

CRISIS IN THE CHURCH

Part 4

THE WORD OF GOD AND LEADERSHIP

By
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National mourning erupted when Israel's first king, Saul son of Kish and his son Jonathan, were slain in battle against the Philistines. When David and his men, who were hunted by the king, heard the news, "they mourned and wept and fasted till evening" (2 Sam. 1:12). Saul's death inspired David to pen the poetic elegy, *Lament of the Bow*. Three times in this dirge the psalmist bewailed, "How the mighty have fallen!" (2 Sam. 1:19, 25, 27). The sword of Saul would no longer subdue the enemies of Israel.

If we only had the discernment to see the spiritual condition of a growing number of church leaders we would cry out like David, "*How the mighty have fallen!*" Many of our spiritual leaders have fallen in battle. They have grown emotionally and spiritually weary in the fight and have lost the strength to brandish their swords and wield their shields. Scores of others have dropped their swords—the Word of God—due to the pressures of family and ministry. Whole contingents of leaders have forsaken their sword thinking that it is irrelevant in this more enlightened age. They are spiritual traitors, anarchists against the Most High because they have discarded Biblical truths to embrace politically correct lies.

No matter what motivates spiritual leaders to abandon the preaching, teaching and ministration of God's Word they have done it nonetheless. Consequently, the church-at-large is abandoning the Scriptures for a tantalizing array of fad teachings that are detrimental to the true faith, and at times, even damnable. This problem is at a crisis level in western Christianity. Since America influences the world, we are spawning an international, spiritual crisis. Like Israel of old, the church is prostituting herself with the world and spreading that spirit of prostitution.

As goes the shepherds, so goes the flock. When men of God courageously preach the truth then you will find the people being lovers of the truth. But when the shepherds forsake the

Word, then the sheep will follow them to their own peril. We will now examine four issues that cause leaders to forsake the Word of God.

WEARINESS

The pastoral ministry is emotionally draining, spiritually exhausting and physically taxing. This can cause weariness to seep into the very bones of pastors. The natural challenges of ministry in a fallen world is amplified in America due to our self-indulgent, individualistic society that produces a lot of mean-spirited people that take out their frustrations and pent up anger on the pastor (a good dose of repentance can transform mean-spirited people into lovable saints).

When pastors grow weary of fighting with parishioners and board members there are four different directions they can take: 1) They can passionately seek healing from Jesus and continue the good fight. 2) They can leave the ministry and go into secular work. 3) They can take another church hoping to find a congregation that is not as self-absorbed and contentious. Unfortunately, this is more than likely a fantasy. 4) Or they can accommodate the people by becoming maintenance pastors that don't want to rock-the-boat or stir up a hornet's nest of cantankerous people by preaching the truth. But this is a failure of duty!

If you asked weary pastors if they believed that the Bible was the inerrant Word of God they would invariably say yes. They would also affirm their belief in the orthodox doctrines of the faith. But their spiritual and emotional fatigue can cause them to water-down the Word so that they do not have to deal with belligerent church people. Such pastors need to become desperate for God's healing so they are not found unfaithful when they stand before Him.

Burned-out and weary pastors need to be loved back into spiritual and emotional health by faithful saints. Woe unto the wolves and predatory sheep who chew up God's pastors, who abuse them, attack them and malign them with gossip and deceitful scheming. Jesus pronounced "woe" unto those that cause others to sin (Mt. 18:5-10) and accused obstinate religious people of killing the prophets (Mt. 23:29-32). We would do well to remember that the Lord hates those who cause dissension among the brethren (Pr. 6:16-19). What John the Baptist preached is still relevant for all who will face the just wrath of God, "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance" (Mt. 3:8).

COWARDICE

Some pastors preach watered-down sermons because they are cowards. They suffer under the fear of man which causes them to so abhor confrontation that they avoid the appearance of it in pulpit ministry, pastoral counseling or administrative duties. Pastors can become slaves to the people when their congregation gets deep in debt. Fear of people leaving the church and taking their tithes with them can drive a pastor to preach non-confrontational messages so no one is offended. Small church pastors and those facing internal struggles can also be afraid to preach the truth out of fear of people leaving.

While preaching at a large church on the east coast the pastor introduced me to the congregation with an apology for bringing in such an evangelist. It was obvious that he was terrified of the people. Some pastors are afraid of the people because they never had a spiritual backbone that caused them to stand in Christ's strength in the midst of conflict or to preach the truth that the people so profoundly need. At other times their backbone has been crushed by contentious church attendees.

Cowardly pastors are to be greatly pitied. They find little joy in ministry because they suffer under the fear of man and do not know the strength that the fear of God gives. They will find when they stand before the Savior that their cowardice caused them to preach an impotent message that was powerless to save and transform lives. What a tragic condition for ministers to find themselves in when they could have lived and died for the glory of God.

The only hope for cowardly pastors is to repent of their fear of man and passionately seek to be instilled with divine courage. They have to love Christ more than their position, comforts or the praise of men. They must be willing to lay down their ministry, yes, even their lives for Christ.

EASY-BELIEVISM

There is a price to pay to grow a large church, and more often than not, the price is the forsaking of the truth. In such cases the pastor preaches accommodating messages that will draw a larger variety of people. The popular approach is to preach positive messages that offend no one and makes people feel good about themselves. But such messages lack the fullness of truth that manifests the power of God to change people for their eternal good.

We must understand that whatever it takes to draw people is what it takes to keep them. Draw people with a Christless, crossless, costless message and you will have a church full of people rushing to hell. Compromising pastors must continue preaching compromised messages to their unconverted people lest they seek another lukewarm church or expel the pastor.

Most of our nation's largest churches are propagating a gospel of easy-believism, which is basically a message that we can have heaven while still living like hell. This anti-Christian message is powerless to save or transform people. Smaller church pastors and future pastors look up to the big churches as models to emulate. The idol worshipped is a large church and the truth must be scarified on its altar. Shamefully, a vast number of church leaders are afraid to ask if the sermons preached, and the church model they are using, is soundly Biblical. The answer will reveal whether or not the preacher and church is advancing the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of hell, for there is no middle ground.

Whenever the truth is compromised the results are always eternally tragic. By telling people they are "Christian" when they have not been authentically born again is a damnable practice. They are given a false sense of security when they are actually dangling over the brink of hell. When people do not manifest the fruits of repentance and regeneration you have verifiable proof that they are not saved.

Spiritually dead congregations are the result of spiritually dead pastors. The Lord will hold the shepherds accountable for all the souls they damned to hell with their worthless preaching (Ezk. 3:17-21). Their only hope is to return to the firm foundation of Scripture and begin to minister according to the example Jesus gave us. He preached through the power of the Holy Spirit and gave the people the truth that they so desperately needed regardless of whether they loved or hated Him.

HERESY

The Great Reformation of the 1500s brought deliverance from many of the religious tyrannies of the age. As religious freedoms grew, a purer faith unfolded and expanded. Since the Reformation the Protestant church has splintered again and again. Some of this was necessary so that the life of the church remained vibrant and Biblical; most of the time it was the result of unconquered characters that caused division or wanted to keep the status quo. Occasionally the divisions were the results of heresies.

Not so very long ago most Christians could discern between truth and lie. However, in our day a growing percentage of believers are having a difficult time with this. The devious secular teachings of moral relativism and tolerance is creeping into the church and thwarting her ability to recognize error and speak against it. Now we are afraid to judge righteous judgment or offend anyone (Jn. 7:24). This is a grave deception!

Cults that once were known as heretical are now gaining acceptance among many Christians. Even blatant New Age teachings are being propagated by self-proclaimed prophets and teachers within the evangelical church. Divorce and immorality have become a plague in the ministry, disgracing the church before the world and the people in the pews are not greatly disturbed over it. So where is the outcry of the shepherds, where is their defense of the faith, where is their preaching on holiness, where is their protection of the sheep? Most shepherds are virtually silent on those truths that are of true eternal worth. Either they are immersed in the errors, afraid of the people or in love with numbers.

How have heretical doctrines and immoral practices wormed their way into our churches? Because the watchmen on the walls have fallen asleep, they are not defending the truth. Why are so many professing believers ignorant of what constitutes truth and lie? Because the preachers preach comfortable messages and are afraid to proclaim the unadulterated Word. The growth of lies among the people directly corresponds with the absence of truth that comes from the pulpits. There is a crisis in our leadership today; “How the mighty have fallen!”

Take “Christian” TV for example. Does the average viewer know the difference between what is Biblical and what is error? No, because the pastors are silent. People are enamored with smooth talking preachers that advocate a gospel of cheap grace, promote “new” truths or promise financial prosperity. People follow such teachers because they love the lies that feed the lust of their flesh more than the truths of God’s Word (Jer. 5:31).

I know pastors that have forsaken sound Biblical truths for heresies because they were emotionally moved by a new preacher or prophet. They were unwilling to examine whether what was being advocated was doctrinally sound. If they did recognize some of the errors they believed that a little bit of error was harmless to the sheep. When pastors are taken up with lies the sheep will follow.

Spiritual experiences can be powerful influences upon people. The preaching of truth should always be accompanied with the demonstration of the Spirit’s power. But here is an

important truth—because spiritual power is present in a speaker does not mean that the power is from God. Many Christians have been deceived because they equate spiritual power with truth. This is a very dangerous error. The Lord established only one standard to define our faith and that is Scripture. When a preacher advocates errors we are obligated to question the source his power. If we are not solidly planted upon the Word then we will be taken captive by “every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming” (Eph. 4:14).

If the truth has not changed then what has? Our willingness to base the entirety of our faith upon the changeless truths of Scripture. In this evil and corrupt generation our desperate need is for fearless pastors and preachers. It is also of paramount importance that Christians only sit under real men of God who soundly minister the Word through the power of the Spirit. When we stand before God He will not be impressed with our pet-doctrines, pop-preachers, comfortable churches and new experiences. The Lord proclaimed, “This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word” (Isa. 66:2).

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