

Higher...or Different?  
November 4, 2014

In nearly 30 years of pastoral ministry I have heard it again and again. I was reminded of it again recently. Pastors (and all spiritual leadership) must live to a higher standard. There is an expectation that leadership should exercise a standard in their lives which is above that of the ordinary church member.

The scripture is very clear about this approach. Listen to what James says: ***“Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.”*** (James 3:1, ESV) Clearly, those who teach and exercise a spiritual authority will be examined by God with a greater scrutiny than those whom he leads.

But let us be clear about what this scripture does say about leadership. The standard for the leader and the led are exactly the same – the only difference is that it is applied more strictly to the leader. In other words, there is not one standard of behavior for the church member and another for the pastor...they both have the same obligations of discipleship and character. They both have the obligation and expectation to love God and love their neighbor as themselves – only the leader is expected to be further along than the people he leads.

The problem that I see with “fishbowl” judgmentalism that exists in so many church bodies today is the application of different standards. One standard exists for the attendee and entirely different standard is applied to the pastor and his family (or other leaders). This should not be so.

I wholeheartedly believe that pastors are held to a tighter scrutiny to the standards of the scripture – but this does not mean that the people in the church can apply a different standard of behavior upon their pastor than they are willing to embrace for themselves.

Jesus said that the summation of the law is contained in a simple description: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength...and love your neighbor as yourself.” That is the standard for every leader of the congregation (pastors included). But don’t miss it...it is the standard for every person who claims to be a child of God.

Prayerfully (and hopefully) our pastors and leaders are a little further on the journey of love and devotion than those that they lead – so that they can aid them in the journey.

I am ok with a higher scrutiny...and I have lived my life in an attempt to live up to the divine expectation (not the human examination). I am not ok with those who gaze into the fishbowl of ministry and apply a different standard to the pastor.

Love God with your all today...and love your neighbor! Join me as I pursue the highest standards!