



We've seen in Jesus' relationship with the Father and in God's intention for marriage how crucial submission is to healthy relationships and the fulfillment of God's purposes. In God's created order both spouses submit, the wife to her husband and the husband to God as he serves his wife sacrificially. God's plan for parenting follows a similar pattern. Children are to submit to the authority of their parents even as their parents submit to God in caring for and disciplining their children. Sunday we looked at the tragic implications in the lives of King David and his sons of their failure to submit. The story of Eli and his sons is another disastrous example of arrogant rebellion against God.

1 Samuel 2:12-17, 22-25 tells about the problems the Judge and High Priest Eli has with his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. The two men manage much of the Tabernacle's sacrificial system, and they see it as an opportunity to benefit themselves. Instead of waiting for the appropriate time to take the priests' portion of a sacrifice, they send their servants for the best portions before the fat is burned before the Lord. They treat the Lord's offerings with contempt by taking the best for themselves (17), and even threaten the worshipers if they don't give them what they want. Hophni and Phinehas also abuse their positions to sleep with women serving at the Tabernacle (22). They take advantage of women serving under their authority and in so doing commit adultery against their own wives.

The two men are entirely unfit to serve at the Tabernacle, but Eli is unwilling to do much about it. He does confront them at one point, asking "Why do you do such things?" and telling them that he hears from others "about these wicked deeds" (23). He even warns them of the danger of sinning against God himself, indicating that there will be no one to mediate that kind of judgment. The irony is that mediating between God and people is actually their job, though they have long lost sight of it. Hophni and Phinehas don't listen to their father's correction, and the stage is set for their destruction.

After Eli warns his sons, he himself receives two warnings. The first warning comes from an unnamed "man of God" who tells him that he and his family will be removed from priestly service and that his descendants will live short lives. In the warning God asks "Why do you honor your sons more than me . . . ?" (29) The second warning is through the child Samuel, who will replace Eli as the next judge of Israel when he comes of age. One might question God's judgment on Eli since he is genuinely rebuking his sons, but he can and should do much more as the high priest. He can easily remove them from service and give their responsibilities to others until they confess and repent of their wickedness, but he is unwilling to submit to God as both high priest and father to his children. The result is disastrous for everyone. Eli and his sons will die, their family will be replaced in priestly service, their children will be orphaned (31-36), and thousands of Israelites will die in battle with the Philistines. Unfortunately God will have to do what Eli is unwilling to do.

Discussion Questions

The fifth commandment is the only one with a promise, that we may "live long in the land." How does submitting to one's parents contribute to a long life?

We quickly recognize excessive discipline from any authority, especially parents, as discouraging or even abusive. But how can a lack of discipline be discouraging in light of Heb. 12 or the stories we've discussed?

How do we as grandparents, extended family, and friends sometimes undermine parental authority and even encourage disobedience in the children around us? How can we encourage parents and healthy discipline?