

The Consequences of Despising God

1Samuel 2:12-36

Listen to a few passages of Scripture and see if you can hear a theme in them.

Psalm 94:1-7, Matthew 24:36-44, 2 Peter 3:3-9.

One theme those passages have in common is godless people mocking God, thinking that they are never going to have to answer for their wicked ways.

I think it is safe to say that would be the thinking of many in our own day.

People think, "I can do whatever I want and I should be able to get away with it."

That thinking ranges from the silly to the serious.

How many of you would like to eat all you want of your favourite junk food and not gain a pound?

How many people have ever stayed up all night and then wanted to stay in bed the whole next day?

I'm not talking about working the night shift, I'm talking about staying up for fun.

I am amazed when I watch people cross the street these days.

I'm amazed at the number of people who don't bother to check for cars before they step out onto the road.

I know the pedestrian has the right of way but the truck still wins the contest.

People want to be able to spend all kinds of money they don't have and never pay it back.

People want to show up for work whenever they want and still expect to have a job the next time they arrive.

People today want to have relationships with no attachments.

The prospects for strong stable marriages today are pretty grim and I don't care what any so called expert on TV says, that is having disastrous effects on society.

I'm sure we could think of many other examples that show people living without a fear or sometimes even a concept of consequences.

Here is the thing, not fearing consequences or failing to understand them, does not remove them.

Oh they might be delayed, but sooner or later the bill will come due.

[It is good for us to be reminded of that every now and again and our text this morning does just that. In 1Samuel 2:12-36 we are told about the lives of Eli's sons. Eli, you may remember was the high priest in Israel at the time and so his boys served in the tabernacle as priests under his authority. These guys followed their sinful nature, they despised God with their lives, and God in His wisdom has recorded the consequences of their actions for us. From this text I want to point out 5 lessons regarding evil that we would all do well to take to heart. Number one...]

Point #1 – When people ignore God evil increases. (Verses 12-17)

Since the natural condition of human beings is to rebel against Lord, if we are indifferent towards Him we will by default start saying, thinking, feeling, and doing more things that He hates.

Look with me at the description of Eli's sons in verse 12.

The NAS translates this as they were “worthless”, “they did not know the LORD.”

That may be a commentary on their lack of knowledge, but it also saying something about their lack of affection for God.

In other words they just didn't care. How did it get that way?

In this case it seems others led the way.

Verses 13-14 tells us about the “practice of the priests”

The word in Hebrew suggests that these priests enacted by their own authority this thing with the three pronged hook.

I spent a good bit of time searching through Leviticus and reading commentaries.

I believe Carl Keil is correct when he says this practice does not originate from the Bible and was an abuse of their power.

You see God is very specific in the Law of Moses how sacrifices are to be made and what portions of the sacrifices the priests may have for food.

Not every sacrifice is the same.

What they are doing here seems to be a hodgepodge of regulations mashed together according to their own authority.

The sons of Eli take it to another level of evil wanting to select their cut of meat even before the fat is burned.

That is very important to all the sacrifices I read through this week.

The fat is burned first on the altar.

Many times God says in regards to what is burned on the altar that it is a “pleasing aroma to the LORD.”

Burning the fat first is a way of saying “God comes first”.

They had turned these holy sacrifices intended for the proper worship of God by His people into an abuse of people in order to score some choice meat for their BBQ.

Do you see? It starts by ignoring God's word and it leads to the absolute profanity of Tabernacle worship.

[Some people wonder, “How did we get to where we are as a society which seems pretty far from God.” It starts with sleeping in on Sunday morning. It starts by not saying grace at the supper table or reading your bible for yourself. Before you know it, God is out of the schools,

government, and most aspects of society. Where we are now is the result of decisions made 100 years ago.]

The same thing is true in our lives as individuals.

People rarely get to full out rebellion against God in one step.

They get there by failing to make the LORD the priority of their life.

It is the ever present danger of indifference that can lead you right down the road of rebellion.

Once you begin to ignore God in favour of yourself, there is no telling how far you may end up.

[That is what happens to the sons of Eli and the same thing will happen to us if we ignore the LORD, evil will grow. Something else happens when we could care less about God and keep doing things that are evil/wrong. That is the second lesson we see in the lives of these wicked men. We see that...]

Point #2 – Consistent rebellion against God hardens the heart. (Verses 22-25)

The more evil we do, the easier it becomes to do it and the harder it is to turn away from.

Verses 22-25 tell us about these men being rebuked by their father. Let's listen together.

On top of their contempt for the sacrifices of the LORD they added immorality with women serving in the temple.

Eli rightly points out their “wicked deeds”.

He rightly seeks to put some of the fear of God into their hearts.

What he says to his sons here is worth thinking about.

If we wrong someone and they seek to retaliate against us, it is possible for God to rescue us from that person.

God restrains and allows every action of every human being.

No one can harm you if God stands in the way.

On the other hand, if God is the one seeking retribution from a person, who can stand in the way and stop it?

Eli likely intends this to be a rhetorical question expecting the answer no one. No one can rescue someone from the wrath of God.

No one that is except God Himself. Eli's question points us to the glory of the gospel brothers and sisters.

God the Son stands in between the believer and God the Father absorbing the fullness of God's wrath against all of our evil and covering us with His perfection.

No one else but the Risen Christ can do that for us!

Eli's question should have terrified his sons, should have caused them to fall on their faces seeking God's mercy.

It doesn't! Look again at what it says at the end of **verse 25**.

When some hear those words they want to blame God.

Some people get the impression that God is forcing these guys to be evil.

Not at all. He simply giving them over to what they want to do. He has given them over to their hard hearts.

That is the nature of evil. The more you do it the harder your heart becomes and you become increasingly deaf to those who are urging you to turn away from it.

[Evil is an addiction. When we think of addiction most of us probably think about drugs and alcohol. That is probably because the nature of a drug is that the more you take it the more you crave it. Addiction goes way beyond drugs and alcohol. We have to understand that our corrupt nature enjoys evil. When it gets a taste for it, it wants more. That is why our only hope is a new nature that is killing the old nature, because our old nature wants the things that will kill us.]

While Christians live in the hope that God can soften the hardest of hearts, we also ought to live in fear that He is under no obligation to do so.

If you have any desire to repent today, don't ignore it because who knows if it will be there tomorrow.

If you continue on in evil it will only make your heart harder to the gospel and lead to death.

[That is what happens here with the sons of Eli. But, it's not just the two sons that have a problem, their father has a problem as well. He is the high priest and he is presiding over the condition of worship in the Tabernacle. We know from what he has just said to his sons that he knows the things his sons are doing should not be happening, but other than a verbal rebuke he does nothing to stop them. From this we learn a third lesson...]

Point #3 – When people compromise God's word it reveals their true affections. (Verses 27-29) If we ignore or explain away the word of God because we don't like how it applies to us or someone we love, it shows that our love for LORD far too weak.

We are told in verses 27-29 about a man who shows up and has some things to say to Eli.

Knowing the situation I would have expected him to have something to say to Eli's sons, but he talks to Eli instead.

First, he reminds the high priest of some history in **verses 27-28**.

He reminds Eli of the wonders of God in Egypt and that Aaron was chosen out all the people to minister in the Tabernacle, to be as close to the visible presence of Almighty God as any fallen human being could be.

They received the best deal in terms of inheriting the Promised Land.

The tribe of Levi doesn't get any land for themselves, they get the privilege of serving in the Tabernacle.

In Joshua 13:33 we are told that "The LORD, the God of Israel, is the inheritance for the Levites.

Aaron's descendants held the highest position among the Levites and the high priest the highest position among the priests.

While they did not get any land, they had the best opportunity to enjoy the glory of God.

That reminder leads the prophet to say this in **Verse 29**.

Eli is the high priest. He had the authority to discipline his sons. What they have done deserved the death penalty and Eli doesn't even remove them from the priesthood.

Why? Because he put his sons before God.

[I remember years ago having to go to someone's house for a difficult visit. If you met these folks you would think they are extremely nice people. They were upset about some things that were said from the pulpit because they had a family member doing the kinds of things that were rebuked in the bible passage the week before. They asked me, "What if when your children are older they get into something like that? Won't you change your mind then?" I said, "I pray that I don't because God's word doesn't change."]

It is not enough to want your children to be happy. We need to want them to be happy in God.

It is not enough to simply love your children. To truly love them properly we need to love the LORD more than our children.

If we neglect our responsibility like Eli, or worse deny or explain away the scriptures to try and justify what our kids are doing, then we are showing that we love our children more than God.

Jesus said if we do that we "Are not worthy of being His disciples."

[Eli knew what was right, he had the responsibility to deal with his sons, and yet he did nothing because his love for God was far too weak. The cost for that is incredibly high. He did not do himself, his sons, or his family any favours by being so passive about their behaviour. That is very clear as the prophet of the LORD goes on to tell Eli about the coming consequence for permitting the evil of his sons to go unchecked. These consequences shows us this fourth lesson...]

Point #4 – Despising God leads to destruction. (Verses 30-36)

The patience of the LORD only extends so far and so at some point everyone who defies Him will be confronted with the consequence of that choice.

Verse 30 begins with the word "Therefore". Because you Eli have allowed the altar of the Tabernacle to be profaned...(Verse 30-34).

As we will see over the next couple of chapters there are some immediate fulfillments of these consequences, but there are also long lasting ones.

When Solomon takes the throne God is still at work bringing about what is said here.

Again someone might question the fairness of this. How is it that future generations are punished because of the wickedness of Eli's sons and his failure to deal with them properly?

It is not that the future generations are judged based on the past sins of their forefathers, but it is that the children and grandchildren take up the sins of their ancestors.

Eli had an opportunity to leave a legacy of love and zeal for the LORD, instead he instituted a legacy of showing contempt for God.

It is a legacy that is going to lead to the death of his sons and early death of his grandsons.

In the future there will be no old men in the house of Eli.

Despising God has led to destruction in Eli's house.

[It is sort of like rock climbing without a rope or safety equipment. You may not fall the first time you do it. You may not fall after you have climbed hundreds of times without a rope. But one slip, one hand hold that gives way, one misplaced foot, and you are all finished.]

How many opportunities did Eli's sons have to repent? How many times could Eli have stepped in to discipline as he should have?

It's safe to say that it was more than a few.

According to God's hidden wisdom He tolerates it for a time, but not forever.

Eventually, despising God leads to destruction.

[That leads us to one more lesson from this text. The vast majority of these verses are about the wickedness of Eli's sons and the failure of Eli to do anything about it. A couple of times, however, the boy Samuel is mentioned. His mother had dropped him off to live at the tabernacle probably at the age of three or four. He is living in the midst of the evil that is taking place and from what is said about him we learn this fifth lesson this morning...]

Point #5 – Righteousness stands out from evil. (Verses 18-21; 26; 35)

The bible talks about this in Philippians 2:15 were we are encouraged to live pure lives in a "crooked and depraved generations". We are told there to "shine like stars in the universe". Stars seem brightest were it is the darkest. So it is that...

Right after we hear about how the sons of Eli showed contempt for the Lord's sacrifices we see this in **verse 18**.

Again when we hear of the increasing sin of these men and their growing hardness of heart we read this in **verse 26**.

Finally, after the prophet of the LORD had pronounced lasting judgment on the house of Eli, we read this in **verse 35**.

After every section in this chapter about the evil taking place at the tabernacle, there is a glimmer of hope in the life of Samuel.

As is the case with every person who purposefully pursues righteousness, Samuel's life is an example rather than an end in itself.

That is clear from verse 35.

The way this future priest is described, he must be someone else besides Samuel.

Samuel does not minister always before the LORD's anointed (that is the king).

The only one who fits the description here is Jesus.

He is both the eternal high priest and king.

Nevertheless, Samuel's righteousness is intended to point us to Jesus.

The same is true for us.

Our pursuit of righteousness does nothing by itself.

Everything we do on our own is tainted and corrupted.

It is only when we act in faith, putting our trust in Jesus' perfection for us that our works are truly pleasing to God.

Our righteousness in the midst of evil does shine brightly and it does so for the purpose of calling attention to the glory of Christ.

Let us then be sober minded about evil.

Let us be people who give careful attention to the LORD so that we might salt and light in a perverse generation.

Let's keep short accounts with the Lord so that our hearts remain soft toward Him.

Let's keep God as the priority in our affections so that we never compromise His word.

In doing this these we will enjoy eternal life instead of destruction and our lives will shine in the darkness for the glory of Jesus.