

HYPOCRISY

Judges

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HYPOCRISY. We can have our theology right and yet live as hypocrites. This is not to say it is okay to have wrong theology (That's another problem this passage does not directly address.) But our lifestyle should match our words. There's perhaps nothing that causes people to turn away from Christianity more than the hypocrisy of some of those who profess Christ. People make enough excuses not to trust in Christ without those in the church giving them ammunition!

In not correcting the people as they give him credit for the victory over the Midianites, Gideon takes what did not belong to him—God's glory. He causes others not to give God the credit. What a contrast to the song of Deborah, in which Yahweh received the honor and praise that he is due and which is sung just before the Gideon account. When God works through us, whether in a formal or informal ministry situation, we must give him the honor and glory. The deep-rooted pride of human achievement can blur our vision as to how we got where we are. God has gifted men and women, and therefore whatever they accomplish ultimately redounds to his credit. The athlete, the intellectual, the businessman, the preacher—all owe their achievements and accomplishments to God's endowment. Gideon should've been content with being used to help accomplish the defeat of the Midianites. Instead, he denies God and seizes the acclaim of his countryman.

The apostle Paul challenges us: "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). Whether it is a promotion, accomplishment, recognition, or a success, the Lord should be the first to receive the glory. To glorify God is the whole duty of humankind. Jesus prayed, "I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began" (John 17:4-5). Gideon and his puny three hundred did not win the battle; the Lord did. Thus all boasting should have been in the Lord (Jer. 9:23-24; 1 Cor. 10:31; 2 Cor. 10:17).

CAUSE OF SIN. This passage is also a warning about being the cause of sin among the body of believers. God knows that sin will come. Nonetheless, one should not be the cause of any stumbling in the body, for God takes the source of sin in the body seriously. This warning crosses the centuries. God holds the source of such sin totally accountable. The church today is, on the one hand, prone to pay little attention to the details concerning doctrinal teachings in God's revelation. This response puts the community at risk. Often practical mistakes ensue because theological errors stand behind them. On the other hand, practical errors may occur, even with "correct" theology. When this happens, it immediately undercuts the theology. It causes others to sin. The sequel to the story of Gideon (i.e. the story of Abimelech), will document the repercussions of Gideon's sin. As with him, when we cause others to sin, destructive consequences



wreak havoc throughout our families, our communities or our nation.

Those who are called to leadership in the kingdom of God face a constant temptation to exchange the divine agenda for personal ambition. Ironically, the more impressive ones achievements, the greater the temptation. Gideon began to behave as if the victory has been achieved by "the sword of Gideon" rather than by "the sword of the Lord." Unfortunately, Lord Acton's famous saying that "power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely" is often true in the church. Too often in their dealings with others, Christian preachers, teachers, leaders, elders, and deacons exhibit their egos rather than the person of Christ.

This text makes it clear that Gideon was able to resist the obvious temptations to rule over the Israelites, at least in his initial reaction. But he fell prey to something more subtle, which eventually brought about the same damage. Often it is not the obvious temptation that brings about our demise into sin, but the subtle, more nuanced, and more sophisticated temptation that is our undoing. Vigilance for both is the Christians call.