

SANCTIFIED AND USEFUL LEADERS

Introduction

The importance of personal holiness cannot be over estimated. Indeed, it is only as such holy fruit is seen in people's lives that we can say with any assurance that they are truly children of God. Jesus himself taught us in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:20, "... *by their fruit you will recognise them.*"

This is especially true for those who are leaders amongst the people of God, because they have a responsibility to set a godly example to others. Sin in any believer's life grieves God, dishonours Christ, distresses his church and hinders the work of the gospel amongst unbelievers. This is even more so for pastors and church leaders, whose influence in the lives of others is considerable.

I am indebted to Martin Leech, himself the pastor of a church in the east of England, who gave four talks on this subject in '*Serving Today*', the radio programme for pastors and church leaders. The content of this short booklet is the main substance of those talks, and it is our prayer that as you read them you will be stimulated to walk closer to the Lord Jesus Christ and to grow more like him. Each chapter will challenge you, but it is good for us to be challenged regularly concerning our own relationship with the Lord.

May the Lord himself, by the gracious working of his Holy Spirit, produce in us those qualities that give clear evidence that we are indeed those who have been born from above,

and may that in turn make our ministries even more effective.

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Chapter 1 The leader's holiness of life and his relationship with the Lord

Let me take you back for a moment to the late 1940s and to the island of Lewis off the west coast of Scotland. The ferry from the mainland had just arrived and on board was a preacher of the Word of God. His name was Duncan Campbell. Christians had been praying about this visit and asking God to bless the preaching of the Word. And very soon revival came to that island.

Waiting to meet Mr Campbell as he got off the ferry that day were some men from the local churches. Later, he told the story of what happened. "One of the men said to me, 'Mr Campbell, might I ask you a question? Are you walking with God?' And I was happy to be able to say, 'Well, I can say this at any rate ... that I fear God.'"

What a vital question this is and what an instructive answer. Taken together, they give us a good picture of what the Christian life should be like. Let us take these things to heart – do you fear God? Are you walking with God? How vital it is for you to be able to say, 'I fear God'... Then the answer will quickly follow, 'And so I seek to walk with God'. So, what does it mean to walk with God?

First of all it means that you must be, ‘with God’. By that I mean you must be saved, you must be a true child of God. The most important thing in your life is not that you happen to be a pastor or an elder or whatever your responsibility may be. No, it is to know that you are indeed truly saved.

The very first point Charles Spurgeon makes in his famous *Lectures to my Students* is this, ‘It should be one of our first cares that we ourselves are saved men... Whatever call a man may pretend to have, if he has not been called to holiness, he has not been called to the ministry... How horrible to be a preacher of the Word of God and yet be unconverted.’

You know that in Hebrews 12 we are told to “*pursue ... holiness without which no-one will see the Lord*”. So a true Christian can say, ‘I know that Jesus has died to bring me to God.’ In other words, ‘Jesus died to make me, a sinner, holy so that I can see God.’ It is marvellous to know that the holiness you need comes to you by faith in Jesus Christ. It is the free gift of God’s grace.

But being saved by Jesus is just the beginning of a new life. God’s word in 1 Peter 1:15 says, “... *as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’*” Just as a child is often like its parents in looks or behaviour, so you, as a child of God, should show in your life the reality that God – who is holy – is your heavenly Father.

If this is true for all Christians then how much more should you, as a minister of the Word of God and a shepherd of God’s flock, pursue holiness? You are a minister of the

Word of God that says, ‘Be saved from sin, come to God who is holy.’

Spurgeon’s second point in that lecture is this, ‘that it is of the next importance to the minister that his piety be vigorous’.

What does he mean by ‘piety’? The Christian writer Errol Hulse explains it like this: ‘Piety is that constant culture of the inward life of holiness before God, and for God, which in turn is applied to all other spheres of life and practice. Piety consists of prayer at God’s throne, study of his Word in his presence, and the sustaining of the life of God in our souls, which in turn affects all our manner of living.’ He is describing a life lived close to God, or, as we have said, walking with God. As Jesus said in John 12:26, “*Whoever serves me must follow me,*” by which he meant, ‘follow closely behind me’ (see also Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23).

How vital these matters are! Without holiness no one can see God!

How can we minister the Word of God to others and live as though the Gospel has made no difference to us? Is it true to say that once you are saved by the precious blood of Jesus Christ you can live how you like? Not at all! “*Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means!*” (Romans 6:1) Not open, scandalous sin maybe, but does that little sin really matter? Or what about that secret sin that no one else knows about? Have you ever thought that to harbour a secret sin is a form of atheism? It is like saying that God is not there, or cannot see, or does not care!

Away with such thoughts – they will lead you into the spiritual wilderness. What did Paul tell the Christians in Thessalonica? He said (1 Thessalonians 4:3), “*It is God’s will that you should be holy.*” This is the place to be. This is where God is found and enjoyed. Jesus said (Matthew 5:8), “*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*” Without holiness you cannot know these things! But remember, “*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*” (1 John 1:9)

Let me end this chapter by asking you again – do you fear God? Are you walking with God? This is God’s will for you. It is why Jesus died for you. It is why the Holy Spirit dwells in you. It is for God’s glory and your good.

Chapter 2 The leader’s holiness of life and the fruitfulness of his ministry

What is God looking for in those he calls to be pastors and church leaders? What is God looking for in your work as a minister?

The answer is that he is looking for faithfulness and fruitfulness. When you are wondering about the life and work of a pastor or church leader you would do well to read carefully Paul’s letters to Titus and Timothy. In 1 Timothy 4:16 Paul writes, “*Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.*”

I think this gives a good summary of what the Lord is looking for in his ministers – faithfulness and fruitfulness.

“*Watch your life*”, or look to yourself, reminds you of that call to personal holiness, of faithful devotion to God. Then he reminds you of the need for faithful perseverance in the doctrine or teaching of the Bible. And finally, he speaks of fruitfulness – saving yourself and those who hear you.

We are thinking about the importance of holiness of life for the fruitfulness of our ministry. I want to remind you first of all that, as a minister, you have a calling from God. You have been given a divine call to serve God in this world.

The Bible speaks about your calling in different ways. How does it express it? Let us look at some examples from Paul. In 2 Timothy 2:24 he calls a minister ‘a servant of the Lord’. In 1 Timothy 4:6, he is called a ‘minister of Jesus Christ’. In 2 Timothy 3:17 he is a ‘man of God’ and in Acts 20:28, someone the Holy Spirit has made an overseer, ‘to shepherd the church of God’.

Brother, you have a high calling from God himself. There is a solemn responsibility laid upon you by the Lord himself. It is, as Paul expresses it, to “*discharge all the duties of your ministry*” (2 Timothy 4:5) or, to carry out your ministry to the full with your best endeavours. It is sheer hypocrisy to think that you can fulfil your ministry and be a faithful and fruitful servant of God whilst living an ungodly and worldly life. Repentance is a necessary part of Christian living for as long as we live in this world.

Let us think now about fruitfulness in the ministry. Don’t forget that God gives gifts to all his people. If he has called you to be a pastor, he has given you the gifts you need to be a pastor where you are. Your responsibility is to use those gifts in being a pastor. Or, using the parable

Jesus told in Luke 19, you are to be a faithful steward of these gifts. Fruitfulness in the ministry is stewarding the gifts you have been given to the glory of God and for the good of his flock. Just like the men in the parable, you are answerable to the Lord for the use you made of his gifts.

How can we measure fruitfulness in the ministry? In the world of business, fruitfulness might be measured by profit, or the size of the company. We need to be careful about worldly ideas infecting our understanding of what fruitfulness is. We need to be looking for spiritual fruitfulness above all else!

There are numerous ways we could think about this. As a minister you need to be growing in the faith personally by adhering to the apostolic doctrine, and by seeking to live close to the Lord. What a tragedy to read of Demas, once a fellow labourer of Paul, but who later forsook him, having loved this present world (2 Timothy 4:10).

Next, you are a shepherd of God's flock, so you need to build them up in the faith, to help them in their own spiritual growth. What is the work of a spiritual shepherd? It is to instruct the brethren, to nourish them, to protect them, to guide them, to serve them, to help them. If you do these things you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ. Your ministry to the flock is to help them along the way through this life. Fulfilling this ministry, you will save both yourself and those who hear you. Perhaps another way we could put it is like this: a spiritually fruitful ministry will see the fruits of the Spirit, listed in Galatians 5, developing.

This is spiritual fruitfulness and I have made no mention of numbers! A church that is being built up spiritually will become a church more and more concerned for the unconverted and a church equipped for the work of ministry. Where there is closeness to Christ, the concern of Christ for the lost will be felt. A Christ-centred, word-hungry, mission-minded, loving church – itself sanctified and useful for the Master – should be your desire and the goal for your ministry.

I hope you feel like saying, 'Who is sufficient for these things?' Our sufficiency must be of God! So, can you see why holiness, or closeness to God is so vital? If you are not walking with the Lord then you are saying, 'My sufficiency is of myself' and you are in danger of being a Demas and harming God's flock.

God's idea of a minister, according to 2 Timothy 2:21, is a man "*made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work*". Nearly 200 years ago, a young Scottish minister called Robert Murray M'Cheyne wrote, 'It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Christ. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God.' That is the man who is a faithful servant – like Epaphras in Colossians 1:7 – and when "*the Chief Shepherd appears ... will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away*" (1 Peter 5:4), and will hear those blessed words from the lips of Jesus himself (Matthew 25:21), "*Well done, good and faithful servant!*"

Chapter 3 The leader's holiness of life as an example for the flock of God

What do we know about God's plan for the church? One answer is that Jesus Christ gave himself for the church that he might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the Word, that he might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish (Eph 5:27,28). Then the church will be a glorious bride for Christ for ever and ever. God's plan is for the church to be like Christ. But we are not to forget that the church is people, individual Christians – God's people, saved by his own precious blood, in whom he is working by the Spirit and the Word in this great work of sanctification.

We said in the first chapter that the Christian life is to be holy. You know how it is often easy to **say** what something is like, but it is really helpful to see it in practice as well. Imagine you are going to a village to tell people who have never seen one what an aeroplane is. You cannot just pack one in your bag, so you have to describe it. If you take a picture, or better still, a model to show them, then how much more meaningful the words will be.

So, God's people are called to be holy men and women. God's word tells us what such a life looks like. And God gives to the church people who are to be examples of that life. Who are they? The Bible tells us that the elders of the church are to be like models for the members to see and copy and like shepherds for the flock to follow. So, how do we work this out?

There are two words in the New Testament that help. They are 'example' and 'imitate'. An example is a model or a pattern to copy. Imitating – or mimicking – is about

copying the example. It is a bit like having a mould of a coin from which you can make numerous copies.

So, who is the supreme example of holiness for us to imitate? It is Jesus Christ. As Paul said (Ephesians 5:1,2), *"Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us."* Of course, we cannot imitate Christ in absolutely everything, but he sets for us the supreme example of holiness in what it means to love God above all else and to love your neighbour.

We have other examples too, by which I mean the apostles. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 4:16, *"Therefore I urge you to imitate me."* And in Philippians 3:17 he said, *"Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you."* Peter said (1 Peter 5:2,3), *"Be shepherds of God's flock ... being examples to the flock."* In case someone thinks, 'Isn't that rather bold for Paul to say imitate me?' he gives this qualification in 1 Corinthians 11:1, *"Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."*

Can you see it? Men can be examples of holiness insofar as they imitate Christ. Read 2 Thessalonians 3, where Paul gives a specific case of his example of godly living for the church to imitate.

So, what about today? Christ is on the throne in heaven, the apostles are with him in glory. How are they examples now? Well, their examples are now safely secured and set before us in Scripture. The apostles were living examples in the days when Scripture was not yet complete, and their example still lives in God's Word.

The value of living examples of godliness remains. That is now part of your calling. You are to be an example to your flock. As Paul says in 1 Timothy 4:12, “... *set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.*” To Titus, in Titus 2:7, he says, “*In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech.*” We have already mentioned 1 Peter 5:3 – be ‘examples to the flock’. And in Hebrews 13:7 Christians are exhorted to “*Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.*”

Think of this, that a church imitating the good example of the apostles, seen in its own leaders, will itself become an example to others! Look at 1 Thessalonians 1:6,7: “*You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.*” This is spiritual fruit and the outworking of God’s plan for his church.

How can you be an example in holiness unless you are pursuing holiness? Think of the damage caused by a bad example. How terrible not to practise what the Word of God preaches. The flock is called to follow the shepherd. What if he is an example of immorality and worldliness? Paul told the Thessalonian church that it was a matter of church discipline if members were disorderly and did not obey the word or follow his example. It was a shameful thing. Likewise it is shameful for leaders to set bad

examples today. It is a slander on the name of Jesus and it harms his flock.

Let me ask you, who are your examples? We all need them. Supremely, the Lord and his apostles – seek to know them better and follow them closely. But look for others too. As Paul said (Philippians 3:17), “*Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.*”

May God grant you the enabling of his Spirit that you may be examples to the flock. What a privilege! What a responsibility. And may we see the fruit of churches becoming examples themselves.

Chapter 4 The leader’s holiness of life as a challenge to unbelievers

Robert Murray M’Cheyne once said that, ‘The greatest need my flock will ever have is to see their pastor walking before them in holiness.’ We have already looked at the importance of your holiness of life as an example to the flock God has entrusted to you. But what about people who are not Christians? The life of a holy man of God can be a great challenge to unbelievers.

In the book of Acts we read about the impact Christians made on the world around them. Yes, by their preaching and evangelising, from time to time backed up by the miracles of the apostles, they were turning the world upside down as the kingdom of God came in power to Jerusalem and to the ends of the earth. But it was not just what they said that had such an effect on the world – it was also how

they lived. They were in the world, but they were no longer of the world. And in their devotion to Christ their whole way of life became a visible witness to the power of the Word of God.

There were all kinds of reactions to them. In Acts 2 we read that there was a sense of awe (v43) amongst those who watched the Christians. For a time they were viewed with favour (v46) and so highly regarded by the people (5:13) that their enemies amongst the religious leaders could not punish them (4:21).

But it was not always to be like that. Jesus had already warned the disciples to expect the world to hate them because they were his followers. Persecution soon sprang up. But what was noticeable about Peter and John, for example, as they were arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin? Their persecutors *“took note that these men had been with Jesus”* (Acts 4:13). Or what about Stephen? Here was a man from whom holiness shone out; he burned with zeal for the glory of God. They stoned him to death.

There is a principle underlying all of this in Matthew 5:13-16, where Jesus said, *“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”*

It is a call for God’s people to bring a powerful influence into the world in which we live – like the preserving, purifying effect of salt that is so beneficial, and it is the wonderful power of light to drive away darkness. In other words, the truly Christian life makes a difference for good in a world of corruption and darkness. The life that can be used so powerfully of God is the life of holiness, of walking with God in the fear of God.

So, as a leader in the church, your life ought to be a witness and a challenge to the unbelievers who know you and see you. Never underestimate what goes on in the minds of people as they are watching. You never know what impact your manner of life may be having on them.

Think about the unbelievers who attend your church or its activities, or those in your family, or amongst your friends and neighbours. Can they see Christ in you? Can they see the difference Christianity makes as you seek to honour God as a pastor, family man, a friend, a neighbour or as a citizen of your country?

Yes, a holy life may provoke hostility, or mockery, or worse. When salt comes into contact with corruption there is bound to be a reaction! Jesus said that darkness hates the light (John 3:19-21). So don’t be surprised by hostility – in fact, be encouraged because it means that your life is making a difference. There are several passages in Peter’s first letter where he speaks about the power of a holy life to challenge unbelievers. Why not read it and search out these passages? Peter is very open – the holy life may well bring hostility from the world, but he says that it is your privilege and glory to suffer for Christ’s sake! However, if

you have a bad name with unbelievers because of shameful, sinful words or behaviour, then not only have you earned it, but you are being a hypocrite and may well be disqualified from continuing in the ministry. Paul says that an overseer “*must also have a good reputation with outsiders*” (1 Timothy 3:7).

Paul said to the Philippian Christians (Philippians 2:14,15), “*Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe.*” So here is one thing in which you ought to be an example to the flock.

Then you must (1 Peter 3:15) “*in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have*” because you never know when someone who is watching and reading the ‘book of your life’ will take an interest in what motivates you. And then you can tell them about Jesus!

Can there be anything more essential for us than the pursuit of holiness? Seek the Lord and his righteousness. Seek purity of heart, exercise yourself unto godliness. What weapons such holy men might be in the hands of the holy God!

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