



FEED MY SHEEP

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How Church and State Control People

Ahithophel, traitor to David, had counseled David's treasonous son, Absalom, to essentially have a public orgy with David's ten concubines.

2 Samuel 16:22 So they spread Absalom a tent upon the top of the house; and Absalom went in unto his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel.

Later that same day Ahithophel gives his counsel on how Absalom should secure the throne for himself.

2 Samuel 17:1 Moreover Ahithophel said unto Absalom, Let me now choose out twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue after David this night:

2 And I will come upon him while he is weary and weak handed, and will make him afraid: and all the people that are with him shall flee; and I will smite the king only:

3 And I will bring back all the people unto thee: the man whom thou seekest is as if all returned: so all the people shall be in peace.

Let us analyze this advice. Ahithophel thinks the smartest thing to do is to *immediately* assemble a sizeable contingent of troops and go after David before he has time to get organized. Ahithophel knows that David has been slowed down in his flight because he has a large number of women and children with him.

He figures if they can march during the night, they will catch up with David before he has a chance to cross Jordan and organize his forces. He points out that David and his entourage will be weary and weak, so that when 12 thousand soldiers approach David's camp,

the people will flee out of sheer fright. At that point, Ahithophel proposes that *he* will strike David alone. Ahithophel realizes that as long as David is alive, Absalom can never be secure on the throne, and Ahithophel himself would remain in danger as a traitor. His one overriding goal, therefore, is to assassinate King David. Once that is accomplished, Absalom can provide amnesty for all the people who followed David, and Absalom's occupation of the throne will be accepted by all. Frankly, it was a very sound plan. The key to its success, however, lay in the fact that Absalom had to act *immediately*. What did Absalom think of this advice?

4 And the saying pleased Absalom well, and all the elders of Israel.

5 Then said Absalom, Call now Hushai the Archite also, and let us hear likewise what he saith.

This is most interesting! Absalom has already heard the sage advice of the most reputable counselor in the realm. He likes the advice. All the other top-ranking conspirators agree that it is a viable plan, but then, for *some strange reason*, Absalom decides to ask for counsel from Hushai. Gee, I wonder Who could have caused Absalom to ask for this advice, a move that will ultimately prove to be his fatal mistake. This looks like the Father's handiwork here. He seems to have His hands in everything, doesn't He?

6 And when Hushai was come to Absalom, Absalom spake unto him, saying, Ahithophel hath spoken after this manner: shall we do after his saying? if not; speak thou.

Notice the contrast between Ahithophel's advice and the plan suggested by Hushai.

7 And Hushai said unto Absalom, The counsel that Ahithophel hath given is not good at this time.

First, Hushai adds that phrase *at this time*. By this, Hushai is seemingly saying that Ahithophel's earlier advice for Absalom to have sex with his father's concubines was indeed good advice. By appearing to approve of this deed, Hushai not only thereby strengthens his relationship with Absalom (because he's basically giving Absalom an "ataboy" and a pat on the back), but it serves to lend more credence to Hushai now that he is setting forth an alternative to Ahithophel's plan. The following, then, is God's method of answering David's earlier prayer to "turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness." Ahithophel's advice becomes foolhardy in the mind of Absalom when he hears this plan set forth by Hushai.

8 For, said Hushai, thou knowest thy father and his men, that they *be* mighty men, and they *be* chafed in their minds, as a bear robbed of her whelps in the field: and thy father is a man of war, and will not lodge with the people.

Hushai uses *fear* as the first of his psychological devices to persuade Absalom to follow *his* counsel. Whereas Ahithophel had declared that David and his men would be weak and weary, Hushai says: Look, Absalom, you *know* your father and his mighty men. They are not 97-pound weaklings. They are men accustomed to the rigors and privations of war. And they have reason to be fightin' mad. Hushai uses a word picture which would be quite familiar and vivid for men in those days: that of a mother bear being robbed of her cub. *That* is a picture of rage. Thus, Hushai begins to plant fear in Absalom, so that he will be more receptive to follow the rest of his plan.

Contrary to Ahithophel's belief that the women and children will slow David down, Hushai points out that David and his mighty men will separate from them. "You won't find them like sitting ducks out there on the plain in the wilderness by the Jordan." He then continues:

9 Behold, he is hid now in some pit, or in some *other* place: and it will come to pass, when some of them be overthrown at the first, that whosoever heareth it will say, There is a slaughter

among the people that follow Absalom.

10 And he also *that is* valiant, whose heart is as the heart of a lion, shall utterly melt: for all Israel knoweth that thy father is a mighty man, and they which *be* with him *are* valiant men.

Hushai is now laying it on thick to reinforce the fear motive: "Look, Absalom, your father knew how to survive and he lived in many caves while fleeing Saul long before *you* were even born. He's a *master* of warfare out there in the wilderness. And do you know what will happen if you follow Ahithophel's' advice?"

"Your father and his men will be hiding in various holes and when your 12,000 men go out there, David and his men will begin picking them off one by one. Your soldiers won't even know where the attack is coming from. Your father is a master of disguise. Even your bravest soldiers will become fearful when going up against your warrior father.

"And then when word gets back that your troops are not only suffering some casualties, but that they can't even *see* where the shots are coming from, well then, your royal majesty, then, you will really have a morale problem here among your loyalists. The people who followed you will begin to waver and you will be in serious trouble then."

Having thus planted the fear motive deep in Absalom's psyche, Hushai then appeals to the usurper's pride and ego. This could also be a left-handed jab by Hushai against Ahithophel, because Ahithophel was proposing to lead the troops himself and get the glory for the victory.

11 Therefore I counsel that all Israel be generally gathered unto thee, from Dan even to Beersheba, as the sand that is by the sea for multitude; and that thou go to battle in thine own person.

We see how Hushai paints a picture of this vast army—as the sand by the sea for multitude—hoping Absalom would take the bait and visualize himself at the head of it. Given his privileged upbringing, it is possible that Absalom had never personally lifted a bow in battle. But he was a prideful man and this certainly appealed to his enormous ego. Hushai continues with the word pictures, now incorporating himself as standing right alongside his new king.

12 So shall we come upon him in some place

where he shall be found, and we will light upon him as the dew falleth on the ground: and of him and of all the men that *are* with him there shall not be left so much as one.

13 Moreover, if he be gotten into a city, then shall all Israel bring ropes to that city, and we will draw it into the river, until there be not one small stone found there.

Thus did Hushai—with some rather fantastic final flourishes—paint this panoramic picture of a glorious victory with Absalom playing the starring role. We can easily imagine Absalom beaming from ear to ear as Hushai finishes his proposal.

14 And Absalom and all the men of Israel said, The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel. [And now listen carefully...] For the LORD had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, to the intent that the LORD might bring evil upon Absalom.

Can one ask for a statement any more clear than that concerning the sovereignty of God? Incidentally, notice that the counsel of Ahithophel is characterized as “good.” Does that mean that God approved of Absalom’s ravishing the ten concubines? No, not at all. One explanation is that it was “good” advice from Absalom’s perspective, not that it was good and righteous and morally upright in the absolute sense. But it was “good” from a political maneuvering sense.

Another explanation is that the good advice being referred to is only that advice by Ahithophel on how to remove David from the scene. In other words, from a tactical military perspective, it *was* sound advice. But, as we have seen, God caused Absalom to ultimately decide that Hushai’s advice was superior, and thus Ahithophel’s counsel was relegated to foolishness, comparatively speaking. Then, in keeping with the intelligence plans of David, Hushai gets word to the co-high priests, the spy-priests, of what has just transpired.

15 Then said Hushai unto Zadok and to Abiathar the priests, Thus and thus did Ahithophel counsel Absalom and the elders of Israel; and thus and thus have I counselled.

16 Now therefore send quickly, and tell David, saying, Lodge not this night in the plains of the wilderness, but speedily pass over; lest the king be swallowed up, and all the people that *are* with him.

At this point, it is clear that although the advice of both Ahithophel and Hushai has been heard, Absalom has not yet made the final and fateful decision. That is why Hushai is telling the priests what his advice was and what Ahithophel’s advice was. Time was of the essence in getting word to David. Fortunately, or better said, providentially, Absalom’s *delay* in making a decision is bad news for Ahithophel because every minute wasted by indecision is providing David more and more time to escape across Jordan.

The Saul character in Absalom is manifesting in a number of ways: First, he is proud. His ego causes him to see the world unrealistically—as though *he* could command the armies of Israel and even *think* that he could succeed against his warrior father along with his elite “Delta forces.”

Absalom’s *indecisiveness* has just rendered moot Ahithophel’s plan of action. There is a general principle to be observed here which can benefit all of us: *indecisiveness sometimes leads to the wrong decision by default.* In many cases, it is a situation in which, by not deciding affirmatively to do something, we have actually, by default, made a decision not to do it. One can imagine any number of examples; perhaps some have occurred in your own life.

For example, suppose you go for a job interview. You like most of the things about the job, but you’re not sure. You tell the interviewer that you need to think about it and you’ll phone him tomorrow. Well, of course, you know what happens. You call back the next day only to learn that the position has been filled.

Here is one that happened to me many years ago. We were looking for a house to rent. We found one that looked pretty nice, but for some reason I cannot remember, my wife and I decided to go out to the car and discuss it for a few minutes. While we were sitting there, someone else came and took a tour of the house. After a few minutes, we decided to take it, but when we were going up the steps of the front porch, the owner was coming out with the other looker—who had just rented the place, of course.

We learned from that incident because at the next house we had opportunity to rent, nearly the same thing happened. We took a tour. We liked it. As we walked out onto the front porch after the tour, the rental agent said he had another looker due any minute. I looked at my wife. She nodded. So I looked at

the agent and said: "We'll take it!" By the time we paid the deposit and first month's rent, the other looker was arriving.

The character quality of decisiveness is one that was lacking in Absalom and is lacking in many Saul-types. You might even know some. Of course, this must be balanced because one can also go to the opposite extreme and have the negative quality of being impulsive or reckless and irresponsible. Decisiveness must have wisdom and discernment as her handmaidens. Here, Absalom's indecisiveness contrasts sharply with David, as we will see next time.

A second general principle which we can draw from the story thus far is that *a person who is highly susceptible to flattery can also be controlled by flattery*. It is the vice of pride which makes one susceptible to flattery. Hushai's appeal to Absalom's pride and vanity ultimately made him putty in Hushai's hands. It was this which led to Absalom's downfall, thus illustrating how pride goes before a fall. Pride—flattery—fall.

A third universally true principle which is evident in this story is that *fear is one of the strongest means of controlling people*. **A person who can cause you to fear can ultimately control you**. This applies at every level of society, from the family to the marketplace to the government. We hear of horrible stories these days of men who batter their wives. They control the wife with the threat of more violence. It takes great courage on the part of wives to overcome that fear enough to seek help.

At the national level, despots, dictators and totalitarians of every stripe and in every age have understood this principle quite thoroughly. Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin died in 1953. Did you know that Stalin was not his real name? But then Hitler was not Adolf's real name either. We will not elaborate at this juncture. However, Stalin is one of the premier examples of a man who controlled a large chunk of global geography by means of extreme fear. Over the many years of his reign of terror, he was responsible for the deaths of perhaps as many as 30 million people in the Soviet Union, primarily Christians.

But it is not only government which has mastered this strategy of controlling people through fear, the *church* also has applied it with tragic effectiveness. I speak of the church in general, of course. For

many centuries, even up to the present time, the Saul church and their Saul-type ministers have used fear as a tool for controlling the sheep. They treat them like cattle. Remember, Saul was a cattle man, not a shepherd. Shepherds lead the sheep by example. Cowboys drive cattle from behind and bark orders.

There is one doctrine above all others which utilizes fear and has allowed the Saul church hierarchy to control the minds and thus control the lives of the people. It is the doctrine of eternal hell fire. In a nutshell, here is how it works: somewhere in the early stages of the Christian church, some ungodly leaders realized that while most people fear death, what they fear far more than being dead is torturous pain which often accompanies the process of dying. So the leaders thought to themselves, gosh, since people fear pain more than they do being dead, then if we could just get them to believe that *we* have power over their souls' eternal destiny; and that if they don't do what we say, that when they die, God will torture them for all eternity in a burning hell; well, bless my soul, I think we've just come up with the *ultimate* form of people control.

Think of that! For centuries, Christian people actually gave away power over themselves to the Saul church by believing that God would actually do such a thing. I was taught that doctrine as a child, and I believed it. I can tell you, it struck fear in me. I was a good little Roman Catholic for all my childhood and teenage years—until the time when I left the seminary, which is when I left Catholicism completely. Unfortunately, most Protestant denominations preach the same pernicious doctrine.

We have examined this damnable doctrine extensively in the follow-up album to our sovereignty of God series. The album, (A-103), called *It's Hell...or Nothing!*, consists of 10 CD's or tapes. (Specify which format you want.) It is available for a gift of \$33 post-paid. We will continue studying Absalom's rebellion next month.

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