

Broomfield



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Forfeiting Privileges

Apostasy and Its Attributes, Part 4

When someone commits a crime, regardless of the society in which they live, there is the expectation that there will be consequences when the criminal's caught — whether it's making restitution, serving time in prison, or perhaps even execution. In fact, never has there been a society where this expectation didn't exist. For you see when God created this world, the law of “reaping and sowing” was woven into the fabric of our being such that Paul reminded the believers in Galatia “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7).

And that is why when it comes to micro-apostasy — the apostasy attributed to Eli in our text — we are not surprised to read that there are consequences in the life of the child of God. It was to a church that was trampling underfoot the Lord's Table that Paul exhorted this way:

1 Corinthians 11:30, “For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.”

Likewise we read this exhortation to the Galatian church:

Galatians 6:8, “For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.”

Indeed! We are not surprised to read that there are consequences for sin. What is a surprise is how serious the ramifications can be.

Our text details the consequences of a life lived in the flesh with unrepentant sin by a servant living unto self as a citizen in the Kingdom of God. Although Eli was a priest of God most high, nevertheless he was not exempt from suffering on account of the consequences of his sin.

Loss of Privilege

Let us consider two consequences attributed here to living in unrepentant sin. The first is the loss of privilege.

1 Samuel 2:30, “Wherefore the LORD God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and

the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the LORD saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.”

This and similar passages in Scripture have given cause for concern on the part of the body of Christ for it appears as though God here either lied to Eli's family or changed His mind. How is it that God could promise Eli's house that they “should walk before Me forever,” and now could say, “Far be it from Me”? Isn't this capricious? Doesn't “forever” mean “forever”?

Well *forever* does mean forever and yes it does sound rather capricious on the surface — but that is only because we don't understand the nature of Biblical prophecy as it relates to the privileges of covenantal blessing.

Covenantal Relationship

Brothers and sisters, Biblical prophecy was not given in a vacuum, but in the context of a covenant relationship with God. Without a relationship, there would be no prophet, no word from the Lord, and no revelation of God's will for His people. It is in the context of a relationship with God — a covenant relationship — that we must begin if we are to understand this text.

Accordingly when we consider our passage, we must realize that the covenant that God established with His people called for covenant faithfulness! Think back with me to the inception of the Abrahamic covenant.

Genesis 17:7-8, “And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”

This sounds rather absolute, doesn't it?

Abraham! It's in the bag. Your children and your children's children will forever be the Lord's! But then we read this:

Genesis 17:14, “And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant.”

The promise of God — the Covenant — was predicated upon covenant fidelity. Where faithfulness to the covenant is compromised or secured, so also will be the privileges associated with that covenant. We see it detailed in the prophets also.

Jeremiah 18:1, 7-8, “The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying . . . At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.”

Conditionality is implied in every promise made by God because every promise presupposes a covenantal

relationship with the Lord.¹ If a promise of judgment is proclaimed, and that nation repents, then forgiveness will be found even though the promise of judgment was given in absolute terms.

We see it in the promise of the gospel. Outside of Christ, the non-believer will suffer judgment — that is an absolute promise. But if that same person comes to Christ, they will find grace.

Now this truth — the blessings or cursings of covenant fidelity or infidelity — underlies every promise that God makes in the Scriptures. For example, turn with me to Micah 3 a passage written around 735 BC.

Micah 3:9, 12, “Hear this, I pray you, ye heads of the house of Jacob, and princes of the house of Israel, that abhor judgment, and pervert all equity. [God continues describing their sin in vv. 10-11, climaxing in v. 12 with] Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest.”

Again, this sounds pretty absolute, doesn't it?

The people of God at the time of Micah are doomed. Because of their infidelity, they are going to be judged! But then we read these verses written approximately 100 years later:

Jeremiah 26:16-19, “Then said the princes and all the people unto the priests and to the prophets; This man is not worthy to die: for he hath spoken to us in the name of the LORD our God. Then rose up certain of the elders of the land, and spake to all the assembly of the people, saying, Micah the Morasthite prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah, and spake to all the people of Judah, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Zion shall be plowed like a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest. Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him at all to death? did he not fear the LORD, and besought the LORD, and the LORD repented him of the evil which he had pronounced against them? Thus might we procure great evil against our souls.”

The prophecy given to Micah in 735 BC — this prophecy which spoke of certain and imminent death and destruction — was in reality conditioned by covenantal faithfulness. If the people in the face of judgment turned to God seeking grace they would be forgiven.

Covenant Fidelity

Such is the nature of every prophecy given in the Bible. They are given in the context of a covenant/contract/relationship predicated upon covenant fidelity.² In fact, we see it in our text as well. The conditions upon which the blessings of God were enjoyed by Eli's household are clearly stated: “For them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed” (1 Samuel 2:30).

From all of this we see that God did indeed promise Eli's family that they would “walk before the Lord all the days of their life,” but in the context of a covenantal relationship with God. This promise was predicated upon covenant fidelity! Thus, as Eli proved himself unfaithful to the covenant, he forfeited the

¹ Either the Covenant of Works by which all men and nations are bound, or the Covenant of Grace entered into through Christ.

² We could look further at such passages as Jonah 1:2; 3:10; 4:2; Jeremiah 26:3; 42:10; Joel 2:12-13; Psalm 7:12; and Ezekiel 18:32.

PRIVILEGES associated with the covenant³ — and that is what we are talking about here... the Privileges!

Eli did not lose his salvation, eternity, or grace — as we'll see in the coming weeks. Eli lost the PRIVILEGE of “walking before God” as a priest in the house of the Lord!

And this brings us to the first consequence of unchecked apostasy in our lives as God's children- THE LOSS OF PRIVILEGE! Ronald Youngblood put it this way:

“Although the Aaronic priesthood was perpetual, individual priests who sinned could thereby forfeit covenant blessing.”⁴

And such also is the case in our life. If we live in persistent rebellion against God then it is Not that God will change His mind and take back His offer of salvation and send us to hell. It is RATHER that we will forfeit the privileges and blessings that accompany faithfulness in the body of Christ.

After his sin with Bathsheba, David received this message:

2 Samuel 12:8, “And I gave thee thy master’s house, and thy master’s wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things.”

Do you see? David's apostasy cost him future blessing!

After recounting the blessings that God’s people enjoyed as His children, God said, “Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withholden good things from you” (Jeremiah 5:25).

You say, what good things do we forfeit on account of our sin?

- Assurance could be one of them.
- Joy, Psalm 51:12
- The fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5:22-24, 25-26
- Intimacy in our walks, Psalm 32:3-4
- The protection of God, 1 Corinthians 5:5

In fact of all the blessings that could be forfeited, notice that the one emphasized here was Eli's ability to “should walk before [the Lord] for ever” (1 Samuel 2:30). This is not a reference to walking with God but to serving the Lord as a priest. In other words, one of the greatest privileges Eli forfeited was the ability to serve the Lord.

Serving God

This raises a very important point that we too often forget when it comes to God's Kingdom: Service in the Kingdom of God is Privilege! Did you know that? We are not obligated to serve Christ as a condition of salvation — in fact if out of laziness or carelessness, we fail to serve the Lord we will not perish!

³ For a more thorough treatment of this subject, cf. Hoffner, Jr., Harry A. “Ancient Views of Prophecy and Fulfillment: Mesopotamia and Asia Minor” *ETS* 30:3, September 1987. pages 257-265.

⁴ EBC, Volume 3, 1 Samuel, Page 587

But so few of us see that today. We act as if by ministering to the body of Christ, loving the brethren, bearing one another's burdens, sharing the gospel, and leading someone to the Lord we are doing God and the body of Christ a favor!

I have news for you brothers and sisters! Service in the Kingdom of God is not accomplished by the Christian as if he is doing God a favor. Service in the Kingdom is privilege — and nothing less. Accordingly, let us repent of the arrogance which has us believing the opposite. As grace is defined as “unmerited favor,” let us realize that God is doing us a favor by allowing us to serve Him and His kingdom!

Psalm 84 is Korah's famous Psalm in which he talks about the glorious privilege of worshipping with the people of God. Here he envies the swallow who built its nest in the temple area. He tells how he would choose the task of a doorkeeper — and thus not even be allowed to worship — over dwelling in the rich, lavished, and opulent environment of the wicked.⁵ He would take one day with the people of God than spend three years living as a king because the worship of God is so beautiful and glorious.

Now I want you to imagine for a moment that on account of God's providence you no longer attend worship. Your children have grown, your spouse is gone, and your age is such that you can't attend this gathering. Instead you have to spend the day in a wheel chair, stuck in a home with total strangers.

Do you think you would give up 1000 days in the house of a great king to come back to this moment, right now, that you might worship once again with your children, friends and co-heirs of grace? Wouldn't your rather be a healthy individual able to belt out the hymns, listen to the sermon, and approach another person following the service to ask how their walk was going?

I think you would!

And yet listen. To be satisfied and unrepentant in your sin and to allow your flesh free-reign in your life will cause you to forfeit the privilege of worship with God's people. It won't be advanced age that will cost you this privilege, it will be your sin!

Such is the first consequence of apostasy in the life of the child of God: The Loss of Privilege when it comes to Serving in the Body of Christ!

Familial Devastation

This brings us to the next Consequence: Familial Devastation.

1 Samuel 2:31-33, “Behold, the days come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father's house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house. And thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation, in all the wealth which God shall give Israel: and there shall not be an old man in thine house for ever. And the man of thine, whom I shall not cut off from mine altar, shall be to consume thine eyes, and to grieve thine heart: and all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age.”

Each of these promises revolve around a common theme: Eli's family — his children, and their children

⁵ Compare Psalm 84:10

— would be devastated on account of Eli's sin. And that is exactly what happened. When one traces Eli's line through the Bible you read of tragedy,⁶ hardship,⁷ untimely deaths,⁸ and eventual deposition from office.⁹

A Shortened Life

Truly, Eli's sin wasn't in a vacuum or self-contained. It affected himself, his children, and every one of his heirs! Now let's be very clear as to what we are talking about here. None of this is to imply that Eli's descendants wouldn't know success, wealth, strength, honor, and the like. It is that they wouldn't know this as it related to the Kingdom of God! They wouldn't flourish as Kingdom citizens. Look at the text again.

1 Samuel 2:31-33, “Behold, the days come, that **I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father's house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house. And thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation, in all the wealth which God shall give Israel: and there shall not be an old man in thine house for ever.** And the man of thine, whom I shall not cut off from mine altar, shall be to consume thine eyes, and to grieve thine heart: and all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age.”

The theme that arises in this passage is that of a short life — which was/is a serious thing in Scripture. Think of it:

- Ephesians 6:3 and the promise given to obedient children
- Titus 2:3 and the call of older women
- 1 Timothy 3 and the name given to a pastor and church leaders — elder

See, by not having children who would grow old Eli's line would be deprived of any who would attain the status of elder — whether man or woman. And thus, while in our culture it is natural for an elderly Christian to “check out” having “paid his dues” the Scripture teaches that this is when real ministry begins!

The status elder denotes one close to God. It describes one who has approached wisdom — having walked with God for many years. It describes a teacher and guide to the younger generation. The elders were freed to worship full-time in the synagogue if you so desired. And thus to be deprived of old age — have your life cut short —as a serious thing indeed!

And thus from this text we are shown the real tragedy when it comes to unchecked apostasy. It deprives not only us **BUT ALSO OUR CHILDREN** of the joy, blessings, and privileges of service in the Kingdom of God!

And so we see the second consequence of apostate Christianity: Familial devastation! When a Christian lives in unrepentant sin, it will affect his children!

In Ephesians 6 Paul exhorts the people of God with regard to their responsibilities to their families. He describes the duties of

⁶ Compare 1 Samuel 4:17

⁷ Compare 1 Samuel 4:20

⁸ Compare 1 Samuel 2:18-19

⁹ Compare 1 Kings 2:35; and 1 Chronicles 29:22

- Husbands to wives
- Wives to husbands
- Parents to children
- Children to parents
- Slaves to masters
- Masters to slaves

In this context, he gives this exhortation to the children of a covenant community.

Ephesians 6:2-3, “Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.”

The idea here is “spiritual health” — when a child learns to honor his parents, his walk with God is established. From this verse we conclude that when a child honors his father and mother, he honors the Lord. And how is this so? It is because a parent's authority to raise the child is derived from God. Thus when a child is allowed to grow up dishonoring his parents, he actually is being trained to dishonor God.

When this occurs — when a child is trained to dishonor the Lord — you and I both would expect that their walk with Christ will be detrimentally affected, they will be alienated from God, and they will struggle spiritually. Why? Because again, the Lord ultimately is the object of their rebellion.

That is why Paul links a child's spiritual welfare to their relationship with their parents: If a child honors his parents, “it will go well with them” (verse 3) — speaking of their spiritual maturation. If a parent raises their child correctly, they won't “provoke their children to anger” (verse 4) — which references a lifestyle that is in rebellion against God.

I hope you see from this that as parents we have a grave responsibility when it comes to our children! What we do or don't do will have dramatic effects upon them!

We'll get this and don't ever forget it. According to this passage, when we live in unrepentant sin, our children foot the bill! When we down play our rebellion — thinking that what is done in private stays in private — we curse our children! When we choose to sin we violate our children's walk with the Lord!

You ask, “How does this work? How is it that my sin curses the walks of my children?”

It is as God promised to Moses in Exodus, that he “will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation” (Exodus 34:7). This doesn't mean that God will judge our children on account of our sin. Rather, it means that one of the consequences of sin is that it bleeds into other areas of our lives — including that of our children's. When we sport a rebellious attitude toward God, we pass this to our children.

That is why so many of our struggles in the Christian walk parrot that of our parents! It is no mystery. It is the nature of sin!

And thus when we allow sin a foothold in our lives, live in sin, and look down upon repentance, sorrow, or humility as hallmarks of the Christian life we teach/encourage our children to do the same! And thus, rather than raising spiritual giants, we raise stunted Christians!

Now this was the second consequence of Eli's apostasy. His children might be rich in this world yet according to our passage, they would ever and always be poor toward God — as evidenced by their short life!

Family of God, what dire and horrible consequences accompany our sin! There is little ill that could happen in our lives which could surpass knowing that our cavalier attitude toward sin corrupted our children's walk with the Lord. And yet that is what is at stake when we live in unrepentant sin, mediocre Christianity, in constant alienation from God!

What a cross to bear!

Matthew Henry put it this way: “Grief for a dead child is great, but for a bad child often greater.”¹⁰

And yet, let us not grieve this morning or despair. Let us rather behold this dreadful consequence and flee to Christ! Don't ever forget, that though David sinned so greatly, nevertheless he knew the forgiveness of the Lord.

2 Samuel 12:13, “And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.”

Likewise if you have found yourself identifying with Eli over the past couple of weeks, don't despair. Seek the Lord! Cry out to Him! Confess your sin! He will listen; He will heal; and He will forgive!

Realize that the dire consequences of sin here pictured in Eli's life need only occur if you and I remain in our sins. Accordingly don't give up like Eli, but ever and always strive in the battle against sin!

¹⁰ *Matthew Henry's Commentary in One Volume*, 1 Samuel, Page 285.

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About the Preacher

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