

## The Importance of Godly Leaders

In my last article in this series we saw that Habakkuk is questioning God as to whether he has failed to punish the Covenant people of Judah for their wickedness. To support what Habakkuk is saying about the evil of the people, I referenced two other Old Testament writing prophets, Jeremiah and Zephaniah, who were contemporaries of Habakkuk. What we saw was that the leaders carry a serious responsibility before God for the sins of the people of Judah. “The priests did not say, ‘Where is the LORD?’ Those who handle the law did not know me; the shepherds transgressed against me; the prophets prophesied by Baal and went after things that do not profit.” (Jeremiah 2:8) Notice also that Jeremiah addresses the fact that when the leaders fall into grievous sin the people will often follow their example. “The prophets of Jerusalem.....commit adultery and walk in lies; *they strengthen the hands of the evildoers so that no one turns from his evil.*” (Jeremiah 23:14) We immediately see that the wickedness of the prophets encourages and strengthens others to sin which, inevitably, leads to the sad reality that “no one turns from his evil.”

The list of sins committed by the children of Judah reminds us that leaders carry a grave responsibility before God. Although imperfect, leaders must seek to be a godly influence. It was the priests, prophets and shepherds that Jeremiah said didn’t know God’s word which resulted in leading the people into idolatry. The prophets were *encouraging* sin by never seeking to address sin in their own lives or in the lives of the people. This is not to say that the people were not responsible for their own sins. But, if the leaders fall into sin it will go a long way toward wrongly influencing those in their care. It was our Lord Jesus Christ who—quoting the Old Testament prophet Zechariah—declared to his disciples just prior to going to the cross: “For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’” (Matthew 26:31)

We saw in my last article that the sinfulness of Judah was not an anomaly in the history of the church of God. The universal church in our day, including the church in our local communities, is just as prone to fall into grievous sin as the children of Judah in Habakkuk’s day. Christian’s today—in many places—have fallen headlong into worldliness. Leaders in the churches are often prone to practice pragmatism, i.e., whatever seems to work best in the moment, rather than patiently and faithfully following the word of God. Leaders find that—no matter how hard they may try to love his people—following God will sometimes come at a cost, including shattered relationships and loss of members in the church. The temptation can be to look the other way and hope for the best. Satan’s desire is to destroy the people of God. Given the fact that he can’t take our salvation, he seeks to compromise the church’s witness.

What are we to do? The church as a whole always needs prayer which is an important means of God’s grace in our lives. The shepherds/leaders *especially* need your prayers because they’re called to be godly examples to the flock. It was the Apostle Paul who gave some very helpful teaching to Timothy who was the pastor/leader of the church at Ephesus. “[S]et the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.” (1 Timothy 4:12) This passage gives us a model of conduct for every leader as well as for every Christian. I want to give some points of application for both shepherds and sheep as we consider Paul’s words to Timothy:

—*Speech*: Discipline your tongue; make sure that our words follow God’s truth and build up those who hear.

—*Conduct*: Leaders, be sure that our conduct (personal behavior) is worthy of example in every way; this holds true also for everyone in the congregation as we interact with one another.

—*Love*: Every Christian should demonstrate steadfast love for God as well as love for your leaders who must patiently and faithfully express God's love for the flock under their care.

—*Faith*: Demonstrate a faith/trust in God, certainly including obedience that's in accord with God's Word of truth.

—*Purity*: Cultivate *purity/godliness/holiness* in word and life.

Although each of these points are worthy goals to aspire to, it's important that we're resting in the perfect and finished work of Jesus Christ and not resting in our own imperfect obedience. It's only when we're *truly resting* in the perfect righteousness of Jesus, by faith, that we'll ever begin to obey God from the heart.

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