

Thursday, August 13, 2020 - Deja Vu

Ten years ago I wrote an article discussing an eldership that was warned of a false teacher they had invited to fill their pulpit. They failed to act and the gentlemen, true to his apostate nature, began preaching a sermon that blasphemed the very nature of Jesus Christ. He was stopped during his sermon, not by the elders, not by the ministers but by a member sitting in the audience.

Today, I again find myself writing about an eldership that ignores the fact that the words spoken from the pulpit matter. The people you put in the pulpit matter.

I'm constantly perplexed at the number of elderships who fail to grasp the simple, but incredibly straight forward command God gives, through the apostle Paul:

Acts 20:28-30 - Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood. I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

Warnings regarding false teachers are found throughout the New Testament. Jesus warned, "Beware of false prophets..." (Matt. 7:15). Paul warned of those who would speak "perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:30). He further said that these false teachers ("grievous wolves") would "enter in among you, not sparing the flock" (Acts 20:29). Paul told the Ephesian elders that these false teachers would come from "your own selves" (Acts 20:30), meaning from the ranks of the eldership. Peter tells us, "There shall be false teachers among you..." (2 Pet. 2:1). False teachers are not just a possibility. Peter emphasized that "there shall be" and that these false teachers will be "among you."

There are certainly false teachers in the world, but when they exist in the church, and unopposed, they are the most dangerous. We need to be aware that they exist, and we need to know how they work. We should not be "ignorant of his (i.e., the Devil's) devices" (2 Cor. 2:11). False teachers are very dangerous. We need to be aware of them and beware of their false doctrine(s)!

The way of Christ, "the way of truth," is always dishonored by teachers of error and those who follow them. Error when practiced or taught causes those outside of the church to think that being a Christian is not something to be desired. These false teachers claimed to be Christians. What many people know about being a Christian comes from their observation of the way those that are supposed to be Christians live. We as "earthen vessels" (2 Cor. 4:7) either tell and show others the light of Christ, or we adulterate the truth by corrupting the Word in word or deed. When Christians live as the world or teach contrary to the doctrine of Christ, "the way of truth" will always be "evil spoken of."

Second Peter chapter two speaks a great deal about false teachers. Peter tells us that they use "feigned words" (2 Pet. 2:3) as they deceive. Their deception depends on their ability to use "enticing words" (Col. 2:4), which have no substance or foundation, but sound good. The "feigned words" of these false teachers are described by Paul as "good words and fair speeches" which they use to

"deceive the hearts of the simple (innocent, ASV)" (Rom. 16:18). Barnes stresses the importance of correct reasoning when he observes, "The doctrines which they defend were not maintained by solid and substantial arguments, but ... they would make use of plausible reasoning made up for the occasion" (the emphasis is his). Their promises were false (see 2 Pet. 2:19), and the basis for their doctrines was false.

So, who is designated to stop false teachers by God? Obviously, all of us are. But most critical to this task are the elders.

Based on Acts 20:28–30, this famous charge of Paul to the Ephesian elders reads as follows:

Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood. I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

This passage links purity in doctrine with purity in church organization by making doctrinal purity the responsibility of bishops in the local congregation. As the overseers and shepherds of God's people they must be doers, taking the lead in this work.

The Lord intended for elders in each local church to be the primary line of defense against every threat to the faith. This is why Paul charged the Ephesian elders to take heed to themselves first (Acts 20:28). Elders in the Lord's church must be diligent students of God's Word. There is no way they can hold to the faithful Word (Tit. 1: 9) if they don't know what it teaches. Neither can they feed, exhort, or teach others in that which they themselves do not know (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:9).

Woe unto those shepherds who invite a wolf to prey on their flock! In most cases, lack of available information cannot be used as an excuse for so doing. Several men have been parading around the brotherhood for over 25 years with their false doctrines and some elders are still pleading ignorance about them. Some elders (as well as preachers and school administrators) claim that they are too interested in "spiritual things" and the souls of men to "keep up with the issues." I can't see much interest in "spiritual things" when men willfully remain ignorant of damnable heresies and their sources. Nor do I see a great love for souls demonstrated when those charged with their care choose to remain unprepared to protect them.

Elders must practice a zero-tolerance policy toward any and all religious error. Many churches have been undermined by and lost to various erroneous "isms" advocated by brethren through the years because elders were either inattentive, apathetic, ignorant, or cowardly.

Unfortunately, courageous, faithful elders are in terribly short supply in our time."

In Christ,

Chuck

