**A Tragedy in Parenting**

Eli was high priest in Israel just after the death of Samson and God was not pleased with him. It’s not that Eli was such a bad guy himself, but he had a real problem with his sons. You see, Hophni and Phinehas were serving as priests, but they were every worshipper’s nightmare. God had clearly prescribed the portion of each sacrifice that was reserved for the priest and his family, but Eli’s sons simply took whatever they wanted for themselves. If that wasn’t enough, Hophni and Phinehas were having illicit relations with the women who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting!

There are lots of examples in scripture of men who have gone bad, with no indication that their parents had, in some way, contributed to their failures. But in this case, God places at least part of the blame squarely at the feet of Eli. In His revelation to Samuel, God says that Eli’s sons “brought a curse on themselves and he did not rebuke them.” Eli bore his share of the responsibility for their delinquency and may even have been profiting from their abuses of the sacrifices. A man of God asked Eli, “Why do you kick at My sacrifice and at My offering which I have commanded in My dwelling, and honor your sons above Me, by making yourselves fat with the choicest of every offering of My people Israel?” (1 Samuel 2:29)

I would suggest there are three things Eli failed to teach his sons that are absolutely critical for our children to learn if they are to be pleasing to God.

**Love of God** – Jesus, a member of the Godhead, said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15). Our children must come to understand that truly loving God means having a profound respect for His authority in every aspect of their lives. That respect for His authority manifests itself, not only in their service to Him, but in submission to civil authority and parental authority that God’s will requires.

**Love of Neighbor** – Selfishness resides naturally in the heart of a young child, and it is the parent’s responsibility to help the child realize that the world doesn’t revolve around them. Selfless care and concern for others is taught in principle and through example, and extends even to those who hate us.

**Self-Control** – Knowing and respecting God’s will is important, but self-control is often necessary to put it into practice in our lives. When children are young, self-restraint is not one of their greatest attributes and we must help them realize that they are responsible for their own actions. Eli and his sons should serve as examples of the consequences of unrestrained selfishness and disrespect that we must help our children avoid.

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