Marks of an Excellent Shepherd: Reverence
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:19
Code: B130314

Writing in the early 1960s, A.W. Tozer rightly identified the dire lack of reverence in the church. In the opening paragraphs of *The Knowledge of the Holy*, he wrote, “The words, ‘Be still, and know that I am God,’ mean next to nothing to the self-confident, bustling worshipper in this middle period of the twentieth century.” It’s been more than fifty years since Tozer’s words were first published, and the problem he identified has only gotten worse.

In many churches today, there is no hint of the fear of the Lord—no reverence for His Person, His work, or His Word. Too many congregations are given over to trivial matters, and they deal with Scripture in a flippant, irreverent way. For them, God’s Word matters only inasmuch as it tells them what they want to hear and affirms the lifestyles they want to lead.

This modern lack of reverence for the Lord and His Word starts with the poor example of many pastors and church leaders—their lack of reverence for the Lord and shallow approach to His truth trickle down to their flocks, exponentially increasing the problem.

It should go without saying, but the pastor isn’t called to be a CEO, a standup comedian, or a rock star. He’s called to shepherd the people of God, strengthening their knowledge and love for the Lord and encouraging their spiritual growth. The job is to protect and guide, not entertain.

Even in the midst of touting his apostolic credentials in his own self-defense, the apostle Paul was a model of reverence for the Lord. After answering the accusations of the false teachers who had infiltrated the Corinthian church, Paul paused to clarify what he’d written, saying, “All this time you have been thinking that we are defending ourselves to you. Actually, it is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ” (2 Corinthians 12:19).

Paul did not want the Corinthians to misinterpret his lengthy defense of his apostleship and integrity. He was not on trial before them, and they were not his judges. Ultimately, Paul knew he stood before a divine tribunal, and as a faithful preacher of the Word, God was the only audience he was concerned about.

He had already made that very point abundantly clear in his first epistle to the Corinthians:

But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men’s hearts; and then each man’s praise will come to him from God. (1 Corinthians 4:3-5)

Throughout his life, Paul was acutely aware of the Lord and His final judgment. Popular opinion was

unimportant to him—he answered only to God. And he encouraged his followers to imitate that same attitude. To Timothy he wrote:

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. (2 Timothy 4:1-2)

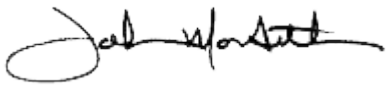
Later in the same chapter, Paul reminded Timothy, “In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Timothy 4:8).

Paul did not get caught up in the trivialities of his day. He wasn’t concerned with tapping into the felt needs of his community and endearing himself to his followers. As a shepherd, he was called to serve the sheep, but those sheep would not render the final judgment on the job he did. Whether or not they liked him wouldn’t matter when he stood before the Lord, and his reverence for God prompted him to stay faithful and focused to the end.

Here’s how Tozer described it:

In olden days men of faith were said to “walk in the fear of God” and to “serve the Lord with fear.” However intimate their communion with God, however bold their prayers, at the base of their religious life was the conception of God as awesome and dreadful. This idea of God transcendent runs through the whole Bible and gives color and tone to the character of the saints. This fear of God was more than a natural apprehension of danger; it was a nonrational dread, an acute feeling of personal insufficiency in the presence of God the Almighty.

Paul’s life and ministry reflected the reverent heart of an excellent shepherd. He’d been entrusted with the work of God’s kingdom, and he knew that God alone would render the final verdict on his life—and that verdict would be, “Well done, good and faithful slave. . . . Enter into the joy of your master” (Matthew 25:21).



(Adapted from *2 Corinthians*: The MacArthur New Testament Commentary.)

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