

Pastors Should Beware of These Common Dangers.

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Satan is a roaring lion seeking those whom he may devour. To be sure, he is chained and unable to spiritually destroy believers. Nevertheless, the chained monster hungrily pursues ministers of God and preachers of the Word so as to discourage them, discredit them, defile them, or distract them. Because of the cleverness of our great enemy and because of the proneness of our hearts to exercise little trust in God and wander into sin, all pastors *must* beware of these common dangers. Though not exhaustive, I'll list five of the most common dangers to pastors.

1. Prayerlessness.

Honestly, prayer is hard. When else do you find (or make!) the time to be still, be quiet, be undistracted, and *fight* to be alone, quiet, focused, and passionate? In our unstopably busy age and with our ever-increasing satisfaction that comes at amazing warp-speeds, one of the most difficult duties of the pastor can be to get down to his knees, open his bible before him, and call upon the name of the Lord for a lengthy period of time. To be prayerless is to exercise little trust in God. To live prayerless means that the man contents himself in his own abilities to perform the tasks that lay before him. But O how pastors must fight prayerlessness with holy violence. Get less sleep! Rise at midnight and pray for an hour for your congregants if you need to! Say no to some lunch appointments to go on a walk in the woods and meet with God. Shut off the entertainment and say no to the activities if you find yourself prayerless. Praying well demands time. You learn to pray by praying. And meeting with God in fervent and holy communion doesn't occur in a 3-minute short prayer while waiting for the car to warm up on the way to a breakfast meeting. Diligently desire and passionately prioritize prayer. Pray in your praying! Down to the knees & up with your eyes to the heavenly Throne where the King of the everlasting ages beckons you to come and fellowship with Him in sweet communion.

2. Self confidence.

Relying on self proves to be the highway to spiritual calamity. Indeed, to state it again, trusting in one's power and abilities and character to do God's work will most assuredly give birth to a catastrophic disaster. The ministry of the Lord demands that the man of God utterly die to self -- daily! The Christian must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Christ. How much more must the man who speaks the utterances of God! How much more should the man who cares for *God's sheep* slay every single shred of self-confidence and stake his focus supremely and exclusively on Christ and His wondrous power. Self confidence manifests itself in a plethora of ways. Little prayer before, during, and after sermons proves self-confidence. Lack of prayer before counseling appointments reveals self-confidence. More concern about your dress, your tie, your appearance, and your charisma more than being exegetically faithful and heart-grippingly direct in application is another proof of self-confidence. Too much trust in programs to build the church and excessive thoughts about being relevant and cultural and acceptable demonstrates self confidence. And this is tragic. Christianity at its very heart slays every part of self confidence and drives the sinner to Christ! So let every minister of the gospel flee to Christ regularly and passionately for grace and strength in every endeavor! Trust *Christ* alone.

3. Arrogance.

The very first sin in the history of the world was pride. The sin of arrogance rises up in rebellion against God in that pride seeks to *be* God. It doesn't *merely* wage war *with* God (although it most certainly does this) but it wants to slaughter God and put self in the place of God *as* God. Over and over in the Book of Proverbs, Solomon states that God utterly hates pride. It is an abomination to Him. The prideful will not inherit the kingdom of God. Those who love self, trust self, enjoy self-accomplishments, and promote self-glorification prove they do not truly know *God* or themselves. Moreover, they misunderstand sin, man, God, Christ, the gospel, and the clear teaching of God's Word. The pride of life is *not* from the Father but it's from the world. So then, let men of God

remember that local church ministry and *every *single* sermon* must be focused exclusively and exaltedly on the person and work of Jesus Christ. The way that a minister's arrogance comes forth is when his sermons tend to be more man-focused than God-focused. It's when the worship services cave into the cultural demands to serve what people want rather than what God requires. It's preaching texts and giving clever stories to connect with the audience so they'll be entertained, happy, and come back again next time -- and maybe even join their church! When people leave captivated more by the church, the minister, the sermon, or the homiletical outline more than by Christ and His substitutionary crosswork in all of its magnificent facets, arrogance has crept in for something has risen up to *take the place of Christ alone* -- and that's the very essence of pride. Ministers, *daily* let's slay our pride!

4. Lukewarmness.

It could be hard to tally in a handful of pages the many demands that rest on the shoulders of the pastor. From service planning, to picking out music, to the selection of a sermon text, to the studying and praying and organizing and crafting of the sermon, to the meeting with congregants, to the counseling relationships, to leadership development, and to the love and constant care of his own wife and children in the home, it seems that endless **things** constantly blast the man for his attention and time and concern. (And let it be said that most of these things are important and good.) However, *none* of these things are good when they busy the pastor so much that his heart becomes lukewarm as he outwardly does the 'job' of pastoral ministry. O how common this can be. Just think of how many times our Lord confronted the Pharisees for their externalism. Few pastors are honest enough to state, after arriving on a Sunday morning after a real draining and exhausting week, and tell people: "Wow, I really don't feel ready to preach for I've been so busy doing the duties of ministry that I've not been devoted to my Master." Those statements are quite infrequent. And yet, that's precisely the Lord's counsel to the very wise, learned, theologically astute, and historically grand church at Ephesus. He told them that they've lost their first love. They had all kinds of activities and works happening, but their hearts were far from Christ. O let men of God warm their hearts early before meeting with people for meetings. Let us remember: we can do much after we've been alone with God in the early hours but we can't do anything profitable in the day until we've met with God in the early hours. Kindle afresh the gift of God! Let the gospel grip you and blaze through your soul hotly and unstopably! Meditate on the gospel! Preach to your soul what you endeavor to preach to others! Passionless preachers are dead preachers that persuade no one to believe. Take the gospel and dig them deep into the ground of your heart. Feast and focus on your heart!

5. Isolationism.

I wonder if you surveyed the average pastor how many close friends he would honestly say he has. Many pastors have no real close friends in the ministry or outside of their local congregations. There is that "pastoral pedestal" that they find themselves sitting upon (whether they like it or not) and who is he going to go to when he finds himself battling with lust? Where is he going to turn to when he and his wife are not sexually intimate? To whom is he going to confide in for accountability when he is battling anger with his children and impatience toward his small children in the home? How easy it can be for pastors to cover these up and not tell *anyone* because, after all, they've believed the sly and Satanic lie that they **cannot** tell anyone. Then the man digs himself deeper into the hidden nature of his sin by his own isolationism and lack of seeking accountability. Undoubtedly this is one reason why Christ Himself calls His church to be led by a plurality of godly, qualified, biblically-minded men to help and hold one another accountable. Sin happens. We shouldn't be surprised by that. Temptations will certainly come. We are to bear each other's burdens and pastor *even our pastors*. Have you ever asked your pastor: '*who holds you accountable?*' That may be a good question to ask. Or, '*where do you go in seasons of sin and temptation to wickedness?*' Though deep and personal, those are necessary questions to ask men in leadership. Popularity or being 'the-guy-up-front' can sometimes come with the false appearance that all is well and with the mistaken assumption that surely he has many men around him that guard him so that he certainly can't fall into sin. But that line of reasoning is bad, unhelpful, dangerous, and tragic. Let pastors be open and honest with the leadership teams in times of struggle and hardship. Let ministers find other (and older) men to confide in and meet with for prayer, accountability, help, bible-reading, and nurturing. Yes, even the hard questions should be asked about sexual purity (in all its forms), marital fidelity, communication, intimacy, and happiness, financial integrity, disciplining and shepherding of the children in the home (and in family worship), and personal bible reading, prayer, meditation, and repentance. These issues should be asked of the pastor. And the godly minister will welcome these questions from other men who love and care about him and his soul.