

Broomfield



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The Self Absorbed Minister

Servants of God, Part 3

A Chinese proverb says that “man is three persons: what he thinks he is, what others think he is, and what he really is.” And Scripture somewhat bears this out.

Proverbs 27:19, “As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man.”

Speaking of the general principle that our heart will always reflect our true identity this passage implies that what you see is not always what you get. Speaking of some who serve in the kingdom of God,

Titus 1:16, “They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.”

Interesting! There are some in the Kingdom of God who are false servants. Though they profess to know God, their living denies Him. And so we are not surprised to read this:

Matthew 7:21, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.”

In the Kingdom of God there truly are a variety of servants; much more than simply the genuine and the false. As we've already seen in our text, there are the sincere they long for God to be worshipped no matter what. They allow nothing to impede their service.

There are the unseen servants. Those who daily serve the Lord without compliment, fanfare, or attention. They are content to be unseen so long as Christ alone is seen.

And know this morning we come to a third type of servant found in the kingdom of God: The self-absorbed as epitomized in Eli. And yet before we get into the nuts and bolts of it, it is imperative that we understand who Eli really is.

The Self-Serving

On account of a lack of familiarity with the Biblical text, it is easy to read this verse and take what is being said at face value. Because of our understanding of leadership and the respect that ought to be

given to God's man, we read the opening chapters of Samuel with an a priori respect for Eli and his position. After all, he was the high priest and Hannah obviously respected him.¹ He was charged with the oversight of Shiloh.²

And though his sons were wicked... well so also was the testimony of Samuel, David, and many other men of God in redemptive history. As such when we come to 1 Samuel 2:20, we read Eli's blessing of Hannah and maybe even think, "What a guy!" Yet to draw this conclusion regarding Eli is to make a big mistake- seeing how Hebrew is more inclined to show it than to say it. Thus as we endeavor to understand this passage, we need to step back from 1 Samuel and look at the over-all picture that is presented here concerning Eli. If he is a diligent servant of the Lord, we will take verse 20 one way, but if he is a sham-Christian, we will take verse 20 another way.

So what do we know about Eli?

It is clear from a reading of chapters 1-4 that if Eli ever enjoyed "glory days" of sincerity and devotion to the Lord, those days were long since gone.

This is what we know by way of high points about this High Priest. First, Eli cared little for 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?"

We read about Hophni and Phinehas' abuse in 1 Samuel 2:12-17 and we are shocked. Yet Eli wasn't. In fact, he actually benefited from their rebellion as he himself ate that part of the sacrifice intended only for God. And that leads us to the fact that Eli was a man pleaser.

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."

It is clear that Eli was more concerned about what his sons thought than God.³ Thus when Eli was forced to make a choice, he sided with pleasing his sons rather than the Lord. Eli had what might be called, "An Inferiority Complex" — he was afraid to confront the real abuse of the mighty and powerful, but quick to rebuke the weak and helpless.

One of Eli's downfalls is that he didn't rebuke his sons.⁴ Yet give him a woman who is by herself praying with the slightest appearance of evil⁵ and he is all over her!

1 Samuel 1:13-14, "Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken. And Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee."

¹ Compare 1 Samuel 1:15-18

² Compare 1 Samuel 14

³ Compare 1 Samuel 2:23-24. The text seems to indicate that Eli's response was more on account of the rumors than anything else.

⁴ Compare 1 Samuel 3:13

⁵ Compare 1 Samuel 1:13-14

Eli's walk with God at best was distant. In 1 Samuel, Hannah is recorded as praying no less than four times.⁶ Each time her prayer was directed to “Yahweh” (which is God's personal, covenant name). And yet, Eli is never said to have prayed — not even once in this book! And when he actually does reference God, unlike Hannah, he does not use the Lord's personal, covenantal name!

While Hannah and Samuel had a close walk with God (Samuel also is recorded as praying to God), it is obvious that Eli doesn't.

Finally, Eli not only failed to control his sons and himself had a distant walk with God, he himself also “embraced” all sorts of idolatry, wickedness, and deceit.

Psalm 78:56-61, “Yet they tempted and provoked the most high God, and kept not his testimonies: But turned back, and dealt unfaithfully like their fathers: they were turned aside like a deceitful bow. For they provoked him to anger with their high places, and moved him to jealousy with their graven images. When God heard this, he was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel: So that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men; And delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy's hand.”

Brothers and sisters, the list of abuses detailed here all occurred under Eli's watch. And thus we cannot ignore the obvious fact that Eli was directly responsible for them. Under his watch — and therefore his endorsement — God's people forsook their God to worship that which was not God.

The result was the abandonment on the part of God of the Shiloh sanctuary — but only after God's people had abandoned it first!

So what do we conclude about Eli?

Far from being a silly old man who on account of his age lost control of Shiloh⁷ he was one of the ring leaders! For him God had become a means to a greater end, and he had no scruples otherwise.

And yet, this is not to say that Eli was a deceiver, self-deluded, or a false child of God. While we might be tempted to conclude this about Him, amazingly these chapters speak sympathetically of Eli. He was not ignorant of the Lord.

1 Samuel 1:17, “Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him.”

The picture we gather is that while the abuses above occurred under Eli's watch, he didn't necessarily participate in them directly. He allowed them, and at times benefited from them.⁸ His sin is that he indirectly embraced the sins of his contemporaries. And thus when the time came for judgment, God showed mercy.

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.”

⁶ Compare 1 Samuel 1:10, 12, 26, 27

⁷ Compare 1 Samuel 2:22

⁸ Compare 1 Samuel 2:19

While we will conclude that Eli's sons were wretched and false-believers, we fall short of that assessment here. Rather from all the data we conclude that Eli, though a follower of God, was a SELF-ABSORBED man consumed primarily with his own welfare rather than the glory of God.⁹ And so we are dealing here with the self-absorbed! This is another type of Servant that can be found in the Kingdom of God.

The Self-Absorbed Service

1 Samuel 2:20, “And Eli blessed Elkanah and his wife, and said, The LORD give thee seed¹⁰ of this woman for the loan which is lent to the LORD. And they went unto their own home.”

Notice that at face value Eli outdid himself here. Such a glorious and poetic benediction! He would have been dressed in his robes of ministry — but unlike Samuel's which we have discussed over the past couple of weeks — Eli's would have been made of the finest linen adorned with gold and jewels and sporting the magnificent colors of gold, blue, purple, scarlet and fine twined linen.

For us this may not seem like a big deal. Yet back then, fine cloth made with these colors would have been beyond the reach of the common man. Indeed! Eli here would have looked dazzling. He also would have been wearing the breastplate with the twelve precious stones representing the tribes of Israel.

Underneath he would have been wearing a blue robe which extended all the way to his feet. His arms would have been raised such that his robe would have draped beautifully off his arms and shoulders. And

⁹ In fact, we see further evidence that verse 20 ought to be taken as criticism of Eli. For in reality, the focus of this entire periscope — Eli's Service — is placed under the magnifying glass.

How many of you are familiar with the literary tool found throughout the Bible called a Chiasm? A chiasm is a way of writing in which, on account of the structure of the sentences, emphasis is placed on a particular statement. For example, notice the following chiasm.

- A. The mountains proclaim the glory of God.
- B. The Lord is Great.
- C. Let all the nations serve Him.
- B. The A' All the earth is full of His glory.
- A. All the earth is full of His glory.

Through this Chiasm, the call for the nations to serve the Lord has been placed in the position of emphasis — the “C” line!

Because, the physical creation is full of his glory- that's the A and the A'. God is great and reigns on high- that's the B and the B'. We must serve Him! Do you see that it is the middle line that is receiving the emphasis in a chiasm! In light of this, notice the Chiasm as presented in our passage.

- A In v. 18 we read of the **Status of Samuel.**
- B In verse 19 we read of the **Status of Hannah.**
- C In v. 20 we read of **Eli.**
- B' In verse 21a we read of the **Blessings of Hannah.**
- A' In verse 21b we read of the **Blessings of Samuel.**

d. And so in this chiasm I hope you see that the focus is on verse 20 and therefore The Service of Eli!

¹⁰ The Septuagint (LXX) renders this repay There is not much divergence in the translation of this verse among the best Bibles except with the ESV. Personally, I find it convoluted and confusing. The better translations are the NIV, NASB, KJV, NKJV, and RSV — all of which agree on this verse.

he would have spoken with perfect diction, having given similar benedictions throughout his ministry which spanned at least 50 years if not more.

Yet because we know that Eli's walk with God was so shallow, we know that verse 20 was little more than a show. It was all pomp and circumstance, but with little substance. He had a form of godliness, yet he clearly had denied its power.¹¹

And from this we see that on the surface the work of self-absorbed Christians is enviable — their work looks so good. Granted, they may be abusing a thousand commandments of God, but you'd never know it by their appearance. They're phony and fake.

They've mastered the language of “God-speak.” And if you're NOT with them for any length of time, you may even find yourself envying them and wishing you could be like them. And yet in the end, they are miserable — for all that they've got is themselves! And this brings us to their flaw.

The Flaw

1 Samuel 2:20, “And Eli blessed Elkanah and his wife, and said, The LORD give thee seed of this woman for the loan which is lent to the LORD. And they went unto their own home.”

It is very clear that Eli, as all self-absorbed Christians, related to God on the basis of his merit — and this is important! The Lord he called upon was NOT the God who reconciled man to Himself through grace — which is why Eli never called Him Yahweh! Rather, he was as a foreign god.

Don't miss Eli's thinking here in regard to Hannah. He says, in essence, “In light of everything you have done for the Lord, God certainly will repay you with children!” In fact, that is close to the wording of this passage... “may the Lord REPAY you with children... IN PLACE of the one [you] dedicated to the Lord! (NASB).

What is this, but the Debtor's Ethic?

And yet this is the predominant view of so many in the church today. If you do something for the Lord, He in turn will do something for you. If you fall short in your service of God, He will punish you. If you pray enough, He will answer. If you sacrifice, He will reward. If you sin, He will punish.

This is such a cold and impersonal god. This is the makings of an empty religion! Yet this is what accompanies the Debtor's Ethic. This is the default program of each and every one of us. And this was the religion of Eli! In fact, if there is any doubt skip down to verse 25. This is part of Eli's “rebuke” of his sons. Notice the statement that he makes here; it reveals his theology,

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.”

Do you see it?

Like Zeus, Apollo, and the many other gods of the nations, Yahweh was viewed by Eli as the cosmic

¹¹ Compare 2 Timothy 3:5

baby sitter who mediates between men. He helps them get along. He establishes the “hail Mary’s” requisite for reconciliation when two people are at odds. But, if — God forbid — you should fail Him, transgress His laws, dishonor Him, then there is no forgiveness of sins! You are left on your own! Do what you can to placate, and hope that maybe He will be gracious in the end!

This was Eli's theology. And such is the theology of the self-absorbed!

Failure to know grace

In fact, let me give you two characteristics of self-absorbed Christians. First they are identified by what they expect from God. Again, when Samuel received a word from the Lord, what did Eli automatically expect? BAD NEWS!¹²

Such is the anticipation and expectation of the self-absorbed. When they look at the cross they do not see a God who poured Himself out for rebellious and wicked individuals. They don't think they have free access to the Father. They don't believe in unconditional love. They don't know complete and total forgiveness. Rather, they see the beginning of a salvation that they have to perfect in order for God to love them.

And so because they do not know grace, they ever and always are mindful of their own short-comings. Accordingly, God resembles a taskmaster — ever looking for that moment when we mess up.

Hurting the weak

Secondly, they can be seen in what they themselves extend to others. What do you see when you look at Eli? A gracious shepherd longing for others to walk in Christ? A gentle servant who takes God's Kingdom seriously? Or, an insecure person ready to strike when the weak and hurting walk by?

All we need to do is look at Eli's initial response to Hannah and you have the answer.¹³ Because Eli was self-absorbed he did not know grace and thus he couldn't extend it to others.

This is what the self-absorbed people do. Since they do not know grace, they do not extend it to others. Rather in and through life they remain absorbed with themselves. Life revolves around their trials, difficulties, struggles, and short-comings. They concentrate on how others have failed them or have neglected them. They complain about how unfair their life has been.

And in spite of their creedal affirmations, life is really about what they can get! Accordingly, the concept of sacrificing for another person for no other gain than the blessing of that person is completely foreign. The idea of living for a greater cause than themselves is foreign to them. And the idea of being consumed for another is something they have never thought of.

Now I wonder... have I described anyone here?

I'm sure I have — because the three categories of Servants in the Kingdom of God that we have seen thus far in this study are not exclusive. Indeed! What child of God here cannot identify at times with each type of servant? Don't we genuinely long to see God worshipped? Isn't it for His glory that we live? And

¹² Compare 1 Samuel 3:17

¹³ Compare 1 Samuel 1:13-14

honestly, don't we want to live in a world where Christ and Christ alone gets the glory?

Oh, but then there are our selfish times! When things don't turn out the way we want, or life deals us a blow, and we blow it again then our true colors show forth. When we are left alone for a little too long — and begin to wonder if the Lord has forgotten about me, then are we seen in our true, yet sad colors.

Would you consider Eli with me one more time.

You know what is sad about this man?

In 1 Samuel 3, God told Samuel these words:

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.”

So why don't we read of Eli pouring his heart out before God? Why don't we read about Eli confessing his sin? Why don't we see Eli clinging to the cross? Why didn't he respond as Hezekiah when told that he was going to die?

2 Kings 20:2-3, “Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the LORD, saying, I beseech thee, O LORD, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore.”

I'll tell you why, it is because self-absorbed people don't understand grace!

So, rather than enjoying fellowship with God, Eli settled for formalism. Rather than living in grace, he knew only guilt.¹⁴ Rather than knowing the pleasure of God, he knew only the praises of men. To the self-absorbed in this congregation, let me introduce you not simply to grace — most here probably could articulate what this means — BUT to AMAZING grace, SAVING grace, GOD'S grace.

And to do that, turn with me to Romans 5.

Romans 5:6-8, “For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

This is the grace with which most of us here are familiar: Christ died for the sinner! Christ died for the wretch! Christ died for me! Of this grace most of us know.

Now notice, Amazing Grace.

Romans 5:9-10, “Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.”

Do you see the point? Have you captured a glimpse of Amazing grace?

¹⁴ Compare Hebrews 10:1-3

Amazing grace isn't just that Christ loved the sinner enough that He died! Rather, it is that Christ continues to love us even though we continue to sin!

See, the fairy tale Christian believes that Christ died for you when you were a sinner. But now that you are saved you no longer are a sinner that wretched, vile person you were, instead now you are a cut above most.

Yet listen! As a Christian, God's love for you continues and though you sin a hundred-fold every day your testimony is that you aren't a cut above the non-believer. You are racked with sorrow, guilt, and pain on account of continued failure. However, **GOD DOESN'T LOVE YOU ANY LESS TODAY THAN WHEN HE SAVED YOU!**

Do you understand that?

When you've come to the point in your walk with God where you think, "There's no way He could forgive me!" That is when you finally are coming to grips with the nature of true, saving grace!

Romans 5:10, "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life."

Now practically speaking, do you understand what that means?

If God's love for you is unwavering, unconditional, and not predicated upon your actions. Then Christ has you covered! He's watching out for you! He's protecting your back! He's more concerned for you than... you!

And thus, you can get out of the business of self — for the King of kings and Lord of lords of this universe is watching out for you! You can live knowing that what is necessary for us to be all that God intended, to serve Him, to fight the good fight of faith, to run the race and finish the course He certainly will provide when you need it.

Now, you can live as sincere servants. You can long for Christ to be glorified. You can now live willingly and knowingly overlooked in this life and serve Christ anonymously, or persecuted because in Christ you are the beloved of God!

And yet this is scary, because it involves trust!

So in closing let me ask you, can you trust God with your future? Can you trust God to do what is best for you in your present? Can you trust God with your real needs — not the felt ones?

This is the solution for the Self-Absorbed servant of God- in the words of Peter, it's

1 Peter 4:19, "... commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator."

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About the Preacher

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