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March 2015 "GUARD YOUR HEART"

Dear Friends,

I have been asked if I travel and preach in other churches. The answer is, yes, I do minister in other churches from time to time. Not only have I ministered in churches in the United States, but also in other countries such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Kenya and South Korea. I do not accept invitations to minister just to have bragging rights about all the places I've been; I go where I believe God is sending me.

Whenever I accept an invitation to preach, I stress the following to the pastor inviting me:

- I do not demand that my airfare or any other traveling expenses be paid for
- I do not demand that my hotel room be paid for
- I do not demand that my meals be paid for
- I do not demand any specific amount of money be given to me as an honorarium
- I do not demand that offerings be received for me or my ministry

I let those inviting me know that when it comes to offerings and expenses, what they do is totally between them and the Lord. I do not go for money; I go as the Lord instructs. I try my best to let them know I do not want to be a financial burden on their church.

Some might ask, "But Brother Jim, how in the world do you pay for all the expenses associated with traveling to all these places?" I pray and trust the Lord to provide. How does He provide? He moves on the hearts of people and organizations to give in support of our ministry.

Traveling - especially long, overseas trips - presents unique challenges and can be tiring, but there is so much joy when it comes to ministering the Word of God to people and seeing Him move in their lives. God has blessed Kathy and me with so many wonderful friends everywhere we go, friendships that will carry over into eternity.

As the invitations to minister in other places have increased over the years I have noticed something that is quite alarming. Before I share this concern I will briefly point out some of the responsibilities of a pastor, starting with the words of the Apostle Peter,

¹The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: ²Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; ³Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. ⁴And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. (1 Peter 5:1-4)

Many Christians believe that a pastor's primary responsibility is to serve people, but that is not true. A pastor is called to serve God. It is out of a pastor's service to God that he will be able to serve those in the congregation according to the direction of God.

Peter wrote that the flock (congregation) is to be fed. This feeding is to come from the Word of God, and everything a pastor teaches in his church is to have as its foundation nothing but the Word of God.

Likewise, a pastor is to be very cautious about who he allows to minister in the church in any capacity, including guest preachers he invites to speak. This brings me to what I have found to be very troubling; a problem so common it may shock many Christians.

Many of the pastors who have sent emails inviting me to preach know very little about my ministry. In fact, some know next to nothing about me. These individuals have searched the internet for ministries, found mine, read a little about me and our church at our web site, and then sent me an email asking about such things as:

- We want to partner with your church
- We want to open a branch of your church
- We want you to come and preach or hold crusades

When I receive such emails I generally reply and ask some or all of these questions:

- What do you know about my ministry?
- How did you hear about me?
- How many of my sermons have you listened to?
- What are the titles of the sermons you've listened to?

Some of these pastors completely ignore my questions in their reply and tell me more about their ministry, then again ask about partnering, opening a sister church or me visiting to preach. I reply, asking the same questions as before and usually ask why they ignored my questions the first time.

Most of the time they finally admit that they have not listened to any of my sermons. This gives me the opportunity to minister to them about the dangers of inviting people to preach when they know very little about them. I explain that they have no idea what kind of doctrine I teach and that I could believe some things that are very unbiblical. Without knowing much about me or not having listened to my sermons they are opening their congregation to teachings that could result in strife, division and great conflict. I remind them that ultimately, they will answer in judgment to God for the preachers they allow to sow into the lives of their church members.

All pastors absolutely **MUST** be well acquainted with the teachings, ministry and doctrine of those invited to preach. They are required to guard their flock against wolves in sheep's clothing and against poisonous doctrine that could be set before their church.

But there is an even greater problem with these pastors inviting someone they know little about to preach in their church: As pastors, they should *already* be aware of the dangers I have described. The fact that I have to explain this to them is very disturbing. Thankfully, some of them answer back that they had never thought of such things and commit to listen to teachings at my web site or to CD's that we send them at no charge.

In some cases, this has led to fruitful relationships whereby pastors have seen their ministries transformed. More than one pastor has emailed me and shared that he is

teaching his church what he is learning and that the people are growing in their spiritual life.

In contrast, some of these pastors seem totally unconcerned. They appear willing to invite anyone to preach who names the Name of Jesus, regardless of the doctrine that person teaches. One pastor even knew enough to realize the doctrine of a particular traveling minister was very wrong, but still invited that minister to his church because so many in the congregation liked him. In another situation, a minister invited to preach in a conference actually stood at the pulpit and smoked during his sermon!

Just because a person wants to preach, or believes he is called to be a pastor, does not mean he is ready to pastor. In Acts 9:1-19 God revealed to the Apostle Paul the ministry calling on his life. Even though Paul knew how God was going to use him, he was not ready to step into the full operation of that ministry; he had to separate himself for a time of spiritual growth. In fact, depending on which historian you believe, it was between 10 and 14 years after Paul's conversion in Acts chapter 9 that the Holy Spirit sent him forth on his first ministry trip (Acts 13:1-3).

It seems that zeal overrides wisdom in most of these cases. A burning desire to serve God frequently leads people to step out in ministry before they are ready. Too many Christians assume that if a person is operating in the role of a pastor then he must be qualified and ready to pastor. Sadly, this has led to much conflict, bickering, division and strife in churches.

In Mark 16:15-16, Jesus gave what many refer to as The Great Commission to reach people with the message of salvation. But that passage in Mark is only part of what Jesus instructed. In Matthew 28:19-20 we see even more of this commission:

¹⁹Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: ²⁰Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

Not only are we to reach the lost with the message of salvation, but we are also to make disciples of those who accept Jesus as Savior. This brings up an interesting question: When does discipling end? The answer is: Never. No matter how much we have grown spiritually, there is room for more. No matter how much we understand scripture, there is always more to understand.

However, a person can only disciple another to the level at which he himself has been disciplined. This is one reason why I thoroughly enjoy listening to sermons by spiritually mature preachers, following along in scripture as I listen, taking notes and praying in the Spirit the entire time. This helps me continually grow in the Lord, becoming better equipped to disciple others.

Pastors are responsible for watching over their flock, but Christians are also responsible for guarding their own hearts. This means church members have the individual responsibility to be aware of what they are hearing; they must search the scriptures to confirm if the teaching set before them is truth or error (Acts 17:10-11).

I remember digging out some old sermon cassette tapes from 25-30 years ago. Back when I heard those sermons for the first time I was very impressed, thinking I was hearing the deep things of God. But now, I can't listen to some of them for more than 5-10 minutes because the doctrine is so bad! The sermon on the tape hasn't changed, but I have changed. Years of meditating in scripture and praying in the Spirit have led me to a place of being better able to discern the accuracy of what I am hearing taught.

Far too many Christians are not spending the necessary time to develop spiritually so as to guard their hearts against incorrect doctrine. They tend to follow certain preachers who are their favorites. I, too, have had my favorites over the years; however, as I have grown in the Lord I have had to distance myself from some of those favorites. In fact, the list of preachers I regularly listen to has become very short. You see, as we press deeper into truth, we can no longer justify feeding on a continual diet of error. When we stand before God, His Word will be the only standard of judgment (John 12:48).

To summarize all of this:

- 1) Pastors cannot justify inviting preachers into their pulpit just because that preacher is from the United States or just because that preacher is popular among the people.
- 2) Pastors must seek to be disciplined by others who have a strong, contextual understanding of the Bible.
- 3) Christians have a responsibility to study God's Word to be approved by Him (2 Timothy 2:15). They also need to pray in the Spirit to be purged of wrong doctrine and led deeper into truth (John 14:26 and John 16:13).
- 4) Christians must become more discerning in their choice of spiritual food. Liking a church or preacher is one thing; but being in the church where God wants you and listening to ministers who have a strong, contextual understanding of the Bible is a must

We are too close to the return of Jesus to take lightly the issues I have identified in this letter. End-time prophecy is coming to pass before our eyes and false prophets are rising among us. Whether or not you are a pastor, think long and hard over what you have read, then pray to get God's leading concerning any changes He wants you to make. Jesus is coming back, and we want to be the pure, spotless bride awaiting His return!

In His Grace,



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SPRING PRAYER AND POWER CONFERENCE

The dates of our Spring Prayer and Power Conference are Sunday, March 22 through Friday, March 27. Everyone is welcome to join us. People throughout the United States and in other nations have said they are planning to attend. Please register if you plan to attend. Registration is free and the registration form is at our website. If you are unable to register by the internet, please mail in the form below. Pastor Dave Roberson, Gary Carpenter and Pastor Bronc Flint are some of the speakers. Jamie Legault will again lead worship for the morning services. Service times are Sunday 10:30 AM and 6:00 PM; Monday - Friday 10:00 AM and 7:00 PM (pre-service worship 45 minutes before all services; you will not want to miss it).

Our two primary host hotels for the conference are:

Country Inn and Suites- Fairborn South
3971 Colonel Glenn Highway
Beavercreek, Ohio 45324
937-429-2222
<http://www.countryinns.com/fairbornoh>

Holiday Inn Dayton/Fairborn
2800 Presidential Drive
Fairborn, Ohio 45324
937-431-4644
www.holidayinn.com/fairbornoh

When you contact them for reservations, let them know you are attending the Grace Christian Center Conference to receive the special conference room rate. Please visit our web site for more information about these hotels and other hotels in the area.

Our ministry does not have sleeping rooms or dormitories, neither will we be preparing meals before or after any of the services. You will be responsible for the expenses of your travel, hotel and meals. Knowing this, please do not anticipate that if you can save enough money for your flight to Dayton that we will pay for your hotel and meals once you arrive. **You must make your hotel reservations before arriving in Dayton; failure to do so may result in you not getting a room.**

You must fly into the Dayton International Airport. If you fly into any other airport we will not be able to provide transportation from the airport to your hotel. Once you have purchased your plane tickets, please forward your itinerary to us so we will know when you arrive.

Please visit our web site, www.jmmgrace.com, for more conference information. *If you are unable to attend, you can watch all the services live at our web site.*



_____ Check here to receive this month's special offer, a CD of my sermon, "Guard Your House." It flows perfectly with the message in this letter and will be a blessing to all Christians, especially pastors.

_____ I plan to attend the Prayer and Power Conference (if others are coming with you, please write their names on the back of this form).

[PLEASE PRINT] Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Country _____

Email _____

My love gift is: \$ _____ (Make checks payable to "Jim Martin Ministries.")

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