

Are You Committing This Awful, Under-the-Radar Sin?

When Jesus was led into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil, He had to contend with wild beasts.

“And He was there in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts. And the angels ministered to Him” (Mark 1:13).

I’m not even completely sure why this verse is in the Bible. None of the other gospel writers mention it. Perhaps Jesus needed angelic ministry to not only help Him overcome Satan, but to also to overcome the distraction of these wild beasts. The CEB translation states it this way:

“He was among the wild animals, and the angels took care of him.”

These temptations and distractions were early lessons in Jesus’ anointed ministry. He had to set a standard for the coming church. As I said, in addition to facing great temptations, it appears that these wild beasts were also a distraction. When I think back on my own journey there were many distractions and early lessons, that had I failed to learn them, would’ve stunted my spiritual life, growth and calling.

I learned that if you can’t win in your personal life and home, you can’t win anywhere else. If you can’t overcome there, you can’t overcome in any other place. How are you going to conquer the world if you can’t even conquer your home? How will you serve others if you haven’t overcome your own issues? Many Christians never conquer their bad personal habits and demons. They never learn to cooperate with the grace of God and discipline their body’s appetites and crucify their fleshly lusts. The Spirit of God works with us and helps

us, but we cannot override His principles and the laws He set in motion.

For example, here's a qualification for an overseer that actually applies to all ministers:

"And one who manages his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence" (1 Tim. 3:4, MEV).

Simply put, you can't lead a church if you can't lead your own house. Many are disqualified from a ministerial leadership position right there on that note.

Ruling your corporate house is one thing, but ruling your house, as in your physical body, is yet another.

"But I bring and keep my body under subjection, lest when preaching to others I myself should be disqualified" (1 Cor. 9:27).

The apostle Paul wrote that he would be disqualified if he didn't rule and discipline his body. It's the same principle today.

Here's another one:

"An overseer then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, sober, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach" (1 Tim. 3:2).

Compromise, Immaturity and Deficient Character

Most ministers are deficient in this character area, aren't they? Such imperfect men we are, but as I said, the Spirit of God helps us in our infirmities as we cooperate with Him. He has chosen to use redeemed men, not necessarily perfect men. However, He will still not override His own character qualifications that He has established in His Word, especially for overseers and deacons. Maturity in character is a definite non-negotiable in the ministry. Why do we continually

compromise it? It is because of the sin of presumption.

One of the definitions of this word is “transgressing the limits of what is permitted or appropriate.” The Word of God outlines boundaries and limits to what is permissible or appropriate. It is getting more difficult to find ministers who qualify for ministry based on these character qualifications. The epistle of 1 Timothy 3 lists them.

I’ve been in ministry a long enough time to see that we have greatly compromised this area. And this has led to so many of our problems, issues and scandals in the ministry. It has been embarrassing and brought great reproach to the work of God and the name of Jesus. The ministry road has been littered with casualties of men and women who were taken out because they could not overcome their flesh, the world and the devil in their lives and ministries.

None of us are above temptation. None of us can claim to be perfected or invincible. We are ever learning and ever growing. All of us have feet of clay and are subject to weaknesses and the flaws that are common to man. But none of that changes what the Lord has laid out for us in His Word. This should encourage us to avoid excuses such as “nobody is perfect,” “God understands,” “everyone does it,” “it’s not that bad” etc. There is forgiveness but no excuses.

Maturity is a must for serving in ministry. If you’re quick to repent and quick to forgive, and also quick to believe, you have a great advantage over most. That means your heart is soft and tender. It means you’re humble and teachable. It means God can work with you. You are workable material. But my experience has been that many ministers do not possess these qualities, so they are an easy target for the enemy. They don’t repent easily and quickly, they harbor unforgiveness and offense in their hearts, and they’re full of doubt and subtle unbelief.

Due to some of these issues, the truth is too many ministers live and die and never reach the first phase of their callings and ministries. That shouldn't be. Why is it? What's the bottom line here?

One of the big reasons is the lack of personal consecration. If we assume we can make it without that we are in presumption. Self-gratification and a self-pleasing spirit will greatly hinder your consecration and cut the maturity process short. We are infamous for taking short cuts. There is an old African adage that says: "Short cut kill deer."

It's the cross that we are always dodging and attempting to skirt and avoid. No one wants to die, but this is what the Spirit comes to help us with.

"For if you live according to the flesh, you will die, but if through the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (Rom. 8:13). You cannot bypass the cross of Jesus Christ and its application in your life. All of us must return to our Christian roots and the message of the cross. I believe it is the greatest need in the church today that would distinguish the church from the world. And it must begin with leaders and ministers everywhere.

Overcoming the Wild Beasts

"Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts" (Rom. 6:12).

"But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts" (Rom. 13:14).

"For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. These are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please" (Gal. 5:17).

"That you put off the former way of life in the old nature, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts" (Eph.

4:22).

The Word speaks of many kinds of lusts, but I can't remember the last time I heard a message concerning putting to death these lusts in the members of our bodies. It seems like there's been a diabolical silence on it.

"Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and lusts" (Gal. 5:24).

These lusts are a part of our wild beasts. It's time to stop feeding them. It's time to stop transgressing the limits of what is permitted or appropriate. It's time to stop being presumptuous. {eo}

My full testimony of God's dealings with my own character issues is in my book, *The Journal of a Journey to His Holiness*. Also, *Soulful Leadership* and *Purity of Heart* are two other books that have helped many leaders deal with pride and presumption.