

Don't Let Your Pulpit Be Defiled

Visiting ministers can be a great blessing to any church. But if you don't do your homework, you could be inviting disaster.

A friend of mine recently told me that the leaders of a ministry invited a prominent American preacher to speak at a conference. During discussions about the engagement, the preacher's handlers explained two of the terms of his visit: (1) he was always to be addressed as "apostle" by anyone who spoke to him; and (2) he was to be ushered out of the auditorium and into a green room immediately after he delivered his sermon, to guarantee that he would not have to fraternize with the audience. He needed his privacy.

If I had been on the other end of the telephone conversation that day, I would have offered this reply: "Please tell Apostle Arrogance that since he is so concerned about being bothered by the little people, never mind. Just don't come. We don't need the disease he is spreading in the body of Christ. God bless you." *Click.* That may sound harsh, but I don't think there's any other way to prevent the spread of this plague. The "celebrity syndrome" is still alive in 2011, in spite of the recession, and the only way we are going to stop big-headed charlatans from corrupting churches is to boycott them. We need to hand them a pink slip. I recommend these safeguards.

1. Investigate before you invite. There are many wonderful traveling ministers who carry genuine anointings and can bring great blessing to churches and ministry events. They have been called by God as evangelists, prophets, teachers and apostolic leaders—and those who walk in the anointing of the Holy Spirit will produce fruit wherever they go. But there are also imposters on the preaching circuit. Some of them once carried

the anointing and lost it; others actually entered the ministry as fakes and learned to prey on naive congregations. Don't give anyone a platform who has a questionable record. Always find out who they are accountable to. If they have no relationships, no oversight or no reference board, you are taking a great risk by having them in your church.

2. Slam the door on egotism. The celebrity syndrome is easy to detect. Does the visiting preacher have a servant's spirit? Or does he come across as cocky and unapproachable? Any man or woman engaged in ministry should have the attitude of Jesus, who was willing to ride a donkey into Jerusalem and wash the feet of His disciples. If you allow a prideful, unbroken preacher in your pulpit, you are giving a spirit of Lucifer the opportunity to infect your congregation.

3. Don't feed the spirit of entitlement. Every traveling minister appreciates a gracious host. You show honor when you provide him or her with a nice hotel room, meals and transportation during their stay. But you should be alarmed if a preacher demands celebrity treatment. I have heard horror stories of ministers who required their hosts to provide shopping money, certain types of exotic bottled water, limousines and manicurists. One preacher who recently ministered in Australia demanded a certain type of steak that had to be flown across the Pacific Ocean from the United States! A childish rock star might be expected to ask for these luxuries, but such behavior is reprehensible for a minister of the gospel. Don't cater to their appetites.

4. Don't tolerate financial rape. I know of an American minister who traveled to a church in Canada and insisted that the pastor rent a civic auditorium that seated more than 1,000 people. The pastor couldn't afford the hall, but the evangelist said she wouldn't come unless a large venue was provided. In the end, the evangelist canceled the trip because not enough people registered for the conference—and the pastor was left holding the bag. His church went bankrupt.

A true minister of the gospel would never push a church to go into debt just to satisfy his or her egotistical need for a big crowd. Jesus was just as comfortable preaching to a few disciples as he was to a multitude, and He didn't base success on numbers. If you fall into the numbers trap you will be sorry. Also, a shepherd who cares about his or her flock will never allow a visiting preacher to manipulate a congregation financially. Visiting speakers who spend 30 to 45 minutes begging for money, or making outlandish claims of "supernatural returns" for investing in their work, are sheisters who need to leave the ministry and find a job on a home shopping network.

5. Beware of strange fire. A minister imparts his life, not just the words of his sermons. That is why it is so important for preachers of the gospel to walk in humility, sexual purity and financial integrity. If a minister has allowed compromise in any of those areas, his anointing will be hindered and he may pollute your pulpit and leave a toxic environment in your church. I talked to one pastor in California who had invited a speaker to his annual conference. But before the speaker arrived, the pastor learned that this man often used drug imagery in his sermons and even compared the Holy Spirit to marijuana. When he asked the speaker to refrain from such references, the man arrogantly refused. Thankfully the pastor did the right thing: He politely but firmly canceled the man's visit.

It is possible for us to "just say no" to the charlatans, shysters, con men and rock star evangelists who have never submitted their lives to the discipline of the Spirit. Please heed the warnings, inspect the fruit and be willing to disinvite.

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