

Living "Before the Lord" and "Unto the Lord"**T. Austin-Sparks:**

"But Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a child... And the child Samuel grew on, and increased in favour both with the Lord, and also with men. And the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli... And (Eli) said, What is the thing that the Lord hath spoken unto thee? I pray thee, hide it not from me... And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord. And the Lord appeared again in Shiloh; for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord" (1 Sam. 2:18,26; 3:1,17,19-21).

Those fragments serve to indicate the growth of Samuel, and bring us to the matter of spiritual increase, enlargement, growth. The marks are quite simple and yet quite fundamental.

"Before the Lord"

"Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a child." "Before the Lord." Like Another even greater, he grew up before the Lord, and it is of far greater importance than might be suggested by the little fragment of three words. That is the first thing that must be true of us - that our whole life is not lived before men but primarily before the Lord; that there is always that about us which speaks of an inner life before the Lord. When we are alone, shut in our room with the Lord, then everything is very pure. We know quite well that there before Him there is no deception, there is no feigning and pretending, there is no unreality. We know quite well when we come into personal aloneness with the Lord that everything artificial is stripped off. There we know that we are seen through, we are thoroughly well known; we can put on no camouflage, no disguises, in the Lord's presence. There we are what we are, and we know it, and we make no pretence about it. And this is something which has got to be brought out in our lives when we come from the secret place with the Lord - that everything is to be as it is there before Him, as transparent, as clear, as true, as unfeigned as it is in His presence; no pretence, no makeup, no unreality, no false ways. We cannot be on stilts or on a pedestal in the Lord's presence. When we are with people we may put on a lot of things to cover up, to make believe; we may become very artificial. Even when we are praying in the presence of other people, we can be anything but natural. We are so conscious of them, and begin to preach to them in our prayer. We do not do that when we are alone with the Lord, we do not make up anything then. We are right down on the very bedrock of what we are, a certain kind of naturalness; we cannot be other than perfectly natural there. What we are as before the Lord we have to be when we are with people in public life. It is important, it is essential. You see, anything put on amongst people, anything artificial, is not our measure at all; it is a false measure, and it may be holding us up in true spiritual life and growth.

"Samuel ministered before the Lord." We might well take that for every sphere and every hour of life. "Whatsoever ye do, work heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men" (Col. 3:23). God said to Abram, "...walk before me..." That may be very simple in its terms, but it is something which has to do with a ground work for spiritual growth. People who are like that will go on, will grow.

The rest of the statement about Samuel is only fresh emphasis upon what that means "being a child." The Lord Jesus Himself put His finger upon that on one occasion. His disciples, grown men, were talking about big things, and high place; He took a little child and set him in the midst and said, "Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3). 'This is the way to enlargement. You are thinking about place, position, influence; you are thinking big thoughts; you have big ideas; but this is the way to true greatness - a little child: no assumptions, no pretensions.' "Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a child"; and then, of course, you are not surprised that he "grew on."

"Unto the Lord"

Then the next thing - "Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli." If we could put ourselves in Samuel's place, we should find that it was not easy for him in those days. Remember, Hophni and Phineas, Eli's two sons, were there. A most corrupt, base, iniquitous thing was happening, for which eventually they were slain in the judgment of God - a state of things utterly deplorable. Samuel might well have become a cynic, he might have become bitter and sour and critical. It is very easy when things are like that to be cynical, to be disgusted, and to have no interest in what we are doing, even though we ourselves are in no way compromising with the evil. If we must be in it, we simply do it because it is our job. Others involved in it are wrong and corrupt; but the work has got to be done, so without any interest at all, we just do it. But it seems that Samuel closed his eyes to a very great deal, and just kept them on the Lord, and his attitude was: 'All around me is very evil, very corrupt, but I am here for the Lord; I am not doing this for the sake of these people, nor just for the sake of keeping this

thing going; I am here, in the midst of it all, for the Lord.' Thus was his spirit kept free from sourness and bitterness and cynicism. "Unto the Lord." He ministered not to Eli, and not to Hophni and Phineas, and not to a mere procedure, to keep it going, but to the Lord.

Remember, that is a secret of growth. We may all have reason to say: 'There is a good deal around me that I do not agree with and which I am sure is contrary to what the Lord would have; and a lot of people who are wrong and difficult around me, even of those who are the Lord's. If I were to take account of them I should give up and leave; but I am here to live unto the Lord, I am only doing it for Him, and so I intend to stay where I am.' That is a way of growth. Eli was the embodiment of the religious order of his time, he was in the place of authority and for the time being had to be recognised as such, and Samuel was submissive. He was not trying to oust Eli, nor to condemn him; he was not all the time saying, 'This whole thing is wrong, I have no place for Eli' - going about gossiping and spreading reports about Eli. It is so easy to do that; because you find something wrong at headquarters, you can easily become disaffected and critical. Samuel was submissive. Later, even when he did not agree with the people's desire for a king, Samuel received commandment from the Lord to go and anoint Saul, and he obeyed, and afterward did all that he could to make it easy for Saul to do the right thing and to fulfil his mission. Samuel did not accept Saul, but he did not get in his way; he did not spread evil reports about him. He gave him a good chance. The attitude of Samuel to Saul is wonderful. He has not accepted Saul, nevertheless he is submissive for the time being to what has to be; and here before Eli, in a like spirit, he takes the submissive and subject position and ministers to the Lord. No wonder he grew.

You will not grow if you are observing the faults and flaws and errors around you, especially in people who are holding superior positions, and if you are talking and spreading reports about them. The Lord will say, "If... thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness" (Matt. 6:22,23). Beware of getting an evil eye on someone - it will stop your own growth. Samuel did not eye Eli thus; he left Eli with the Lord and himself went on with the Lord. Lay such lessons to heart. Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli, in subjection and in patience, waiting until the Lord took steps to deal with that very difficult situation which must have been eating into Samuel's soul every day. It is our spirit that matters - purity, simplicity, earnestness, reality. That is what it means to grow, and to grow on.