first place.

Modern Systematic Theology was a response to the threat of the European Enlightenment that sought to gut the church of its spirituality by means of ushering in secular humanism to replace it. Since this was the era when intellectualism and the Scientific Method were established as the best of all possible protocols for the discovery of truth the Church felt it had to find a systematic way to present itself that would be acceptable to the new Enlightened Society, and yet retain its spirituality and reliance on faith in God. And the system that was created divided the essence of Christianity into about 10 elements, and each element was then given a category and a name and the church endeavored to answer key questions about Christianity that each of these 10 or so elements would naturally ask. Of course by now the Catholic Church was no longer the only accepted church, the Church of England was quite powerful, the Protestant church was well established and the Protestant Reformation had occurred and so there were already a substantial and growing number of competing branches of the church in the West. And in general each of these various branches had already formed their own (and separate) orthodoxies. Systematic Theology simply offered a new route and method to forming orthodoxy (and thereby hopefully fending off the dangers of the Enlightenment philosophy).

That we have more or less 3000 differing sets of Christian orthodoxy ought to be a clue that as good as was the intent, there is an inherent (and probably unavoidable) flaw within the very nature of how modern Systematic Theology has evolved. It is far too simplistic to conclude that one Christian denomination holds all the truth and so the remaining 2999 are based on error. But how did we arrive at such a place of confusion and splintering of the church? What is the flaw that has developed to cause such an unintended result?

Before I give you a way to think about this issue let me remind you why we're attempting this detour. It is because Believers are today confronted by a new and well-accepted form of bible academia called Literary Criticism that says that the books of Samuel and Kings have been corrupted and cannot be taken at face value. And this assumption is mostly because contained in those writings we find two opposing views and agendas on the question of Israel having a human king. One view is that they SHOULD have a king and that God is OK with this; the other is that Israel should NOT have a king and God is NOT OK with this. And because when we read these books we do SEEM to see such a conflict we must conclude that either God indeed changed His mind or the texts are indeed suspect. So I want to show you that we don't have to accept one or other of these conclusions at all. Rather, there is a better solution and it really is all wrapped up in how we ought to approach extracting meaning from the Bible.

Here's the thing: the notion of orthodoxy and heresy that is today expressed within modern Systematic Theology (the basis for practically all Christianity) has followed a path that allows for fewer and fewer gray areas. The required answers to the 10 categorical elements of Systematic Theology must be firm and unequivocal. "I don't know" or "It can be either a, b, or c or some combination of them" is no longer acceptable.

Let me first illustrate this matter. Systematic Theology looks into the Scriptures (primarily the New Testament Scriptures) to find the answers to the questions posed for each of the 10 categories. There are of course a number of bible verses that addresses each of these issues, sometimes very directly and at other times somewhat indirectly. Allow me to give you 4 familiar

examples of subjects that are typically addressed by Systematic Theology: The Law, eternal security, the Sabbath, and the deity of Christ.

Now I'm going to demonstrate to you shortly what you really already know; that there are several verses spread throughout the New Testament that address each of these subjects and they're not usually the same principle merely repeated in each verse but rather slightly different aspects of each subject that are brought to light. But due to the modern way of implementing Systematic Theology, a rigid and well-defined answer is required (an answer that will become the accepted "doctrine" for that subject). And the answer is established when a contingency of a particular denomination's leaders feel they have defined that which best reflects what is intended by the passages of Scripture (concerning that particular subject) when weighed as a whole.

A visual illustration of this development of a Systematic Theology for a denomination might be thought of as the construction of a wall, a high straight wall. On one side of the wall lay the denominational orthodoxy, on the other side lurks heresy. On the one side of the wall is truth and on the other side is error. You are either on one side or the other and there is no middle ground. Like the wall I'm using in my graphic presentation (a wall separating Israel from Palestinian territory), it is a narrow but strong wall and there is no such thing as being partly in and partly out. You're either here or there or nowhere. This is a pretty good illustration of how Systematic Theology effectively operates as a wall that is constructed, segment by segment, for the purpose of establishing a good straight understandable boundary that divides orthodoxy from heresy, truth from error.

Let me give you another example of how Systematic Theology works towards an outcome. Let's create an imaginary Systematic orthodoxy to define a car. First question: what does a car do? Answer, it transports people. Doctrine #1: a car must carry people to where they want to go. Second question: how many people does a car carry? Well, depending on where you look, there is evidence that it can perhaps carry 2 people, or 4, or 6 or even 8. However since the bulk of the evidence is that most cars carry 4 people and since our Systematic orthodoxy demands a firm and not a broad answer, and the most usual number of passengers for the cars that were selected for examination is 4, our second doctrine is: a car must hold 4 people.

Question number 3: what color is a car? Looking again at our car sample we see a variety of colors. But with a little observation we soon see that 40% or more of all cars are white, the next most is black at 20% and the remainder of cars of other colors is a significantly smaller amount. Since we can't have any gray areas and must pick the one best answer, the best answer we can give is white because there are more white cars by far than another color. Doctrine #3: a car must be white. Question number 4: how many doors does a car have? Well after some study it seems as if the number of doors on a car, depending on the situation, is 2, 4, or 5 (if one considers the door at the rear of certain cars a door, or if the sliding doors on a van are to be considered doors or not, but that is for another systematic argument). It is not even close: some cars do have 2 doors, a few less have 5, but the vast majority of cars have 4 doors. Doctrine #4: cars have 4 doors.

I think this is enough to pause and see what our current imaginary systematic car orthodoxy is

without venturing into the several other systematic category questions that will finally give us a more complete definition of what a car is. So, our systematic car is this: Cars carry people to where they want to go. In fact cars carry 4 people. And cars are to be white in color and have 4 doors. But what if I want to buy a car that carries only 2 people? Nope. That's probably heretical, because cars are supposed to carry 4 people (perhaps a car that only carries 2 isn't even a car.) How about if I'd like a red car (that does carry 4 people) instead of a white one? Again, nope. A REAL car is white. Red is obviously indicative of something else, maybe of pride or of evil. How about if I want a more practical car that carries 7 people and has 5 doors. Heavens, NO!! Not only can that not possibly be a car (according to our systematic definition of a car thus far) but to even consider it indicates that maybe you need some additional instruction on car orthodoxy. You get the picture.

Now no analogy I can give you is perfect, and I don't mean to poke too much fun at Systematic Theology (because there's nothing inherently bad about it, and I just wanted to lighten things up a bit) nor is my intent to demean the brilliant bible scholars and good men who participated in designing it; but I think this analogy of a wall and of establishing a car orthodoxy is somewhat representative of how a Systematic Theology is approached in principle. However I remind you, that this sort of mindset is NOT how the ancient Hebrews, nor how Judaism up to the time of Christ, ever envisioned establishing the revelation of truth in Holy Scripture. Rather they recognized that for practically any subject we can envision that the Scriptures give us some number of aspects of that subject as boundaries for dealing with it. But Systematic Theology demands by its nature (a nature that demands orthodoxy) that we must choose only the BEST one of those several aspects of each subject as pre-eminent and the other aspects are therefore given less weight or deemed irrelevant because they don't agree with our choice. But of course sometimes after you've chosen the answers to the first 4, 5, or 6 categorical questions, it narrows the possible range of choices you can make to answer the remaining questions because an answer that doesn't take the previous categorical answers into account could easily lead to a set of doctrines that conflict with one another.

Let me give you a real life example of that. As I was putting together this lesson, I wanted to examine a substantial sampling of differing views on this subject of orthodoxy/heresy and Systematic Theology. One website I went to (operated by a person whom many of you would recognize as well-respected and known), had a section that discussed the important doctrinal subject of eternal security. And the lesson began by explaining that we would examine variety of Scriptures some of which supported one side of the matter and others which might support the opposite view so that one could come to an informed conclusion.

A column labeled "once saved always saved" listed about 30 scripture verses the author felt were representative and supportive of his belief that once a person was saved they could not lose their salvation by any means.

The next column was labeled "you can lose your salvation". And under it there were no scriptural entries, only a couple of sentences that said: "Since you cannot lose your salvation there is no point to examining Scriptures that seem to say that you can, because it would just lead to an improper interpretation". Now in no way do I want to paint all Systematic Theology as that blatant in attempting to close off dialogue on an important theological issue; but in

many respects the end effect at times is just that. The rationale of the actual example I just gave to you is that if you are satisfied that verses “a, b, and c” provide the answer to your theological question, then there is no point in considering verses “d, e, and f” that also discuss the same subject but offer a bit different perspective. Or better, if the leadership has decided that of all possible choices that “a” is true and is our doctrine, then to even examine “b” is a waste of time or is even perhaps heretical.

My wife has a running joke about me that she enjoys tormenting me with (and occasionally putting me in my place) and it involves her perception of how I view the rules concerning the role of the man of the house. It goes like this: House Rule #1, Tom is always right. House Rule #2, if Tom is ever wrong, refer to Rule #1. You get the idea.

So back to our analogy of a wall built of systematic doctrines. What we have with the way that modern Systematic Theology operates is that there are perhaps 3000 or so denominational walls and in each case one must choose which is the right wall and then stand on the side of the wall that is the orthodoxy side of it. Since there is generally but one pre-eminent and best answer to each categorical systematic question, it is the answers to those questions that form the substance of the wall. But was the Bible actually created in such a way that this is how we're supposed to use it? Is that how it is intended that we find truth? Is this the best means to arrive at the set of answers that (when taken together) lays out the divine truth about our Christian faith and how to operate within it?

I think there is another way to approach the issue of searching the Scriptures for truth and it is not as if we are building a tall, straight and impenetrable defensive wall, but rather as though we are creating a sheepfold. It is this mindset that the ancient Hebrew scholars and the first generation of Believers in Messiah Yeshua looked at the Bible. And I am firmly persuaded that this is the path back to the days before the notion of orthodoxy and heresy wormed its way into our beloved church and set us on a long path towards the disunity and confusion that we see among our brethren today.

A wall has only two sides: in or out, orthodoxy or heresy. On the other hand a sheepfold creates a safe, definable AREA in which to freely operate, and in the process it creates boundaries and limits to surround us. A sheep operating within a sheepfold has a great deal of latitude and liberty to stand at one end or the other of the sheepfold, or to move from the top left to the top right, or to the center. Anywhere within that sheepfold he chooses to stand the sheep is within the authorized boundaries as defined by the shepherd who built the sheepfold; and thus the sheep are safe.

Now might some sheep prefer one spot in the sheepfold to another because for them it seems more comfortable there? Certainly. Might it be that all the other sheep think exactly the same way and also have exactly same preferences? Not likely. But it doesn't matter because all the sheep honor the boundaries of the sheepfold as created by the shepherd. Just because some prefer the north end and some others the south and still others the center doesn't mean that some are in and others are out, or that some are right and the others are wrong.

Applying the sheepfold metaphor to how worshippers of God ought to read and perceive Holy

Scripture; if we can refrain from seeing every theological subject as a coin with one side, and through the filter of assumptions based on a particular orthodoxy/heresy, then our minds and consciences can be freed and we can begin to take notice that most of the questions we can ask about Christianity that helps us to ascertain the perfect and divine truth that the Lord has graciously provided for us are constructed like a sheepfold and not a defensive wall.

How can it be that any and every theological question can have so many opposing answers from fine bible scholars and godly men, and each denomination that holds to one answer or the other is unwilling to budge and thus sees all other possibilities as error? And that without hesitating, each denomination is able to point to a scripture verse that indeed seems to validate their point of view? Because while that scripture verse does indeed exist it is also unconsciously perceived as a necessary block added to that defensive wall rather than the addition of another post out of the many posts that forms the safe inner area of a sheepfold.

The orthodoxy/heresy system is the champion of the “my verse is better than your verse” filter by which the Bible is typically read and doctrines are established and debated. I emphatically say to you today that the place we have arrived in Christianity whereby rigid sound-byte answers to complex and multi-faceted theological questions has had the unintended consequence of stunting our spiritual growth and creating an atmosphere of disunity and thus fractured the fellowship of God's people.

Now before I give you an example of the sheepfold method of reading the Bible, so that I am not misunderstood, I need to say a couple of things. First I'm not speaking about embracing tolerance as it is defined today. I'm also not talking about accepting as valid the liberal church doctrines that simply disregard the Scriptures altogether and replace it with fine sounding philosophy. I'm also not suggesting that I have discovered something new or perfect or a better doctrine. Second is that while a sheepfold does offer a substantial area of freedom to roam around in, there remains an outside. And if one ventures outside of the sheepfold's boundaries then one is no longer within the safe confines of that sheepfold. It is dangerous out there and to try and exist outside the sheepfold is to try to live outside of God's protective boundaries that consist of His laws and commands, principles and patterns.

Now let me give you some examples of the sheepfold method of perceiving God's Word, and in so doing setting up boundaries in which we are to live (in liberty) as redeemed folks. Earlier I gave you 4 examples of the several theological issues that Systematic Theology addresses: The Law, eternal salvation, Sabbath, and the deity of Christ. I have no intention of declaring a right answer or pointing out a wrong answer or of pronouncing a new doctrine or criticizing an existing one about any of these subjects. Rather I'm only intending to show you how Scripture constructs a sheepfold, and not a wall, for the Believer.

Let's begin with the subject of the Law. I'm going to use only New Testament verses to create some posts in our sheepfold, however there are so many New Testament passages about the Law (and each of the other 3 examples) that I can only use a few or we'd be here for hours. But the idea is to give you a sampling of aspects of New Testament views of the Law, eternal security, Sabbath and the deity of Christ, hopefully balanced between what some might regard as negative and positive or pro and con.

CJB **Matthew 5:17** "Don't think that I have come to abolish the *Torah* or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete.

CJB **Galatians 3:24** Accordingly, the *Torah* functioned as a custodian until the Messiah came, so that we might be declared righteous on the ground of trusting and being faithful.

CJB **Galatians 5:18** But if you are led by the Spirit, then you are not in subjection to the system that results from perverting the *Torah* into legalism.

CJB **Galatians 5:4** You who are trying to be declared righteous by God through legalism have severed yourselves from the Messiah! You have fallen away from God's grace!

We have established 4 posts in our sheepfold that concerns the Law: The Law is not abolished, the Law was to act as a custodian for God's people, but on the other hand if one is led by the Holy Spirit then the *Torah* system is not the source of our righteousness, and if one is saved and tries to use the Law (the *Torah*) as our righteousness then we have fallen away from the grace provided by God through Messiah. These 4 of many aspects of the Law are equally valid. When used together they help to establish a set of boundaries concerning the Law that we are to operate within. Modern Systematic Theological principles, however, don't allow for a doctrine that is flexible in this way. Instead one verse (one facet of the Law) is pitted against another and we must choose ONE BEST answer and at times explain away the others or relegate the remaining answers (scripture verses) to less relevancy.

Now for the matter of eternal security.

CJB **John 3:36** Whoever trusts in the Son has eternal life. But whoever disobeys the Son will not see that life but remains subject to God's wrath."

CJB **Titus 3:5** he delivered us. It was not on the ground of any righteous deeds we had done, but on the ground of his own mercy. He did it by means of the *mikveh* of rebirth and the renewal brought about by the *Ruach HaKodesh*,

CJB **John 10:28** and I give them eternal life. They will absolutely never be destroyed, and no one will snatch them from my hands.

CJB **Romans 11:22** So take a good look at God's kindness and his severity: on the one hand, severity toward those who fell off; but, on the other hand, God's kindness toward you- provided you maintain yourself in that kindness! Otherwise, you too will be cut off!

OK. Here are 4 more posts marking the boundaries of our sheepfold, and these concern our eternal security. In just this small sampling of the many verses concerning this subject, we see that it was the Lord who delivered us and our redemption has nothing to do with our own merit or deeds, that all who trust God's son have eternal life but on the other hand those who disobey the Son will be subject to God's wrath. Further no created being of any kind can snatch a saved person away from Messiah Yeshua, but then again one must maintain one's self in God's kindness or He will cut you off! Notice that these are pretty wide ranging

comments on the same issue and how multi-faceted the subject of eternal life is and that there are several aspects to it that are all true simultaneously. The problem we face in the standard orthodoxy/heresy system of creating doctrine is that these 4 aspects of eternal security are sufficiently different enough that we are forced to accept one aspect as "most true" and then figure out what to do with the others.

Let's take a look at just a few of the several New Testament passages concerning the Sabbath.

CJB Hebrews 4:9 So there remains a *Shabbat*-keeping for God's people.

CJB Luke 23:56 Then they went back home to prepare spices and ointments. On *Shabbat* the women rested, in obedience to the commandment;

CJB Colossians 2:16 So don't let anyone pass judgment on you in connection with eating and drinking, or in regard to a Jewish festival or *Rosh-Hodesh* or *Shabbat*.

CJB Acts 20:7 On *Motza'ei-Shabbat*, when we were gathered to break bread, Sha'ul addressed them. Since he was going to leave the next day, he kept talking until midnight. I'm staying with the CJB in every case so we're consistent. ***Motza'ei Shabbat*** means the day after *Shabbat*, the 1st day of the week, Sunday. And with these 4 posts our sheepfold boundaries are starting to fill in a bit. Concerning the Sabbath we see the aspects that a Sabbath keeping is still in effect and that in fact the Believing women who tended to Christ observed the Sabbath in order to obey the commandment. On the other hand how exactly one goes about observing the Sabbath is not to be judged by another, and further that while Sabbath (Friday night to Saturday night) is the king of days it is not the only acceptable day of meeting for Believers as we find Paul meeting with other disciples on the 1st day of the week, Sunday. Finally, as to the subject of the deity of Christ.

CJB John 1:14 The Word became a human being and lived with us, and we saw his *Sh'khinah*, the *Sh'khinah* of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth.

CJB John 10:30 I and the Father are one."

CJB John 14:28 You heard me tell you, 'I am leaving, and I will come back to you.' If you loved me, you would have been glad that I am going to the Father; because the Father is greater than I.

CJB Hebrews 2:9 But we do see Yeshua- who indeed was made for a little while lower than the angels- now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by God's grace he might taste death for all humanity.

And here are 4 of some of the most important sheepfold posts that act as boundaries for we sheep. Christ was indeed a human being, but He was also God's son. Yeshua was one with the Father in one sense yet in another sense Jesus pronounces that the Father is greater than He is. There was even a time when the divine Jesus was made lower than the angels. That we

cannot understand how some of these aspects of Yeshua harmonize with the others is irrelevant. They are all true and we should not be trying to explain any of them away, or explaining one aspect as overriding another.

While there are many other aspects of our sheepfold that we'll not discuss today, the point is that by perceiving God's Word this way, we can easily move from the unyielding orthodoxy/heresy viewpoint of "either/or", to the Scriptural view of "this/and". We are permitted by the Lord to move closer or further away from one aspect or the other inside a Scriptural sheepfold, but provided we don't add to or subtract from God's Word by creating our own doctrines and philosophies and thus find ourselves outside that sheepfold, all is well and regardless of where we stand inside of it we remain united and in harmony with the Lord.

Suddenly the disharmony among Believers begins to fade away. Splintered denominations have little to argue. You may not have realized it but this way of discovering the boundaries of the sheepfold, as opposed to the way of constructing of a doctrinal wall, is how I've presented Torah Class to you since the beginning. And if you will consider accepting this kind of mindset, I believe you will find great peace in it and common ground with other brethren that up to now seemed impossible.

Armed with this understanding, I think it's time to end our detour and circle back to 1st Samuel, which we'll take up again in earnest next time.