

TEXT: Judges 8:22-35

TITLE: THE SNARE OF HIERARCHICAL HUMAN LEADERSHIP = THE KING COMPLEX

BIG IDEA:

GOD'S PLAN FOR GOVERNANCE SHOULD NOT BE EMBRACED IN THEORY ONLY

INTRODUCTION:

Gideon had been anointed by the Spirit of God to deliver Israel from the Midianites. He is flush with success, having just seen the Lord use his tiny band of 300 soldiers defeat the vast enemy troops. He has just cleaned his sword of the blood of the two Midianite kings he captured and then executed. Now he faces the supreme test. How will he respond to the tendency of the depraved human heart to reject God's plan for governance and institute a hierarchical human system where he gets to enjoy the perks of honor and reward? This is a twofold problem: people crave a dominant, charismatic, outwardly successful personality to follow – call it the King Complex; and leaders love the attention and power and perks associated with being in charge.

The situation in Gideon's day was desperate. We have seen the degenerative cycles reflective of the vacuum of ongoing effective leadership.

Judges 21:25 *"In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes."* They had a king = Almighty God; they were not submitting to His kingship

But each time God graciously raised up a human savior to temporarily relieve their misery and serve as a type of the Messiah to come, the people failed to learn the lesson that God is alive and active and desiring to reign over them as their theocratic ruler. *"We want a king like the other nations"* was the cry of the people.

In the NT church, the situation is no different. The depraved human heart still falls into the snare of hierarchical human leadership. We naturally reject the divine plan and substitute our own expedient human wisdom – thinking that we are helping God solve the crisis we see in terms of the need for effective church leadership. Jesus warned of this tendency and admonished His foundational band of key leaders to embrace the uniqueness of **God's servant model** over the hierarchical Gentile model:

Matt. 20:25-28 *"But Jesus called them to Himself, and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.'"*

Mark 10:42-45

Despite such clear instruction, pastors continue to elevate themselves into the position of head of their local church and usurp the unique role reserved for the true Senior Pastor, the divinely ordained Head of the church, that Great Shepherd of the sheep, our Lord Jesus Christ. They do this with the best of intentions and with a sincere desire to see the church succeed. They do this despite embracing God's plan for governance in theory and teaching the NT model of plurality

of elder leadership. They do this because this is what the people really want. They do this because they like the perks of honor and reward associated with such unbalanced responsibility. They feel that the church will be better off if they can control the situation.

GOD'S PLAN FOR GOVERNANCE SHOULD NOT BE EMBRACED IN THEORY ONLY

How can you teach on this topic again, you might groan? That is the beauty of textually based, expositional preaching. God has placed this topic in chapters 8 and 9 at the heart of the message He wants to teach us in the book of Judges. I have invested my life in trying to implement this priority truth for the NT age – if I were basing my ministry on principles of expediency I would have rejected this truth a long time ago. I wake up from dreams at times where I find myself arguing these points of practical implementation ... But here we go again. . .

Let's remember some

OT BIBLICAL BACKGROUND:

Deut. 17:8-20 *"If any case is too difficult for you to decide, between one kind of homicide or another, between one kind of lawsuit or another, and between one kind of assault or another, being cases of dispute in your courts, then you shall arise and go up to the place which the LORD your God chooses. 9 "So you shall come to the Levitical priest or the judge who is in office in those days, and you shall inquire of them, and they will declare to you the verdict in the case. 10 "And you shall do according to the terms of the verdict which they declare to you from that place which the LORD chooses; and you shall be careful to observe according to all that they teach you. 11 "According to the terms of the law which they teach you, and according to the verdict which they tell you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside from the word which they declare to you, to the right or the left. 12 "And the man who acts presumptuously by not listening to the priest who stands there to serve the LORD your God, nor to the judge, that man shall die; thus you shall purge the evil from Israel. 13 "Then all the people will hear and be afraid, and will not act presumptuously again. 14 "When you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, and you possess it and live in it, and you say, 'I will set a king over me like all the nations who are around me,' 15 you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses, one from among your countrymen you shall set as king over yourselves; you may not put a foreigner over yourselves who is not your countryman. 16 "Moreover, he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor shall he cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, since the LORD has said to you, 'You shall never again return that way.' 17 "Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself. 18 "Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. 19 "And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, 20 that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left; in order that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel.*

1 Sam. 8:1-22 *And it came about when Samuel was old that he appointed his sons judges over Israel. 2 Now the name of his first-born was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judging in Beersheba. 3 His sons, however, did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after*

dishonest gain and took bribes and perverted justice. 4 Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah; 5 and they said to him, "Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. **Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations.**" 6 But the thing was displeasing in the sight of Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed to the LORD. 7 And the LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, **but they have rejected Me from being king over them.**" 8 "Like all the deeds which they have done since the day that I brought them up from Egypt even to this day-- in that they have forsaken Me and served other gods-- so they are doing to you also. 9 "Now then, listen to their voice; however, you shall solemnly warn them and tell them of the procedure of the king who will reign over them." 10 So Samuel spoke all the words of the LORD to the people who had asked of him a king. 11 And he said, "This will be the procedure of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and place them for himself in his chariots and among his horsemen and they will run before his chariots. 12 "And he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and of fifties, and some to do his plowing and to reap his harvest and to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. 13 "He will also take your daughters for perfumers and cooks and bakers. 14 "And he will take the best of your fields and your vineyards and your olive groves, and give them to his servants. 15 "And he will take a tenth of your seed and of your vineyards, and give to his officers and to his servants. 16 "He will also take your male servants and your female servants and your best young men and your donkeys, and use them for his work. 17 "He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his servants. 18 "Then you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day." 19 Nevertheless, the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel, and they said, "No, **but there shall be a king over us, 20 that we also may be like all the nations, that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.**" 21 Now after Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the LORD's hearing. 22 And the LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to their voice, and appoint them a king." So Samuel said to the men of Israel, "Go every man to his city."

Let's work our way through the text in Judges 8:

I. (:22-23) THEORETICAL PROFESSION OF GOD'S PLAN FOR GOVERNANCE

A. (:22) Man Desires a Single, Preeminent, Visible Ruler – Advocating for the Human Kingship Model – like the Gentile World

"Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, 'Rule over us, both you and your son, also your son's son, for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian.'"

Insecurity of men – need someone impressive to take the point for them; Look at who Satan is using to lay the groundwork for this temptation – it is the men of Israel – the failure of male leadership has been a chronic problem for the people of God; they just don't want all the responsibility that God has laid out for them; they don't want it in the home; they don't want it in the church of God; can we enlist someone to carry a disproportionate part of this burden? So they approach Gideon with this demand

Dynastic succession – passed down within the family

Is. 10:15 – *"Is the axe to boast itself over the one who chops with it? Is the saw to exalt itself over the one who wields it? That would be like a club wielding those who life it, or like a rod lifting him who is not wood."*

Placing the preeminence in the visible instrument used by God rather than placing it in the invisible God Himself -- God is the one who had delivered them -- Gideon should have aggressively corrected their faulty thinking here

Inrig: One of the oldest tendencies of our sinful hearts is to exalt men to the place that belongs only to God. In the history of the church, there has been a pernicious tendency to elevate men into the position that belongs only to the Lord Jesus. Men are given special titles, special powers, and special clothing and are set apart from ordinary Christians. One of the most evident patterns in the evangelical church today is for men who are pastors to take more and more power.

James Jordan: we find explicitly stated the principle that the savior is the lord. Those who separate Christ as Savior from Christ as Lord are completely out of line from Scripture at this point. Gideon's reply is sound: The Lord saved you, so the Lord must be your king.

B. (:23) God Has Ordained a Single, Preeminent, Invisible Ruler -- Rejecting the Human Kingship Model --

"But Gideon said to them, 'I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the LORD shall rule over you.'"

- OT -- a theocracy
- NT -- Christ as Head of the Church

You cannot get a clearer doctrinal statement of clarity and conviction than this short response from the lips of Gideon; it would have helped if he would have clarified: Look, your request doesn't even make sense; don't you realize the deliverance you experienced was not of my doing?

Psalms 10:16 *"The Lord is king forever"*

James Jordan: Those who separate Christ as Savior from Christ as lord are completely out of line from Scripture at this point. Gideon's reply is sound: The Lord saved you, so the Lord must be your King.

Inrig: That was the high point of Gideon's life. He had not only resisted a very strong temptation, but he had stood for a great biblical truth, the truth of the kingship of God in Israel. If only the story ended there! But it does not, and the irony is that Gideon's decline began in the very moment of his affirmation of God's absolute kingship. Unfortunately, his actions were not consistent with his words.

Transition: Problem: What is taught in **theory** is often not embraced in **practice** --

Example of **MacArthur's** key work: Answering the Key Questions About Elders

"Does government by elders eliminate the role of a special leader?"

Richard Swartley: Senior pastors, even those committed to church governance with elders, have curious ways of justifying their own privileged positions. The lure of being in charge and of having a title seems to prove an irresistible temptation for most church leaders. Some even say, "Yes, I believe in team leadership: I am the coach, and all the others are the players." Equality of elders does not exist in that formulation! Even **Gene Getz** and **John MacArthur** differentiate themselves from the other elders. This is despite the fact that both have written excellent treatments on elders, and are very effective in presenting the biblical argument for plurality and

equality of elders. Sadly, both men engage in special pleading for senior pastor positions, positions they hold in their own churches. Their arguments for these special positions are unsupported by all they have presented and previously concluded on the biblical mandate on elder equality. In fact, their assertions in their concluding chapters are contradictory to, and destructive of, their previous theses on elders' leadership! (To his credit, in recent years MacArthur has nuanced his position on the senior pastor title.)

Transition: Look at the close juxtaposition in this short text between Gideon's doctrinal orthodoxy and his practical compromises:

II. (:24-31) PRACTICAL COMPROMISES THAT UNDERMINE GOD'S PLAN FOR GOVERNANCE

3 Key Areas of Compromise

A. (:24-27) Realm of Ecclesiastical Authority -- Compromise of Presumptuous Usurping of Authority

"Yet Gideon said to them, 'I would request of you, that each of you give me an earring from his spoil.' (For they had gold earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.) And they said, 'We will surely give them.' So they spread out a garment, and every one of them threw an earring there from his spoil. And the weight of the gold earrings that he requested was 1,700 shekels of gold, besides the crescent ornaments and the pendants and the purple robes which were on the kings of Midian, and besides the neck bands that were on their camels' necks. And Gideon made it into an ephod, and placed it in his city, Ophrah, and all Israel played the harlot with it there, so that it became a snare to Gideon and his household."

Recall that earlier Abraham had rejected the spoils of war: **Genesis 14:21-24**

Block: he requested that each of his men give him a gold earring from their share of the spoils of war. This action is doubly significant. On the one hand, by requesting gifts from each of his men, Gideon demanded a symbolic gesture of submission. Gladly surrendering a share of their loot, they confirmed their status as his vassals. On the other hand, the amount of gold Gideon received takes on the character of a royal treasure. Seventeen hundred shekels of gold amounts to 43 pounds. This is indeed a treasure fit for a king!

Recognized a legitimate problem: Israel lacked a strong high priest; how were they to discern the will of God? God's people need direction!

Must understand the **function of the ephod**:

Inrig: An ephod was simply a garment that resembled a fancy apron, but it had a very special significance. The ephod was part of the clothing of the high priest. On the front was the linen breastplate which had the two stones the high priest used to discover the will of God, the Urim and the Thummin, and in the course of time, the ephod had become the symbol of the office of the high priest. When the high priest put on the ephod, it was because he wanted to know the will of God.

Constable: there are three possible alternatives [concerning what this ephod was]: that it was a garment after the pattern of the high-priestly ephod but with an unusual degree of gold ornamentation; that it was a replica of the high-priestly garment made of pure gold; or that it was

a free-standing image [cf. 1 Sam. 2:28; 14:3]

Block: Because this object was “*placed*” in Gideon’s city and became an object of pagan worship, this meaning seems unlikely here. Gideon created some type of image and draped a garment (ephod) over it with the part standing for the whole. Before he had torn down the altar of Baal; now things have come full circle.

Provided an illegitimate human resolution: Gideon stepped in to be the **visionary** through whom God would communicate His plans and direction for His people; important for the sake of unity to have one man take up that visionary role; worship was to be centralized around the tabernacle in Shiloh – not in Ophrah; and the Levitical priesthood was ordained by God to supervise the worship and wear the ephod; very sincere objectives on the part of Gideon, but outside of God’s revealed plan and contrary to God’s instructions

Imagine the scene of some poor little biblical prophet who might try to step up and confront Gideon regarding his presumptuous sin:

Prophet: “You know the function of the ephod should be reserved for administration by the high priest.”

Gideon: “I agree with that in theory, but we don’t seem to have an effective high priest and the people need to know the will of God right now.”

Prophet: “You don’t want to act presumptuously here.”

Gideon: “God has been working through me giving great success. This step will help unify God’s people.”

The poor unknown prophet would have been squashed!

James Jordan: The parallel between this incident and that of the golden calf must not be missed. As Gideon drifts into a *de facto* though not *de jure* (in fact, though not in law) humanistic kingship, the golden calf type of image worship also creeps into society. . . The ephod at Ophrah came to be regarded as a magical answer box, and people looked to it rather than to the Levites and the Lord for answers. Even Gideon lost sight of the person character of God, and came to regard the ephod with superstitious awe. It corrupted him, his family, and the community. As Gideon lost sight of the personal rule of God the Lord, he lost sight of Who Israel’s true King really was, and picked up more and more of the characteristics of an oriental, humanistic king.

S. Lewis Johnson: Why is it that we as human beings are dissatisfied with the things that God has given us? He has given us himself as our guide, as our leader, as our head. We do not need any human guide, any human leader, any human head. We have the greatest head that the church could possibly have. We need his word, to hear his voice as the spirit uses it in our lives. We are to be submissive to the Scriptures. Let them be our final standard of faith and practice. And following them we shall please our head and be fruitful for him.

Aside (:28) Blessing Despite Compromise

[Proves that blessing does not legitimize compromise]

“So Midian was subdued before the sons of Israel, and they did not lift up their heads anymore. And the land was undisturbed for forty years in the days of Gideon.”

Must not forget that for the most part, Gideon was a good man and an exceptional judge as the Spirit worked through him

Last period of peace and rest referenced in the book of Judges

B. (:29) Realm of Indulgent Lifestyle -- Compromise of Regal Living

“Then Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and lived in his own house.”

Risen from obscurity to prosperity – but forgetting to exalt the Lord in everything

Block: The statement is superfluously tautological unless the verb “*to live*” means more than “*to reside*.” Naturally people reside in their own houses. But if the verb is understood mansively “*to sit* [on a throne],” that is, “*to be king, to reign*,” then the comment is sensible.

C. (:30-31) Realm of Sexual Morality -- Compromise of Fleshly Indulgence

1. (:30) Multiplying Wives with Blessing of Many Sons

“Now Gideon had seventy sons who were his direct descendants, for he had many wives.”

Mixed tone here; blessing of many sons; but problem of many wives

Kings had the practice of multiplying wives and thus increasing their power and influence; why should a king restrain his fleshly impulses? Certainly he deserved to grow in prominence and power

Illustration: Passages from book by **Richard Swartley**: A Wolf in the Pulpit – The Setup for Moral Failure and the Abuse of Power

This same successful, visible, pulpit ministry and elevated leadership position have another downside. The preacher’s apparent power leads him to prideful presumptions, with the regrettable result that his inner person is corrupted. Narcissistic and arrogant, he has come to believe he is entitled to special privileges. Worse, he decides he is exempted from the rules that govern others. He has arrived progressively at an unhealthy place. Others around him – especially women – are not safe. . .

Gideon embraced his celebrity status – he liked the prestige and the royal treatment

2. (:31) Fooling Around with Concubine with Curse of Problem Son

“And his concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son, and he named him Abimelech.”

“*Concubine*” – more of a slave status; not elevated to equal status with the wives; created situation of tension

Brensinger: In such marriages, the woman remains with her parents rather than moving in with her husband, who then visits her from time to time. Furthermore, any offspring resulting from their union remain with and belong to the mother’s family, not the father’s.

Name Abimelech = “*my father is king*” – Gideon has ended up in practice where he professed he would never go in theory – usurping the unique authority of God

Herbert Wolf: probably does not mean that Gideon regarded himself as monarch. In personal names “*my father*” normally refers to God, so Gideon could have been reemphasizing the

assertion of v.23. ???

III. (:32-35) DEGENERATIVE CYCLE RENEWED AND INTENSIFIED

A. (:32-33a) Turning Point is the Death of Gideon

“And Gideon the son of Joash died at a ripe old age and was buried in the tomb of his father Joash, in Ophrah of the Abiezrites. Then it came about, as soon as Gideon was dead,”

Blessing of a long life – faithful but faulty

Herbert Wolf: To die “*at a good old age*” implies a long and full life. Elsewhere in the OT the expression is used only of Abraham (Gen. 15:15; 25:8) and David (1 Chron 29:28).

Blessing of an honored burial

Shows that he is largely regarded by God as a good and effective leader – to some degree he had been holding back the depravity of his countrymen

B. (:33b-34) Total Depravity Displayed in Idolatry and Ingratitude

1. (:33b) Idolatry

“that the sons of Israel again played the harlot with the Baals, and made Baal-berith their god.”

Obviously God was not very important to the Israelites in their everyday living; they slipped right back into idolatry; Friendship with the world is the pattern of the church today; a Christian brother at work was lamenting to me that in the church he sees very little evidence of transformed Christian lives – of those who are characterized as followers of Jesus Christ; we look just like the children of this world

2. (:34) Ingratitude

“Thus the sons of Israel did not remember the LORD their God, who had delivered them from the hands of all their enemies on every side;”

Rom. 1:21-23 *“For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.”*

Quick remedy for spiritual problems in your life; especially the spiritual blahs –

1 Thess. 5:16-18 *“Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks”*

C. (:35) Traitorous Mentality Reflected Towards Gideon’s Family

“nor did they show kindness to the household of Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon), in accord with all the good that he had done to Israel.”

CONCLUSION:

Who is reigning as King in your life? Are you living from the perspective of doing what is right in your own eyes? Do you desire to live like the Gentiles live?

In The New Reformation, **Greg Ogden** observes: “A chief reason why the dependency model of ministry is still dominant is that many pastors’ sense of worth and value is derived from being a benevolent lord reigning over the little fiefdom . . . Underlying the dependency model of ministry is a distorted and unhealthy means of seeking value. Pastors and people are co-conspirators denying the addiction and fostering the sickness.” . . .

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What are you doing to encourage and support the genuine practice of plurality of church leadership in your local setting?
- 2) How should leaders respond to the praise and appreciation expressed by those under their ministry?
- 3) What are you doing to combat the temptation toward idolatry and ingratitude in your own life?
- 4) Who is really ruling over your life and your church?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Douglas Goins: {in foreword to book by Swartley] The all too common moral failure of men at the top of hierarchical church structures is disheartening to those who follow them, and injurious to the cause of Christ. In contrast to a shared New Testament leadership life of community, transparency, equality, and accountability, too many pastors find themselves isolated, alone at the top, unaccountable, a law unto themselves, set up for spiritual failure.

Swartley: In almost all cases since the third century, from the smallest church to the largest, one man has been in charge: in small churches it is the solo pastor; in large churches it is the person called the “senior pastor.” The focus on one man may start innocently in a new fellowship when a church planter leads a new ministry, or when a small group starts a church with the preaching falling to one man. He alone becomes known as the pastor. Traditionally, as the body grows in size, and as more men and women are added to the staff, the original leader rises in a hierarchical structure, with himself as senior pastor. Such a superior leadership position can have very adverse consequences: the man may have put himself on the path to moral failure. . .

Keil & Delitzsch: The germs of Gideon’s error, which became a snare to him and to his house, lie unquestionably deeper than this, namely, in the fact that the high-priesthood had probably lost its worth in the eyes of the people on account of the worthlessness of its representatives, so that they no longer regarded the high priest as the sole or principal medium of divine revelation; and

therefore Gideon, to whom the Lord had manifested himself directly, as He had not to any judge or leader of the people since the time of Joshua, might suppose that he was not acting in violation of the law, when he had an ephod made, and thus provided himself with a substratum or vehicle for inquiring the will of the Lord. His sin therefore consisted chiefly in his invading the prerogative of the Aaronic priesthood, drawing away the people from the one legitimate sanctuary, and thereby not only undermining the theocratic unity of Israel, but also giving an impetus to the relapse of the nation into the worship of Baal after his death. This sin became a snare to him and to his house.

David Silversides: The Lord Does Reign

There were faults in Gideon that affected the next generation. He declined to be king and yet he became like a king in some ways. Encouraged idolatry and idea of a monarchy after his death. Abimelech seizes power; first over his immediate family circle; pushes to be king in Israel; lot of internal strife where polygamy is practiced

Glenn Tomlinson: The King Complex – Loving a Harlot

You see something of the love of God for His wayward people; the bible is like a mirror is showing us what we are really like; coming off a grand deliverance that was all of God; Defiant theme of Invictus poem; the temptation to replace God as king as appealed to human nature from the very beginning; **Gen. 3:5-6** “*you will be like God*”; opposite of inferiority complex = lack self confidence; king complex is our natural bent = we want to be in control of our lives; attribute the blessings we have received from Jesus to someone else; robbing God of His rightful place;

1. See how the people evidence a King Complex

You would have expected the people to praise God in v. 22; instead they ascribe deliverance to Gideon; they exalted the instrument over the wielder of that instrument; they exalted instruments that had not even been used; honor was appropriate for a leader used by God; but this was over the top; **Is. 10:15**; when we see blessing we are only the instruments; maybe one of Gideon’s sons participated in the battle – but certainly had no grandsons at this point; creating dynastic succession; the cult of personality and celebrity; removing God and putting someone else on the pedestal -- **1 Cor. 1:10-13**; read many Christian authors so you don’t just idolize one

2. See how the leaders evidence a King Complex

How does Gideon respond to all that adulation and praise and honor? He gives a godly response verbally; “Thank you but may the Lord be praised ... I am just the instrument;” We tend to mouth humility but practice pride; lack the Spirit’s wisdom; began to take the glory back for himself; the crescent ornamentation of the Midianite kings were taken by Gideon

- See the problem in the request that Gideon made
- See the problem in the name that Gideon gave to his son Abimelech