

Little Men In High Places

by James L. Sloan

Eric Hoffer, who has been styled “the poor man’s psychologist,” gives an intriguing definition of “**rudeness**” as the “**weak man’s imitation of strength.**” And, really I am surprised that a lot of good people cannot spot such a counterfeit. Self-assertiveness seems to be the key to “bluffing your way through.” If you just say it loud enough and hard enough, you can intimidate and beat into submission the weak and timid. Usurpers and misusers of power are wrongly judged as “the strong.” There was a notation in the margin of a preacher’s outline that said, “When you get here, yell and stomp your feet, for this is a weak point.”

But it is not strength at all. Only weak men feel the need to bluster and bully their way through life and over others. They mask insecurities with crude braggadocio. Real tragedies occur in the kingdom of God when “little” men are put in positions of power. They are almost certain to try and become tyrants. In desperate attempts to keep others from spotting their weaknesses, they imitate strength with rudeness. It seems an almost weekly occurrence that news comes to us of some church hurt, weakened, or even divided because of some preacher or elder who under the guise of “strong” tried to become a “boss” or “lawman.”

In regard to the elder, there are preventive measures built into the qualifications to keep the dictator out (“**self-willed**”), and there are regulations governing his work to keep him from becoming such, after he gets there (“**neither as lording it over the charge allotted to you**”). Kind, gentle, patient, self-controlled brethren still need to have the courage to mark preachers “**who serve not our Lord Christ, but their own belly.**” The welfare of the cause of Jesus Christ is vastly too important to allow proud, arrogant, self-seeking individuals to go unchecked in the church. Many of the churches in which this becomes a problem are small and struggling, and can least afford such destructive work.

To be a preacher or elder are works of *service*, not opportunities to wield *power* and exert *threatening authority*. As a Christian, every opportunity to teach and exhort is to be done in humility, and such an attitude does not indicate weakness nor diminish strength. The strong (“**spiritual**”) are to restore those who are overtaken in a trespass “**in a spirit of gentleness**” (Gal. 6:1). We are to be ready always to give an answer for our hope -- “**yet with meekness and fear**” (1 Pet. 3:15). I do not expect those with the spirit of Diotrephes (3 John 9) to be impressed with the attitude we are exalting from Scripture. They did not like Paul’s “**weakness**” either (2 Cor. 10:10; 11:29-30; 12:9-10).

I guess it is hard for a cat to try to act like a lion. I suppose what you wind up with is an unhappy, paranoid critter that does a lot of aimless scratching and senseless yowling to try and keep up the act. Being “King of the Jungle” just wasn’t ever intended for lowly kitty cats.

-- via Bulletin of the Kleinwood Church of Christ
Houston, Texas
Vol. 3, #1, November, 1986

273202