

INTRO: One of the greatest criticisms against Christianity is people who preach it without integrity. Still today, many unbelievers excuse their Christ-less, church-less lives by observing that they'll repent when Christians do. Besides, you might say "I don't need some greedy hypocrite telling me I should give him all my money if I want to go to heaven. So I'll just do what I want." Maybe it will surprise you to hear that we Christians are just as disgusted by the prosperity preachers as you are. And so is God. Of course, God rarely works as fast as we assume he should. After all, he's eternal. But this morning, we'll find that God sees and knows all the bad apples in church boardrooms, and he will clean his own house, in his own time. If you'll turn with me to **1Sam 2:12-36**, we'll see the Lord bring a high family down, and exalt a little boy in their place at the very same time. Hannah's song from last week brought us to the top of the hill on the roller coaster. From that perch, everything seemed fair and made sense; but 2:11 is the last click at the top before the blistering descent. "*Then Elkanah went home to Ramah, and the boy was ministering to the Lord in the presence of Eli the priest.*" What happens next releases us from the height of divine justice into a moral free fall..., and it is a steep decline, so try to keep your eggs down.

STORY

The Worthless Priests 1Sam 2:12-17. "*Now the sons of Eli were worthless men. They did not know the Lord.*" That is not the beginning of silly safe story time at the library. This is a literary throw down. The sons of the priest are spawn of Satan. The last time we read of worthless men in Scripture was Judges 19:22, when the worthless men of Gibeah had their way with a Levite's girlfriend and left her for dead. The same kind of men are now the priests! This is not the kind of sanitized history you spin to sell your sham religion. Here's an honest episode from everyday tabernacle "worship" that proves how bad it was in Israel. "*The custom of the priests with the people was that when any man offered sacrifice, the priests servant would come, while the meat was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand, and he would thrust it into the pan or kettle or cauldron or pot. All that the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. This is what they did at Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there.*" That was not a one-off. This was the custom—how the priests always misrepresented God and mistreated people. Watch this and get mad. Every time poor Joe Israel came with an animal sacrifice to God, the priest's lackey would show up and go bobbing for meat. What you're supposed to know is that God had already set aside both the breast meat and the thigh meat for the priest in Lev 7:34. This is impatient and impulsive—they don't even wait till it's cooked. It's greedy and presumptuous—they feel entitled to more than God assigned. And it is totally pagan—they've turned religion into roulette. This narrator gets it. His blood is boiling as hot as the sacrificial meat. "*This is what they did at Shiloh to all the Israelites.*" Can you believe that? It's true.

Moreover...[it gets worse? Yeah, it gets worse]... *before the fat was burned, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, 'Give meat for the priest to roast, for he will not accept boiled meat from you but only raw.'* Here again, the writer assumes that **Leviticus 3:16** is ringing like a fire bell in the back of your mind: "*All fat is the Lord's. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, in all your dwelling places, that you eat neither fat nor blood.*" This is decadence. They eat what God had saved for himself. Instead of serving God and the people, they serve only themselves. *And if the man said to him, 'Let them burn the fat first, and then take as much as you wish,' he would say, 'No, you must give it now, and if not, I will take it by force.'* Joe Israel is a better man than these punk priests. "At least let them burn the fat, brother, then I'll give you whatever you want." But if Joe tried to correct him like that, the priest would pull a piece on him. "Give it now, or I'll take it." The sanctuary is now the swamp. No wonder v.17 concludes *Thus the sin of the young men was very great in the sight of the Lord, for the men treated the offering of the Lord with contempt.*" The only hope is that it happened "*in the sight of the Lord.*" Camera was rolling, as always. But would God actually drain his own swamp?

The Rising Prophet (1Sam 2:18-21). Meanwhile, “*Samuel was ministering before the Lord, a boy clothed with a linen ephod. And his mother used to make for him a little robe and take it to him each year when she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice.*” In the same place where the big boys are out getting theirs, here comes boy scout, learning the ropes, wearing the uniform, with his homemade robe he got from momma every year at family week. Bless his heart. It all looks so...what...cute? Naïve? Insignificant? Nerdy? Surely this is not God’s answer. Ah, never despise the day of small beginnings. Careful. You are looking at the greatest prophet since Moses. God is already beginning to replace Eli’s boys with a better boy. This boy will be the only minister to make it out of Shiloh alive. Back to v.20....

“*Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and say, ‘May the Lord give you children by this woman for the petition she asked of the Lord.’ So then they would return to their home. Indeed the Lord visited Hannah, and she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters. And the boy Samuel grew in the presence of the Lord.*” Notice the contrast, Eli’s sons did not know the Lord, while Samuel ministered before the Lord, and grew in the presence of the Lord. Slowly, slowly, the wheels of divine providence are turning. Samuel’s mom makes his robe a little bigger every year. At least five years pass as Hannah gets another 3 sons and two daughters. And notice how she gets them. Eli, of all people, prays for her. But Eli’s prayers are answered because of God’s faithfulness, not Eli’s.

The Reputation of the Priests Mom and dad go back home, and we go back in Shiloh, **1S 2:22-25.** “*Now Eli was very old, and he kept hearing all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting. And he said to them, “Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all these people. No, my sons; it is no good report that I hear the people of the Lord spreading abroad. If someone sins against a man, God will mediate for him, but if someone sins against the Lord, who can intercede for him?”* If you have a heading in your bible, it may say something like “Eli Rebukes his sons.” That word “rebuke” should be in quack quotes. This is not even close to the severity his boys deserve.

Word is getting back to Eli. Rumors are spreading. Theirs is not a ministry for God’s people; it is a “ministry” inflicted on them. But what is Eli’s really concerned about here—his sons’ reputation, his own reputation, or God’s reputation? *He kept hearing... I hear of your evil dealings.... It is no good report that I hear....* Seems like all Eli wants is to hear a good report. And all he can muster is “Why do you do such things?” A why question? That’s it? And he fears for their safety. “*If someone sins against the Lord, who can intercede for him?*” That’s an important question. Eli is rightly concerned for his boys, yet he says not a single word about **God’s honor** being restored. That is the real issue to God as He Himself puts it in 3:13 where He promises to punish Eli’s dynasty “...*because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them.*” God’s reputation is what is ultimately at stake, not Eli’s, not his sons’. Eli is idolizing his boys, and his own reputation in his boys. He is worshiping them, and himself through them, at God’s expense. God has let that play for now, but He will not let it go on forever.

What Eli should have said was, “You guys are done. Out of the tabernacle. And out of my tent. Your ministry is over.” Instead, he can’t even muster a declarative statement about their behavior. He can only muster questions about their behavior. The only declaration he makes is about the report. “It is no good report.” This is weak sauce. What is he, afraid of them? This is too little too late. Eli was already “very old” by now. He had kept hearing all the boys were doing, yet only now, when he is very old, does he say anything about any of it. God will say later that Eli was complicit. He knew, all along, and he didn’t restrain them. Eli said little, and did less. He waits until he’s a retiree, and even then all he does is throw up his hands. He takes no action. He levels no consequence. He takes no stand. He brings no punishment.

Not even much of a reprimand. What do you mean “why do you do such things?” You know why, old man, you’re just too afraid to admit it. It’s because your sons are worthless sons, they don’t know the Lord, and much of it is your fault. This is what it looks like when all you want is for your kids and your congregation to like you. You love them to Hell.

And the result of this sorry excuse for a rebuke, this “I’ll-just-hope-they-draw-their-own-conclusion” approach, is not surprising. “*But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the Lord to put them to death.*” Of course they wouldn’t listen, from a human perspective, not after all these years. Eli is an old man now. He spent a lifetime looking the other way, playing dumb. Yet there was now a divine reason they wouldn’t listen, “*for it was the will of the Lord to put them to death.*” They had sinned themselves not only into the unwillingness to listen, but the inability to repent; because God had decided to harden their hearts and confirm them, literally, in their own damned sin.

The Rising Priest Meanwhile, 1Sam 2:26 “*Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and also with man.*” Eli’s sons don’t know the Lord, and God wants to kill them. Meanwhile, the Lord knows and favors Samuel and causes him to grow, before Samuel even hears God’s voice for the first time (3:7). God favored Samuel before Samuel even knew it. But while God favors Samuel, Eli gets a history lesson, an indictment, and a sentence. As Eli had asked his own sons a ‘why’ question, so God now has His own ‘why’ question for Eli. But first, a history lesson.

We pick it up in 2:27, when “*...there came a man of God to Eli and said to him, ‘Thus says the Lord, ‘Did I indeed reveal myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt subject to the house of Pharaoh? Did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to go up to my altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? I gave to the house of your father all my offerings by fire from the people of Israel.’*” Look how the story is told. It’s not a named man addressing Eli as if Eli is the man of God. It’s a real, honorable though anonymous, man of God, calling Eli by his first name, not by his title. A real man of God now rebukes Eli, as Eli should have rebuked his boys. I gave your great grandad Aaron a covenant within a covenant. I chose your family to represent all Israelite families to me, and to honor me before them with your sacrifices. There’s the history. Now comes the indictment.

“*Why then do you [pl.] scorn my sacrifices and my offerings that I commanded for my dwelling, and honor your [sg] sons above me by fattening yourselves on the choicest parts of every offering of my people Israel?*” Whose sacrifices are they? Mine, God says. Whose offerings are they? Mine. Who commanded them. I did. Whose house are you in? Mine, God says. Whose people are you mistreating? Mine, God says. My sacrifices, my offerings, I commanded, my house, my people. And you. You scorn them. You honor your sons. You fatten yourself and your boys on the fat that I reserved for myself, even after I had given you good meat to eat. You want to know why your boys “do such things”? Because you such things! Why do you do such things, Eli? Why do you honor them over Me? All you care about is your “legacy.” To hell with your legacy, Eli. To hell with your boys and your whole ministry. I reject all of it. I will do to you what you should have done to your boys. I’m cutting you off. Get out of my House. Your favoritism to your boys has done no one any favors—not them, not you, not Israel, and certainly not Me. I am patient; but that’s does not mean I don’t punish.

V.30 “*Therefore the Lord, the God of Israel, declares: ‘I promised that your house and the house of your father should go in and out before me forever,’ but now the Lord declares: ‘Far be it from me, for those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed. Behold, the days are coming when I will cut off your strength and the strength of your father’s house, so that there will not be*

an old man in your house. Then in distress you will look with envious eye on all the prosperity that shall be bestowed on Israel, and there shall not be an old man in your house forever. The only one of you whom I shall not cut off from my altar shall be spared to weep his eyes out to grieve his heart, and all the descendants of your house shall die by the sword of men. And this that shall come upon your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, shall be the sign to you: both of them shall die on the same day.” So much for your legacy, Eli. You only ever served at my pleasure, and you have sorely displeased me. You prospered at Israel’s expense. Now no one of your legacy will live long enough to lose their hair. And no matter how much Israel prospers, your progeny will live in poverty and die by violence. The sign of this judgment—just the way you’ll know it will be so—will be the death of your two sons on the same day. I never needed you. The privilege was yours, and you wasted it. As for me, in v.35....

“I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind. And I will build him a sure house, and he shall go in and out before my anointed forever. And everyone who is left in your house shall come to implore him for a piece of silver or a loaf of bread and shall say, ‘Please put me in one of the priests’ places, that I may eat a morsel of bread.” God’s plan will go on. God will build his own house, while he sees to it that Eli’s house crumbles like dry bread. You see how God brings the sins of the unrepentant back on their own heads? His punishments fit the crimes. You fattened yourself on my offerings long enough for the sake of your legacy. Now your legacy will be that whoever is left of your line, to cry his eyes out, will do it on an empty stomach, while he’s begging for a bite of bread. And so Hannah’s prophecy will find tragic fulfillment, *“Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread.”* Friend, you think you know something about justice? You have no idea. God is holy, which means He is not harmless. “Meanwhile,” God says, “I’ll raise up a faithful priest for myself, because you are replaceable, Eli, but My glory is not.” And just that fast, we’re at the bottom of the first hill. Takes your stomach, doesn’t it? I hope you didn’t lose your lunch; but I understand if it made you nauseous.

POINT

God will disgrace the proud and honor the humble. This is how God does, just like Hannah sang in her Aria. *The Lord kills and the Lord brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and he raises up. The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts.... The adversaries of the Lord will be broken to pieces; against them he will thunder in heaven. The lord will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed.”* He’s already started doing it right here in chapter 2. give His people a faithful priest and shepherds after his own heart. God loves His people enough to discipline them and give them godly leaders.

APPLICATIONS

1. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. God is patient, not negligent. The wheels of God’s justice grind slowly, but that is only because they are huge and heavy. God is slow to anger. But his justice is patiently poetic. In fact, if God is not an inflexibly righteous judge like this, then Jesus wasted both his life and his excruciating death. God’s holiness, his inflexible righteousness, his majesty, his transcendent glory, and our inveterate sinfulness before him, is the whole reason God had to send Jesus. The holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, and God’s holiness breaking out in wrath against our sin, is the purpose of the cross. The cross of Jesus is literally overkill if this holy, just God is not really the God we’re dealing with. You do not want any of this God’s justice meted out on you. What you need from him, sinner, is mercy. And you can have it, free of charge, in Jesus, the only priest worth having.

2. The only priest worth having is Jesus. We see Jesus by contrast in 1Sam 2. Jesus came not to be served (like Hophni and Phinehas), but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). Jesus had food no one else knew about; his food was to do the will of the Father who sent him (John 4). Hophni and Phinehas extorted people for food. But the bread that Jesus gave for the life of the world was his flesh (John 6:51). Jesus' gave his blood and his very life as a priestly sacrifice acceptable to God, once for all time (Heb 9). Hophni and Phinehas spent their lives dishonoring both God and Eli. Jesus spent his childhood submissive to his parents in Nazareth (Lk 2:51). He spent his whole life honoring His Father with his obedience. Therefore, the Father now honors Jesus as King of Kings forever (Phil 2:10-12). Eli wondered who could intercede for someone who sinned against the Lord. But praise God there is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus (1T 2:5). And if we trust him to represent God to us and us to God, then his blood will cover our sins and his righteousness will be credited to us on the basis of faith alone in Him alone. But you cannot be like Eli's sons. You must listen to the voice of your heavenly father in Scripture, turn from your sins, and trust in Jesus.

3. Corrupt pastors do no invalidate God's truth; they only invite God's discipline. This episode illustrates one of the biggest reasons unbelievers hate religion. If you are a disillusioned agnostic or atheist or nihilist listening to this, God feels you. God gets why this kind of hypocrisy makes your blood boil. You're right. It makes his blood boil too. Corrupt pastors deserve judgment. They misrepresent God, they mistreat people, and they have done it "in the sight of the Lord." God sees it. God knows it. God will judge it. Just because it looks like an ungodly pastor is going to get away with it, doesn't mean he will. God is patient, but He is not a pushover. He will wait, but sometimes only to harden a hypocrite in his sin so that he is no longer able to hear correction or willing to repent. That is judgment. Therefore, do not become cynical and skeptical about God and Jesus and the Bible and truth and heaven and hell. If you let corrupt pastors make you jaded and suspicious about Jesus and the Bible, then you are actually following those corrupt pastors right into their damnation, and you will spend eternity with them—the very people you hate. Don't let them drag you down to hell with them in their sin. You trust and obey Christ, even if they don't. Pray and wait. God sees. God knows. And remember, they've done it "in the sight of the Lord." God sees, God knows; and God will do the right thing even if His people don't. Public Ministry can be void of personal mercy (Spurgeon, An All-Round Ministry?)

4. Churches should discipline unrepentant pastors and elders (Dale R Davis). Eli should have kicked his sons out of the tabernacle. And sometimes, congregations have to kick a pastor out of the pulpit or an elder out of the office because he sins without repentance. **1Tim 5:19-20** "*Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.*" God does not accept a greedy, mercenary, manipulative ministry. He does not accept a self-important, demanding ministry. He does not accept a ministry impervious to correction. He certainly does not accept an adulterous ministry. An unconverted ministry is a ministry God doesn't want. And it should be unwanted by those who love Christ and His church.

Having said that, some of us were actually converted under the ministries of men who later turned out to be no better than Eli and his boys. That may feel unsettling to you; maybe it makes you question your conversion—"how could my conversion be real when my preacher was false?" That's not necessarily right. God did not bless Hannah because Eli was faithful. God blessed Hannah because **God** is faithful. And that is why he converted you, even if he did it under the ministry of someone who proved to be unconverted. If God can give a Samuel through an Eli, then he can produce a true convert through a false teacher. It doesn't confirm the teacher. It gives Christ all the credit. Hannah didn't question her

pregnancies just because the guy who prayed for them was a hypocrite. All she had to do was look at her baby bump. Christian, if you want to know you're alive, then ask yourself, what is the fruit of my life? Am I bearing good fruit like a good tree, and when I sin, whose side do I take, mine or God's? And most of all, who am I trusting to make me right with God, my false teacher, or my faithful Jesus? If it's the gospel of Christ's shed blood and repentance for the forgiveness of sins, then you are alive and well.

5. God is dead serious about the way we worship him. In 1S 2:29 God calls them “*my sacrifices, my offerings, that I commanded for my dwelling*” among “*my people*.” We will worship God obediently, or he will find other people to worship Him in his way. We should remember that Hophni and Phinehas are not the first brothers God executed for worshiping the right God in the wrong way. Nadab and Abihu had offered strange fire before God, and when God saw it, he did not consume the offering, he consumed the disobedient priests (Bergen, NAC). God will later kill Uzzah for reaching out and touching the ark of the covenant to stabilize it because they were carrying it with a cart instead of between the golden poles God had commanded. Well intentioned assumptions are still assumptions. God hates it when we assume we know what He wants, without actually listening to what He says He wants in Scripture. God is holy, and that means he demands that we respect his holiness by doing his things his way. This is why we only read God's word, preach God's word, pray God's word, sing God's word, and see it in the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. And when we recite historic confessions, those are summaries of what God has said in His word. We do not approach God based on our word. We approach Him based on His word, not our assumptions or even our good intentions.

6. God hates it when we use His worship for our ends. Eli and his sons used worship only to serve themselves. Do not make worship about yourself and how you feel or the network you can develop or the reputation you can get out of it. God hates that. God condemns that. This applies to all of us, not just pastors, because we are, together, as a church, royal priesthood. If we worship God only for what we sense we get out of it—for how it meets our felt needs—that is self-important, self-serving worship. God does not accept that; and He will condemn pastors and leaders who facilitate it for you.

7. Knowing about the Lord and even being around the Lord is not the same as having an obedient relationship with Him (so also Baldwin, Tsumura). Heb 6:1-6... Hophni and Phinehas were sons of a priest in the most religious nation ever. They'd have grown up hearing about the exodus. They would have been trained in the liturgy of Leviticus. They had every religious advantage. Many members of churches today have even greater advantages under the preaching of the gospel, yet they are no more converted than Eli's sons. J.C. Ryle confronted members of evangelical churches over a hundred years ago: “You go to Mr. A's or Mr. B's church: you think him an excellent preacher; you delight in his sermons; you cannot hear anyone else with the same comfort; you have learned many things since you attended his ministry; you consider it a great privilege to be one of his hearers! All this is very good. It is a privilege. I should be thankful if ministers like yours were multiplied a thousand-fold. But after all, what have you got in your heart? Have you yet received the Holy Ghost? If not [then Ryle would say you are no better than [Eli's sons]]” (Ryle, *Holiness*, 223, “Lot's wife”).

8. God will always give you far more than you give him (2:18-22). Hannah gave God one child. God gave her five more to keep at home, and the one she gave to God she still got to see every year. Friends, God is so good. He hears and answers prayer. He's generous. He's trustworthy. You cannot out-give this God. Those who honor him, he will honor. So honor God with your faith, your family and your finances. First give Him yourself, all of who you are. So be generous to his cause. Give to the ministry of the local church. Give to missionaries. Give to parachurch organizations. Be generous in your hospitality to others.

Adopt children. Foster children. Release and devote your children to God's service, and watch what He does. The first principle of faith is that God is, and he is a rewarder of those who seek Him. That is not the only thing God is. But if you will trust his reliability, He will make you know His generosity.

9. Prominence is not importance with God, and smallness is not insignificance. Hophni and Phinehas are prominent, but not important. Samuel is small, but he is significant. This goes for adults and children. God favors obedient obscurity; he frowns on sinful prominence. So brother, sister, if you are serving the Lord in obedient obscurity, God sees you, He smiles on you, and he will make it all worth it. But if you want prominence at any cost, then beware... Children, listen to me. Serve God now, in the morning-time of your life, like Samuel did as a boy, no matter what the cool older boys and girls are doing. It is better to be a good servant like Samuel than to be a hard-hearted Hophni or a foolish Phinehas. They were older than Samuel, but Samuel doesn't imitate their violence, humor, or habits. Children, I know you are tempted to just play around and be silly. You are more inclined to foolishness and pleasure than serious thoughts about your own death and eternity. You assume you'll have plenty of time to think serious thoughts later. Young man, young woman, there may be no 'later' for you in this life. Other children have died at an age younger than you, and God does not guarantee you tomorrow. Look at Hophni and Phinehas. They played around to the day they died, and their own dad was supposed to be a preacher. God held them accountable for their sin and selfishness. It bore bad fruit in their lives that extended into eternity. Children, if you have any sense of eternal truth pressing on your hearts right now, any fear of the Lord, don't waste that. It's the beginning of wisdom. You are never too young to be wise. While you're little, you be like little Samuel. Don't put Jesus off till later. Learn to please Him now. Serve him now. Obey Him now. Trust him now. Read his word now. Pray now. Repent now. Repentance gets harder if you let your sins get stronger. These early years have the most influence. Youth shapes you for the rest of your life. Life is shorter than you think. You have no time to waste. You serve God now, it will serve you well later. Honor God now, and he will honor you. It's OK that your small and no one notices you. God sees you just as well as God saw his servant Samuel, and as well as he saw hard-hearted Hophni and foolish Phinehas (Flavel, *Fountain*, Works 1:405).

10. God is often starting to do something great when His own people are at their worst. Just as Eli's sons were reaching the peak of their sinful prominence, God was raising up a better prophet, who would anoint a good king for His people. This is not an excuse for the ungodly to keep sinning. It is a reason for the godly to keep hoping for revival, even against all appearances to the contrary. God loves to save at the last minute, when everything seems hopeless and lost, when the evil seems insurmountable, and when the lost seem unreachable. That is how God loves to glorify Himself—by beating the enemy at full strength. So as things get darker and more violent, more dishonest and twisted, let's keep praying that God would shine into more hearts with the light of the knowledge of His glory in the face of Jesus.

11. Parents must seek better for their children than a steady job and a good reputation. Eli had become a very old man before he said the first word against the sins of his sons, and by then, what good could it do? This passage is about more than parenting, but not less. Godly fathers discipline their children so that God will not judge them. Passive, permissive parenting walks children to hell by the hand. The "don't-force-it-on-them," "let-them-come-to-their-own-conclusions" approach might work in God's providence. But mom, dad, is that really why God put you in your children's life, simply to let them figure it out on their own? Is your responsibility simply to make sure they get a good job, so they can get a nice house, and a nice car, and have a nice life in a safe neighborhood enjoying a private world of consumer amusements and pleasures? How will your children look at you when you stand together before God's throne on Judgment Day? Teach them. Correct them. Disciple and discipline your children. Lead

by both word and example. Make sin seem stupid to them by giving it a consequence they really don't like. Dad's, image God's moral authority in your home. Yes, be patient, calm, kind, slow to anger. But be a godly disciplinarian. Teach them. Train them. Talk to them, confront them in love, while they are still inclined to listen to you. Don't be a moral and spiritual invertebrate in your home like Eli was. I know we all feel out of our depth as parents. We're all inadequate, inconsistent, and incompetent. None of us feels like we know what we're doing. But God's word will make us adequate, and His Spirit will fill us. Pray God's word for your children. Pray with them. Read to them and with them. God

12. If you want God to honor you, then honor him, not yourself. *“Those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me I will lightly esteem.”* Too many Christians criticize entitlement in their enemies, but then model it in their ministries. We are all prone to vanity. We expect to be seen and admired, or at least approved and appreciated. Now of course, there is nothing wrong with wanting encouragement. That's human. But when vanity becomes the motive, idolatry is the result. A self-idolizing ministry will become an ignored ministry. Those who put themselves first will be regarded as last by God. That's Eli, Hophni, and Phinehas. But those who put themselves last will be first. That's Samuel, serving obediently and waiting his turn. Christian, do you dream of serving God in some prominent way? Don't seek great things for yourself. Learn first to honor God in obscurity. Recognize that prominence often leads to the very pride that God will disgrace. He honors the humble. But the wheels of his providence and justice turn slowly. So whether you are proud, or whether you are humble, you can be sure of one thing. The wheels of God's providence and justice are already rolling toward you.