

When Grace Is Greasy

We face a serious leadership crisis in the American Church.

No biblical character is more pitiful than Eli, the Levite priest who defiled God's house because he couldn't bring himself to discipline his two wayward sons. The Bible says Hophni and Phinehas were "worthless men" (1 Sam. 2:12, NASB).

That was putting it mildly. These rascals, dressed up in their sweet-smelling priestly garb, were responsible for one of the first religious sex scandals in history. They became Eli's greatest shame.

Not only did these guys prey on vulnerable women (and engage in sex with them right in the doorway of the house of God), but they also were involved in the worst kind of financial exploitation. They cunningly manipulated people while taking offerings; then they misused the gifts for their own sordid gain.

Slick-talking preachers with zipper problems and big expense accounts—does this sound familiar?

Eli's fatal flaw reminds me of a problem we face today. He was timid about confronting sin. He tiptoed around the real problems. He lived in denial at a time when the church was in moral crisis.

Even though Eli questioned his sons' behavior and warned them of the consequences, he did not remove them from their positions. Even though the people in the pews were shocked by Hophni's and Phinehas' sexual escapades and financial shenanigans, Eli let his privileged boys go right on taking

offerings and raping parishioners. Year after year he allowed his sons to mock God and infect people with their corruption.

The story does not end well. Because sin had entered the house of the Lord, the ark of God's presence was captured by the Philistines, and Hophni and Phinehas were killed in the raid. The Bible paints an ugly picture of what happened when Eli heard the news of his sons' deaths: "Eli fell off the seat backward beside the gate, and his neck was broken and he died, for he was old and heavy" (1 Sam. 4:18).

That's not a flattering obituary, especially with the mention of Eli's obesity. Perhaps the Bible uses such graphically honest language to drive home the point that this pathetic priest was not only timid but also undisciplined in his personal life.

What does this obscure Old Testament character have to do with us? There are plenty of people today who have adopted Eli's theology of greasy grace and sloppy holiness. Their mantra is "mercy." They say there is no longer any need for church discipline or moral standards in leadership.

Among independent charismatic churches in America, we've developed a lovey-dovey culture that shies away from hard-line discipline and makes it easy for disgraced leaders to find new jobs fast. But I don't see this lax attitude in the apostle Paul, who set high standards of character for all his leaders, blacklisted false teachers and even excommunicated people who continued in immorality.

Paul went so far as to turn certain crooked leaders over to Satan so they would learn their lesson (see 1 Tim. 1:20).

Sounds kind of extreme, but extreme sin requires extreme measures.

The bottom line: Godly leaders draw lines and enforce moral standards—without becoming self-righteous and unkind. Ungodly leaders, on the other hand, may appear to be nice and compassionate, but they actually are being unfaithful to God if they refuse to require their spiritual sons and daughters to follow biblical standards of behavior.

We face a serious leadership crisis in the American church, and part of our problem is the sin of Eli. I am making an appeal to the fathers and mothers of the church: Will you please do your job? We need your rebuke and your rod of correction.

Please go to those who are exploiting God's people financially and make them stop. Please confront those who are robbing the church for personal gain. Please go to those who are abusing others, sexually or in any other way, remove them from leadership and get them healed.

Please don't let the Hophnis and Phinehases of today have airtime on Christian TV. Please don't showcase them in your conferences. Please stop looking the other way when you hear about their blunders. Please restore discipline to the body of Christ.

J. Lee Grady is the editor of Charisma. Check out his weekly online column, along with many other exclusive Web features, at [jlee.com](#). You can also post your comments about this article on our Web forum.