

A Warning to Shepherds Who Mislead the Sheep

Some of the strongest warnings in the Bible are directed to leaders who mislead God's people, to prophets and priests and pastors and teachers who by their example or their doctrine lead the sheep into sinful conduct and destructive beliefs.

Be very careful not to hurt God's flock! You are touching the apple of His eye, and He does not take this lightly.

Recently, I was speaking to a pastor about a major church in his city that had just announced its support for committed homosexual unions, sending shockwaves throughout the region, since it is a highly influential church that claims to be "evangelical."

I said to him, "There are obviously other areas of compromise in their midst," to which he replied, "When we met with the one of their key pastors, he explained that he was now 'inclusive' when it came to salvation"—meaning that people of all religions are saved through Jesus, even if they don't believe in Him, as long as they don't willfully opt out. The pastor also told me that, "The leader I was speaking with dropped (expletives) during our interaction and then lit up a cigarette as soon as we went outside."

Is it any surprise that this pastor has now changed his beliefs about homosexuality?

Every leader sets an example for better or worse, and when our example is substandard, it is not only repeated by those who follow us, it is exaggerated, opening up a floodgate of destruction on those for whom Jesus died.

We dare not play games with the lives of those who were purchased at the high cost of Jesus' blood. As Paul said to

the Ephesian elders, "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to the entire flock, over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28).

When God spoke to Jeremiah about the sins of the false prophets, he was devastated: "My heart is broken within me, because of the prophets; all my bones shake; I am like a drunken man, like a man overcome by wine, because of the LORD, and because of His holy words" (Jeremiah 23:9; I once heard a preacher use this verse to justify getting "drunk in the Spirit"; what an abuse of the Word!).

The prophets of Samaria had been guilty of prophesying in the name of Baal, misleading the nation. But what the prophets of Jerusalem did was even worse, "I have seen also among the prophets of Jerusalem a horrible thing. They commit adultery and walk in lies. They also strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one repents from his wickedness. All of them are as Sodom to Me and her inhabitants as Gomorrah" (Jeremiah 23:14).

They prophesied in the Lord's name but lived in sin and led the people into sin. As a result, the ungodly were strengthened, the godly were discouraged, and no one turned from evil.

And it was the sin of the false prophets that led to the destruction of Jerusalem: "Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions; they have not revealed your iniquity, to bring back your captives, but have seen for you oracles that are false and misleading" (Lamentations 2:14).

To God's people, I say in the strongest possible terms: Beware of those who make light of sin, who trivialize holiness, who throw a wet blanket on the fires of conviction, who minimize repentance, and who brand others "legalistic" and "religious" because of their devotion to the Lord. Beware!

Such shepherds do not have the heart of God and, rather than protecting the sheep, are leading them to slaughter.

Paul was so burdened about false teachers that he warned the Ephesian believers about this for three years, night and day with tears, saying, "I know that after my departure, dreadful wolves will enter among you, not sparing the flock. Even from among you men will arise speaking perverse things, to draw the disciples away after them" (Acts 20:29-30).

That's why he exhorted Timothy, as a young leader, to "be an example to the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, and in purity," reminding him to "take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you" (1 Timothy 4:12, 16).

Pastors, when you indulge in ungodly entertainment and compromised living then demonstrate your "freedom" by speaking about it from the pulpit, referencing the latest unclean movie in your oh-so-cool sermons, you spew filth on those whom Jesus has cleansed, encouraging them to follow in your footsteps—and beyond.

You will have to answer to God for this one day. (I write this while trembling on the inside.)

It's the same when you minimize God's standards for marriage, divorcing and remarrying without cause.

There is spiritual and moral blood on your hands.

And what of those who preach deceptive and destructive doctrines of carnal prosperity, appealing to greed and motivated by greed, manipulating the gullible flock to their personal financial gain? What does God say to them?

In the words of Peter, "They have eyes full of adultery that cannot cease from sin. They entice unstable souls. Their

hearts are trained in greed. They are cursed children!" (2 Peter 2:14).

Perhaps many of our contemporary leaders have not fallen this far, but to the extent we are leading God's people away from purity and truth by our example and our teaching, we are in serious danger.

Repent, my fellow leaders, before it is too late, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive his recompense in the body, whether it was good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10).

And to the sheep who are being misled, I urge you in the fear of the Lord: Run for your lives and get into a place of health and safety. There are plenty of godly leaders who will help you, not harm you.

And to each of those godly leaders I say, "Be strong and be faithful. Your reward will be great."