

Broomfield



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Servants of God, Part 4

Christian's Armor

In Ephesians 6:10-20, we read a most instructive passage when it comes to living out the Christian life. It details the Christian's armor as a soldier in the Kingdom of God. The picture is quite detailed because as Paul penned these words he himself was chained to a Roman soldier.

As he gazed upon the soldier before him, no doubt inquiring into the purpose and function of each article of his armor, Paul saw the spiritual parallel and so spoke of our armor as soldiers of Christ:

- Loins of truth.
- Our breastplate of righteousness.
- Shoes which are the gospel of peace.
- The shield of faith.
- The Helmet of salvation.
- The sword of the word of God.

You know as I consider this list of weaponry, I realize the folly of most Christians (I included) who in the midst of the battle cast aside God's armor and weaponry only to take upon themselves the armor and weaponry of their own making:

- A defensive spirit.
- Questionable ethics to promote a “godly” end.
- Worry.
- Gossip.
- Manipulation.

All these eventually end in failure.

As a soldier in the Kingdom of God, you and I are going to engage in battle. The question is, “How and with what will we fight?”

I want to consider with you the “warfare” that leads to failure in the Kingdom of God. These are the tactics of the self-absorbed Christian. Previously we saw a third type of Servant that can be found in the Kingdom of God — the Self-Absorbed. And unlike verses 18-21 where these servants are simply

introduced, the writer of Samuel chose here to elaborate on the ministry of Eli. Let us consider the end of the ministry of the self-absorbed: Failure.

Failure

1 Samuel 2:22, “Now Eli was very old¹, and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel; and how they lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.”

This text tells us two things about Eli. First, he was very old.

It is difficult to assess the implication of this description. First off recognize that it is here for a reason. Details are not added in the Hebrew to make the story more readable or exciting. What is written is included for a purpose. And so once again we are being shown something here. But “Just what?” is the question.

- Is this an explanation for why Eli merely “heard” about his sons' excess? On the surface that is how this text seems to read.
- Was he “very old” in the sense that he was losing his abilities — and so not able to oversee Shiloh properly? We need only think of say Isaac who, toward the end of his life, struggled with poor eye-sight such that he mistakenly anointed Jacob as head of his household.² Jacob who toward the end of his life was confined to a bed on account of his advanced age.³ Or, Martin Luther who toward the end of his life said some pretty bigoted things as he espoused his hatred of Jews. Or perhaps even J. I. Packer who signed a document⁴ which undermined much of his teaching ministry. Is this how we ought to understand Eli here? He's gotten a little too old. He's lost touch with the daily goings on at Shiloh. His eye-sight or intellect are dimming.
- Or, in contrast is this grounds for further criticism of Eli? He is not living up to the requirement of an elder. The concept of an “elder” in the Bible (plus factoring in the concept of advanced age) is defined as one who is wise and godly having walked with God for many years. In other words, far from an assertion of his inability, this could be a statement of Eli's expected wisdom and stature as a leader in Israel. As an elderly man, Eli represented a seasoned servant in the house of God. And so, far from giving an excuse, it actually makes his transgression/his failure to address his sons that much more inexcusable!

So which is it?

While most of my commentaries are mute on the point, the text seems quite clear. IT IS THE LATTER! I am going to say this for four reasons.

- First that while chapter two of Samuel is not early in Eli's ministry, it certainly isn't late. Samuel here is a boy — in fact in chapter three he still is a youth serving beside Eli. It is not until 1 Samuel 4:1 that enough time has elapsed for Samuel to serve as an adult.⁵ And so while Eli here is said to be “very old,” we must not conclude from this that he is too old to properly oversee the temple in Shiloh. In fact based on the chronology of Samuel⁶, Eli here has a good 10 to 20 more

¹ זָקֵן zaqen

² Compare Genesis 27:1

³ Compare Genesis 48-50

⁴ The document is the one known as *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*.

⁵ Compare also 1 Samuel 7:9 where Samuel is seen doing the work of a priest. This is significant because priests were ordained at the age of 30.

⁶ Compare also 1 Samuel 4:15 for Eli's age at the end of his life.

years until his death!

- Secondly, it would not be until 1 Sam. 4:15 that we read of Eli losing some of his capacity — by this time he's gone blind. What that means is if we are going to posit that Eli's advanced years made him unable to minister — much like Isaac and Jacob — then we are going to have to wait a couple of decades, for it was when he was 98 that Eli is said to have lost some of his capacity in the form of blindness.
- Thirdly, “old age” in the Bible is pictured as an asset. Think of Abraham, Moses, John, and the like. All of these men lived as long as Eli and were indeed wise, sharp, and active servants in God's kingdom. Deuteronomy 34:7 says this about Moses when he was one hundred twenty years old., “his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated.” In fact the Bible clearly teaches that a gray head “is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness” (Proverbs 16:31). And again it teaches that “the beauty of old men is the gray head” (Proverbs 20:29). Throughout Scripture, the picture of a “very old man” is NOT that of an invalid waiting to die in some nursing home BUT a man of God who is adorned with godliness and righteousness! And thus to the typical Jew reading that Eli here was “very old” they would not have thought, “He's over the hill; it's over.” But, “Here's a man who has walked with God now for many years!”
- Finally, Eli's failure as a priest is rooted NOT in his advanced age or some other inability BUT in his love of self. “Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded in my habitation; and honourest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people?” (1 Samuel 2:29).

And so, far from this verse giving us cause to have pity upon Eli, it does just the opposite. Eli here has attained a status in Israel which most of us long for in the body of Christ — the status of a father (or mother) in the faith.⁷ Now as a “father in the faith,” who sadly was a man-pleaser, this is what we read: That he “heard all that his sons were doing to all Israel” (1 Samuel 2:22)

This too is an odd statement. The picture presented throughout the opening chapters of Samuel is that while Eli wasn't directly participating in his son's sin, nevertheless on countless occasions he was enjoying the fruit of their transgression.⁸ Accordingly, we conclude that Eli had a good idea of what his sons were doing, and how they were dishonoring the Lord. After-all, that is why God judged this man. Eli KNEW what his sons were doing. And yet, he did not rebuke them.⁹

So, how is it that Eli heard of this sin, and yet hadn't seen it for himself? How is it possible that his sons could have done this under his nose, and yet he remained ignorant of it?

It isn't! In fact, it is obvious that Eli knew about his sons' sin! It is just that he didn't act until it became a public scandal! Notice that three times in Eli's rebuke of his sons the emphasis is placed on the fact the Eli had “heard” the “report”/”rumor” about his sons' transgression. Thus the focus here, contrary to how the English may read, is on the fact that Eli is NOT reacting to his sons' sin RATHER he is reacting to the RUMOR!

And that is the difficult situation in which this self-absorbed man found himself. Because Eli loved himself and therefore cared most about what others thought He did not confront his sinning sons when they needed it. When they were children, he let them go. When they needed a stern word, he downplayed it. But this eventually lead to the horror of having unfavorable rumors being passed around Israel

⁷ Compare also 1 John 2:12-14

⁸ Compare 1 Samuel 2:29

⁹ Compare 1 Samuel 3:13

when the sin of his sons grew to public proportion — to a man-pleaser there is very little that could be worse than a tarnished reputation! And so he must now do something about his sons' public sin.

Service

That's the setting — which brings us to the service of the Eli.

1 Samuel 2:23-25, “**And he said unto them, Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the LORD’S people to transgress. If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the LORD, who shall intreat for him?** Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the LORD would slay them.”

This is the first time we have seen Eli faced with a serious issue.¹⁰ And yet because of his love of self, he falls miserably short of fidelity to God here.

You say, Eli confronts his sons in this text. How is this not serving the Lord?

The truth be known that while at first reading this has the appearance of a rebuke — in fact from one point of view, Eli really doesn't say anything wrong here — we nevertheless know that whatever this is, it is not a rebuke.

1 Samuel 3:13, “For I [God] have told him [Eli] that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.”

On account of 1 Sam. 3:13 we conclude that Eli's response in our text is not a rebuke. It is a slap on the hand for Hophni and Phinehas' indiscretion — for sinning in public, for getting caught, for dishonoring their father's name. Having said that, consider with me Eli's three-fold “rebuke” — it reveals the tactics of the self-absorbed.

First he uses psychological manipulation.

1 Samuel 2:23, “And he said unto them, Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people..”

You and I are no strangers to this type of argument. For example this is the common appeal that one might make to a drunkard. We discover that a friend has a serious drinking problem. And so in an attempt to illustrate the folly of such a choice, we approach him after one of his nights of drinking — when he's truly at his worst — and say, “Do you really enjoy waking up like this?” the goal is to lead him to the realization that drinking's bad.

This amounts to Eli's first rebuke — his first “volley.” It is the attempt to illustrate the folly of his son's ways by making a negative statement about their conduct. Why are you doing such evil things? Is your sin really that good?

This leads us to the second volley, he adds to this the weight of social or peer pressure.

¹⁰ And sadly this is not the last time either. Compare also 1 Samuel 3:18

1 Samuel 2:24 (NASB), “No, my sons; for the report is not good which I hear the Lord's people circulating.”

This is akin to our arguing, “What will the neighbor's think?” ”Do you understand that people are beginning to talk?”

On the whole this is a more powerful argument to the self-absorbed because their life revolves around public opinion as the means to establish their own righteousness.¹¹ The only problem is that this approach is worthless if the one you are talking to cares more about their sin than public opinion. Nevertheless this represents a stronger rebuke than verse 24. In essence Eli here is saying, “Not only is your sin foolish. BUT listen, you've got the neighbors talking!”

Now from the perspective of the self-absorbed, this would have clinched the matter. However Eli is “pulling no punches” here and so he brings the argument to an even more serious level. Finally, he ends with the “fear of the Lord.”

1 Samuel 2:25, “If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the LORD, who shall intreat for him?”

This is such an incredible reflection of Eli's theology- as we saw last week. To Eli, God was akin to the gods of Greece and Rome — celestial baby-sitters to be called upon to mediate between man. Yet when it came to approaching Him, Eli didn't understand grace.¹² Thus to sin against God was to find no forgiveness, mediation, or mercy but only the terrifying expectation of wrath!

Thus, for Eli this is the final and ultimate blow. “Listen sons, if you keep it up God is going to get you! Aren't you afraid of God?”

Many of us have heard the phrase “Putting the fear of God in someone.” Well, that is exactly what Eli is seeking to do here.

And so we see the “rebuke” of a self-absorbed man to his sons — a rebuke that has a form of godliness, and yet has denied its power¹³ — for the entirety of the “rebuke” is askew. Notice that Eli is speaking NOT as one who longed for his sons to serve God but RATHER, he is speaking as one who longed for his sons not to dishonor their father. Thus it is clear from this text that Eli didn't necessarily want his sons to stop sinning.¹⁴ Rather, he wanted his sons to stop sinning in public.

And that brothers and sisters is the ministry or misery of the self-absorbed!

The Weapons

And this brings us to a very important question, in Ephesians 6, Paul talks about the weaponry of the Christian soldier, in the spirit of Paul what are the weapons of the self-absorbed?

As we gaze upon this passage we see it in a word is this: manipulation.

¹¹ Compare Romans 10:3

¹² That grace could have been comprehended by Eli is seen when we consider Job 19:25 which was written many years before Eli's time and many of the Psalms which were written by one of Eli's near contemporaries, David. Compare Psalm 32.

¹³ Compare 2 Timothy 3:5

¹⁴ Again, Eli himself was responsible for multiple sins in his day. Compare Psalm 78:56-6!

In a sentence it would be, “Manipulation fueled by the desire to save face, placate, preserve the good appearance, and promote yourself and your cause.”

Now this only stands to reason. A self-absorbed person is not direct in his selfish desires because that would be too ugly and obvious. So instead he adopts an indirect path. He drops hints. He presents his cause as the right and only cause. He beats others to the punch. He pawns himself off as the intelligent servant that cares because he is faithful and the one worthy of the attention and focus of others.

Rather than being content in the Lord to be accepted by the Lord, the self-absorbed man manipulates his environment to get what he thinks he needs and is necessary for the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God needs no such weapons. Indeed, our call is to do God's work in God's way. God's way is the way of trust, submission and seeking Christ and Christ alone in and through all things. Examine Ephesians 6 and you will notice that this is the essence of the Christian's armor. Yet, sadly the Kingdom of God is filled with the self-serving.

James and John's Selfish Request

Let me share with you the classic work of the self-absorbed. During Christ's third year of ministry James and John had a brilliant idea. They had heard the Lord speak of the coming Kingdom¹⁵ so they decided to ask Christ about sitting at His right and left hand in glory.

Of course they didn't say this too loud since they didn't want the other disciples to think these thoughts too so they thought of a plan to get their request to Christ. And like a lot of young men, they had their mother do the dirty work. After all, they reasoned, if Christ rebuffs her, she'll simply be seen as an over-zealous mother. And if Christ accepted her request, then James and John would have their way without looking proud. And so we read these words:

Matthew 20:20-21, “Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.”

Christ rejects her plea and, because James and John were behind it¹⁶, we read this:

Matthew 20:24, “And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren.”

.Family of God, this is about as ugly as you can get! Such selfishness, scheming, manipulation, and taking matters into one's own hand.

Again, the Kingdom of God needs no such weapons, and yet we use these “tactics” all the time! Don't we?

¹⁵ Compare Mark 10:32-34

¹⁶ Because Mark 10:35 records that it was James and John who asked the question, we conclude that James and John were behind the request. Matthew 20 lead us to conclude that they obviously put their mother up to asking the actual question.

Childhood

I'll never forget as a child when in a fight with one of my brothers that I came upon this plan as I began to lose the fight. My brothers would hit me just hard enough for me to fall down — and then came Oscar time for me. I'd roll around on the ground as someone who was about to die, hoping that they might buy into the scene and give me pity.

It looks and sounds silly now, but yet when boys and girls grow up, what they do doesn't change, just how they do it. The self-pitying spouse wants more attention, and so they play the martyr. The parent can't get their child to do what they want, and so they threaten. The worker seeks the promotion, and so they posture.

As I have counseled over the years, I have watched men and women play silly games at the expense of their marriage. Children do the dumbest things to get attention. Parents become children in their attempt to reign in a son or daughter. And the sad thing is, as bad as this “tactic” might be in our relationships with one another, it always bleeds over into our walks with God.

We think, if we pray using these “certain” words, or have a good week of holy living, or just give up that bad habit, then — and certainly then — God will hear us. He will give us what we want!

Brothers and sisters, “How do you refrain from such 'weaponry' in your parenting, work, relationships, service in God's kingdom, and your walk with Christ?”

The Gospel

The answer is only found when you understand the glorious gospel of our Lord!

Recall from last week that Eli's service in the kingdom of God was self-absorbed because he didn't understand the grace of God that loves the Christian even when he sins! Eli, there is a mediator between man and God. You can rely upon Him — and He will set you free! He cares more about than do you; entrust yourself to Him; be free from such slavery!

And yet it is clear from our passage that a prominent message that God would have us understand as well is that the gospel is the good news of a Sovereign, Omnipotent Lord! As ineffective as was Eli's approach to his sons, the truth be known, he could have spoke the word of Christ perfectly to Hophni and Phinehas and still they wouldn't have changed. Why?

1 Samuel 2:25, “If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the LORD, who shall intreat for him? **Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the LORD would slay them.**”

We are going to discuss this passage next week in more detail, however for now understand the emphasis of this verse: **WHEN IT COMES TO SERVICE IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD, WE MUST RELY UPON THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD!**

That's the message of the Kingdom! We read it elsewhere.

Proverbs 16:33, “The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD.”

Do you understand who is in control of this world?

Isaiah 45:6-7, “That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.”

Whatever may be the circumstances of your life, take comfort in knowing that a Sovereign God holds you in the palm of His hand. He has ordained all things — the good and the bad!

Psalm 127:1, “Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.”

Oh how our life ought to take on a completely different tone. .In and through all things, God is in control!

Do you understand how this message impacts our service in His name?

Psalm 127:2, “It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep.”

In other words, stop your manipulation and worldly games. God's grace is that of an Almighty God who is in control of all things! Accordingly, set down your worldly weapons, and cultivate a heart of trust and dependence upon the Lord.

Psalm 46:10, “Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.”

So many of us can be found “striving” when it comes to our careers, parenting, relationships, life on this earth, and our walks with God. How we must cease from such folly and learn to rely upon Christ.

Now that won't mean that we will be left to inactivity in our service in God's Kingdom. Rather it means that our service will be done in God's way — trusting Him for the results!

Family of God don't miss it! To believe the Gospel of an Almighty God is to entrust your soul to God to do what is right. Live moment by moment in reliance upon God to work His perfect plan in our life — we need only strive to be faithful!

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on May 8, 2005. Greg is the Preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.