

“Following Christ, Not His Leaders, Part II”  
Sermon Manuscript

Well, we are continuing our little mini-series on moral failure in leadership, or moral disqualification in ministry leadership. What was initially meant as a one-off sermon turned into three because as I was researching and typing up my sermon, I realized I had so much more to say about this topic, and to do it all in one sermon, wouldn't do it justice. Last week we started looking at 2 out of the 4 essential traits, qualities, or virtues of the Christian life that Christian leaders may lack when they disqualify themselves from ministry leadership. We looked at how first of all, leaders or pastors may lack the virtue of biblical humility or humbleness. And when you lack a proper biblical humility, you will become prideful and egotistical. We saw that a proper biblical view of self is seeing that are what you are only because of the grace of Christ, and not because you are special, or that God saw something in you that He wanted to display or exalt in front of His people, but God chooses weak vessels to display His glory and strength and majesty. The apostle Paul acknowledged that he worked harder than any of the other apostles, yet it was not because of Him, but because of the grace of God. He said in 1 Corinthians 15:10 *“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.”*

When we have this attitude of *“yet not I, but the grace of God with me,”* we are much less likely to be in a posture to commit moral failure. And when we see that we are fallible and depraved sinners in need of God's grace constantly, knowing that we are prone to the same moral failures as others, we will seek to create a proper biblical accountability for our lives, to help us in our fight against sin and temptation and that was the second aspect of the Christian life that we talked about last week. And I say “biblical” or “proper” accountability as opposed to just “accountability” because biblical accountability is not just having people around you and present with you. Many pastors have brothers in the Lord that are present with them, but unfortunately, they are only “yes-men” who say “yes” to everything that the pastor is doing. Proper biblical accountability is having godly people whom you trust that can speak into your life and hold you accountable to things that are sinfully questionable in their eyes. It is having men who are not afraid to rebuke you and to tell you the truth of a situation. And rebukes are not fun to receive, and they can be very painful, but just like how a surgery can be painful, yet necessary, so reproof for our sin can be painful, yet necessary for longevity in ministry. Just like how a timely surgery might prevent irreversible damage done to the body, so sometimes spiritual surgery is necessary to prevent a lifetime of ministry pain and spiritual damage done to the body of Christ. That's why I quoted Proverbs 27:6 *“Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.”*

But we come to the third and fourth qualities or virtues or essential aspects, or however you want to call it, that is key to not only faithful ministry leadership, but also of being a Christian period! And those third and fourth qualities that Christian leaders who fall most likely lack are the fear of sin and a genuine love for Christ. A lack of the fear of sin and a lack of a genuine love for Christ. Now I realize that last Sunday, I said the third quality was a lack of the fear of God. While there is some overlap, I realized it was more accurate for me to say a lack of the fear of sin. So let's look at the third quality or virtue that a ministry leader who falls may have lacked which contributed to his fall: a lack of the fear of sin. Why should we fear sin you

might ask? Hasn't Christ paid for and defeated our sins at the cross? Aren't we no longer going to be judged for our sins? Yes. So why should we be afraid to sin? Why? Because Christ died for our sins so that we would no longer be enslaved to our sins, but free from our sins. We should be afraid to sin because sin goes against the very character and goodness of God. Sin is everything that God is opposed to. Yes, we shouldn't fear of eternal judgment when we do sin because all those who are in Christ Jesus Romans 8:1 says are no longer under condemnation and Christ paid for all those future sins we would ever commit. But we should fear what sin still does to us, to those around us, and to the God whom we love and profess to follow. In other words, we should fear the ramifications or consequences of sin and that should be especially true for those in leadership in ministry because that person's life influences and impacts many other lives. That's why not any old Joe can be an elder, pastor, or deacon. The strictest standards of moral character are required for those aspiring to become an elder or deacon. You can read all about that in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

But those who disqualified themselves in ministry leadership, when they engaged in whatever sin disqualified them were not thinking: "in a couple of years, by committing this sin, I will ruin possibly my career, I will destroy my family, ruin the trust of my wife and kids, destroy the ministry and credibility I have built up over the years with my church, and tarnish the reputation and precious name of my lord and Savior Jesus Christ." If you have that thinking, that is a good thing, and it shows you are fearing sin and its consequences as you should. And so when a ministry leader does disqualify themselves by bringing reproach on himself, either they know all this, but they go for it anyways, showing how incredibly hard their heart is from God and from all those things that are dear in his life...or they are deceived by the deceitfulness of sin into being led somehow that these consequences won't happen or aren't as severe as he thinks... or a combination of both. Fear is a good thing when it's for our good and prospering. The prophet Jeremiah in Jeremiah 32 says that God putting His fear in us is a good thing for our good, in verse 38-39 it says *"And they shall be My people, and I will be their God; and I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me always, for their own good and for the good of their children after them."* What parent would not warn his child that if he goes down a path of a criminal or a path of drugs, that he could end up in jail or even worse...dead? And while that seems obvious that a parent would warn their children of the consequences of a certain lifestyle, yet the tragedy is we too often forget that there are serious consequences to our sin. We are very amnesic to sin. We easily forget God's Word and His warnings. God is serious about the reputation of His holiness. And He is serious about the purity of His people, especially His leaders. When we don't hear of or see the consequences of living a life of sin, we can too easily forget the fact that sin can still wreak devastating consequences. I think that's why God keeps allowing pastors to fall instead of preventing them because it's a constant reminder to us of the serious nature and consequence of sin. [I will talk more about that next week].

Thankfully however, God has not given real time examples of men who fall so that we wouldn't follow after their path, but He has given biblical examples in His Word of the seriousness of sin. I think of one example in the book of Numbers, chapter 16 of Korah and Dathan's rebellion. Korah and Dathan were men who stirred up a rebellion against Moses and Aarons' leadership out of jealousy and envy saying, *"does God only speak through you?"* And they tried to get a bunch of Israelites to rebel against Moses' leadership as well. But what did

God do in response? He opened the earth and swallowed them whole, killing them. In the New Testament we have God striking dead Ananias and Sapphira. Now I don't know if they were part of leadership of the early church per say, but Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit, and they were struck dead by God as a consequence to preserve the purity of the church.

Or if you look at the way the Corinthian church did communion, from the very passage from which I usually read from, in 1 Corinthians 11 it says, *"that many of you have gone weak, sick and some have even died!"* Why? The Corinthian believers were coming to the Lord in an unworthy manner. Instead of coming to communion with their hearts trembling and remembering the sacrifice of their Lord for their sins, they were treating communion like a feast to indulge. Instead of a time to examine their own life to see if there was any unconfessed sin, many brazenly sinned against their fellow brothers by putting themselves first in getting access to the communion table. And back then, communion was not a piece of bread and some juice it was often also the occasion for a meal, a feast. For some Christians, that was a time in which they could not only celebrate the Lord's sacrifice, but also have their physical needs met. But those who were poor working all day were the ones who could only come later, but the richer believers who didn't have to work as long came first to the table and were able to eat all the good stuff. So not only were the richer brethren causing the poorer believers to get only the scraps of the communion feast, but they were contributing to the poorer believers being distracted from the whole point of gathering for communion to remember the cross...because you can imagine their stomachs were growling and those brothers are offended at the insensitivity of the richer brethren. So what did God do in response? God caused some of those sinning Corinthian believers to become *"weak, sick, and to even die!"* Even though they did not lose their salvation, as true believers never do, yet, they did lose their physical life because God was seriously upset at how His Son was being treated.

If God struck dead His own people both back in the Old Testament and even in the New Testament, then who says that can't happen today? Who says it was only God back then that cared about the purity of the church, but He doesn't care as vigorously about the purity of His people now? Hebrews 13:8 says, *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever!"* Wait, pastor, are you saying that even for yourself, if you sin too far, God could remove you from the pulpit by striking you dead? Yes! Isn't that pretty severe for a God of love and grace to do that? Well, yes it is severe because God sometimes acts severely to prove His point. For example, if we saw in the book of Romans that if we as Gentiles boast that God has extended salvation to us over the Jews because we are somehow better than them, God can easily cut us off from being a representative of Him on earth as part of the church. Paul said in Romans 11:22 saying, *"Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off."* If you're still not convinced that God can't act severely...think about this...go back to the very beginning. Adam and Eve disobeyed God right? For what kind of sin? By eating some fruit on a tree. And what was the judgment and consequence from God? Physical and spiritual death, destruction, suffering, misery, and sin entered the world because of not refraining from eating some fruit. And are there not worse sins that we could think of that we ourselves have committed against God?! And yet we are still living, breathing, and enjoy the good gifts that God gives to us in life instead of being divinely struck dead by almighty God.

Now, what I have talked about is the fear of sin's consequence. I have talked about underestimating the damage sin can do in your life. And those who engage in morally disqualifying sins has a light view of sin and a light view of what God can do in response to this sin. They lack the fear of sin and the fear of God. But if we left it just at that, that we would be giving the rod of discipline to a child but not showing him how to have a right heart to act rightly in place of that. That would be like putting something off, but not putting something on. What we also need to talk about is the lack of a genuine love for Christ. Because the fear of God and the love of God go hand in hand like hand into a glove, like two sides to the same coin...you can't have one without the other.

Why does a fear of sin and of God and a love for God go hand in hand together? Let me ask you this? If our sins are paid for at the cross, why not keep sinning? Why does it matter if you sin or not? Well it matters that you sin or not because if you truly love and treasure God, you will fear to have your sin distance your closeness with Him. You will fear His holy displeasure with your sin and actions not because you fear eternal separation with Him, but because you fear putting temporal separation from Him. The Bible says in 1 John 4 that perfect love casts out fear because fear has to do with punishment...But 1 John 4 is talking about the type of fear that characterizes unbelievers where they are terrified of doing something that angers God and they will be thrown into hell forever for it. It's like the type of fear that an employee might have for his boss where one wrong move could get him fired. There's no intimacy there. No, the type of fear that we are to have is the type of fear that spouses have for each other in marriage. BECAUSE I love Heidi, I fear doing anything to hurt her or to put a wedge between us because of my sin. That's the key "BECAUSE I LOVE HER," I fear losing that closeness with her. I fear going to bed with unresolved anger and bitterness in my heart towards her and I'm sure she feels the same.

You fear to displease those whom you most love. You fear to displease those whom you most love. And that is why you will find if a ministry leader lacked a proper fear of sin and a fear of God for sin, then that means He did not love Christ as He ought to have as well. Jesus says in Matthew if your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you, for it is better for you to enter into heaven with one eye, than to have both eyes and be thrown into hell. In this passage, on the one side, we see the fear of sin and fear of God...He is warning about the seriousness of sin, and the seriousness of hellfire for those who continue in that path. But if you flip that coin to the other side, you will see the love of God where Jesus is saying, do you love me so much that you are willing to rip out your own eye for me? Do you love your family? Men do you love your wife and your kids? If a robber with a gun came into your home and tried to shoot your family, would you not step in the way to take a bullet for them? Would you not try to even maybe subdue the robber and take away the threat? If we are willing to do that for our families, how much more should we do that for our own souls' sake? Because there are intruders coming into your heart every day seeking to rob and pillage the home of your heart. And yet, many men and those in Christian leadership are opening the door of their heart to sin and letting the enemy destroy the home and they are doing nothing about it.

At the end of the day, there's not a complicated process we need to know by which we avoid moral failure. It simply comes down to this: do you love Jesus? Do you love Him? Jesus asked Peter three times after He denied Him, "Peter do you love me? Peter do you love me? Peter do you love me?" Because at the moment that Peter betrayed His master, Jesus was not

the love of His life. Jesus was not the supreme treasure of His life. At the end of the book of Ephesians, in Ephesians 6:24 Paul said this *“Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love.* There’s a blessing for all those who love Jesus with a pure love. And the reason why God says with *“incorruptible love”* is because our love can get corrupted. Our love can get corrupted by many things in this world, by many sinful desires of the flesh. Like an unwanted weed sprouting up in the place of another plant you planted, our love for Christ can get corrupted and choked by the sinful weeds of this world and our flesh.

And so we need to remind ourselves of Jesus’ love for us by rehearsing the gospel to ourselves. We need to remind ourselves of where we were before Christ saved us. We were once dead in our sins, without God and without hope in this world. We thought sin was life giving and joy producing, but all it was doing was ripping out chunks of our flesh. Like thinking the bait on the hook was going to taste good, we like fish, continuously bit the bait only to find out that a sharp hook pierced our mouth. That’s what sin does, it deceives, and we deceive ourselves with it. And the bad news is there was nothing we could do about getting out of it, we were enslaved to it and its power. We were sinners by nature and by choice. And because of this, we were destined for unimaginable place of torment called hell where the worm never dies and the fire is never quenched because is a good and righteous Judge who must see that evil and sin is punished.

And yet the good news is this; that in the kindness of God, God shined a bright righteous light into the darkness of our hearts, the light of Jesus Christ and revealed our ugly and depraved soul. God showed us our true condition and true need for cleansing and forgiveness. And then God granted us the faith to believe in His one and only Son Jesus Christ. He caused you to be born again to newness of life in Christ through His Holy Spirit. He took your sin and placed it on His perfect Son Jesus Christ taking the wrath of God in your place for your sins. He placed Jesus’ righteousness on you so that you would be seen as righteous and perfect. He gave you a new heart to turn away from sin and to believe and to obey and please God. Now in Jesus, you are forgiven, redeemed, and cleansed by His blood. *“For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died. And He died for all, so that they who live would no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.”* What is controlling? Is it your sin, or is it the love of Christ? [pray]