

CHAPTER 17

THE WICKEDNESS OF 'HIRELINGS' AND OF COWARDLY LEADERS WHO LEAVE THE CONTROVERSIAL PARTS OF THE BIBLE OUT OF THEIR TEACHING

¹¹ *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.* ¹² *He who is a hireling and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.* ¹³ *He flees because he is a hireling and cares nothing for the sheep.*

John 10:11-13 (RSV)

*To whom shall I speak and give warning,
that they may hear?
Behold, their ears are closed,
they cannot listen;
behold, the word of the Lord is to them an object of scorn,
they take no pleasure in it.*

Jeremiah 6:10 (RSV)

¹³ *“For from the least to the greatest of them,
everyone is greedy for unjust gain;
and from prophet to priest,
every one deals falsely.*
¹⁴ *They have healed the wound of my people lightly,
saying, ‘Peace, peace,’
when there is no peace.*

Jeremiah 6:13-14 (RSV)

*For the shepherds are stupid
and do not inquire of the Lord;
therefore they have not prospered,
and all their flock is scattered.*
Jeremiah 10:21 (ESV)

The word of the LORD came to me: ² “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord GOD: Ho, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? ³ You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fatlings; but you do not feed the sheep.

Ezekiel 34:1-3 (RSV)

*Her prophets are fickle, treacherous men;
her priests profane what is holy;
they do violence to the law.*

Zephaniah 3:4 (ESV)

*Thus says the Lord concerning the prophets
who lead my people astray,
who cry “Peace”
when they have something to eat,
but declare war against him
who puts nothing into their mouths.*

Micah 3:5 (RSV)

*Her leaders pronounce judgment for a bribe,
Her priests instruct for a price
And her prophets divine for money.
Yet they lean on the Lord saying,
“Is not the Lord in our midst?
Calamity will not come upon us.”*
Micah 3:11 (NASB)

A church leader or teacher can also be wicked because of what he does *not* teach i.e. the things he leaves out, due to his dishonesty or cowardice.

We tend to think of false doctrine and false teachers in terms of an *untrue* message being preached. It is easier to identify that as false, as there is something tangible which you can check against the Bible. However, in listening to the teaching of many leaders over three decades, I have come to the view that most falsehood actually consists of what men *don't say*. In particular, they under-emphasise or ignore the Gospel. Many other parts of the Bible are also left out.

Some leaders might technically mention these topics, but only briefly, or toned down, so as to avoid being controversial. I only realised how numerous these neglected topics are when I set out to write my own books. I wanted to focus on the things that other leaders under-emphasise or ignore. That sounds like a narrow field, but I realised they had actually left me with most of the Bible, because their preaching and teaching is confined to so few areas. It probably covers 10-20%, at most, of what is in the Bible.

I shall set out below a list of just some of the main subjects which most leaders *avoid* or seriously under-emphasise within the traditional, denominational, clergy-led churches. This problem is compounded by the fact that such leaders tend to copy each other. They like to ‘play safe’ by sticking to things that other men preach on. They don't want to be the first, or the only, man who is saying something. That policy of imitation further reduces the range of topics that are taught, quite apart from their own reluctance to teach on contentious or complicated issues in the first place.

A list of just some of the main issues and subjects which most church leaders avoid, under-emphasise, or trivialise

In no particular order, the subjects that most leaders don't teach adequately, or don't teach on at all, include the following:

a) *Anything involving Bible prophecy*

This makes up about 30% of the entire Bible, so avoiding this whole area is a huge omission. It deprives the people of a vast area of knowledge and understanding that God wants us to have. Prophecy is avoided primarily because leaders don't understand it themselves, due to being taught to use the misguided “*allegorical approach*”. I cover this grievous error in my Book 3. However, prophecy is controversial too, so they also avoid it because they fear arousing antagonism or being criticised. They fear people more than they fear God.

b) *Anything involving Israel*

The word ‘*Israel*’ itself, not to mention ‘*Israelite*’ or ‘*Israelites*’, occurs 2563 times in the Bible. Thus one would imagine that everyone would agree it is a crucial subject which needs to be dealt with thoroughly. Instead, in most churches, it is avoided like the plague, except for the fact that, in liberal churches, the modern State of Israel is heavily criticised. But they avoid speaking about Israel in biblical times, so as not to draw attention to the fact that the Jews have been in the land for 4,000 years.

Modern day Israel is only spoken of for the purpose of condemning it. That hostility is due to their misguided and misinformed views on so called 'Palestine'. Therefore complete silence on the subject of Israel would actually be preferable to the inaccurate things that they do say. However, that misguided political agitation isn't what I mean by teaching on Israel. People need to be told about God's promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, which He fully intends to honour by blessing, preserving and restoring the Jewish people.

Instead, the promises are ignored, mainly because leaders themselves have been taught (wrongly) that the Church has 'replaced' Israel. Therefore they think that the modern State of Israel, and even the Jewish people as a whole, have no biblical significance and are nothing to do with God's promise to Abraham. It is widely assumed that the Jews are no longer part of God's plans at all, or at least no more than any other nation or race.

Such leaders also know that the subject of Israel is controversial and they aren't willing to speak on any topic which might arouse criticism, make them unpopular, or reduce the financial giving to the church. That is especially so, given the bitter hostility that is felt by so many liberal Christians towards Israel. They speak so loudly and aggressively that cowardly leaders are too intimidated to teach the truth about Israel, even if they knew it, which most of them don't.

c) Sin, in all its forms

Cowardly leaders and hirelings know that talking about sin makes you unpopular. It convicts people, if we faithfully teach what the *Bible* says about it, rather than give our own opinions. Congregations don't like hearing the truth about their sinful lifestyles, and will react aggressively if such things are spoken about. Thus, if a man is a hireling rather than a shepherd, and therefore cares more for himself than for the sheep, he will soon learn to avoid speaking about sin. The only exception, which they are willing to speak about, is someone else's sin, such as capitalists and bankers. But they scrupulously avoid mentioning the sins of the congregation.

d) Repentance

Repentance is another forbidden subject, perhaps even more so than sin. No leader who wants to be liked will ever call for it. Yet, "*Repent*" was the very first word spoken in their public ministry by both John the Baptist and Jesus. It was also almost the first word Peter said in his first sermon after the ascension. None of them were seeking to be popular. Their only objective was to tell the truth and to benefit their audience, not to promote themselves, gain popularity, or secure their incomes.

e) God's judgment

God's judgment is even more of a taboo subject. It has two main aspects. The judgment for unsaved people is about condemnation and wrath, and leads to the Lake of Fire. The judgment for Christians is at the Judgment Seat of Christ. That is not about God's wrath and does not result in condemnation. It is about assessing our faithfulness and the fruit produced by our lives from conversion onwards. However, it will still result in rebuke and the loss of rewards for many of us. I examine this in my Book 4 and would urge you to look at that, as it is so badly neglected in most churches.

Both aspects of the judgment are unpopular with Christians and non-Christians alike. Therefore, both are avoided by preachers and are thus badly misunderstood. However, I would say the judgment for Christians is even less understood. Most Christians, even in the better churches, have either never heard of it at all, or have only the most basic knowledge. I know that because I have interviewed many people on this issue, including leaders, and have been shocked by their ignorance. I have also corresponded about it on Twitter.

f) Anything complicated, which requires a lot of effort and study to teach on it

Many church leaders spend an alarmingly small amount of time preparing their sermons. That is partly due to laziness, but it is also because they tend to be a '*jack of all trades*' who has to do everything else,

as well as the preaching and teaching. So, they avoid any topic which is complicated, such that it would take a lot of study to be able to speak about it. They will choose instead something else which is easier, shorter and simpler to explain.

Ideally, they like to copy a sermon by some other man and just download it from the internet. They know that even if they did enough study to speak competently on a complex issue that is still not quite enough. They would probably be asked questions about it afterwards which would require a lot of surplus knowledge, over and above what is said in the sermon. That is because to speak properly on any subject you need to know it so well that you are sharing only a fraction of what you know in total.

You also need to have so thoroughly mastered the subject as to be able to handle the questions people might then ask. If you don't want to put in that much preparatory work, or if you don't have the time because you are doing every other job in the church, you will simply steer clear of such topics. The problem is further compounded by the fact that, in most churches, only one or two men ever preach. Therefore the time available for detailed study is even more limited.

g) Anything to do with the gifts of the Holy Spirit

The avoidance of this huge subject is partly because so many are 'cessationists'. That means they have been taught that the gifts of the Holy Spirit have *ceased*, and that they were only meant for the first century. They have no biblical basis for believing that. The Bible says nothing at all to that effect, even indirectly. Nevertheless, leaders are not necessarily being dishonest in avoiding this topic. Many do what they mistakenly, but sincerely, believe to be right. That said, most never explain *why* they think the gifts have ceased.

Their main reason for not providing authorities from Scripture in support of cessationism is simply that there is nothing in the Bible to support it. In that respect their silence is blameworthy. They are teaching a doctrine without being frank as to *where they get it from*. They rely solely on what they themselves have been taught, and they assume that must be true, without ever checking it. Then they simply tell their congregations that it's true and leave it at that.

They give no honest exposition of what the Bible actually says on this issue, or rather of what it doesn't say. If they did, people would ask awkward questions and even start disagreeing. If that is their motive for avoiding the issue, then their silence would be even more wrong, and possibly wicked. However, there is another much simpler reason why some won't teach about the gifts of the Holy Spirit, even where they are not 'cessationists'. That is that they have seen that it is yet another controversial subject and they don't want to become unpopular.

So, their avoidance of this is not for theological reasons, but just because they want a quiet life. In part, that fear of controversy is based on the unbiblical, crazy things done by 'hyper-charismatic' churches, where the gifts of the Holy Spirit are grossly misused. Even worse, in many cases, what is said and done is nothing to do with the Holy Spirit. They are just counterfeit gifts, which come from demons. Satan's strategy is to discredit the genuine gifts of the Holy Spirit by causing people to operate in false gifts.

They then say and do weird things, even barking like dogs and clucking like chickens, and claim that the Holy Spirit is causing them to do so. The *false* gifts displayed by such misguided people then deter millions of others from going anywhere near the *genuine* gifts. That reaction may be understandable on the part of immature church members who have been put off by what they have witnessed elsewhere, or heard about. However, for leaders to throw out the baby with the bath-water in this way is not justifiable.

They know better than to do that, or they ought to. Many leaders are fully aware that there are genuine gifts of the Holy Spirit as well as counterfeit gifts. For such leaders to stay quiet, and avoid this whole subject, is profoundly wrong. They are denying their people any opportunity to learn about, and operate

in, the real gifts. Many are even banning what they know to be the *genuine* gifts of the Holy Spirit, not because they believe they ceased in the first century, but simply because they are afraid.

They fear being criticised for allowing them to be used, even in a proper, orderly, biblical manner as God intended. Due to their cowardice, a whole generation of Christians has been brought up with no exposure to the genuine gifts of the Holy Spirit. That is the result of their leaders' failure, or refusal, to operate biblically. In their own defence, such leaders point to what apostle Paul said about the need for things to be done "*decently and in order.*" However, let's look at the verse very closely:

⁴⁰ *but all things should be done decently and in order.*

1 Corinthians 14:40 (RSV)

Such leaders focus exclusively on the second part of that verse which says: "...*decently and in order.*" On that basis, they argue against anything being done which might be felt not to be decent or orderly. On the face of it, that seems fair enough. It is what Paul instructed us to avoid. Where they go wrong, however, is to ignore the *first* part of that verse, which says "*but all things should be done*". Paul's concern was not only to *avoid* the use of counterfeit gifts and the misuse of genuine gifts. He also wanted to *promote* the proper use of genuine gifts.

A leader cannot therefore fulfil his duty solely by merely preventing the abuse, misuse, or counterfeiting of spiritual gifts. He also has to permit and encourage the genuine. That requires a leader to have enough discernment, and common sense, to differentiate between the real and the false. Having done that, his duty is then to encourage the former and prevent the latter. Admittedly, that makes life more complicated for himself. But so be it! We are not entitled to disobey God, or rewrite the Bible, in order to make leadership an easier task.

h) Anything to do with Creation, Noah's Ark, the Flood and the rest of Genesis 1-11

Most leaders in the West do not teach that Genesis 1-11 is literally true. They treat these passages as "*just metaphors*" or "*stories which contain a message*". Such men are often just trying to fit in with modern politically correct ideas and the trends of public opinion. They fear men and want to be popular. Many simply don't want to be sneered at or called '*unsophisticated*' for taking the accounts of the Creation or the Flood literally.

Yet the apostles, and Jesus, took them entirely literally. They didn't worry about being sneered at. They obviously preferred not to be sneered at, but they did not allow that *to have any bearing on what they taught*. One church I used to be part of contained a lot of doctors, lecturers and university students. The senior Minister spoke one day about Creation and tried to accommodate the theory of evolution. I think it was partly because he himself had been brainwashed into accepting it, as so many of our generation have.

However, I felt that another reason was that he wanted to fit in with public opinion. He did not want to be looked down on as a '*non-intellectual*'. If that was his reason, it would be wickedness to speak as he did. He was undermining God's Word, and misleading God's people, merely to enhance his own image and to avoid being criticised. But he was not alone. Thousands of leaders are causing terrible damage to the Church and to the way millions of people see the Bible. That is why I believe it is no exaggeration to refer to such men as wicked.

i) Most of the rest of the Old Testament

Many preachers avoid most of the Old Testament, except for the 'easier' parts. They will teach about Daniel in the lions' den, and his three friends in the fiery furnace. But they will ignore the prophecies and any book which requires hard work to understand it. The problem is that a lot of the Old Testament is hard to understand, at least at first. The end result is that most of the modern Church, at least in the West, is ignorant of more than 90% of the Old Testament.

But if you don't understand the Old Testament, which is three quarters of the Bible, you can't properly understand the New Testament or what God is doing now. Perhaps the main reason for this is laziness, and also the leaders' assumption that the congregation won't want to do any hard work either. So, they stick to a few passages that are easier to understand. Other than that, they focus on the New Testament, though not even all of that. They leave out the "hard" parts, such as Romans, Galatians, Hebrews and Revelation.

j) Anything to do with demons or how they affect us today and especially the subject of casting demons out of people

This whole subject is widely considered to be far too controversial ever to be spoken of in churches, even by those who know something about demonology and deliverance. However, an even bigger problem is that so many people assume that demons were only operative in Bible times and play no role today, here and now, in our own lives, or amongst the people we know. Above all, it is taken for granted that they cannot possibly have any part to play in the lives of Christians, or in the problems faced by churches. The very idea is ruled out and is not even considered.

k) Anything to do with the roles of men and women, within marriage and in the Church

It takes a brave man today to speak openly, even in a church, about what the Bible says about the God-given roles of men and women and the profound differences between them. It is much easier for a leader either to say nothing, or to embrace the misguided 'feminist' thinking espoused by the secular world. The people then never get to hear what God has to say. At least it is never explained or taught. Therefore the people never hear anything to counteract the nonsense which the world churns out. That is one of the reasons why so many marriages are falling apart, even amongst Christians.

l) Anything to do with rebutting 'political correctness' in any of its aspects

Many Christians are just as politically correct as the World, but they usually don't realise it and have no idea where their unbiblical ideas come from. Even if they do, they don't know why those ideas are wrong, or how to rebut them. Church leaders should be tearing political correctness to shreds, on a regular basis, so as to counteract the unbiblical propaganda that is continually being poured into people's minds. Yet, instead of counteracting it, many leaders are supportive of it and their sermons are full of its ideas, principles and assumptions.

m) How the Church operated, and how it was structured and led, in the first century, as per the book of Acts and the New Testament letters

I address this huge subject in my Book 8, but it is almost universally ignored by church leaders. The vast majority of them uphold the hierarchical, traditional, 'clergy-led' system which has been accepted, virtually without question, all over the world, even though it is the opposite of what the early Church did. See Book 8 for a full explanation of how traditional practices and structures have replaced what the Bible teaches and what the apostles did.

n) Anything to do with marriage, divorce, family life and child raising

Again, all of this is felt to be too controversial and sensitive to mention. It is safest for a leader to steer well clear, especially as there are bound to be people in the congregation who are divorced and remarried or who have marital problems and/or issues with their children.

Given all the things which are not being taught, it is hardly surprising that there is now such widespread shallowness and illiteracy in the churches about the Bible. Moreover, it is rapidly getting much worse, because a generation of dumbed-down leaders is coming into place who have no memory of the 1970s and earlier, when the Bible was better taught. Such leaders, who were not taught properly themselves, are not capable of teaching others, even if they had the courage to do so, which most don't.

Why it is ‘wicked’ for leaders to fail to teach the whole Bible, whether due to laziness or cowardice

Some may think it harsh for me to describe as wicked those leaders who don’t teach their people the whole Bible. They may concede that they should perhaps be called lazy, cowardly or misguided, but that ‘wicked’ is too strong a word. However, we need to remember the enormous importance of what is being dealt with here. We are speaking of *God’s own Word*. It reveals the one and only means by which people can be saved. It also sets out how they are meant to grow as disciples, and become able to lead others to salvation.

When a leader fails to teach the whole Bible, whether it is due to laziness, indifference, cowardice, or all three, it is a terrible breach of duty. He is denying his people the chance to learn those things. It could even mean those people will never be saved, because they never get to hear the real Gospel. In other cases they may be saved but never become mature disciples, capable of reaching others, or of becoming effective leaders themselves. If so, the “*Great Commission*” given to us by Jesus in Matthew 28 cannot be fulfilled.

Instead of producing ‘disciples’, the churches are now bringing up a generation of spectators and helpless dependants. They are only there to form an audience and to give money to leaders. Most congregations do not know the Bible, have no discernment, and can’t witness to others. They are largely indistinguishable from the unsaved world. Looked at in those terms, one can see why God might view a leader’s neglect of duty as being more serious than crimes on the part of an unbeliever. That is what I expect God to think. If so, many leaders will be shocked at what is said to them at the Judgment Seat.

Such men, and perhaps we will be among them ourselves, will hear Jesus rebuking them for their insincerity, laziness and cowardice rather than praising their ministries, as they had expected. Any harm done by their (or our) failure to lead courageously will be far greater than that which is caused by thieves or burglars, as the results will be eternal. If someone steals a wallet or car, it only has minor temporary consequences. But if a church leader teaches falsely, or leaves out vital truths due to laziness or cowardice, people are damaged and weakened and their eternal lives are put at risk:

“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.....”

Hosea 4:6(a) (RSV)

“.....and a people without understanding shall come to ruin.”

Hosea 4:14(b) (RSV)

***For the shepherds are stupid
and do not inquire of the Lord;
therefore they have not prospered,
and all their flock is scattered.
Jeremiah 10:21 (ESV)***

God’s judgment will come upon all who mislead others, but especially on insincere or cowardly church leaders who mislead God’s own people:

***He who misleads the upright into an evil way
will fall into his own pit;
Proverbs 28:10(a) (RSV)***

The problem of arrogant church leaders who can’t tolerate being corrected, questioned or instructed, especially by a ‘lay’ person

Many church leaders are unwilling to be corrected, questioned or instructed, especially by a ‘lay’ person. They might accept these things from a fellow ‘clergyman’, but not from ‘ordinary’ people who

are 'only' members of their congregation. That arrogant attitude comes from years of being the ruler of a church, rather than its servant. The clergy system breeds haughtiness and a sense of being above the people. We see this in the account of the man born blind, who received his sight when Jesus healed him. The Pharisees wanted to know what had happened, so they questioned the man:

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ The Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see." ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" There was a division among them. ¹⁷ So they again said to the blind man, "What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet."

John 9:13-17 (RSV)

However, they could not endure it that the man began to challenge and instruct them and had the impertinence to answer back. From their perspective, instruction is something which is only to be done by leaders. Lay people are meant to do the listening and learning, not the other way round. Thus, when the former blind man began to tell them things, rather than defer to them, they became enraged:

³⁰ The man answered, "Why, this is a marvel! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. ³² Never since the world began has it been heard that any one opened the eyes of a man born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." ³⁴ They answered him, "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out.

John 9:30-34 (RSV)

I marvel at their haughtiness in saying: "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" I have been on the receiving end of such attitudes myself. Leaders have been affronted by my challenging them, no matter how politely it is done. They have been particularly irked at the idea that I might teach them something. So, I know what it is to be patronised by leaders with a clergy mentality. It was partly due to their fear of being caught out or proved wrong. They also did not want to be told what the Bible says by a mere lawyer, who is not even 'ordained'. God hates all arrogance. It is an abomination in His eyes and He will expose it and punish it:

*⁵ Every one who is arrogant is an abomination to the Lord;
be assured, he will not go unpunished.*

Proverbs 16:5 (RSV)

Situations where church leaders are telling lies

Deceit is endemic within the human race and it concerns God greatly. But God is far more appalled by church leaders who lie. Thus it is all the more likely that He will classify them as wicked. Their deceit does not only consist of the telling of direct lies. They are also two-faced and they mislead others about their intentions, motives and tactics, so as to get their own way, without being open about what they are really doing or why.

Manipulation is the art of influencing the behaviour and decisions of other people covertly, by dishonest, underhand means. That is always very wrong. We should state our objectives and intentions openly and then argue our case straightforwardly, on the basis of logic and reason. However, many leaders have concluded that such a transparent approach results in greater opposition and questioning. They opt instead for whatever is easiest, least costly, and 'gets results', rather than doing what is right, in the right way.

Even worse, they are willing to alter, edit, add to and prune the Bible in any way they need to, so as to make life easier for themselves. This is now so common as to be the norm. Furthermore, many leaders are not honest in their use of money, resources or time. They might be employed full time by a church or charity, but they waste time or do things for themselves, such as shopping, internet, leisure, errands or general laziness. Yet, they will portray themselves to church members as if they were busy on behalf of the church.

Of course, there are also leaders who work hard, spend every penny honestly, and devote all their contracted hours, and more, to doing what they are meant to do. However, there are vast numbers who don't and who are consistently dishonest and lazy. If we operated biblically, these leaders would not be in paid roles in the first place. The approach taken by the New Testament church was that church workers should not get any financial support unless they are *missionaries*.

That means those who are 'sent' away from their local church to minister elsewhere, where it would not be possible to get a job and work part time in ministry. That is the biblical model, and it is designed to be that way for many good reasons. Firstly, it takes away the temptation to be dishonest in the use of time and money. If a leader is an unpaid elder, who has a job or is retired, he can just do whatever part time work he can manage for the church. Then he has no reason to lie or pretend.

However, if a leader has to put in 40 hours of paid work per week, year after year, even after he has become bored and disillusioned with ministry, he will be tempted to cut corners and keep up an act. I can think of many leaders who are 'living a lie' in terms of the work they claim to do, as opposed to what they actually do. One example was 'Rick', the senior leader I tackled some years ago, when I was the Chairman of the Trustees of a large church.

It came to my attention that he was misusing his time and deceiving the church about it. I discovered, by various means, that Rick was lazy and did very little real work. During the day, when he was meant to be doing things on behalf of the church, he was often just watching videos. Moreover, this was on a regular, ongoing basis, not just as a one-off. He would also sunbathe in his garden, go to a 'tanning lounge', go out shopping, do jobs about the house or generally relax.

I had been a police officer for three years and was, at that time, a commercial lawyer, specialising in litigation. So I was used to investigating matters. Therefore, I was able to enquire into his conduct more effectively than the other members of the church. They just assumed he was working hard. He tried to project that false impression, but it was all an act. The point is God takes it very seriously when leaders lie in any way at all. We know that because He takes *all* lies seriously. Indeed, He tells us that He considers them an '*abomination*':

***¹⁶ For all who do such things, all who act dishonestly, are an abomination to the LORD your God.
Deuteronomy 25:16 (RSV)***

We also know God will judge teachers and leaders "*with greater strictness*" than others:

Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, for you know that we who teach shall be judged with greater strictness.

James 3:1 (RSV)

A leader knows God, knows the Bible, and is meant to be an ambassador for Christ and a servant to His people. For him to tell lies is therefore extraordinarily serious. That should sober us, if we are a leader, and cause us to fear the LORD, repent, and turn away from all forms of deception. Also those who are not leaders need to wake up and realise that wolves and hirelings are at large in the churches, and in huge numbers. They urgently need to be identified and resisted.

‘Hirelings’ are church leaders who see their ministry as just a paid job. They are lazy, cowardly, and won’t take any risks for the sake of the people in their care.

A ‘wolf’, in the context of church leaders, is one who either *deliberately* seeks to do harm or is *reckless* as to whether harm is caused. Many fully intend to lead people astray. They knowingly use, abuse and exploit God’s people. They are out to make money, or get power, and don’t care whether people are damaged by what they do. There are now a great many wolves in the churches, and their numbers are growing rapidly. However, for the moment, let us focus on another category of leader, the ‘hireling’. Jesus speaks of such men in John chapter 10:

11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 He who is a hireling and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 He flees because he is a hireling and cares nothing for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, 15 as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.

John 10:11-15 (RSV)

A hireling has no particular desire to do harm, unless you get in his way or challenge him. He is not deliberately aiming to damage God’s people. Neither does he specifically want to teach falsely or mislead anyone, except in so far as that is needed to achieve his real purposes. Those are to look after his career and protect his own interests. He is not as callous as a ‘wolf’, but he doesn’t care either. He is just earning a wage, in what he sees as a paid job, and has no genuine heart of concern for the people.

The key distinguishing feature of a hireling is that, whereas a true shepherd will lay down his own life for the sheep, a hireling never will. A hireling takes the view that the sheep belong to some other man and are not his own sheep. Therefore he doesn’t truly care about them. It is like the difference between a parent and a babysitter. A parent is willing to die for their child, without hesitating. But very few babysitters would go that far, or anywhere near.

Babysitters don’t see it as part of their job to put themselves at risk, or even to be inconvenienced, for the child’s sake. A hireling, likewise, sees church ministry as a *career*, not a sacred duty or privilege. He has the same attitude as the average man working in a shop, office or factory. Indeed, he is often less diligent than most of them. A hireling may be willing to do his job according to his contract, and to work reasonably hard. But he places limits on how far he will go, how much he will do, and what price he will pay in personal terms.

In particular, he puts strict limits on what *risks* he will take for the sake of God’s people. Those limits will be unspoken, but they are real and they govern how he conducts himself. When a hireling is leading a church, or working as an assistant minister, he will operate in accordance with those unspoken rules. He will not go beyond these boundaries as to how much he is willing to do. He will be a ‘clock-watcher’, and will avoid working excessive hours, or doing anything outside of his ‘job description’.

In particular, he won’t want to do any difficult, unpopular or dangerous work. By ‘dangerous’, I don’t just mean physical danger, though that can come into it. I mean the danger of being criticised, disapproved of or opposed. It can also mean the risk of losing salary, house, car and pension by being too outspoken. A hireling will not preach about sin, judgment, Hell, the Lake of Fire, repentance, discipleship, dying to self and so on. These topics offend people, despite being essential to hear about. The hireling knows that if he spoke about those things there would be trouble for himself.

People might leave the church, or reduce their giving, such that his own income would then be threatened. Indeed, he might even be sacked. The slightest possibility of trouble for himself, let alone losing his career, is enough to persuade any hireling to keep quiet and tone down or edit the Bible. He will limit himself to “sugar and spice and all things nice”, i.e. ‘safe topics’ which won’t offend anybody. For the people in that church it will be a constant diet of feel good messages and warm, cosy sermons about inoffensive things.

A hireling does not genuinely care about the welfare of the people in the church.

A hireling does not genuinely care about the welfare of the people in the church. He may be ‘nice’, extrovert and sociable but, when it comes to the crunch, he doesn’t *really* care about the people. I saw an example of this when I tackled ‘Fergus’ the insincere young man who once worked for me. I speak of him in chapter 12. He resigned, due to the fact that I had discovered his misconduct, and was about to start a disciplinary procedure. When that happened ‘Carl’, the leader of our church, immediately sided with Fergus.

He asked me whether Fergus could have his job back. He actually asked me to reinstate him before even asking me what had happened. Thus he had already formed a conclusion, before he ever spoke to me. In all our subsequent discussions, despite all the evidence I showed him, Carl never moved from that position. All he wanted was to help Fergus, irrespective of the harm his conduct had on others. Those ‘others’ were employees of mine, especially ‘Malcolm’, who was undermined and used by Fergus.

When I told Carl about these people and what damage Fergus had done, he brushed it all aside instantly. It was irrelevant to him. All he cared about was Fergus, because he planned to go into ministry. Carl therefore saw him as a fellow ‘clergyman’, or at least a future one. So he sided with Fergus automatically. I even gave Carl a recording of the investigatory interviews with Fergus, in which his responses were obviously insincere, but the rights and wrongs of it were irrelevant to Carl.

Neither was he interested in me, or my firm, or my staff, or even Malcolm. One might say in Carl’s defence that perhaps he was showing pastoral care for Fergus, because he was part of the church, whereas the others weren’t. Even if that was true, it would still be illegitimate. But it wasn’t actually true. Two families who attended that church had left because they could not bear to be in the same church as Fergus after the things he had done to their relatives, who worked for me.

When I told Carl that those two families had left the church solely because of Fergus, he was still totally uninterested. He brushed it aside, without making any reply. Accordingly, even when we were speaking of two families who *were also part of that church*, their welfare was still of no importance to him, because they were not ‘clergy’. Carl had his own private agenda, and the spiritual and emotional welfare of those two families was not part of it. The dismissive way in which he brushed them aside, and the bored look on his face as he did do so, was shocking.

God used it as a lesson to me in how indifferent a hireling can be about people’s welfare. I think God wanted me to witness it at first hand, for the sake of this book, and also Book 8. Fergus mattered to Carl because he was a fellow ‘clergyman’, but nobody else in the story mattered to him at all. In fact, in the six years that I was part of that church, Carl never gave any indication that he cared for me or my family. He was sociable enough to chat to about cricket, but we didn’t matter to him. The same was true of all of the other *paid* leaders in that church.

The only meaningful relationships we ever formed there were with people who were *not* paid leaders. You might consider that to be a coincidence, but I don’t think it was. It is the way it is when leaders are hirelings. They only form relationships with those who can promote their careers. They see no value in having anything more than a superficial relationship with anybody who is of no use *to them*. That is the opposite of how it should be. A leader is meant to serve, not to be served.

‘Norman’, the laziest assistant church minister I have ever known

I have known a lot of lazy church leaders but the most extreme case was ‘Norman’. He was an assistant minister in a large church, the one led by Carl, and was in charge of youth ministry and children’s work. He may have been more motivated in the past, but I very much doubt it. He was probably always lazy, even before becoming a church minister. Indeed, I think he only entered church ministry as a way of

finding an easier career. He had worked in a secular job for over ten years, and was fully qualified, but he gave that up.

The problem is that, having left a profession, it is very hard to get back into it. Skills fade and the person becomes rusty. They also lose their confidence in that previous job and can become too afraid to go back to it. Therefore a man can become trapped in paid ministry after he has lost his enthusiasm for it, if indeed he ever had any. The point may be reached where he doesn't like ministry any longer, or want to do it. Yet he can't leave it, because he has allowed his previous skills to fade.

It could even be that he has been in 'ordained' ministry since his early twenties and has never had any other job. Therefore he now feels trapped in ministry because he has no other realistic options. That was probably true of Norman. He was in his forties and had no drive at all. He was well known for his laziness. It was not spoken of openly, but most people knew about it. There would be knowing looks and raised eyebrows when Norman's 'workload' was mentioned. However, people tried not to be explicit. They knew they were not meant to speak about it.

Norman was notionally in charge of all the youth and children's ministry, but he delegated just about everything to others. He was fortunate in that regard, because a lot of people volunteered to help. So, one couple led the teenagers' group which met on Saturday nights and also midweek. Several other couples and singles also helped with those meetings and with the one to one follow up work. Other couples led the work for other age groups. However, Norman rarely attended those meetings for teenagers himself, even to observe. He had, almost literally, nothing to do with it.

The same was true of the work for pre-school kids and those aged 5-8 and 9-12. Various couples and individuals ran all of that, including the day to day work and the leadership of it. In short, Norman did almost nothing. Moreover, outside of those youth work activities, he did very little else either. He occasionally preached to the adults but, even then, he used to download his talks from the internet. I could tell they weren't his own work and did not involve any study. At first, I didn't realise that Norman was just downloading other men's talks.

I began to notice something was odd on the second occasion, because he had again used excellent artwork for the overhead projector to illustrate 'his' talk. I remember thinking it seemed very professional and wondering how he could have got hold of slides which so perfectly matched the contents of his own talk. Then I realised that he wasn't just searching for artwork to *accompany* a talk he had written himself. He was downloading the whole lot, the talk itself and the slides to go with it. None of it was his own work. Thus he had spent literally zero time on it.

He hadn't done any Bible study, or prayed or meditated on it. Neither was it a message about which God was giving him a heavy burden and which he felt he had to share. It was 100% plagiarism. I found that out for sure one day when he gave a talk about the book of Jonah, after which I went over to ask him some questions. As usual, his sermon had been accompanied by professional-quality artwork, but he was immediately out of his depth when I spoke to him afterwards and quite unable to explain, clarify or justify what he had just been talking about.

That was when I realised he had done no preparation and it wasn't his own talk. He had not studied the book of Jonah for himself, or even read commentaries. He literally read out another man's complete sermon, word for word. When the reality of that sank in I was appalled. He was purporting to preach God's Word, but was too lazy, or uninterested, to do any work on it himself. There were other problems with Norman. I remember someone in the church who was concerned that her 16 year old son was beginning to drift away from church and from youth group.

She went to Norman and asked him to speak to her son, one to one, to try to keep him in church and prevent him falling away. But Norman wouldn't do it. He made lame excuses and said the boy should attend the meetings, rather than need to be rung up or visited by him. When the parent pressed Norman,

he eventually gave his real reason for not wanting to contact the boy. It was simply that he didn't want to exceed his contracted hours!

That came as no surprise to me. I already knew how lazy Norman was. To him the top priority was his own working hours, pay and conditions, not the spiritual condition and welfare of that boy, or of any of the other young people. He was like a shop steward, demanding strict boundaries for his own job description and refusing to do anything which he wasn't contractually obliged to do. Some years later, Norman asked the church for a sabbatical period on the basis that he was feeling "burnt-out" and was suffering from "depression".

He then did literally nothing at all for some months, after which his workload was reduced even further! He remained in that job for some years, earning over £40,000 per annum, which equates to about \$60,000, plus other benefits, for doing very little. Yet the church did not make him redundant, or even confront him. The other leaders in that church knew all about his laziness, but were also keenly aware that it would be a dangerous precedent for them to tackle him about it.

It could easily lead to people questioning them about their own work-rate, or even whether they were needed at all. From the perspective of those other leaders, there were some advantages to keeping Norman. While he was there, nobody could say that any of them were the least effective, or least productive, of the leadership team. That title was undeniably his, and there was a kind of safety in that, for the other leaders. It meant they could never be the "runt of the litter". That may be putting it harshly, but I believe it was part of their reason for keeping him.