

Parenting Is Not for Chickens

Written by Pastor Andy Cook

1. Compromise is the enemy of godly parenting.
2. God holds parents responsible for their children's training.
3. Eventually, children are responsible for their own choices.

Opening Illustration: Maybe you've heard the story that is making the rounds about the chicken cannon. It seems that the United States Air Force, and the makers of commercial airlines, really do fire dead chickens at their aircraft. It's a safety issue, for aircraft do encounter birds in the air, and it's important for the windshields of aircraft to survive the collision. "Chicken cannons" are thus a convenient way to test the windshields.

According to one version of an urban legend that developed around this practice, the British once constructed a new locomotive that would pull a train faster than any before it. Since they, too, were concerned about windshield safety, they borrowed a chicken cannon, set it to approximate the maximum speed of the locomotive, loaded in the dead chicken, and fired.

The bird went through the windshield, broke the engineer's chair, and made a dent in the back wall of the engine cab.

As you might imagine, the train testers were quite surprised and troubled with this result. The British asked for a review of the test, and it was done. The results? When the test was repeated, said the report, it would be best to use a chicken that wasn't frozen!

When it's your family that's at risk, it's important not to fire any frozen chickens toward your home. Can you imagine the destruction flying in every direction? When parents ignore the Bible's very-clear instructions, very-real destruction is on its way. Parenting isn't for chickens – it's not for frozen chickens aimed at your home, and it's not for timid adults afraid to follow biblical principles.

Body: The story of Eli and his sons is a story of the disaster that followed years of ignored compromise. Eli was the spiritual leader of Israel and the father of two sons, both of them priests. All three men died on the same day, and notation on their death certificates might as well have been the notation, "Cause of Death: Collision with the chicken of compromise." When the father compromised on the clear instructions of the Bible, he and his sons, their families, and their country, suffered terrible damage.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 4:10-22

So the Philistines fought, and the Israelites were defeated and every man fled to his tent. The slaughter was very great; Israel lost thirty thousand foot soldiers. The ark of God was captured, and Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

That same day a Benjamite ran from the battle line and went to Shiloh, his clothes torn and dust on his head. When he arrived, there was Eli sitting on his chair by the side of the road, watching, because his heart feared for the ark of God. When the man entered the town and told what had happened, the whole town sent up a cry.

Eli heard the outcry and asked, "What is the meaning of this uproar?" The man hurried over to Eli, who was ninety-eight years old and whose eyes were set so that he could not see. He told Eli, "I have just come from the battle line; I fled from it this very day."

Eli asked, "What happened, my son?"

The man who brought the news replied, "Israel fled before the Philistines, and the army has suffered heavy losses. Also your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been captured."

When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell backward off his chair by the side of the gate. His neck was broken and he died, for he was an old man and heavy. He had led Israel forty years.

His daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant and near the time of delivery. When she heard the news that the ark of God had been captured and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she went into labor and gave birth, but was overcome by her labor pains. As she was dying, the women attending her said, "Don't despair; you have given birth to a son." But she did not respond or pay any attention.

She named the boy Ichabod, saying, "The glory has departed from Israel"--because of the capture of the ark of God and the deaths of her father-in-law and her husband. She said, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured."

1. Compromise is the enemy of godly parenting.

Some things can be compromised upon. If your toddler loves green beans, but won't eat broccoli, take what you can get. As your child grows older, some rules will change with obvious practicality. While a 4-year-old might need a 7 p.m. bedtime, by the time the child is a teen-ager, only the parents will be ready for bed at 7. Some compromise is part of life.

But when it comes to biblical principles, compromise is not an option for godly parents.

Eli's Eli and his sons didn't get to where they were overnight. They didn't wake up one morning and decide to be immersed in compromise and evil. It took Eli 98 years to die in the midst of disaster. They started slow, and worked their way into a mess.

Perhaps it's been a while since you reviewed the lives of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas.

Eli's sons dove into the deep end of sin. "Eli's sons were wicked men; they had no regard for the Lord." (1 Samuel 2:12).

They fattened themselves by stealing from the sacrifices. (1 Samuel 2:13-15) The priests were supposed to randomly stab boiled meat from a selection of the sacrifices reserved for them. Eli's sons weren't satisfied with just a little bit of meat. They wanted a lot of meat, and they wanted the finest cuts. They would take the meat before it was cooked, and then prepare it to their own taste. To the people of Israel, this must have been a shocking display of self-centeredness. Over the years, through the process of compromise, Hophni and Phinehas became obsessed with physical satisfaction, starting in what they put on their plates. But this wasn't just about poor physical fitness ... this was much more about spiritual fitness.

- They were stealing from God.
- They exhibited their disdain for God before the entire nation, for they had no shame. (1 Samuel 2:14)
- They corrupted the servants of the Temple. (1 Samuel 2:16)
- They had rampant sexual sin (1 Samuel 2:22). They “slept with the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.” This is the only time you'll ever see a reference to women serving at the entrance of the Tabernacle or the Temple, and it was quite a negative case!

The compromising sins of Eli's sons also affected Eli himself. “When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell backward off his chair by the side of the gate. His neck was broken and he died, for he was an old man and heavy.” (1 Samuel 4:18)

What does it mean that Eli was heavy? It's more than a physical description. It means that Eli, too, had begun to eat meat stolen from the sacrifices. Can you picture it? Can you smell the temptation? All his life Eli had eaten boiled roast. At some point, the smell of a T-bone sizzling on Hophni's grill became too much. And one day, probably after years of saying no to such a forbidden practice, Eli succumbs to the temptation, and eats the steak. Small sin, yes, no big deal, as big deals go ... but by the end of his life, his heart is surrounded by the fat of sin, and he dies a failure. Eli had grown to enjoy the taste of sin.

Compromise is the enemy of godly parents today. If parents allow it, television shows will bring images, languages and teaching into our homes that are blatantly evil and immoral. The promotion of homosexuality as a valid lifestyle choice is a main message of the entertainment media today. The message of sexual promiscuity among teenagers is one of the most often repeated themes of popular television shows being aired. If a television is left to its messages without parental control, parents shouldn't be surprised at the ungodly opinions their children soon adhere to.

If parents don't supervise it, the Internet can be a place of immense trouble for children. If parents don't stay involved, teen-aged children can be in serious trouble in an amazingly short period of time. If your battle is between broccoli and green beans, it's OK to compromise. But if the battle is between godliness and evil, godly parents must hold their ground.

2. God holds parents responsible for their children's training.

God sent a nameless prophet to tell Eli to get his family's act together (1 Samuel 2:27-36). The warning came in love. God loved Eli so much that he sent someone to tell him: Correct your course! You're headed for disaster! The warning was an effort to get Eli to do something to change his family's course.

Eli heard the message, and told his sons they were wrong. But like a lot of parents, Eli didn't exercise his responsibility to act when his boys wouldn't change their ways. He chose to do nothing. (1 Samuel 2:22-25).

When Eli didn't move beyond words, when he didn't take action, the continued compromises led to more compromises, and eventually, to a day of disaster. Eventually, God sent a hard message to Eli through the boy prophet Samuel: "I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family - from beginning to end. For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons made themselves contemptible, and he failed to restrain them." (1 Samuel 3:12-13, emphasis added)

If you're a parent, please consider these three principles:

- Words of warning are not enough.
- God expects you to take action to correct sin problems.
- Even if you live for God, your children may not follow the ways of God.

Samuel eventually became a father himself. Ironically, his sons were just like Eli's sons. But Samuel was different from Eli. When his sons had a chance to be promoted as key leaders of Israel, Samuel agreed with the key leaders of Israel that his sons' compromises had eliminated them from leading the country. (1 Samuel 8:1-5)

Unlike Eli, Samuel never heard a dire warning from God's prophets about the actions of his sons. Samuel had done his part, and had held his ground against compromise. While there must have been grief in Samuel's heart, there was no horrible day of disaster for his family.

God expects parents of today to be people not of words only, but also of action. Do whatever it takes to represent your family well before God.

3. Eventually, children are responsible for their own choices.

Both Eli and Samuel had surrounded their sons with the traditions of worship, and the written words of scripture. By their own choosing, however, all four sons headed in ungodly directions. Eli's sons paid a terrible price for their sins. Samuel's sons might have been spared the same treatment only because their father hadn't kept them in positions of national leadership once they had proven to be unethical leaders. (1 Samuel 8:1-5)

No matter what you might hear on national television shows, every problem in our present is not the problem of our parents! The choices we make carry consequences, and every person is eventually responsible for his or her own choices.

Scripture: Galatians 6:7-9

“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” (Galatians 6:7-9)

Conclusion: The grief of watching an ungodly child is severe for any parent. But there is good news, too, and a reason for godly parents to keep praying. The Bible is full of people who were headed down the path of Eli’s sons, of Samuel’s sons, but who heard the warning of God, heeded the words of God, and benefited from the blessings of God as they changed their ways.

There was David, a man who recovered from a deadly mistake late in his life. He became a greater man seeking after God’s own heart. There were kings like Rehoboam, Abijah, and Asa - men who saw evil and took action to correct it. And there were people like Simon Peter, Zacchaeus, and a nameless thief on the cross. They met Jesus and were transformed.

Throughout history, millions of people have changed their course, and been rescued by the same repentance, the same willingness to actually change evil ways. The decision to change today will bring enormous benefit for the future, perhaps for all eternity!