

The Pastor Alone With His Master

The preacher must be what he teaches others. Dr. Lee Roberson has often said, *"Everything rises or falls on leadership."* The church will never grow spiritually beyond the pastor. The heights reached by the church must first be scaled by the pastor. The pastor's private life with God marks the growth of his soul. Men become big or little in the privacy of their own lives. Here is where the battle is waged for possession of the soul. Victory or defeat is obtained here.

This is the time and place where we receive the power to go out and make the dreams become realities to the glory of God. No man can be defeated and overcome until that privacy with God is taken away. The man of God, thirsty for the power of God upon his ministry, can come here and drink from the crystal clear waters of God's eternal spring of life.

The preacher's personal battle with sin and the devil is not fought in the church or the community, but in the inner recesses of his soul. When sin and the devil win there, it is only a matter of time until the defeat comes into the open.

The only control we have over that inner part of our being is as we surrender it to the Lord. Only God can master the heart and keep it in control. Don't neglect that private, soul-baring time with God. Time spent alone with God in prayer, meditation, and Bible study is time of obtaining strength for the battle and cleansing of our hearts and souls (cf. Jn. 15:3). We need this, for sin conceived in our thoughts, and allowed to remain there, will become an act.

How do pastors fall? It is by degrees—by allowing little sins to stay; thoughts, ideas, step by step, until he took the final plunge. It all began in that private time. He allowed it to become commonplace, a ritual he went through with no depth, no real heart searching, no real facing of sin, no baring of his soul to God. Finally, he was dulled to a real sense of sin.

Very seldom does a man fall all at once. It is those little things which, when allowed to stay, will take root and grow. The devil is willing to wait and work a lifetime if he can destroy a man and his testimony in the end.

All the studying, all the digging in lexicons, word studies, and commentaries, will not generate the power he will receive from this private time when God anoints him with the Holy Ghost. It is this holy fire that will cause the pure gold to flow from the ore. When the preacher has such personal experience, he will preach with authority and power.

The man who is willing to get alone with God and spend enough time there will come forth *"as a strong man to run a race"* (Psa. 19:5). The victories won on the outside were really won in the secret place. The man with the blessing of God upon his ministry did not simply "get the breaks." The success did not come by accident, but he paid the price in the secret place.

Many capable men are powerless because they are not connected to the source of power found only in secret. The man of power in the pulpit is the man of prayer in the closet. Success with men will be proportion to how much time is spent with God. It takes time to be holy . . . The debris has to be cleared away. There must be repentance and confession of sin. Our evil thoughts, our selfish ambitions, our pride must be surrendered and put away before our prayers will be effective. *"Search me O God, and know . . ."*

Evil thoughts and harmless flirtations with sin may seem little and innocent, but suddenly they become strong. Even though you may never be guilty of committing the act, your secret thinking is the key to your success or failure in the work God has called you to do.

Your actions will never rise any higher than your thoughts. What you are within, determines what you will ultimately become without. R.F. Horton, in his Yale lectures, truthfully said, *"What the preacher is, determines, in the end, the effect of what he preaches."*

We place the limitations upon our ministry. Any obstacle can be overcome by the God of creation. The only limitation God knows are those imposed by the will of man. If you cannot lead a church in a successful program of work, it is because you have not taken the time to find the leading of God for your own soul. Some spend just enough time to get an idea and then run out and throw it to the people, as you would toss a bone to a dog, and then wonder why they growl. Spend time alone with God until there is meat on the bone, and then feed it to the people. They will happily bless your leadership.

Jealousy and envy can ruin a man's ministry. Instead of being critical and resentful over the success of another man, thank God for him, pray for him, and pray about his accomplishments. A London pastor said that when young Spurgeon came to London, he was embarrassed and angered by the crowds that went to hear Spurgeon, while his own following was very small. He said that he began to pray for the young preacher and it was not long until he felt that every triumph won by Spurgeon he had a part in himself.

Spend time with God!