

5 Ways You May Be Sleepwalking Amid Societal Breakdown

“Great civilizations are not murdered. Instead, they take their own lives.” –Arnold Toynbee, author and historian

In our home I have a plaque prominently displayed that reads, “Make sure that you fulfill the ministry which you have received in the Lord” (Col. 4:17). The charge was given to Archippus, whom Paul called his “fellow soldier” (Phil.1:2). Was he holding back in a time of intense spiritual warfare?

We are unmistakably in a similar time. “If the trumpet makes an uncertain sound who will prepare himself for the battle?” (1 Cor. 14:8).

We are alive in a watershed moment where pornography is a “click away;” gay marriage has been normalized, institutionalized and celebrated; socialism is seducing masses; transgenderism is foisted on women’s bathrooms; legalization of marijuana advances; physician-assisted suicide has been legalized; and now, abortion on demand at anytime and for any reason alongside killing of newly born babies are acceptable.

When pastors should have been hyperventilating amidst our cultural catastrophe, speaking boldly and equipping people on issues transcending politics, many capitulated to cowardice and avoided controversy to pursue non-offensive church growth strategies. Spineless shepherds succumbing to this seduction should reverse course or consider resigning lest their example influence others.

“What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house, lest his brother’s heart faint as

well as his heart" (Deut. 20:8) in the day of battle.

I know of a leader who awoke one morning to God's still small voice, "Get your house in order. You will soon die. What you've done has been 'wood, hay and stubble' " (see 1 Cor. 3:12). He cried out to God for another chance, convicted that his ministry was missing the mark.

How many pastors will do almost anything to draw more people when the root problem is not new plans and shuffling personnel but repenting for not fulfilling the ministry they've received from the Lord at this tipping point in America's history? May we follow another shepherd, David, who exclaimed, "Rivers of waters run down my eyes, because people do not keep Your law" (Ps. 119:136).

Having been involved in pastoral ministry for 46 years, I understand the pressures we leaders experience from culture, congregants, budget, guests and beyond, but we mustn't compromise!

Societal Breakdown

In the 19th century, Charles Finney led in the battle of their generation, stopping slavery. He was criticized by pastors for getting "political" instead of "just preaching the gospel." He responded by admonishing pastors: "Address this monster ... call it *sin*!"

I've spoken at Oberlin College where as its president, Finney, pricked consciences: "It is doubtless true that one of the reasons for the low state of religion at the present time is that many churches have taken the wrong side on the subject of slavery, have suffered prejudice to prevail over principle and have feared to call this abomination by its true name."

Civil War, societal breakdown and the loss of 620,000 lives was the toll from the church sleepwalking through what should've been its finest hour.

Cowardice and Disobedience

A second time, multitudes of pastors and therefore much of the church slumbered to its collective shame was during the Civil Rights era. Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "History will have to record that the greatest tragedy of this period of social transition was not the strident clamor of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people."

When the soul of our nation is being torn asunder as it is today just as it was then, it's time for leaders to choose the fear of God rather than fear of man and financial security. Multitudes are awakening as they observe what's resulted from the pastoral negligence.

- Scores of church members now accept homosexuality along with the adoption of children by gay and lesbian couples.
- Entire denominations ordain gay and lesbian ministers and officiate same-sex "weddings." [The second largest Protestant denomination narrowly escaped going this apostate direction only days ago!]
- Multitudes of young people in our churches embrace the gay, bisexual and transgender lifestyle as okay along with cohabitation before marriage.

Just returning from the annual Roundtable summit hosted by Rick Joyner, we acknowledged many leaders have been hiding rather than heralding biblically-informed moral positions. It's time for the emergence of a spiritual Delta Force to challenge those reluctant to lead responsibly.

I experienced this first hand a few years ago when I was told in a church: Don't put out objective voter guides because they might upset black members. Cease working on an educational video exposing 10 deceptions of gay "marriage" as it would be too controversial, possibly inviting death threats. This would be a deal breaker concerning continuance in the church.

I was soon let go with some severance without any announcement

to the church. When I inquired if something could be said to the people I served for years I was told, "Just go. Don't come back."

Evaluation Time

We are directed by God to be "salt" influencing society positively as an antiseptic holding back decay. We're to winsomely communicate and demonstrate the Gospel and unchanging biblical truth. Addressing issues truthfully and redemptively is nonnegotiable.

"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a basket, but on a candlestick. And it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:14-16).

Many pastors and people today sit silently on the sidelines because of too narrow an understanding of the gospel and the kingdom of God. When Jesus commanded us to "make disciples of all nations ... teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20b), He meant more than "trust Me for forgiveness to go to heaven" but bring the domain of your King to this world.

His directive was, teach "all things I have commanded you." This entails all He taught in the gospels as well as the epistles that come by divine inspiration. Serious about fulfilling our ministry during these "perilous times" (2 Tim. 3:1), let's reject any pull towards "cultural acceptability" and unscriptural "inclusivity." Let's do some evaluation.

5 Checkpoints

1. Do I seek the approval of the world over faithfulness to God's Word?

"For am I now seeking the approval of man or of God? Or

am I trying to please man? For if I were still trying to please man, I would not be the servant of Christ" (Gal.1:10). If I choose man-pleasing over God-pleasing, I disqualify myself as His servant.

2. Am I cowardly or compassionately declaring that a homosexual lifestyle is sin?

There is not one passage in Scripture approving the practice of homosexuality. God condemns the perversion of His design for those He created and loves (Gen. 19:1-38; , 20:13; Mark 10:6-9; Rom. 1:26-7, 1:32; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Jude 1:7). At the same time, He provides freedom for all who turn to Him in repentance to escape the bondage and brokenness of this way of life.

3. Am I silent in speaking the truth on same-sex "marriage" as being sinful and contrary to God's design for man and woman in marriage?

The prevailing "progressive" worldview deceives millions. It will "suppress the truth through unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18) regarding these unions. This devastates the family unit; undermines thousands of years of scriptural teaching on marriage and family; and perverts the witness of husband and wife representing Christ and His church. The Bible explicitly describes a homosexual lifestyle with six terms: 1. Sexual Impurity 2. Degrading 3. Unnatural 4. Shameful 5. Indecent 6. Perversion (Rom. 1:24-27).

4. Am I afraid to say abortion and infanticide are both serious sins?

While there is mercy and forgiveness if someone repents and turns to God, Christians and especially pastors must never treat the murder of a baby lightly. At the same time, we will continue offering compassionate counsel and care, adoption alternatives and practical support for those in crisis pregnancy situations. "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this:

to visit the fatherless and widows" (James 1:27a).

5. As a leader, have I avoided controversial issues to not offend members or lose financial support? Can I say with Paul, "I did not keep from declaring to you the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27)?

Our church members are bombarded with propaganda and pressure to conform from 10 sources:

- Political leaders.
- College professors.
- Public school teachers.
- Celebrities.
- Musical artists.
- Film and TV personalities.
- Sports figures.
- Internet bloggers.
- Talk show hosts.
- Friends.

"The times of ignorance God has overlooked" (see Acts 17:30a), but He's calling pastors and parents to account as a bulwark stemming the avalanche of today's evil. We must boldly communicate truth to experience the dawning of a new day in the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our sermon applications must go beyond boss and co-worker aggravations representing the "horrendous persecution and problems" we face and address today's hot-button issues.

Discerning the Times

Jesus once upbraided a crowd for readily forecasting the weather but failing to realize the urgency of the hour. "Why do you not know how to discern this time?" (Luke 12:56).

He's saying the same to us today as we're experiencing a staggering sea change where pride, godlessness, immorality, violence, perversion and rebellion to God's commandments are

at an all-time high. We're in a period of "training for reigning" so we'll not hold back.

This is not a time to say, "Let others get involved"... "God is sovereign"... "I'll just pray... I'm busy"... "We're called to just preach the gospel"... "It's all going down anyway."

"If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point that the world and the devil are at the moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages is where the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battlefield besides, it's merely flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point" -Martin Luther.

Here's the deal: A.W. Tozer said, "When we become so tolerant that we lead people into mental fog and spiritual darkness, we are not acting like Christians, we are acting like cowards." As Paul told Archippus, "Make sure you fulfill the ministry you received in the Lord." Let's rise up in faith before another Civil War unfolds. May this be the church's finest hour leading to America's Third Great Awakening!