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Destroying High Places

Apostasy and Its Attributes, Part 2

In 2 Corinthians Paul wrote an important exhortation to the Corinthians:

2 Corinthians 10:3-5, “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”

In this passage Paul outlines the warfare in which we are engaged as children of God. This is not a physical battle, because “we do not war after the flesh” (2 Corinthians 10:3). Christ said, “My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight” (John 18:36). Rather this is a spiritual battle.

Paul pictures thoughts, speculations, and worldviews as fortified castles from which assaults against the Lord are waged. And thus our calling as children of God is to labor at tearing down these high places as they manifest themselves in our lives!

We are examining a passage that details the “high places” of Christian Apostasy. Our text is describing NOT the events surrounding the downfall of Hophni and Phinehas — two individuals who clearly did not know the Lord; RATHER this passage is God's exhortation to Eli — a genuine believer who loved not only the Lord, but also at times his own sin. Thus this stands as an exhortation to the body of Christ to be spiritually vigilant.

As it details the attributes of apostasy we not only are prepared for Eli's downfall as it is recorded in chapter 4 but also we learn how apostasy is manifested in the life of the child of God. Thus it allows us to discover the staging grounds, which lead to defection in our walks with Christ. And it identifies the “high places” which serve as the genesis of infidelity in our walks with Christ.

The Things of the Lord

When it comes to our walks with Christ, this text contains the high places of apostasy that must be torn down and destroyed! Accordingly, let's consider them one by one. The first “High Place” is that one takes lightly the things of God.

1 Samuel 2:29, “**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?”

It is from this verse that we learn that Eli's role in the sin of his sons was that of complicity. Recall his sons' transgressions. First, they violated the law of the offering in that they claimed their portion of the sacrifice by “chance.”¹ Remember, God's word is very specific as to what portion of the sin, guilt, and peace offerings belonged to the priest.² Rather than submit to this teaching, Hophni and Phinehas ordered the priests serving at the sacrificial boiling pot to approach the offering in a “pot luck” manner. They jabbed a large, three-pronged fork into the pot, and then claimed whatever was brought up.

Second — and the most serious — Hophni and Phinehas claimed the fat of the sacrifice as their own.³ One of the more universal commands laid down in the Bible — which everyone in Israel knew including the common worshipper⁴ — was that the fat of an animal belonged to the Lord.

Leviticus 3:16, “And the priest shall burn them upon the altar: it is the food of the offering made by fire for a sweet savour: all the fat is the LORD’S.”⁵

Yet somewhere along the way Hophni and Phinehas acquired a taste for fat. And so they claimed for themselves the fatty portions — and thus the Lord's portion — of the worshipper's sacrifice.

Now it is clear that Eli did not participate directly in these abuses. However it also is clear from this passage that Eli knew about his sons' transgression, and yet SAID AND DID NOTHING! Because of this, Eli, the high priest, the one charged with the worship of God at Shiloh, and ultimately the one responsible for all this was guilty of foul revolt against God — of “kicking at [God's] sacrifice... and offering.”

You say, “How is it that Eli was blamed for his sons' sin? How is Eli guilty here?” Listen to the words of Martin Luther:

“If I profess with the loudest voice and the clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God, except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battle-fields besides is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.”⁶

Don't miss it! The battle at this time in Eli's life was whether or not God's worship would be allowed to be compromised. Would Eli prove faithful to the Lord and protect His worship? This was where the battle was raging! And yet sadly Eli didn't see the battle. He failed to take God's worship seriously. As a result he proved himself to be a hater of God — notice the strong language.

1 Samuel 2:29, “**Wherefore kick⁷ ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering⁸,** which I have

¹ Compare 1 Samuel 2:13-14

² Compare Deuteronomy 18:3 and Leviticus 7:31-36

³ Compare 1 Samuel 2:15-16

⁴ This is evidenced by 1 Samuel 2:16

⁵ Compare also Leviticus 3:3-5; 7:22-25; and 7:30

⁶ Quoted by Chuck and Donna McHenry, *When the Wicked Size a City*, page 85

⁷ כָּעַט ba'at -- This term is used only here and in Deuteronomy 32:15 in the Hebrew Old Testament

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?"

Though infrequently used, to “kick at something” was a strong statement of derision and scorn. Brothers and sisters, in Bible times when a child failed to plow the field correctly; a student failed to do his assignment; or a servant made a mistake you didn't kick them. BUT when a dog — which was despised in Bible times — was at close quarters, you gave it a good, hard kick of derision. Such is the nuance of this term.

Because Eli allowed his sons to compromise the worship of God, it is as if Eli himself “kicked” and so scorned the worship of God! And yet this was just part of it.

“Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering which I have commanded in my habitation” (1 Samuel 2:29). In other words Eli’s guilt wasn’t that he was a little too permissive when it came to his parenting. Rather, he was allowing the most intimate and holy places on earth — the things of the Lord and His dwelling place — to be trampled underfoot!

Eli is to blame here. Not because of what he did BUT because he looked lightly upon the things of the Lord! God was being shamefully treated and dishonored. And Eli sat by and watched!

1 Samuel 3:13, “For I have told him 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.”

And this is the first High Place from which apostasy rears its ugly head in the life of the child of God. If you want to sabotage your relationship with Christ take Him and His worship lightly!

Oh how we must heed this point for there is not a defection that occurs in our walks with God that doesn't involve us taking Him lightly. A. W. Tozer said this:

“Perverted notions about God soon rot the religion in which they appear... So necessary to the Church is a lofty concept of God that when that concept in any measure declines, the Church with her worship and her moral standards declines along with it. The first step down for any church is taken when it surrenders its high opinion of God.”⁹

We see this in Psalm 50. In this text, the picture of a law court is presented in which God states His case against His people. What was it that they were guilty of? Why did they run into sin? Why did they love thievery (v. 18a), adultery (v. 18b), and evil speaking (vv. 19-20)?

God gave two reasons.

Psalm 50:17, “Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee.”

Psalm 50:21, “These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; **thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself**: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.”

⁸ מִנְחָה minchah

⁹ A. W. Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*, Page 12

Indeed! Notice the staging ground of Israel's apostasy at the time of the writing of Psalm. 50. It began with looking upon God's word lightly! It climaxed with the conviction that God is not much different from us! And brothers and sisters, we are guilty of this all the time. Aren't we?

God's word is not that which influences us. How could it? Most of us give more preference to a T.V. program, a newspaper or periodical than the word. How much longer will we continue to make excuses for why we aren't in the word?

Let us beware! This is a high point in our lives (in fact, that is one reason why getting in the word is so difficult; to do so, is to assault a "High Place"). We take God's worship lightly! Today worship is viewed as optional and a free-for-all. We take God's worship lightly as well! This is exactly what the Galatian churches did.

Galatians 2:18, "For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor."

Galatians 3:3, "Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?"

Though the Galatian believers were saved by grace, nevertheless they thought they could perfect their salvation in the flesh. As such, they looked down upon the cross of Christ.

Family of God, we have done the same every time we think that "if I don't do so and so, God will be displeased. If I don't destroy the high places referenced in this sermon, God won't bless me."

Listen, one of the most glorious truths in the world is that if God loved and so saved us when we were yet sinners, He certainly will continue to love us in spite of our sin. Let us lift high the cross!

Preference to Man

Another high place of apostasy is that it give preference to man.

1 Samuel 2:29, "**Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded in my habitation; and honourest¹⁰ thy sons above me**, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people?"

This furthers our understanding of Eli's role in his sons' compromise. Eli knew that his sons were transgressing the word of God, there is no doubt. Eli benefited from his sons' wickedness, again is not in question — as we shall see. Well, how is it that Eli — this one-time-faithful-servant of God — could stare transgression in the face and yet remain quiet? The answer lies in one issue... the question of honor!

The word honor is one we have considered quite frequently throughout our study of the Bible. It is the Hebrew word for "weight," and therefore was used in reference to that which, by virtue of its moral or ethical weight, influences an individual's thoughts, actions, or beliefs. So for example if you feel the compulsion to wear a certain clothing because "that's what everyone's wearing," then from the perspective of the Bible, you are giving "honor" to public opinion. If you are inclined to heed one person's advice over another, then from the perspective of the Bible, you are giving "honor" to the one you listen to.

¹⁰ כָּבַד kabad

That's the idea behind honor/glory in the Bible. It speaks of the influence, weight, or that by which you are moved or driven. With this, consider Eli. It is clear from this text that toward the latter part of his ministry, he was confronted with a very serious choice. On the one hand he had God's commands detailed, uncompromising, and quite clear. On the other hand he had his sons' affections and opinions.

Now the question is, "Which one would influence Eli's actions? By what would he be bound?"

While I'm sure that it wasn't as black and white to Eli as it was to God and it is to us, nevertheless it is clear that Eli opted for his son's affection.

1 Samuel 2:29, "**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?"

And herein lies the second way in which Christian apostasy manifests itself in the life of the child of God, it cares more about what man thinks than God. It is moved more by the affection of man rather than the love of God. It gives preference to man over God!

And just by way of note, this truth serves as a mini-thesis around which this and the next two chapters revolve: Who will get the honor, Eli? Who will be treated with weight? Who therefore will be heavy? That was the central issue when it came to Eli in his life.

And that is the central issue when it comes to each and everyone of us in Christ today!

Brothers and sisters, the Bible has much to say about "fearing man" — in fact a word search on "fear" and "man/men" reveals fifty plus versus warning us against it! That this is so frequently addressed in Scripture ought to indicate that this is a serious issue in the Kingdom of God.

And so it is. When God created mankind, He entered into a relationship with us based solely upon our conduct/performance.

Genesis 2:16-17, "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

If Adam and Eve obeyed, they'd be rewarded with life. If Adam and Eve rebelled, they'd die.

Now while you know the rest of the story — how Adam and Eve did disobey and God cast them out of the garden, and yet God proclaimed His grace to forgive on account of the cross.¹¹ Nevertheless from this we must see that our creation made us into a race of God/man pleasers!

Thus our inclination is to relate to God and to mankind on the basis of our conduct, reputations, and public opinion. Now this is a healthy passion when the worshipper applies it to God — knowing that in Christ we are well-pleasing to the Lord. As a consequence, we long to serve, honor, and glorify the Lord. But when this inclination is applied to man? Listen to the word of God:

Proverbs 29:25, "The **fear of man bringeth a snare**: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD

¹¹ Compare Genesis 3:15

shall be safe.”

Jeremiah 17:5, “Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD.”

Do you see? This is another stronghold from which apostasy rears its ugly head. When we in the course of life find ourselves moved more by the opinions of man — the affections of a spouse, the expectations of a boss, the views of our peers — than God, apostasy is not far behind.

And so let us be diligent in our war against the flesh!

We have seen that in our walks with Christ we must ever and always be about tearing down the strongholds raised up against the Lord. Well, the fear of man is another one of these strongholds when it comes to apostasy. Accordingly, let us get busy in our assault against this high place.

Assaulting the Fear of Man

Yet again how do we do it?

It begins first by heeding the words of Solomon.

Proverbs 4:23 “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.”

Do you understand what Solomon is exhorting here?

We must be nothing less than vigilant in what we allow in our hearts, to occupy our minds, to move us, and to influence us. God and God alone — His glory and honor — must be that which moves us! So let us guard our hearts! And yet as we guard our hearts, we must actively do something else! Again listen to Solomon.

Proverbs 29:25, “he fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.”

Do you see the one and only thing that can replace the fear of man in our lives? It is trusting or relying upon God. It is being satisfied with God's assessment of you in Christ. It is being content to know that God approves of you. Once you understand this, you won't need your friend's, child's, spouse's, parent's, or boss's affection! You've got God's!

Personal Gain

The third area that leads to apostasy is the use of ministry for personal gain.

1 Samuel 2:29, “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?**”

As a final blow against Eli, this text indicates that Eli not only did nothing when his sons violated God's commands and honored his sons above God but that he also benefited from their sin!

Now herein raises a question which will be very difficult to answer — and which scholars themselves have not answered — was Eli fat?

That this text says that Eli made himself “fat” doesn't necessarily imply that he literally was overweight. It could refer to something else. See from studies on health and nutrition we know that weight-gain isn't dependent upon how much fat a person consumes or the quality of meat a person eats. A person's weight will be directly proportional to the amount of calories he consumes verses the amount that he burns.

Now that's not to say that there are not things that we can do to make us a “better butter burner” in the words of one health guru.¹² It is to say that when everything has been said and done your weight will be determined by calories consumed versus the calories burned. Consequently, at best it is difficult to understand how Eli's weight could have been affected from a different cut of meat.

Again realize that the issue here is NOT that Eli is eating meat. As a priest he would have received a cut as his portion from God with every sacrifice.¹³ This means that meat already was a regular part of his diet! Rather, the issue here is that he is taking that portion of the sacrifice reserved for God.

Was he physically fat?

Did Eli's taking that portion reserved for God make him obese?

Maybe; maybe not. Again, we do not know.

What then is this text referencing if it isn't Eli's physical weight?

It is referencing HIS MORAL WEIGHT! Let me explain.

It is clear throughout the opening chapters of Samuel that Eli did not give weight to God—he did not honor God. Rather, he gave weight to himself. Accordingly, rather than being rich when it came to God or fat at when it came to the Lord, or healthy when it came to his walk with Christ he was rich, fat, and healthy when it came to himself! In fact, that is how this phrase is used elsewhere in Scripture. Moses speaking of the history of God's people used it this way:

Deuteronomy 32:15, “But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation.”

Contrary to what we might think upon a shallow reading of this verse, Israel as a nation didn't literally grow fat. Rather, this is talking about their moral stance as a people before God — they were fat in themselves and so self-sufficient!

Numbers 22:15, “And Balak sent yet again princes, more, and more honourable [literally fat] than they.”

When Balak sought Balaam to curse the people of God it is not that he sent people who were obese. Rather, he sent people who were fat in themselves —i.e., distinguished. That is the nuance of “fat” in our

¹² Covert Bailey, *Fit or Fat*

¹³ Compare Leviticus 7:34 and 10:14

text.¹⁴

Thus to say that Eli “made himself fat” is another way of saying that he was heavy in himself. So Eli exalted himself. Eli made himself rich! Eli furthered his own agenda! Now as bad as this may have been, the real crisis arises when we consider HOW Eli pandered to himself.

1 Samuel 2:29, “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?**”

Do you see the crime? It is not enough that Eli took God lightly and honored his sons above Christ. Here we read that he used the things of the Lord as the means by which to further his own agenda!

And such is the third and final way in which Christian Apostasy manifests itself: It uses the things of the Lord as a means for personal gain. And hence we see a third and final “high place” from which Apostasy works its way into our lives!

And what an ugly “high place!” You can just imagine it.

When the fatty portions ran low, Eli found himself longing for worshippers to come to Shiloh.

Why?

Because he longed to see God glorified? With Korah (Psalm 84), he loved the worship of God?

NO! He longed for worshippers so that he could enjoy a good meal that night!

You say, “You’re reading too much into this text! Eli wasn’t that bad!”

And maybe not — but what about us?

- Why are you here?
- Why do you or don’t you attend an evening study?
- Why do you read the word?
- Why do you or don’t you have family devotions?
- Why do you want a better walk with Christ?

If your answer involves the issue of pleasure, fulfillment, or fun, then you are adulterating the gospel of Christ!

2 Corinthians 4:2 (NASB), “Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart, but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God...”

Years ago when I was in college, I was studying this verse and wondered what Paul meant by

¹⁴ Speaking of the definition of כבד kabad which is the thesis of these chapters, TWOT says: “The basic meaning is ‘to be heavy, weighty,’ a meaning which is only rarely used literally, the figurative (e.g. ‘heavy with sin’) being more common. From this figurative usage it is an easy step to the concept of a ‘weighty’ person.”

“adulterating the word of God.” After looking it up, I discovered that “adulterating” references the idea of doing something for pay. And thus Paul here is saying that he didn't preach for money — unlike many deceivers in the early church.

Now as I studied this at first I didn't see the application to my life. I was a student in college. I never would I think of leading a Bible study for money. But then it hit me. Money comes in all shapes and sizes. I could adulterate the gospel if I shared it to make me feel good. If I used it to get attention or if it became the basis for my fun then I would have distorted the gospel.

Family of God the issue here is this: Eli used his position as a priest to enjoy certain pleasures of life. And we have become his children if we do the same.

In fact if you would go to most college campuses — Christian or secular — you will discover while the packaging is different, so many in the body of Christ are no different than the worldling. On a typical Friday night the worldling is out drinking, partying, carousing and the like. They do this on account of the pleasure these activities give them.

And yet consider the Christian who is out on Friday night. He attends a Bible study. He goes to a “Christian” concert. He goes to a “Christian” fellowship. Why are they doing what they are doing? For many it too is because of the pleasure these activities give them.

Now insofar as this is correct, do you see that there is very little difference at times between the worldling and the Christian? Both are using external means to satisfy their selfish desires. The difference is that one is using alcohol, the other is using the Lord!

Oh family of God, once again let us guard our hearts. Let us not approach the Kingdom of God as a means to our end. Rather let us recognize that as servants of God we are a means to God's end of glorifying Himself and enjoying Himself forever. We have been called to serve in God's Kingdom, not get from it!

Now as we close, I realize that this has been a “cutting” sermon. So let me remind you that though Eli in this text is going to suffer some serious repercussions on account of his “apostasy,” nevertheless he did know grace. God said to Eli, “Yet I will not cut off every man of yours from My altar that your eyes may fail from weeping and your soul grieve” (1 Samuel 2:33 NAS). Brothers and sisters, know this day that God's grace is yours in abundance regardless of your sin.

Accordingly, let us not despair as we see the high places of apostasy in our lives. Rather, let us be quick to repent and plead the grace of God. Let us be quick to labor to destroy each on as it is raised up before God.

By virtue of the fact that you are reading this today, it is not too late!

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About the Preacher

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