

Deacon/Elder Lecture Outlines

Lecture 11

Pitfalls Leaders in God's Church Must Avoid

I. Introduction

- A. Have you ever watched a tightrope walker and marveled at the incredible skill and daring he or she displays? Certainly someone with such skills must experience a great euphoria and sense of accomplishment.
- B. Yet a tightrope walker pays a price for such death-defying accomplishments -- the constant danger that he might make one false step and plummet to disaster.
- C. Likewise, we who serve in leadership roles in God's Church experience the great blessing such service brings, but also, by virtue of that service, expose ourselves to certain pitfalls that in a spiritual sense can be deadly.

II. SPS

This lecture will explain the possible pitfalls of leadership in God's Church and how to avoid them, so you will never lose your vital spiritual footing.

III. Need

- A. Even though we are leaders in God's Church -- even ministers -- we are not impervious to losing our spiritual balance.
 - 1. Acts 20:17-38 -- Paul's strong words of warning were directed at the Church leaders.
 - 2. II Timothy 4:16 -- Even those closest to Paul -- Church leaders of one type or another -- forsook him and thus failed in their responsibilities when he needed them most.
- B. Thus, we need to pause and consider some of the pitfalls that may entrap us if we are not diligent.

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IV. Pitfall One: Vanity or Self-righteousness

- A. Leadership in God's Church involves many duties that can puff up our vanity if we allow it.
 - 1. Ordination itself tends to tell the congregation that we are (or should be) at a certain level of spiritual development, and this realization about ourselves can lead to vanity.
 - 2. I Corinthians 8:1 -- The extra knowledge we should have, or learning experiences we are given, can lead to vanity.
 - 3. Special treatment and compliments that brethren tend to give us out of their love and respect can cause vanity.
- B. Such vanity can display itself within us in different ways depending upon our own character tendencies.
 - 1. A superior, condescending or know-it-all attitude.
 - 2. Self-righteousness.
 - 3. Imagining yourself to be more qualified, competent or experienced than you really are.
- C. Many important texts caution against such attitudes of vanity.
 - 1. I Timothy 3:6 -- This verse cautions Church leadership not even to ordain one who is so spiritually immature that he will allow ordination to swell him with pride. The principle applies also to non-ordained leaders.
 - 2. II Corinthians 12:7 -- Even Paul admitted that one reason he had a "thorn in the flesh" was to prevent him from feeling "exalted above measure."
 - 3. I Samuel 15 -- The story of Saul and how his vanity got the best of him is a grim and important reminder for us not to fall into this trap.
 - 4. I Corinthians 10:12 -- Those who think they stand should take heed lest they fall.

V. Pitfall Two: Becoming Critical of the People You Are to Serve

- A. Of course, leaders in God's Church must enforce God's government and standards even though at times this means giving correction and discipline.

- B. Yet this responsibility does not justify wrong attitudes and actions concerning God's people that some leaders have fallen into, such as:
 - 1. Gossiping about people's problems.
 - 2. Complaining about people with whom you don't get along.
 - 3. Being hypercritical of people's simple personality faults, or subjecting people to virtually microscopic examination.
 - 4. Viewing people as problems.
- C. Deal rather with God's people as potential Gods who need your help and encouragement. Maintain a humble spirit of mind.
 - 1. Galatians 6:1 -- Consider your own weaknesses when you serve, so you will not sin while you try to help others.
 - 2. John 3:16 -- Christ loved the brethren enough to die for them. Follow His example of giving of yourself, even though we are all sinners.
 - 3. I Thessalonians 2:7 -- Paul used gentleness in serving the people. Follow his example. (Of course, he used proper power when necessary, but in love and not in a critical spirit).

VI. Pitfall Three: Competing Among Yourselves

- A. Acts 15:36-40 -- Although contentions or competitions should not arise between leaders in God's Church, scriptures such as these show that they do.
- B. Such contentions may take various forms:
 - 1. Rank consciousness.
 - 2. Disagreements over areas of responsibility and who is in authority.
 - 3. Differences in judgment or opinion about how some matter should be handled.
- C. God's government gives precise instructions about how to deal with such matters.
 - 1. Philippians 2:3 -- Jealousies and other carnal attitudes should be repented of.

2. I Peter 5:1-5 -- Elders of lower rank should submit to those of superior rank in a good attitude. All elders should get along among themselves by humbling themselves before each other.
3. Matthew 18:15-18 -- One who is sinned against by a brother should follow this formula.

VII. Pitfall Four: Disloyalty

- A. Although disloyalty is common, many don't see themselves as disloyal because they don't recognize its many guises, such as:
 1. Speaking out against headquarters at Pasadena, Church leaders, a Church policy or a doctrine.
 2. Speaking out against the local pastor or his decisions or leadership style.
 3. Usurping the local pastor's role by not checking with him often about decisions only he can make.
 4. Dragging your feet or not being supportive of him on matters over which headquarters gives him the right to make decisions, such as speaking schedules, personnel use or timing and type of activities.
- B. All of these are examples of disloyalty, which should be guarded against.
 1. I Samuel 15:23 -- Disloyalty is a type of rebellion -- a grievous sin against God.
 2. I Corinthians 4:2 -- Loyalty is a type of faithfulness and a necessary quality of a Church leader or minister.

VIII. Pitfall Five: Becoming Jealous of Our Responsibilities

- A. It is common for leaders to become so used to doing a certain job or having a certain responsibility that they resent feeling interfered with by brethren or even the pastor. Such interference could take the form of:
 1. Unwanted advice.
 2. Unwanted assistance.
 3. Reassignment of duties, even by the pastor, from a job we enjoyed or for which we felt qualified.



- B. Resentment or hard feelings especially tend to occur when a new pastor comes to the area and reassigns personnel, or when someone is taken off the sermonette list or from some other duty that seems to be one of spiritual status.
- C. Therefore, remember these points:
 - 1. No one has a special right to any job or responsibility for any given length of time for any reason.
 - 2. The local pastor has been given authority by Pasadena to assign personnel as he deems best and to administrate the local church as he sees fit, within broad but specific guidelines carefully spelled out by Church Administration.
 - 3. To properly serve requires that you develop a teachable and willing attitude that is open to suggestions and input both from your superior and even the people who serve under you.

IX. Pitfall Six: Being Served Instead of Serving

- A. God's brethren are loving and helpful people, and can at times wish so much to please their leaders that they become the servers instead of us.
 - 1. Examples: Buying you gifts, treating you to expensive meals they cannot afford, neglecting their families to tend to your needs.
 - 2. Although well intended, some types of serving work to their detriment since it harms their finances or family.
- B. Acts 20:33-35 -- Paul made clear that he was their servant and not the other way around.
- C. Matthew 20:25-28 -- Christ said that the greatest among us should be the servant to the others.

X. Pitfall Seven: Serving So Much You Ignore Your Own Family

- A. While the needs of God's Church are important, they should not be allowed to take so much time that your own family suffers as a result.
- B. I Timothy 3:1-4, 12 -- One of the qualifications for service is a good family life and example.
- C. Each leader in God's Church should make certain he takes time for his or her spouse and children.

1. This means having to schedule your time wisely.



2. You may have to inform your pastor you need fewer responsibilities so you have time with the family.

XI. Pitfall Eight: Using Man's Methods Instead of God's

A. All leaders in the Church should want to improve themselves and increase in competency, such as by reading widely.

B. Yet, while many books can be helpful, we must be ever wary to avoid substituting man's methods for God's methods.

1. This is especially true in regard to man's systems of psychology, finance, business and justice, which form the keystones to man's ways in this world.

2. James 3:13-18 -- There is a worldly wisdom and a godly type of wisdom, and it is God's wisdom we should seek.

3. Proverbs 1:7 -- God's wisdom is based upon His Word, and fear and faith in Him.

4. Remember the words carved on Ambassador Hall on the Ambassador College campus in Pasadena: "The Word of God is the Foundation of Knowledge."

XII. Pitfall Nine: Succumbing to the Lusts of the Flesh

A. We are not immune to the foibles of human nature just because we are leaders in the Church. Therefore, we must be on constant guard to avoid the lusts of the flesh.

Examples are: sexual lust or promiscuity, materialism and striving after money or status, alcoholism and drug abuse or addiction (even to prescription drugs).

B. Ephesians 4:22, I John 2:16 -- We are commanded to forsake such worldly lusts as a part of our quest to become like God.

XIII. Pitfall Ten: Spiritual Lethargy

A. Even though we as leaders should set the example of diligent prayer, Bible study, fasting and meditation, it is possible to let down and drift spiritually.

B. Hebrews 2:1-3 -- Paul warns not to let salvation slip through neglect.

- C. I Corinthians 9:24-27 -- Paul tells how even he had to constantly strive to not be cast away himself, even though he had preached to others.

XIV. Pitfall Eleven: Erring from Doctrinal Purity

- A. With the privilege of using God's Word in preaching and counseling may come the tendency to err from the truth on some doctrinal point. This may be done unknowingly, through mistake or intentionally in the belief the Church is wrong on some point.
- B. Titus 1:9 -- A minister must teach as he has been taught.
- C. I Timothy 4:1-7 -- A leader must avoid perverting the doctrines of Christ.
- D. No minister has the right to teach contrary to the Church under whose authority he was ordained. This prohibition extends even to putting forth opinions or pet theories contrary to the Church's doctrines. If he has a doctrinal disagreement with the Church, he should resolve it through the proper channels. He is not to teach his opinions, but the teachings of the Church.

XV. Pitfall Twelve: Becoming Weary of Serving

- A. Although service in God's Church is a great privilege, it is possible to tire at times and let down if we are not careful. This produces various problems:
1. It can cause sloppiness and neglect of our responsibilities.
 2. It can cause us to look for greater recognition or advancement in a carnal way.
 3. It can breed discouragement.
- B. To overcome such feelings, do the following:
1. Don't look for your reward in this age. Remember that our primary reward is the spiritual one of God's Kingdom.
 2. Galatians 6:9-10 -- Have faith that your efforts will be rewarded by God.
 3. Philippians 2:12-18 -- Realize that service is its own reward, since any effort that results in the growth of God's people is itself reason to rejoice.

XVI. Conclusion

Like a tightrope walker, one who serves in God's Church must be ever sure that each step he takes avoids the pitfalls common to human nature. If we are careful to serve God's people faithfully, we can know the resulting joys and pleasures that others can only imagine!