

# Godly Men Sometimes Get It Wrong

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 01 May 2011

Preacher: Alex Cowie

[ 0 : 00 ] Let's turn then together to 1st Kings and to chapter 19 and we may just read from verse 14. The words of Elijah in response to the question the Lord gives him, what are you doing here Elijah? Verse 14, and he said, I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts, because the children of Israel have forsaken your cabinet, torn down your altars and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they seek to take my life. Then the Lord said to him, go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus, and when you arrive, anoint Hazael king over Syria. Also you shall anoint Jehu son of Nimshias king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat, of Abel Mechola, you shall anoint as prophet in your place. It shall be that whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill, and whoever escapes the sword of

Jehu, Elisha will kill. Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.

Now last time we were thinking about the calling of Elisha and Elijah's role in that. I want to stay in this passage and focus this evening on verse 18, but in contrast to verses 10 and 14, contrast between Elijah's view of things and God's view of things. And if we give it a title, it's simply this, Godly men sometimes get it wrong. Godly men sometimes get it wrong.

And the principle in this verse is an ever relevant principle to the people of God, and it serves as a caution to us when we think we know things and we can easily discover that it's not quite the way we see it.

Now, the particular issue here is that we can easily judge the work of God and the strength of that work that we can easily judge the work of God and the strength of that work. And it is limited criteria.

[ 3 : 24 ] It's not the whole story. It's not the whole picture. And this was clearly Elijah's problem. I alone am left.

I alone am left. Verse 10. And again, verse 14, although perhaps with a softer note, I alone am left. And as we shall see as we get into the study, because this was the case with Elijah, a great man of God, we are advised not to be hasty in coming to conclusions on any matter at one level, but matters of this kind in particular, judging the work of God as if we know exactly what it's like. I remember, it's a long time ago now, when I was in college, Professor Collins, when he was lecturing on the Scottish Church, he was cautioning us students as we were going out into the ministry about the whole matter of church strategy.

And he highlighted that before the great movement of the Spirit of God in Scotland in the 19th century, church committees were actually strongly advising to cut the number of charges, to cut the number of students going into the ministry.

And the plain fact of the matter is, they were wrong. They were assuming that everything was going in a certain direction.

[ 5 : 10 ] They were assuming that the criteria they had to hand was the whole story. And they were simply wrong, because all of a sudden, God began to work.

And the changes happened. And they needed more students and more churches. And within a similar situation with Elijah, he said, I alone.

God said, I have reserved. God said, I alone.

God said, I alone. God said, I alone. God said, I alone. For example, he knew Ahab's household or palace overseer.

It was a man called Obadiah. Remember, he was the man that met Elijah when Elijah was looking for Ahab. And Elijah told him, go and tell your master Elijah is here.

[ 6 : 39 ] And he said, remember, he said, what? Do you think I'm mad, so to speak? If I go and tell him, he'll kill me. Well, that man, that supervisor of the palace was a godly man.

We might say he was eminent in godliness. We're told in verse 3 of chapter 18 that he feared the Lord greatly.

We're told he was a dedicated servant of the Lord. He hid a hundred of the prophets of the Lord. Notice that, a hundred prophets of the Lord.

Fifty to a cave. And he fed them. And he looked after them. Under the very nose of Jezebel, who was looking to kill every single prophet left in Israel.

So, with a few words, we've already established that Elijah knew of Obadiah and of the hundred prophets.

[ 7 : 49 ] And they represent more than one left. So, Elijah himself got it wrong.

There were at least a hundred and one godly men. A hundred and two counting Elijah himself. And of course there were more.

Do you see what we're saying here? So, we say that Elijah's mistake was that he overstated the position.

He overstated it significantly. And he was wrong to do that. And sometimes, you see, we can overstate that case.

We want to prove a right. So, we gather as much ammunition as we can to make the case. But we may not gather it all.

[ 8 : 52 ] That's the point. And Elijah overstated the case. And he was wrong, I say, to do that. Because he wasn't being true, even to the knowledge he had.

It was wrong to say, I alone, as we'll see. And you see, the cause of God doesn't require us to overstate its weakness.

The cause of God doesn't require us to overstate the serious nature of things in the church today. Theologically, ecclesiastically, or in terms of a practical side.

Of constitutional issues. We're in these areas in our own day. And overstating the thing is not the way to do it. We are encouraged here to be careful and thoughtful, balanced, and restrained in our judgment.

I alone was a mistaken and overstated way of putting things.

[ 10 : 12 ] The second point within this basic point, Elijah's view of things, is that he was too sure of himself and his opinion.

Because, you see, to say to oneself, I alone am left, when you know the evidence is contrary to that, is clearly not good.

It's to be too sure of oneself. It was wrong to assert that. It was no help to himself and it was no help to the others who heard him say it.

Don't think for a moment that the first utterance of I alone am left was at Mount Sinai to the Lord. He fled from Jezreel.

He had had enough. He wanted to die in the Negev, remember. And the Lord provided for him and took him to Horeb, to Sinai.

[ 11 : 20 ] And therefore what we say is, when Elijah was too sure of himself and his opinion, he did wrong. Both to himself and to the cause.

And worse than all that, it was wrong to say it to God. He spoke it to God, as we've said in verse 10, I alone am left.

And verse 14, I alone am left. It's almost an arrogance. And it was certainly dangerous to himself. Now, for argument's sake, even if Elijah was saying, there isn't anyone left who is very zealous for the Lord God of hosts.

That itself is not right. He's too sure of himself. He's too opinionated. Nobody is like me.

[ 12 : 27 ] Nobody is taking a stand but me. And it was a presumption. It is true, of course, that he took a stand, a lonely stand, on Mount Carmel, against the prophets of Baal and Ashtoreth.

But it didn't follow that he was entitled to say, I alone am left. It wasn't correct to say, I alone am left. And so often in the church's life, in the past, and I'm afraid in the present too, things are said by way of overstatement and actions are taken because people's view of the thing is too narrow.

I alone am left. There's nobody like me taking a stand. And Elijah serves as a caution to you and to me and to the church today.

And this all the more, because thirdly, within this point, Elijah was affected by his mood. His view of the cause was affected in an adverse, negative way by his mood.

[ 14 : 02 ] Don't forget, he fled from Jezreel in a fit of depression, at the very least. And he wanted to die under that broom bush away down in the Negev, in the south.

And the Lord was merciful to him and spared him. And you see, the achievements of an earlier day were forgotten.

They didn't influence Elijah. Jezebel threatened to take his life. And it seemed to him as if everyone was against him and that he was going to die.

The false religionists were still in ascendancy. They were empowered and they were too powerful to overcome.

And not the victories of Carmel. The calling down of the fire, the victory over the prophets that were slain, achieving the commitment of the people, the Lord, the Lord, he is the God.

[ 15 : 16 ] Nor even the answer to prayer, the seven times prayer for the rain to return. All these did not influence him in a positive way at this point.

I alone am left. These things that should have influenced him and lifted his head heavenward and encouraged his soul were obscured by the threat to his life.

And so it was, as we've seen earlier, hopes blasted and the fruit of victory forgotten by the people, he plunges into depression and he runs for his life.

In fact, worse, he wants his life to be taken. Take my life now, he said, under the broom bush in the Negev. Take my life.

I'm no better than my father's. Let me die. And all this affected his judgment on the course.

[ 16 : 30 ] And in his gloomy mood, or indeed, as Kyle suggests, with his dissatisfaction with the way things panned out in the course, he judges it so low that I alone am left.

He was affected thirdly, by his mood. And it's never safe for us, you see, to make major decisions when we're like that, when we're despondent, when we're depressed with the cause.

And any minister of the gospel worth his salt will tell you that's so true. every minister knows that Monday morning is not the time to make a decision of what you do for the future, I can tell you.

Because the mood is clouded, the mood is low, the spirits are low, and your judgment is not safe.

And Elijah was like that. And although God took him to Sinai and restored him at Sinai, it was little by little.

Because even there, second time round, I alone am left, he's still in that mood. But you see, the cause of God is never so low.

[ 18 : 02 ] It's never so low that it is down to one, even an Elijah. If it happens that things don't work out the way we wanted them to, let us beware of using Elijah's philosophy, his approach, gathering a selected amount of criteria and coming to the wrong conclusion about the strength of the cause of God.

That brings us therefore to think about, just briefly before we move on, it brings us to think about, this is not simply a phenomenon of the Old Testament.

You have it in the New Testament, you have it among the disciples. You have it in their attitude to the death of Christ.

Even before that death came, when Jesus spoke about it, this shall not happen to you, Lord, said Peter. No way. Well, he misunderstood from all that he had heard, he never gathered enough to give him the understanding that Jesus knew what he was saying and what he was saying was right. No, no, far be that from you, Lord. Zoom on through the sufferings and the death of Christ. Zoom on to how the disciples were.

[ 19 : 49 ] We were looking at the situation just the other week, prayer on Easter Sunday at the response of Mary Magdalene looking for the dead body, looking for an answer to the question, where have they taken my Lord?

Where have they laid him? And she goes and she tells the other disciples, he's not here, he is risen, and they say, she doesn't know what she's saying.

These are idle tales. Clearly, the criteria they used to come to that judgment was wrong. Godly men sometimes get it wrong.

And I'm using men there simply generically. Godly people sometimes get it wrong. and even after the Saviour appeared to ten of the disciples, Thomas wasn't there.

Judas had gone to his own place. Thomas would not believe. He had gathered for himself criteria which made him conclude, the Saviour is gone and that's it.

[ 21 : 26 ] And he was wrong. It happens. And it happens, you see, often, because things don't go the way we want them to go and expect them to go and almost insist this is the way they should go. and we judge God and his cause by a limited amount of criteria. Let's be instructed by this view. Elijah's view is not unknown to us, nor was it unknown to the apostles themselves. But let's look, finally, at the Lord's view of the cause.

Well, for sure, it was different, as is stated in verse 18. Yet, I have reserved 7,000 in Israel. We'll just stop there for a moment.

I have reserved. That's where we start considering the Lord's view of the cause. The reserved remnant.

[ 22 : 45 ] God had his remnant in Israel according to his purpose of grace. The Bible makes it clear to us, as clear as need be, that God from all eternity has a chosen people for himself from the human race.

We were thinking a little on that earlier on today. how the bride of Christ was given to him in eternity. Given by the Father, the Father who had planned the wedding that's yet to be, the wedding of weddings, we were thinking.

And we were reminding ourselves that the plan was laid in eternity. The Father planned it with the Son and the Spirit. and it was a plan to bring that number innumerable so it be, that number to Christ, that Christ would present that bride to himself at last, at the wedding that John sees in Revelation 19.

God has his people whom he calls in time. They have been given to Christ and Christ will have them and they will come to him.

And nothing in heaven or earth or hell will prevent them coming to him. God who calls in that way knows the strength or otherwise of his cause.

[ 24 : 34 ] It's not something that is out with his control and out with his sphere of knowledge. So the I alone stands pretty low compared with I have reserved.

There's a remnant according to the purpose of God, his electing purpose of grace. And it was seen in the days of Israel from Moses onward, it was seen in the days of Elijah, the bulk of the people were idolaters.

They had sold their souls to Baal and the Ashteroth. We were singing in Psalm 81 that they refused to listen to God and he gave them over to their own councils to wander in their own councils.

It's a terrible thing to be left to our own council. As if God is saying, right, have it your own way, go your own way, and you'll find out what that comes to.

That's what happened to them. That is what is happening to them to this day, the world over, left to their own councils, refusing to believe the report concerning Messiah Jesus.

[ 26 : 09 ] But you see, to return to the Elijah scene, by God's sovereign gracious purpose, there were those in Israel set apart by him and for him.

I have reserved seven thousand. It's an interesting verb that's used there, the way it is, I shall cause to be left, is how you would fill it out in the English.

I will cause to be left, seven thousand. In the technical terms, it's a causative, and it emphasizes what God causes to happen, what God causes in his sovereign purpose.

I shall cause to be left, seven thousand. God's word, seven thousand. And this doctrine of the remnant is thoroughly biblical, and it is summed up in God's words to Elijah here, yet I have reserved seven thousand.

commentators have speculated on why they weren't more supportive of Elijah, why they weren't showing themselves on Mount Carmel, and so on, or maybe on other occasions too.

[ 27 : 38 ] The fact is, we don't know, and it's a bit pointless in speculating, we don't know. We may question the level of their courage, we may question the level of their commitment to the Lord, to his truth, to the cause of God, we may question why they were not known to Elijah properly, all seven thousand, or many of them.

We don't know. But there is, and there was then in Elijah's day a remnant according to the election of grace.

God caused to be left over. That number committed to him. And the practical point in all this is that we must not imagine we have more knowledge of the strength or the weakness of the cause of God than he.

Nor must we imagine that we have more concern for the strength of the cause of God than he has.

many as a minister like me, we chastise ourselves for sometimes thinking like that. That we have more anxiety, we have more concern over the cause that seems on every hand to be shrinking. [ 29 : 06 ] God has a remnant according to the election of grace and that ought to encourage us not to do nothing but to be much in prayer, much in prayer and much in seeking the salvation of others.

God has to be precisely because he has a remnant in every generation that we are all the more encouraged to be seeking to touch people's lives with the good news.

I remember somebody challenging Ray McCabe years ago about going back to Jewish people many times over the years.

And I thought what he said, well I thought it was true and it was most insightful. Every time you tell a sinner, whether he's Jewish or Gentile, the good news in Jesus, it's a fresh, opportunity.

And you don't know whether this or that will bring fruit. It's not for us, you see, to know, it's for us to do.

[ 30 : 30 ] Isn't that what it says in Ecclesiastes? Withhold not your hand from sowing the seed. Because you don't know which will prosper in the morning sowing or in the evening sowing, whether this or that or both will be alike.

And each opportunity, even with folk we've talked to before, is a fresh opportunity. God has his purpose and on this we are to rely, not our puny, limited, mood-affected view of the kingdom kingdom and strength.

And within this point, before we finish it, the Lord's cause has a sure foundation.

A remnant according to the election of grace and a sure foundation is Christ Jesus the Lord. God has this as well.

The Lord is the builder of his cause. He knows those who are his. And the principle of the remnant abides, it abides in every generation.

[ 31 : 53 ] We sing in Psalm 22, A seed shall do service to him, and it shall be recounted in every generation that he has done this.

That he has done it. That the seed that serves him in every generation will serve him because he has done it.

And that of course reminds us of what I quoted earlier on. Jesus said all that the Father has given me shall come to me.

They shall certainly come to me. And the one who comes to me I will in no wise cast out. They will come. And as they come to me I will receive.

Therefore the Lord's view of the cause should matter most to us and should influence our judgment on it.

[ 33 : 02 ] No doubt there are negative things to be said today about the cause among us in Scotland that we must not be hasty to judgment as Elijah was but be restrained in our judgment remembering the Lord has his remnant in every generation in every corner that pleases him.

Paul of course argues at length and in depth about God's purpose regarding Israel in relation to the remnant to his electing Romans 11 chapter 11 verse 5 The Lord has his remnant the cause is not hopeless because of the unbelief of people no no it operates in this way that he has his remnant.

It's not down to the will of man it's down to the will of God it's down to what he does it's down to the fulfillment of his purpose you see in fact this is smack bang in what we're thinking about has God cast away his people God forbid God has not cast away his people whom he foreknew or do you not know what the scripture says to Elijah how he pleads with God against Israel saying Lord they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars and I am alone am left what does the divine response have to say I have reserved 7000 who have not bowed the knee to

Baal and then he adds this to make the point about Israel as it was then in his time the same thing even so at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace and my dear friends we can say that to ourselves tonight about Glasgow City about the people around us about our congregation about our congregations even at this present time there remains a remnant according to the election of grace and our business must be to help those who are within our circle our sphere of service to touch their lives with the word and therefore we need to lay to heart the Lord's view of the cause in the world and in our land and in our sphere of service let us beware of the Elijah mentality I alone Jesus said as we were quoting it a moment ago a seed will serve him and therefore we are not to lose heart no matter the difficulty we are to rebuke ourselves when we lose heart and we feel like giving in 1 Corinthians 15 58 be steadfast immovable always abounding

in the work of the Lord for as much as you know that your labor your work in the Lord is not in vain  
it's not in vain don't use limited criteria to judge the work of  
[ 37 : 19 ] God even your work for him let's lay hold of the Lord's view of the cause and let's be clear  
that we distance ourselves from the Elijah mentality Amen keep level to the endonon to the first  
and time to