

Beaver Creek on Moral Purity

We, the Beaver Creek, along with other Associations/Conferences in our State have been asked to respond to two (2) questions. The Executive Committee discussed this matter and will offer a biblical reply.

We understand that a issue such as this brings in the emotional side and many times we get clouded by our feeling and miss the teachings in the Word of God.

We must ask you, as a pastor, or a deacon, "Do you really believe that this problem is not serious?" The levels of indiscretion are high and widespread. Furthermore, if you have studied church history, especially the eras of powerful reformation, the change should be apparent. Though not one account of a sexually fallen pastor is ever recorded in the New Testament, sexual sin was openly present in the church (1 Corinthians 6:18). Yet there is no mention of a pastor being overtaken in such a fault, and this in a first generation of new believers who were living in a sexually intoxicated society.

There can be little doubt that ours, too, is a sexually explicit culture, much like that in ancient Corinth. Though ministers have fallen in every age, perhaps even unnamed ones in the New Testament, where in collective memory can such public scandal be recalled by anyone living today?

THE PERSONAL TRAGEDY

We cannot overestimate the untold hurt and agony brought about by sexual sin. Statistics do not tell the story. Ministerial sin, especially this sin, destroys both trust and respect. People have loved their pastor, listened to him with more than passing interest, and invested their lives with his. Some sins carry in them a heavy price; this is clearly one such sin. It violates the pastoral-congregational bond and destroys effective ministry. It smears Christ's bride, the church, before a watching world, and it draws attention to everything but the gospel.

The overwhelming majority of these fallen pastors began their ministries with a sense of divine vocation, or spiritual calling. They had high spiritual goals combined, usually, with much formal training. They entered their ministries longing to serve and to help people. They have ended up hurting the people they were called to serve, and the deep pain they now feel is the result of failing both God and their church. The reproach of their indiscretion will never go away, no matter how much help they get in coming days, or how much recovery they undergo through various therapies (Proverb 6:33) "A wound and dishonour shall he get; and his reproach shall not be wiped away."

It is not by accident that the apostle Paul refers to Timothy as the "man of God" (1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Timothy 3:17). In most churches mothers in the congregation have trusted their pastor to be faithful to them and to their children. They looked to this man to be a strong tower of moral purity. And single women have particularly honored this man as a role model for sexual fidelity. In a time when more and more women are struggling with the painful awareness of sexual abuse in their childhood they do not need a pastor they trust and love to become a sexual abuser.

Men, too, face grave difficulties when their pastor falls into sexual misconduct. They have led their families to public worship under the leadership of this man, trusting him in the administration of the Word. They have prayerfully urged their families to hear God's still quiet voice through his preaching. They have respected him. No words can express the hurt, the loss, and even the anger that is often felt when scandal becomes public in the local church. Men, who desperately need the role model of a godly leader living above the sexual compromises of our age, will be severely tempted to lose hope that any man can remain pure. They are often, thereby, encouraged to sin because of what they see. And sexually tempted teenagers will often lose

confidence that purity can really be preserved.

Some fallen leaders try to justify their involvement by claiming that the sexual infidelity actually opens the door in his mind from his own moral indiscretion to help others. What a shame to try to justify sin (Rom 6:1-2) "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" Sin is brazen. It needs only a spark to light a huge fire. The indiscretions of ministers will be used to light many such fires.

The tragedies of scores of pastors, church leaders, and congregations transform our discussion from the theoretical to the personal. Whether you are a pastor, or a deacon, or a layperson you probably recognize that this is an agonizing, personal problem. What can we do? It is important that we feel sincere empathy for the fallen. We need compassion and prayers for these men. It is also important to develop better counsel which will help restore broken and fallen leaders.

But it is also time for us to acknowledge the divine principle "that judgment must begin with the household of God" (1 Peter 4:17). If we do not, we shall be collectively brought down to complete uselessness, as salt without saltiness, which is "thrown out and trampled under foot of men" (Matthew 5:13).

Judgment is visited upon the entire family of God when a leader falls. Divine chastisement is administered to local churches in their corporate identity, even if few recognize this reality any longer. (Consider the seven churches in Asia Minor in Revelation 2-3.) The whole church must beseech God for mercies that will awaken us out of the moral sleepiness of a dark night. And we must respond to the present crisis with the Word of God as our only weapon, knowing that it alone is sufficient for all matters of faith and practice.

What is God's view of the fallen pastor? What does He have to say about this sin, about this pastor's future, and about his restoration? These are the questions we need to address clearly. And there are other questions we will answer as well. How does God feel about what has happened to the local church, and to those abused by the adulterous pastor? What does holiness demand in the face of this moral crisis? Does forgiven mean ready to serve once again? Is forgiveness all that is necessary for a man to be a good minister of the gospel of grace? How important is moral purity, both past and present, for a man to hold the office of pastor/overseer? How should the church leaders respond to scandalous behavior, and why? How should our denomination, state Association, and local churches treat those ordained or licensed who fall sexually after entering the ministry of the gospel? These, we believe, are often the ignored questions when we seek to address the problem of sexual mis-conduct in the church.

Now, To answer these questions, some explanation must be done.

First, what is meant by "restoring." It can mean to restore him back to the pastorate or the pulpit or it can mean to restore him back in his relationship to Christ, his wife, his family and his church. The Beaver Creek Executive Committee (all of the members) believe that we are to "restore" a fallen ordained man to a relationship with Christ, his wife, his family, and work with him in building a good relationship in the church. However, we believe that the following qualifications are for pastors/ministers and deacons (any ordained man).

In 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9, almost every requirement listed has to do with personal integrity and proven character. Read carefully the 20 requirements Paul gives:

1. Above reproach (1 Tim. 3:2) Leaders are to be blameless, having nothing in their lives for which they can be rebuked.
2. Devoted to their wives (1 Tim. 3:2) They are to be one woman men.

3. Temperate (1 Tim. 3:2) They are to be spiritually stable, having a clear, biblical perspective on life.
4. Prudent (1 Tim. 3:2) They are to be sober-minded, sound, sensible, sane, balanced, wise, knowing their priorities.
5. Respectable (1 Tim. 3:2) Leaders are to have such well-ordered lives that they are honored for it.
6. Hospitable (1 Tim. 3:2) They are to love strangers, opening their homes to those in need.
7. Able to teach (1 Tim. 3:2) That phrase is translated from the single Greek word didaktikos. It is never used to speak of the gift of teaching or the office of a teacher. It is not saying every leader must be a great Bible teacher. It is saying he must be teachable and able to communicate biblical truth to others. The word conveys not so much the dynamics of his teaching as his sensitivity to others. He teaches with a meek and gentle spirit.
8. Self-controlled (Titus 1:8) Leaders are not to indulge in alcohol or drugs of any kind. They need to exercise self-control.
9. Not self-willed (Titus 1:7) They should not be self-centered. A church can't have people in leadership who are concerned only about themselves. The most important thing about church leaders is that they be concerned about the people they are shepherding.
10. Not quick-tempered (Titus 1:7) Those in leadership cannot have a volatile temperament; they must be patient.
11. Not pugnacious (Titus 1:7) This literally means "not a fighter." A church doesn't want someone in leadership who solves problems with his fists.
12. Not contentious (1 Tim. 3:3) This attitude corresponds to the previous physical reaction. A contentious person likes to compete and debate.
13. Gentle (1 Tim. 3:3)
14. Not materialistic (1 Tim. 3:3) Church leaders must be free from the love of money (but that is not to say they should be free from money itself).
15. Good managers of their households (1 Tim. 3:4) Church leaders are required to keep their children under control, with dignity. Many people keep their kids under control, but not many do it with dignity.
16. Of good repute among unbelievers (1 Tim. 3:7) What does the world think of church leaders? As they interact with the unsaved world, their integrity should be above reproach.
17. Lovers of good (Titus 1:8)
18. Just (Titus 1:8) Church leaders are to be fair.
19. Devout (Titus 1:8) They must also be holy in their daily lives.
20. Not new converts (1 Tim. 3:6) They are to be spiritually mature.

Often the local church ignores these qualifications and proceed without questioning the individual and they finally ordain the man if he meets these conditions or not. What is particularly troubling is the pressure brought to bare on a pastor when he serves on the Counsel by an individual who comes but is not qualified. He has family, friends and relationships in that congregation who put pressure on those who must make hard decisions.

MATTERS OF PERSONAL INTEGRITY AND CHARACTER

These two passages (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9) are the classic of the New Testament on pastoral/leadership qualifications. The important qualifications regarding the man's sexual Purity are found in three phrases that literally jump out at us. These are: (1) "above reproach and blameless"; (2) "the husband of one wife"; and (3) ". . . he must have a good report of them which are without;," We need to carefully consider each of these important qualifying requirements for pastoral ministry.

The eligibility of a man to continue in pastoral ministry, having once been placed in office after careful examination and proper qualification, must ultimately hinge upon the written Scripture. Decisions regarding qualification for pastoral ministry must not be determined by our emotions, nor arbitrarily or democratically, but by "every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). If we will not use the Scriptures as the source of all truth for faith and practice, then we shall never be able to respond adequately to vexing issues that threaten to overrun us in this day.

As we can see, all of this raises some major problems regarding restoring a sexually fallen pastor to office when he has abused his office and the very people he was called to protect. When this happens the children of darkness are often wiser than the children of light in recognizing that the man's reputation is seriously flawed and thus what he now seeks to do — mainly, develop good and godly character in others through the ministry of the Word — will not be acceptable.

Maintaining a proper reputation with those outside the faith is an often stated concern of the apostle Paul. (See 1 Corinthians 10:32; Philippians 2:15; Colossians 4:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:12; 1 Timothy 2:2; 5:14; 6:1; Titus 2:5, 8, 10; and 3:1-2.) It is expressed by others (Acts 22:12) and is a personal concern of the apostle Peter as well (1 Peter 2:12, 15; 3:1, 16). What is true for all believers is particularly true for would-be leaders. The world will tend to evaluate all of us by our leaders. If their conduct discredits our corporate message then the world scoffs, with a certain measure of justice, we might add, and the devil has successfully set his trap and brought about great destruction.

We must note that this qualification of a good reputation is quite subjective. The answer to the question "What do those outside the church think about this man's character?" will surely fluctuate from person to person and occasion to occasion. And we must not be quick to take every opposing word uttered against a pastor by some worldly people. But it must be observed that this requirement is nonetheless given to the question of restoring sexually immoral pastors to office.

The "good reputation" is literally a "good witness." As with a credible witness in the court, who is completely believable because of his life before others, so this man has both a good name and good standing in the surrounding community.

"ABOVE REPROACH AND BLAMELESS"

The requirement that the minister be "above reproach and blameless" clearly are concerned with moral purity. The phrase "above reproach" comes from a compound Greek word that means "unimpeachable" or "unassailable." The word "blameless" comes from another word that seems to have a similar meaning in Paul's

use in both 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:7. The wording in the two texts is quite close in the Greek, and thus the terms should be treated as virtual synonyms.

The term "above reproach" is used elsewhere in 1 Timothy 5:7 and 6:14. In the first reference the word is used to describe how children are to care for their parents "so that they may be above reproach." In 6:14 the word is used with a Greek word which means "spotless" or "without blemish" in telling Timothy to "keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ." Extra biblical evidence supports these definitions as well.

It is logical to understand that what is in view here is present status. The man might very well have been blameless in the past, or he might become blameless in the future, but the qualification of this verse is clear he is blameless now.

Every other mention of this idea in the pastoral epistles leads to the same conclusion. When we go further in 1 Timothy 3 we find a similar idea in the qualifications for those who would be deacons. Paul says: "And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless." (Verse 10) And let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach.

Does sexual failure automatically keep a person out of pastoral ministry? If a man has been sexually immoral, living the lifestyle of an adulterer or fornicator, must he forego consideration of placing him back in the pastoral ministry? These texts support an affirmative answer.

The mention of the leader's name when he falls should not cause derision among the opponents of the gospel or those within the Bride of Christ. The behavior of the leader should provide an example of integrity and commitment to the gospel he professes.

The point is quite clear: If the overseer has an unsavory reputation with the unsaved world and the church, then the leader, with him the entire church, will fall into disgrace. If the pastor has lived in such a manner as to cause unsaved people not to hear his message, then the devil has lured both the leader and his flock into a trap, for as Paul writes, "he may fall into reproach and the snare of the devil" (v. 7). This thought is stated well in the Weymouth translation: "It is needful also that he bear a good character with people outside the Church, lest he fall into reproach or a snare of the devil."

Christians must realize that unbelievers scrutinize their actions with a searchlight of fault-finding investigation. Paul's implied appeal is that church leaders give no opportunity for unbelievers genuinely to find fault.... In this verse Paul presented Satan as a hunter who lays out traps into which the careless, short-sighted Christian can fall.

It is true that a man may be forgiven immediately of any sin, but it is not true that the effects of his sin will go unnoticed by the world. Character, which produces reputation in general, is essential for ministry. Abraham Lincoln put this relationship well when he said, "Character is like a tree and reputation its shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing."

Character is not set in cement....progressive sanctification means even the worst of sinners can make progress.

Character can be rebuilt in many cases, but reputation will be destroyed, as numerous examples will prove. It seems that this is in view in Proverbs 6:32-33 "But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul. A wound and dishonour shall he get; and his reproach shall not be wiped away."

"THE HUSBAND OF ONE WIFE"

We were not asked to respond to a question we are sure will need to be addressed. The Beaver Creek already have a rule in place that states:

“No one shall be licensed, ordained or exchange credentials who has two living wives or if the wife has two living husbands. (Scripture: Titus 1:6; I Timothy 3:1-2; 11).

(Titus 1:6) "If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly."

(1 Timothy 3:1-2) "This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;"

(1 Timothy 3:11) "Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things."

In 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:6 Paul indicates that the pastor must be "the husband of one wife."

Now, to the Second question “What position should the state take in regards to a conference who licenses and/or ordains a pastor in this situation?”

If, we believe the Scriptures that we dealt with, that it firmly forbids “restoring” a fallen leader back to his previous position as senior pastor. Then we would further confirm that the State Association should withdraw fellowship from that Association/Conference that, after a reasonable time, it does not administer the qualifications that is recorded in 1 Timothy and Titus they are in violation of the Word of God.

TO SUM IT UP

You, the Beaver Creek Association now is ask to speak to a very emotional, delicate, sensitive, important issue that is quite controversial. This is a rather lengthy article that we seek to inform you, the delegates.

We trust you will exam the Scriptures in 1 Timothy and Titus which were written so we would be informed of how we aught to set the churches in order.