

When Church Leaders Think Too Highly of Themselves

Holding a position of authority can be spiritually dangerous. Unless a man possesses true humility, he will likely one day commit prideful sins of presumption. David believed that sins of presumption are very serious.

“Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; Let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression” (Psalm 19:13).

A pattern of presumptuous sins in a life are symptomatic of an independent spirit that resides in the unregenerate heart. This is why a pattern of presumption in a life is so serious. It points to a future in hell where the hypocrites dwell. The unmerciful are those who habitually commit acts of presumption.

In contrast, those who fear God believe that only God knows all things. As a result, those who fear God withhold judgment until they have searched out a matter.

In the book of John, we get a glimpse of presumptuous sins in action and we behold the folly that results.

“Then the officers came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, “Why have you not brought Him?” The officers answered, “No man ever spoke like this Man!” Then the Pharisees answered them, “Are you also deceived? Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him? But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed.”

Nicodemus (he who came to Jesus by night, being one of them) said to them, “Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?” They answered and said to him, “Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee.” And everyone went to his own house” (John 7:45-53).

In this story, the Pharisees hold positions of religious authority and it obviously had gone to their heads. They thought they are the ones who know and those outside their click are inferior. First, they look down in judgment on the officers who were told to apprehend Jesus. Then, they looked down on the crowd assuming that they are ignorant of the law. Then they looked down on Nicodemus insinuating that he too is ignorant of the Scriptures and thus, inferior to them.

Their pride is so deeply rooted that they ignore Nicodemus’ correct assertion that according to the law, no man may be condemned unless a matter has been fully established and any man under scrutiny has the right to tell his side of the story. But rather than admitting they are wrong, they simply marginalize Nicodemus so that they can justify their sinful act of presumption about Jesus.

Because they hold themselves as superior, they have justified to themselves that nobody has the right to hold them to account. After all, they are the ones in authority. How dare anyone rebuke them!

Their pride gives way to presumption that Jesus cannot be the Messiah since the Messiah had to be born in Bethlehem. Nicodemus and the crowds were simply poor, misguided, ignorant fools. Of course, we know that Jesus was indeed born in Bethlehem. If they feared God, the Pharisees would have withheld their judgment until they researched the matter.

Next, they add to their folly by displaying their own ignorance of the prophecies concerning the Messiah. They pridefully rebuke Nicodemus by saying that no prophet comes out of Galilee. Yet, Isaiah alluded to the fact that the Messiah would indeed spend time ministering there.

“Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee. And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying:

“The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles:

The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned” (Matthew 4:12-16).

This story should produce a certain watchfulness in us. When we read these passages, we should take heed and watch over our hearts with all diligence. We should take heed to Jesus’ warning, *“Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy” (Luke 12:1b)*. We logically should be very cautious of wanting to hold positions of authority^[1] knowing that such positions require a humility that truly fears God. Only such a man really believes that he is fully capable of committing the same presumptuous sins that the Pharisees committed. I pray that God keeps me from presumptuous sins because if He does not, I will surely commit them.

“Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (I Corinthians 10:12).

[1] This article focuses on those who do hold positions of authority because they especially are vulnerable to pride that leads to presumptuous sins. However, those who do not hold positions of authority must also take heed to these things because we are all susceptible to them.