



Secret Sins of Spiritual Leaders



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Many churches are in trouble. Often (though certainly not always) the cause is to be laid at the feet of those in positions of leadership. Entrusted with shepherding the souls of men and women and boys and girls, some spiritual leaders sadly give into secret sins that harm the church in a most insidious way.

There are those whose fall is tragic and public. Their moral failure is simply so devastating and the effects so staggering, everyone can feel the disgust of the scandal and no one is blind to the consequences. Those cannot be considered secret sins of spiritual leaders.

But secret sins do, in fact, exist and can destroy a church even as the more scandalous transgressions do. I refer to those less obvious, but equally treacherous, sins in this essay.

I also refer to more than the secret sins of pastors, although they must certainly be addressed, because the spiritual leadership in a church also includes the elders, deacons, their wives and the pastor's wife. It also includes Sunday School teachers, Children's ministry leaders, Youth ministry leaders and sponsors, church musicians, and Bible Study teachers. All of these are also spiritual leaders in a church and they too can yield to secret sins which become like termites that eat away from within.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE SECRET SINS OF SPIRITUAL LEADERS?

Impatience

God is the God of patience (Romans 15:5) and the Holy Spirit produces this godly character quality in genuine believers who obey the Word and yield themselves to Him (Galatians 5:22-23). Patience is one of the marks of older, mature, godly men (Titus 2:2) and God commanded that it be demonstrated by all Christians toward all people (1 Thessalonians 5:14). As spiritual lead-

ers in local churches deal with the flock of God, they need patience in their responses toward people. It's a sin to bully people, to be impatient and combative and argumentative. But spiritual leaders also need to patiently wait for God to work in His way regarding various ministry situations. Impatience is a subtle sin that shows an unwillingness to wait for God to act in His time. Leaders often are guilty of leading where God is not directing, in the time not of His choosing. Local church leaders sometimes forget to wait for God to do His work in His way in His time. Sometimes impatience drives leaders to abandon a ministry before God has. Their impatience can harm the congregation of God.

Manipulation

Related to impatience, the sin of manipulation is another attempt to get your own way in your own time by self-directed means. Through clever thinking and quick wits, many leaders assemble a complicated series of conversations, meetings, and smaller decisions designed to assert their will. But if things begin to go in a direction not planned or not intended, leaders who lack integrity seek to control the outcome by disingenuous comments and behavior in order to redirect the group. The manipulative leader will be inconsistent in what he says, varying his words to fit each conversation, always attempting to control the listener(s). Different from influence, manipulation is excessive and crafty and dishonest. Sad to say, but manipulation is often times more frequently present in local churches than honest discussion, gentle persuasion, and biblical assent.

Fearfulness

The attraction to popularity, approval, and success leaves a leader vulnerable to fear and insecurity. Fear of what men say, fear of disap-

proval, fear of failure can subtly choke those in spiritual leadership and leave them paralyzed. There's no feeling so free as the freedom from intimidation because you've made the prior commitment to fear God, always seeking to please Him in everything. As Paul asked the Galatians: "Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10).

One older, Irish pastor had this poem by Norman Macleod inscribed on the flyleaf of his Bible:

*Some will love you,
Some will hate you,
Some will flatter,
Some will spite.
Cease from man and look above,
Trust in God and do the right.*

Covetousness

Few churches have large financial resources held in reserve. Most churches live frugally, even from offering to offering. One secret sin of those in spiritual leadership is a jealous envy of other churches that have more people, bigger budgets, larger staffs, newer buildings. Covetousness can bring ruin to the man or woman who yields to its temptation. It can also drive churches to "keep up with the neighbors" and fashion ministries based on what everyone else is doing rather than on how God leads them in His Word. The nation Israel frequently made disastrous decisions in the Old Testament simply because they coveted their neighbors and wanted to

be like them. This secret sin can bring very obvious, and very sad, consequences to churches today.

Dealing with Mistakes

Every leader will make mistakes and errors of judgment. Wise leaders learn from their mistakes and humbly communicate to those who follow. But unfortunately, there are some people in positions of spiritual leadership who actually damage ministries by their inability to accept blame and admit an error. They exacerbate their mistake and frustrate the people by this subtle sin.

J. Oswald Sanders wrote:


"Spirituality does not guarantee infallible judgment. The Spirit-filled person is less likely to make mistakes of judgment than his secular counterpart, but perfection eludes us all, whatever our level of spiritual development. Even the apostles made mistakes that required divine correction. Spiritual leaders who have given such a significant share of their lives to knowing God, to prayer, and to wrestling with the problems of renewal and revival may find it difficult to concede the possibility of misjudgment or mistake. Surely the leader must be a person of strength and decisiveness, to stand for what he believes. But willingness to concede error and to defer to the judgment of one's peers increases one's influence rather than diminishes it. Followers will lose confidence in a leader who appears to believe himself to be infallible. It is strange but true that a perception of infallibility in one area of life often coexists with great humility in other areas."¹

Suspicion

Discernment is a godly character quality to be sought and honored. It is commended in the Bereans (Acts 17:11) who "searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so." It is given major treatment in Proverbs as an important aspect of wisdom. But discernment must be controlled by the Word of God and the Spirit of God or else it can become an attitude of suspicion which casts doubts upon other people's motives and twists them into incorrect conclusions. We must be careful not to attribute to others our own sinful behavior, insecurities, attitudes, and motives ("I know what I'd do in that situation... and so that must be what they're doing!") Note what Cardinal Richelieu, who led the bitter persecution of French Protestants in the 17th Century, stated: "Give me six lines written by the most honorable of men, and I will find an excuse in them to hang him."² It is indeed grievous when this type of spirit is found in our people or in our spiritual leaders.

To assume the worst in people is a burdensome type of leadership which is not loving, godly leadership. Instead, love "rejoices in the truth (i.e. discernment) and bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things (i.e. not sus-

LES LOFQUIST'S ITINERARY		
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	10	Kansas Regional, Rose Hill, KS
	19-20	2011 Convention Site Visit, Fort Mitchell, KY
June 2011	23-25	IFCA Board Meeting, Fort Mitchell, KY
	27-July 1	IFCA Annual Convention, Fort Mitchell, KY



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