

**JUDGMENT
AND
REDEMPTION**



CONFRONTING & CORRECTING
SIN IN THE CHURCH

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AND THE MINISTERIAL
FAMILY LIFE COMMITTEE

Judgment and Redemption:
Confronting and Correcting Sin in the Church

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Introduction

The church is in the ministry of redemption. Redemption begins with a *need* and moves toward a *goal*. The need prompting redemption is sin. Sin involves guilt and condemnation. A holy God must judge sin. Sin also involves depravity. Depravity is the power at work in people that leads them into the pathway of sin and ruin. The *aim* of redemption is forgiveness of sins and transformation of lives into Christ's likeness. The likeness of Christ involves living by Christian values.

Conversion marks a change in people's lives, but it does not usher them into a state of sinlessness. This means that, while the church stands for righteousness, it is not free from sin. Another factor opening the way for sin to enter the church is that not all people who make professions of faith and join the church have truly been saved. This means sin finds its way into the church.

This has always been true. The early church had problems with sin, as well evidenced by the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 5:1-13). Our day is no different. If anything, we have an increased sin problem in the church. This short booklet will tackle the difficult challenge of confronting sin in the church.

Judgment and Redemption

by F. Leroy Forlines

The church's response to sin must be patterned after God's own response. In God's relationship to sin and the sinner, two distinct paths emerge: *judgment* and *redemption*. Judgment issues from God's holiness. Redemption arises from God's love.

On the surface, some think judgment and redemption are contradictory. If God judges, He cannot redeem. If He redeems, it appears He cannot judge. To these, it seems holiness and love cannot be preserved, each in its full integrity. With roots in this type of thinking, theological liberalism has a view of love that so weakens the holiness of God it has no serious view of judgment. Liberalism denies the doctrine of an eternal Hell and ends up with universalism, which offers eternal life to everybody.

Such a view must be rejected outright. We must take seriously what God says about redemption (John 3:16, 18, 36; Romans 5:7, 8; 8:1). At the same time, we also must take seriously what God says about judgment (Genesis 2:17; Romans 1:18; 3:19, 20; Revelation 20:11-15; 21:8).

No contradiction exists between judgment and redemption. However, we must go beyond surface thinking to avoid such a conclusion. God's holiness demanded sin be punished. God's love desired to save man.

The harmony of holiness and love that protects the full integrity of both holiness and love can be found in the Christian doctrine of atonement. The wisdom of God worked out a plan in which both holiness and love are satisfied. The love of God provided atonement through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ fully satisfied the holiness of God. Sin was fully judged at the cross. Jesus Christ suffered the full wrath of God for our sin (Isaiah 53:6; 1 Peter 2:24; Galatians 3:13; Romans 8:3).

Jesus Christ lived a completely righteous life and satisfied the law's demand for righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 3:21-22; Philippians 3:9). God's offer of redemption rests solidly on the full satisfaction of the holiness of God, with no contradiction between judgment and redemption.

When dealing with sin in the church, we must take an uncompromising stand *for* righteousness and *against* sin. At the same time, we must be concerned that the ministry of redemption be fulfilled in the one who has sinned. It is not always easy to minister messages of both judgment and redemption to the same person, but we must spare no reasonable effort to communicate both messages to those who have sinned.

Communicating both judgment and redemption can become quite challenging when we consider specific situations that may arise. For instance, how would we apply the messages of both judgment and redemption to one who has mishandled money in the church? Immorality? Divorce and remarriage? These and other issues must be brought under the scrutiny of judgment and redemption.

Confronting Every Type of Sin

Today, as in any age, the church is confronted with varying types of sin. We find clear examples of church discipline in the New Testament that draw upon both holiness and love. The most serious of these instances could result in excommunication from the local church.

In the hypothetical case described by Jesus in Matthew 18:15-17, both holiness and love are at work. The person who has been sinned against goes to the offender and confronts him or her regarding the fault (verse 15). Here, we see a concern for holiness and righteousness. The offender is reminded of the failure. However, we also see love at work: "If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother" (verse 15). Closely connected with the concern to correct is the concern to restore.

If this private attempt at restoration fails, both holiness and love make further attempts to correct and restore (verses 16-17). Every stage of discipline holds forth hope that the person will be restored and reconciled to the one against whom he or she has sinned. If all attempts to

help fail, Jesus said, "Let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican" (verse 17). This is equivalent to excommunication or regarding him as an unsaved person. In such a case, repentance would satisfy the demands of holiness, but holiness cannot be compromised where there is no repentance.

In Christ's example, the sin that results in excommunication is not the original trespass or fault. In fact, we have no idea what the original failure was. The sin that brings excommunication is the refusal to be reconciled to the brother. Excommunication does not take place until the person spurns all reasonable, loving attempts at reconciliation.

We find one other case of excommunication in the New Testament: the case of incest in 1 Corinthians 5. Paul rebuked the church at Corinth for not mourning the sin and taking the necessary action to remove the man guilty of incest from membership (1 Corinthians 5:1-2). Their holy nature as redeemed people should have caused them to abhor this sin and take the necessary action. Their failure to have such an attitude was an indictment against the church.

In no uncertain terms, Paul commanded them to "put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (1 Corinthians 5:13). The phrases "to deliver such an one unto Satan" (verse 5) and to "put away from among yourselves" (verse 13) both refer to excommunication from the church. Within the church is God's domain. Outside the church is, in one sense, Satan's domain.

The action was severe, but love was not left out. This action was not designed to write off the person as a member of the human race. The design of this action was "for the destruction of the flesh that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (verse 5). I interpret "destruction of the flesh" as "to bring repentance." No matter the exact interpretation, it is clear the action was taken with an interest in the person's salvation.

Even though the person had committed a sin Paul said even the Gentiles wouldn't discuss, the church was encouraged to have redemptive concern for this man. He was still to be viewed as one for whom Christ died. Many scholars believe the man described in 1 Corinthians 5 is the same

individual later mentioned in 2 Corinthians 2:6-8. If this is the case, the man *did* repent, and Paul encouraged the church to receive him back. The members were to confirm their love toward him despite his sin.

In both biblical case studies in church discipline, both judgment and redemption were at work. Judgment was present to uphold right and to condemn sin. Redemption was at work to forgive and transform.

The Brotherhood

A thorough study of 1 Corinthians makes it clear Paul did not consider the man guilty of incest with his stepmother to be saved (1 Corinthians 5). Some have claimed, based on 1 Corinthians 5:11, that the man was considered a brother. It is important to observe that Paul said, "If any man that is *called* a brother be a fornicator" (5:11). There is no reason to believe a person who is called a brother or claims to be a brother is necessarily a saved person.

The church is a brotherhood. A member of this brotherhood would be described as a brother on the simple basis of membership in the brotherhood. By saying "called a brother," Paul carefully avoids identifying him as a member of God's family.

In 1 Corinthians 5:11, Paul wrote, "If any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner..." and then gives advice concerning these individuals. That he did not mean to imply such people are saved is clear from 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. In these verses, Paul repeated every sin named in 5:11. The word translated *railer* in 5:11 is translated *revilers* in 6:10. Having repeated the same list of sins in 6:9-10 that he also described in 5:11, Paul said such people would not inherit the kingdom of God. This certainly included the man guilty of incest.

The ongoing sin of incest made it clear the man was not saved, even though he was a member of the church. When a person's conduct consistently makes it appear he or she is not a Christian, that individual should be removed from the church roll if repentance is not forthcoming.

While excommunication occurs in extreme cases, lesser forms of disci-

pline are available in less serious cases. Paul deals with such a problem in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15. The discipline described in this passage does not appear to be an official “action” of the church. However, it describes the attitude the church should have in such cases.

Paul told the church at Thessalonica to “withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly” (verse 6). Verse 11 describes those who spend their time “working not at all but are busybodies” as *walking disorderly*. Verse 14 likely describes what the apostle meant by *withdrawing* from such people when he said, “Have no company with him.” He encouraged the Thessalonians not to enter any “approving” type of fellowship with such an individual.

Again, this example demonstrates both aspects of discipline. Holiness and judgment are clearly the motives when Paul advised the church to refuse full fellowship to those who walk disorderly. Love is seen in the refusal to have approving fellowship with this type of individual, “that he may be ashamed” (verse 14). Love is further demonstrated in verse 15: “Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.” There is no excommunication in such a case, but action is taken that hopefully results in repentance. There is no total rejection. There is an attempt to restore.

Both holiness and love join their concerns in *admonishing* the person. Admonishing represents holiness by reminding the person of his fault. Admonishing represents love in directing a concern to the moral and spiritual welfare of the brother or sister.

The administration of discipline, either in its mild or severe forms, calls for maturing in our experiences with holiness, love, and wisdom. May God grant the maturity enabling us to bring holiness and love to bear effectively on the sin confronting the church in today’s world.

Personal Correction

To review: New Testament examples of church discipline always demonstrate a desire to restore the fallen church member. These passages never voice a desire to exercise bare-armed authority of the law

(judgment) apart from this interest in restoring the fallen brother or sister (redemption).

At the same time, if repentance was not forthcoming, necessary action required by judgment was administered with the hope the judgment itself might lead to repentance (1 Corinthians 5:5). The person was to be received back into the church family after matters were made right (2 Corinthians 2:6-7).

This integration of judgment and redemption is also seen in biblical examples where formal discipline was not involved. A good example is found in Galatians 6:1, where concerns were expressed regarding a man "overtaken" in a fault. The word *overtaken* seems to describe an individual who fell into sin because he or she was caught off guard rather than by a willful or deliberate act. This individual was guilty of a fault or sin.

The concern of holiness does not permit sin to continue unchecked. The wayward individual is to be reminded of his or her sin. The concern of love is revealed in the fact that, as Christians, we must be concerned that this brother or sister be restored. We cannot be satisfied with simply condemning and criticizing. Our concern is twofold: that the person 1) see his or her wrong and 2) take steps to correct the action. We desire full restoration to fellowship with God and fellow Christians and to a position of usefulness in the cause of Christ. Love is also demonstrated in the attitude in which this help is to be given: "in the spirit of meekness" (Galatians 6:1).

In 2 Timothy 4:2, Paul told Timothy to "reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering." To *rebuke* means to call the person's attention to sin. To *reprove* means to be so effective in calling the person's attention to sin that he or she experiences conviction regarding the sin. This instruction to reprove and rebuke manifests a commitment to holiness. Exhortation expresses the concerns of holiness and love as the person is encouraged to take the right path of action.

Love is most clearly seen when reproof, rebuking, and exhorting are carried out with all longsuffering (or patience). The *spirit of gentleness* in Galatians 6:1 and *longsuffering* in 2 Timothy 4:2 are reminders that

correction must not be done with a harsh, rigid, or critical attitude.

Another word used to describe working with people in a corrective way is translated *admonish* in Romans 15:14 and *warn* in 1 Thessalonians 5:14. The word combines the concerns of holiness and love—holiness when warning and rebuking are necessary, love because these actions involve encouragement.

Holiness and love, judgment and redemption must always be combined when dealing with sin in the church. This is true formally, where official discipline is involved, or informally, where rebuking, reproving, exhorting, and admonishing are involved at a personal level. Holiness with love subtracted is not holiness but harshness, rigidity, and cruelty. Love with holiness subtracted is not love but spineless sentimentality where anything and everything is tolerated.

When dealing with sin in the church, we experience a healthy tension between holiness and love. By maturity wrought through experience, we can achieve a balance of holiness and love and preserve both the interests of judgment and redemption.

Unruly and Disorderly

At this point, we must return to the question of church discipline set forth in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15. In this instance, discipline was not as severe as the cases dealt with in Matthew 18:15-17 and 1 Corinthians 5:1-13. It is important to give more attention to the type of problem Paul encountered in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15.

He described the Thessalonian problem as “walking disorderly” in 2 Thessalonians 3:6 and 11. In referring to the same problem in 1 Thessalonians 5:14, Paul used the word *unruly*. The words *disorderly* and *unruly* in these passages come from different forms of the same Greek word, a military term describing insubordination.

In 2 Thessalonians, Paul used *disorderly* to describe those who refused to work (3:10-11). Some Thessalonians thought Jesus was coming very soon, and they did not need to work. Their refusal to work represented insubordination to church leadership and the position of the church.

Because they refused to work, these people were considered disorderly. Some have translated this Greek word “out of line.” These individuals were out of step with the rest of the church—busybodies, out of line because they were tending to other people’s business. The principle of being disorderly or out of line as used in 2 Thessalonians can be applied to present-day situations to describe those who refuse to carry their part of the load. They refuse to fit into the church. They are at odds with church leadership. They are out of line with what is expected.

Clearly, this does not mean church leadership can impose unreasonable demands upon the members then accuse them of being disorderly. However, it *does* mean those who refuse to identify with the spirit and responsibilities of the church are disorderly and out of line and should be admonished (2 Thessalonians 3:15). The admonition or warning has a dual purpose. First, it is a rebuke—gentle, discreet, but firm. However, the rebuke also holds as its goal the restoration of the erring member.

Also, we must not enter any approving type of fellowship with these out-of-line individuals. We cannot withdraw totally from them. God does not intend this. Neither should we continue as if nothing is wrong. Our actions should make it clear that while we do not reject them as people, neither do we endorse their behavior.

It is obvious this principle can be applied to other situations. It could refer to any case where a person refuses to fit the spirit and direction agreed upon by the church. In some cases, the individual may think the spirit and direction of the church itself are wrong. After a reasonable attempt to correct this, if the situation does not change, the person should move on to another church rather than risk insubordination.

Church members also walk disorderly and out of line when they refuse to respect and abide by the standards and lifestyles of the church. Certainly, churches need room for flexibility. However, when reasonable flexibility has been granted, those members whose behavior is noticeably out of step with the rest of the church body are walking disorderly and should be admonished.

It is absolutely necessary that a spirit of unity and harmony prevail in

a church. This may require voluntary changes in areas where one does not hold the same deep feelings or convictions. This is crucial for unity, peace, and harmony to prevail.

Helping the Fallen

While we have stressed the concerns of holiness in this discussion of confronting sin in the church, we have also emphasized the biblical concern for the restoration of fallen church members. How does this look at a practical level? What is involved in helping those who have sinned?

As I present various scenarios, I will not become involved in questioning whether such people are saved or lost. In the introduction, I pointed out that part of the problem with confronting sin in the church is that some people in the local church are not saved. In this section, I simply refer to them as church members. I have already dealt with the problems of discipline. Now, I want to elaborate on what is involved in helping restore the fallen.

First, we must not restrict our attention to condemnation and criticism. It is easy to condemn and criticize. It requires no special skills. However, it is not always easy to help, and it may be complicated for many reasons.

- **We may be misunderstood.** Jesus was criticized because He ate with sinners (Luke 15:1-2). While we must not enter relationships with people that imply approval of their sin, at the same time, we must not abandon them. To reject and abandon a person totally is to give that individual a push down the road to destruction.
- **We must live beyond reproach.** When we give attention to the fallen, we run the risk of being misunderstood. We must live holy lives that stop rumors from those who would falsely accuse us of sin or compromise.
- **We must always be on guard lest we fall into sin ourselves.** I think this is what Paul described in Galatians 6:1 when he said, "Ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself lest thou also be tempted."

Some commentators interpret the last part of the verse to mean we need to avoid being overly critical because it could happen to us. However, in my opinion, Paul was warning his readers to be careful to avoid falling into sin with the person they are attempting to restore. For instance, the person struggling for victory over alcoholism needs to let stronger Christians go to the rescue of another who has fallen victim to alcohol.

- **We must help restore those guilty of despicable sin.** We see this in 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 where Paul confronted the revolting sin of incest. Paul recommended the individual be dismissed from the church. However, in 2 Corinthians 2:6-8, Paul recommended the church receive this person back. He went so far as to say, "I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him."

In cases of horrible sin, we may be tempted to say, "Get out of here and never show your face again." However, such an approach is not the Christian approach. We labor to restore *all* the fallen, even those guilty of abhorrent sin.

- **Some situations are complicated because of controversy and misunderstanding surrounding them.** For example, the problem of divorce and remarriage is a difficult and explosive issue. This is especially true where ordained persons are involved. Because of the complications surrounding this issue, those who fall into sins in this area (or become a helpless victim of a spouse's sin) may be almost totally rejected by the church. We must uphold sound convictions, but, at the same time, we must minister the redeeming and restoring grace of God to those who have fallen. It is understandable, even advisable, that the weak and inexperienced not attempt to restore some cases, but the church must have those equipped to help in difficult or long-term restoration.

Finding the Root Cause

When a person who has professed faith and manifested consistent evidence of salvation drops out of church or falls into sin, some explana-

tion is needed. There are no moral accidents. Failures do not just happen without motivating influences. A happy, well-adjusted person does not suddenly become an alcoholic. A happy, well-adjusted husband or wife does not suddenly become involved in sexual immorality. When a husband and wife are happily married, they do not suddenly file for divorce.

We can attempt to help people in one of two ways. We can simply call attention to their guilt and encourage them to repent. Or, we can help them understand why they committed the sin and help them deal with the root causes. For restoration, we must use the second approach. While guilt must remain clear both to us and to the person we are trying to help, we must seek the underlying causes.

Identifying why a person committed a particular sin does not mean we explain away the guilt. Sin is sin, no matter how understandable the circumstances that led to the sin. To explain the root cause behind a person's failure is not the same as justifying the sin. It is not enough to explain that sin is caused by the sin nature that has not been totally eradicated. This inclination to sin is true of all Christians, but not all Christians fall into serious sin. We need to seek to understand each case individually.

The significant problems that lead to sin are numerous: depression, self-rejection, rejection by others, false guilt, stress from extended overload, recurring personality problems that result from a broken home or a difficult background, and the feeling of despair. With such people, the puzzle pieces of life are not fitting together, and they do not know how to handle their problems. They turn in the wrong direction.

Dealing With Depression

Prolonged unhappiness is dangerous. It puts a person under pressure. The pain, agony, and frustration of being unable to find satisfactory solutions forms the seedbed of doubt. In its worst form, doubt may arise concerning the very foundations of the faith, such as God, the Bible, and Jesus Christ. The person experiencing this deep difficulty wonders why God allowed the difficulty to happen, or why God does not immediately remove the problems.

Then he or she feels guilty for having such questions and tries to suppress the questions rather than face the questions. Often, these individuals are afraid to talk to anybody about their questions. They are afraid of an outright rebuke, of not being understood, or of not finding answers to the questions. This fear can lead a person not to invite anyone into an important part of his or her life experience. Such isolation is very damaging.

Others doubt their ability to be good Christians rather than doubting the Christian faith. To them, the Christian life makes demands they are incapable of meeting. Despite their most sincere efforts, they feel they are failing and become gripped by despair. The thought enters their minds: "I can't do this. What is the use in trying?" They are overwhelmed by feelings of failure or self-rejection.

To avoid repeating or defining a list of different words, I will use the word *depression* to describe not only depression but other negative emotional states. Depression is painful. It calls for an answer. If a person does not get help in finding the answer through a proper understanding of biblical truth and experience, he or she will likely look for relief in other, often detrimental, ways.

Among these damaging behaviors are alcohol, drugs, immorality, and pursuit of material goods and success. These pursuits offer relief, but as someone once told me with agony in his voice, "It is only temporary." Temporarily, these behaviors ease the pain; but when the pain returns, it is worse and usually adds several other problems.

Some people blame others for their problems: the pastor, an employer, or a business partner. More frequently, the blame falls within the family. When a troubled person considers the unremedied fault of someone else in the family, he or she becomes deeply frustrated. The relationship becomes strained, and tragic consequences develop.

As helpers, our first concern is to help prevent depression or to deal with it before it leads to tragedy. Many people exhibit obvious evidence of being depressed. In others, depression is not so easily detected. Deeply-disturbed people may show no outward signs to casual acquaintances. They may appear to be the life of the party. How can we help them?

Cultivating Concern

First, we must cultivate an atmosphere of concern. Make people feel we will not take their questions, doubts, and fears lightly. We must *never* rebuke a person for being deeply concerned about a matter. We may tactfully show people some of their problems are exaggerated, but we must never rebuke them or refer to their problems as stupid or silly.

A feeling of concern toward people's problems is biblical. Paul said, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2). If we demonstrate concern about people's problems, through experience, we will learn something about how to help them. However, we do not have to wait until we learn *how* to help before we can *be* of help. The simple fact that we care goes a long way toward helping.

Try as we may, we cannot prevent everyone in the church from experiencing depression, especially on a temporary basis. However, with intervention, depression does not have to lead to tragedy.

We must help people develop a value system to withstand all types of pressure. We must convince them that, regardless of what happens, they will be better off if they refuse to violate their Christian convictions. We must help them build high and thick walls of protection around convictions. To do so, we need to teach them to make serious value judgments concerning the negative consequences of violated convictions contrasted with the positive value of standing strong for their convictions. We must help them understand that value judgments must be a frequent part of thought life and prayer life and must be rooted in meditation upon God's Word.

For us, the entire process of helping the fallen must be accompanied by constant prayer and wholehearted dependence upon the Holy Spirit (Matthew 26:41; Galatians 5:17; Philippians 4:13).

Face to Face

Individual correction can be handled better if an atmosphere of concern for both holiness and love prevails in the church. The attitude of the

church toward sin must never be in doubt. At the same time, the loving concern of the church in helping the fallen must never be in doubt.

The first step in restoring a fallen person is to make personal contact. Unless the fallen individual gives reason to think otherwise, we should work in the assumption that he or she feels guilty about the sin and is troubled about it. If this is the case, we need to try to understand what brought about the fall.

This can be done by saying something like this: "I am sure you would not have done this (referring to the particular sin) if you were not bothered about something. Am I right?"

If the answer is yes, assure the person you are concerned and will try to be understanding. Ask if he or she would like to share what has been bothering him or her. Understanding what influenced a person to sin helps you (and the person) understand how to deal with it.

When the problem is clearly defined, try to help the person learn how to deal with the root cause of the resulting sin. At times, you may need to refer the case to a more experienced person. However, the fact that you care and show an interest in helping will go a long way toward helping the person find a solution. One of the greatest needs for humans is to know someone accepts and cares about them. Fewer people will have serious problems if they know a good number of dedicated Christians deeply care for them.

An important part of overcoming sin is for the person to evaluate his or her situation. Ask what will happen if he or she continues in the current behavior. What will be the negative consequences? For him or her? For the family? For the church? After exploring negative consequences, consider the rewards of repentance and change.

Sin brings guilt, loss of self-respect, lack of respect from others, misery in the individual's life and the lives of others he touches (Isaiah 57:20-21; Psalm 1:4-6). Repentance and righteous living bring forgiveness of sin from God (1 John 1:9), self-respect, personal happiness (Psalm 1:1-3; Matthew 5:6), and happiness into the lives of the people around us (Luke 15:21-24).

People do in life what they, in both heart and mind, value. It was a value judgment that led the prodigal son to return home and confess his sin to his father (Luke 15:17-19). Sometimes, it requires an experience with harsh reality before a person will really evaluate the situation and repent. The Psalmist said, "Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word" (Psalm 119:67).

When the person has repented, we need to help him forgive himself of past sins. When a person has repudiated, renounced, and disowned her past sins, she is to see herself in the light of what she is now, not what she once was.

After Paul named some of the most serious sins in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, he continued in verse 11, "And such were some of you." The *were* means their previous behavior was history. They were no longer the kind of persons they had been when they practiced those sins. The formerly dishonest person is no longer a dishonest person but an honest person, if he has repudiated dishonesty. The same principle can be applied to other sins.

The person who has sinned should not expect to slip back into the church unnoticed but should respond with an open indication of repentance and renewed dedication to God. When such takes place, he should be received.

God forbid that anyone in the church manifest the attitude of the older brother in the parable of the prodigal son when a sinner repents (Luke 15:28-30). When one who has repented is received back into the fellowship and loving care and concern of the church, this acceptance helps him become established in his new commitment.

Recovery

A person who has fallen into sin has two primary concerns: He or she needs to deal 1) with the sin itself and 2) with the problems in life that contributed to the sin. First, arriving at the clear-cut conclusion that the action is sin, he or she needs to evaluate the negative consequences the sin brought and consider the negative consequences it might still bring

to others if the behavior continues. The fallen individual also needs to consider the contrasting positive value, both personally and for others. We do in life what we value.

Second, it is important to define the things that contributed to the sin. Depression, despair, frustration, social maladjustment, loneliness, and boredom are factors that frequently lead to sin. Unhappiness—especially long-term unhappiness—is dangerous.

It is impossible to deal thoroughly with the problems above. However, a few observations will be helpful. Depression, despair, and frustration usually come from negative thinking. Over a long period of time, many people struggling in these areas have gotten caught up in thinking about their weaknesses, failures, problems, and disadvantages. These thoughts cannot possibly result in a healthy attitude toward life.

A person needs a true opinion of self. This requires an accurate assessment considering the positive as well as the negative. Honesty sees both our good and our bad. A proper awareness of our positives contributes to more self-acceptance and self-confidence. While “the power of positive thinking” has become a catch phrase in recent years, it is true that positive thinking helps a person overcome depression.

Negatives that can be changed need to be changed. As this is done, a person will develop a better attitude toward life. The person who develops a healthy sense of self-acceptance will have a far better chance of living correctly. He or she will not have a need for alcohol, illegal drugs, or immorality to camouflage pain inside.

Another important area for improvement is to avoid over-involvement and impossible goals. One of the most discouraging and depressing experiences in life comes with ongoing failure to meet impossible or unreasonable goals. A person must define reasonable expectations and live within that framework. Over-involvement spins a web around a person that is difficult to live with and even harder to escape.

Many moral tragedies have come to people who tried and failed to do more than their capabilities allowed. Despair and fear overcame them, and they fell into sin. In some cases, the overload resulted from

a combination of secular work and church work. It is very important that the person seeking restoration avoid overload and unreasonable goals—even when the cause is good. It is crucial for churches to avoid overloading church members to the point of exhaustion, frustration, and eventually depression.

If a repentant person can be received back into the full fellowship and social life of the church, it will contribute greatly to ongoing victory. One of the greatest needs for every person to continue stable and upright living is social acceptance by good people.

Encourage the repentant person to work on two important areas 1) establishing strong convictions and walls of protection and 2) finding satisfactory answers that bring peace and help the individual cope with the problems of life.

Practical Advice in Closing

Let me conclude with some practical advice for those in the church who have repented after falling into sin. I am thinking particularly about those whose sin has become public knowledge to the church. The particulars may not be known, but the fact of the sin is known. He or she should not expect to slip unnoticed back into the life of the church. The prodigal son did not try to return to the family without confession or apology. His actions provide a good example of repentance. His first words to his father were, “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son” (Luke 15:21).

After a person has fallen into sin, some form of public acknowledgment to the church is in order. Responding openly to an invitation to confess at the altar may communicate all that is necessary for the church to know the person is dealing with sin.

In other cases, spoken statements of confession may be in order. The church today needs to hear more public confession of sin. Many times, this confession may convict the hearts of others. The leading of the Holy Spirit and the wise counsel of a pastor can help determine when a public confession is in order.

Repentance is not simply quitting a particular sin. It is judging it to be sin, calling it sin, and turning away from that sin. The prodigal son did not simply decide to return home. He defined his actions as sin and confessed them to be sin.

It is the responsibility of the church to accept a person's repentance as genuine while his or her life backs up the repentance. This does not mean people immediately have the same confidence in the fallen individual that they did before the sin. (Nor should the person have as much self-confidence.) It will take time for full confidence to be restored.

Strong confidence in a person's integrity, dependability, and stability does not grow out of one's simple status as a Christian or repentance from a particular sin. Strong confidence is developed over time and testing. The church must provide a person the opportunity to regain the confidence of the people. However, the repentant individual must accept the responsibility of living in a way that communicates to people evidence of true repentance. This can be a long and difficult process. Confidence and respect are earned, and, once lost, are not quickly regained.

Repentance does not guarantee a person will immediately be returned to a former office or position. In some cases, the individual may never return to previous leadership roles. The church must be very practical. Leaders in the church must be accepted as leaders by the people. Even if no biblical reason exists to deny a person's former position after repentance, the church cannot afford to offer the position if the people will not accept the individual's leadership.

In the course of time, the person may be fully reestablished and hold any office in the church. In some cases, this will be true. In other cases, it will not. The person who has repented must prepare himself to cope with these realities, understanding that loss of trust is a sad consequence of sinful behavior.

Though a person may not return to a previously-held position in the church after restoration, the church must help every person who demonstrates repentance and dedication to God find a place of service.

Every redeemed person who means business with God can be fruitful in sharing the redemptive grace of God in some way. God will not grant forgiveness and, at the same time, deny a place of service for the remainder of the individual's life. When people repent and make the necessary adjustments in life, it is our duty to restore them to a place of service that fulfills the desire of their hearts to serve God.

Judgment, grace, and redemption into God's service—these are the ultimate aims of confronting sin in the church.

About the writer: F. Leroy Forlines (1926-2020) was professor emeritus of theology at Welch College, where he served more than 50 years. After concluding studies at Welch, he earned an M.A. from Winona Lake School of Theology, a B.D. from Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, and a Th.M. from Chicago Graduate School of Theology. A prolific author, his works include *Biblical Ethics*, *Systematics*, *The Quest for Truth*, *Classical Arminianism*, and a commentary on Romans. This booklet has been adapted from material originally published in *Contact* magazine.

About the Ministerial Family Life Committee

During the 1993 convention of the National Association of Free Will Baptists, in response to a resolution, the moderator appointed the Ministerial Family Life Committee to develop guidelines for restoring fallen leaders. The seven-member committee included Leroy Forlines (Chair) Trymon Messer, Larry Powell, Ken Riggs, Eugene Waddell, Ralph Hampton, and Melvin Worthington. Over the next seven years, the committee delivered three separate reports covering three important areas related to restoration.

The committee first addressed the question of whether a fallen minister can be restored to his former ministry and shared a careful process for restoration. Second, the committee offered resources to help prevent moral failure. Finally, the committee presented step-by-step guidelines for church discipline, including the discipline of both church members and ministers. As the committee noted:

These processes, guidelines, and procedures must remain mindful of the rights of the accused. While those guilty of serious offenses should be dealt with, the process must be fair. In our haste for judgment we sometimes forget procedures. When we fail to follow procedures, we make ourselves liable. These procedures are in agreement with the Free Will Baptist Treatise. Thus, the implementation of these procedures should stand up in a court of law. We live in a day when it is popular to sue. We need to know how to protect ourselves and our churches. But we have an even greater reason to follow proper procedures: it is right.

We encourage Free Will Baptists to refer to these guidelines and procedures for the prevention of moral failure, for discipline, and for the restoration of ministers.

Can a Pastor Be Restored to His Former Ministry?

It is with sad and heavy hearts we address this subject. However, we must face the reality that some pastors do experience serious moral failure. While other failures exist (such as embezzlement) the majority of cases involve sexual immorality. Almost all restoration literature focuses on sexual immorality.

While the primary thrust of this material deals with restoration, serious attention also needs to be given to prevention. The only protection is a planned defense. Every Christian needs to have plans regarding how to avoid sexual sin. Regarding a fallen minister who needs restoration, we are assuming the individual has been asked to relinquish his credentials or has voluntarily surrendered his credentials because of sin. Certainly, some problems require discipline yet do not require an individual to give up his credentials. While some of the following recommendations may be useful in such cases, we are not specifically addressing such cases.

In cases where an individual has forfeited his credentials, the body or committee in charge of discipline would be involved. This group should also initiate the restoration process. See the Free Will Baptist *Treatise*, Part IV, Chapter Two, Section II, concerning who disciplines ministers. Also, check with your own association concerning who disciplines ministers.

Observations

1. If there is to be restoration, there must be: a) an admission of guilt and repentance; b) a desire for help; and c) a willingness to receive the help provided.
2. In cases of sexual immorality, at least one other person is involved. There must be concern for those individuals and their families.

3. There also must be a concern for the minister's wife and children. Help for him must involve help for them.
4. There must be concern for the devastation brought upon the church the pastor was serving when the sin was committed. While the church must decide whether or not it wants outside help, concern for the church should be expressed.
5. Sexual sins are devastating and unique in their ability to produce personality problems. Paul warns, "Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body" (1 Corinthians 6:18). Precisely what Paul meant in this passage is hard to determine, but it is obvious he identified sexual sins as unique.
6. We must believe there is hope for a fallen individual previously committed to Christian values to be restored to a stable Christian life.
7. While we believe in the possibility of being reestablished in the Christian life, we must not naively accept an oversimplified approach to restoration. There is much to be overcome and much to be healed. This will take a great deal of time.

Recommendations

The following recommendations all work on the assumption the individual admits guilt and wants help. If he is not ready for help, advise him that if he changes his mind, help will be available. Sometimes it takes time for repentance to work its fruit.

1. The goal of restoration is to bring reconciliation and healing to the individual, his family, and all involved parties and to help the individual become an established, steadfast Christian and a worthwhile member of the local church he chooses to attend.
2. The group responsible for discipline should appoint a committee of three to five Christian leaders to whom the restoration candidate will be accountable during the restoration period. Ordinarily, the pastor of the church where he chooses to attend should be a member of this group. These men should be frank and open while showing they have

the restoration candidate's best interests at heart. At first, they should meet once a month. When adequate progress is observed, these meetings may be less frequent. The individual should be responsible to this committee for at least two years.

3. The committee to whom the restoration candidate is accountable should work with him in selecting a fellow minister to whom he will report on a regular basis for counseling. This should be someone he respects highly. It will be helpful if this fellow minister has experience in assisting people through difficult problems.

It will be better if the counselor is not a member of the committee to whom the restoration candidate is responsible. With discretion and proper regard for confidentiality, the counselor should report to the committee concerning the individual's progress or lack of progress.

At first, the restoration candidate should meet with his counselor once a week. Later, the meetings may be less frequent. He should continue to meet with the counselor until the counselor is convinced adequate progress has been made. If the restoration candidate is not showing serious interest in working on his problem, the counselor should report this to the committee.

In some cases, it may be necessary for the restoration candidate to see a professional Christian counselor rather than a fellow minister.

4. When the committee considers its work complete because they believe the candidate has been restored, they should report to the pastor and deacons of the church he attends. If it is quickly concluded the restoration candidate is not showing proper interest, the committee may report this to the pastor and deacons and dissolve the committee.
5. After one year, it may be acceptable for the restoration candidate to have some lay position in the church he attends, if the committee is satisfied with his progress. Further decisions can be made about this role in the church after the committee gives its final report.

We understand these recommendations are non-binding upon associations and churches. However, we hope that in view of the serious need, our people will consider taking some positive steps to address the growing problem of ministerial restoration.

We encourage those who use these recommendations to modify them as needed. As those who believe in the authority of the Bible, it is incumbent upon us to heed Paul's admonition in Galatians 6:1-2, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."

Maintaining Sexual Purity in the Ministry

By F. Leroy Forlines

Adapted from a series of lectures.

When a person who takes God seriously goes astray morally, it is more likely to be in the area of sex than any other area of life. I used to wonder what could lead a person committed to Christian values over an extended period of time to embrace behavior that seriously violates those convictions. Many times, we have regarded these individuals as “wolves in sheep’s clothing,” that they never were serious about their relationship with God.

If we have any ability to judge whether people are right with God and being used of God, the moral casualties of recent decades paint a different picture. Many people who have fallen into sexual sin were at one time right with God and were sincere about their moral convictions and service for God.

I believe I have come to some understanding about how a person who takes God seriously can fall into sin. Also, I believe I have gained some helpful insight into how a person can protect himself from being ensnared in sexual immorality.

First, we must consider some general observations that apply to every Christian, and then make application of these observations specifically for pastors. What is said about pastors can be applied to other church workers, and much of it applies to people in general.

Contributing Factors That Put People in a Position to Violate Their Values

I believe three things are involved when those committed to Christian values become involved in sexual sin. The first step leads to a second step, and the second step leads to the third step.

The first step in the wrong direction is a prolonged experience with depression or some other form of unhappiness.

Unhappiness greatly increases the risk a person will violate deeply held values. Many bad decisions in life are made during low moments.

It was when Esau was faint from a hunting trip that he asked Jacob for some pottage. Jacob offered it on the condition that Esau would sell him his birthright. Esau said, "Behold, I am at the point to die: what profit shall this birthright do to me?" (Genesis 25:32) In a low state of mind, and for the sake of a deep desire for food, Esau sold Jacob his birthright. If Esau had been feeling all right, he likely would not have struck this bargain with Jacob.

We find another example where the writer of 2 Chronicles tells us, "And in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord: this is that King Ahaz" (28:22).

However, the passage that speaks most directly to the point of our concern is Hebrews 12:12-16. Most of the time, I see a truth in the Bible first and then I observe it in life. Sometimes, I see a truth in life first and then I see it in the Bible. I first observed this truth in life. Later, I saw it in this passage.

Verse 12 reads, "Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees." This verse describes a depressed person. The Christians addressed in this epistle were discouraged because of persecution and the corrective measures God had been taking to bring about needed changes in their lives.

In this verse, the writer admonished them to "get a grip" and deal with their depression. Then he elaborates on why it was important for them to deal with and overcome depression. One reason is found in verse 16, "Lest there be any fornicator."

The message here is that if a person continues in prolonged unhappiness, he or she runs the risk of ending up in sexual immorality. Prolonged unhappiness and depression can have adverse effects on a person's moral judgment. Such a person is at higher risk of violating moral values than the person doing well in life

The second step in the wrong direction is for a person to talk to a person of the opposite sex about his or her problems in a non-professional way.

This may start off with innocent intentions, one wanting help and the other intending to provide help. If it continues, it will lead to step three.

The third step is the development of emotional intimacy.

For a person committed to Christian values, it is not the mere power of passion or lust that leads to a fall. The problem comes when discussion leads to emotional intimacy.

Let me illustrate. A wife begins talking about her problems with a man who is neither her husband nor a family member in a non-professional setting. For the sake of illustration, we will assume the man to whom she is talking is also married.

She begins talking with this man because she has a problem. And, usually, when someone shares a problem, the person with whom the problem is confided responds with kindness and understanding. Otherwise, the troubled person would not continue.

Many times, when a spouse talks to someone else about problems, it is because that individual does not think the spouse understands. In my illustration, when the wife tried to talk with her husband about her problems, as she perceived it, he did not understand. Further, he was part of her problem. They were unable to talk long before tension developed. They raised their voices at one another, or he simply refused to talk.

In contrast, the other man responds with the understanding she has been craving. He does not raise his voice. She begins to think, "He understands me." Before long, she begins to think "I wish my husband was as nice. I wish he understood me like this man does." She begins to develop an emotional attachment.

On the other side of the conversation, as the man hears about her problems, he observes she is nice. He begins to wonder why her husband would mistreat such a nice woman. Perhaps he begins to reflect that, in fact, she is nicer than his own wife. She is so nice that he shares his own

problems. He gets a sympathetic ear. She understands.

He cannot talk with his wife the way he can talk to her. He and his wife seem to have the same problem talking to one another that she and her husband have experienced. He begins to wonder why his wife is not as nice and wishes his wife understood him like this woman. He is beginning to develop an emotional attachment.

The feeling becomes strong toward one another. They like to find occasion to talk on the phone or text one another. They make each other feel good. They do not see any harm in what they are doing. They have not “done” anything. They feel like they are ministering to the other’s need. “What’s wrong with that?” they think.

Eventually, one says to the other, “We understand each other.” For some one hungering for understanding and longing for emotional intimacy, those are among the most dangerous words ever spoken. The tones become soft, and the words are sweet and tender. A temptation comes over them greater than any temptation they have ever faced. Satan’s web has been woven carefully. They have no desire to escape. They commit adultery. Their lives are changed forever.

Applying These Observations to Pastors

The details may differ, but the steps leading to trouble are the same for pastors as those described above.

The problems of the pastorate put the pastor at risk for a prolonged experience with unhappiness.

- 1. There are many pressures in the pastorate.** There is the pressure of time. There is the pressure for the church to grow. There is the pressure of trying to do too much and pursuing quality. There is the day-by-day pressure of knowing the work is never finished.
- 2. There is the problem of not knowing how to deal with feelings of divine obligation.** Somehow, when the thought of slowing up enters the pastor’s mind, he feels guilty. He feels God wants him to do more, not less. With so many people lost, and so many with problems, he reasons, “How can I consider slowing up?” While some pastors do

not feel this way, many do, and they do not know how to deal with their feelings.

- 3. There is the problem of frustration from working so hard and reaching so few.** There has never been a time when it has been so difficult to reach people with the gospel. And, the problems of the saved demand more of a pastor's time than previous generations. Regardless of how much preparation a pastor received before entering the ministry, he is likely to feel unprepared to reach people in today's culture. He does not feel prepared to deal with the problems people bring to him.
- 4. There is the problem of balancing family and ministry responsibilities.** Today, more than ever before, pastors are aware they must spend time with their own families. Previous generations were taught that if they neglected their families while winning souls and ministering to the needs of their congregation, God would take care of their families. That philosophy proved disastrous, and I hope I never hear it taught or preached again. In spite of his awareness and his desire to spend more time with his family, the pastor is often at a loss when it comes to balancing the needs of his family, his personal needs, and the non-stop demands of the ministry.
- 5. There is the problem of finances.** Sadly, many pastors are underpaid. While money is not the solution to every problem, financial stress is real. While pastors are not the only people with financial problems, they have more than their share. They often feel guilty to even consider finances. Surely, if God wanted them to have more, He would see they get it, they think. As a result, they believe the problem lies in their inability to manage their money and their family's lack of contentment. This is simply not the case when a pastor is grossly underpaid.
- 6. There is the problem of trouble in the church.** Unfortunately, over time, problems develop in almost every church. Nobody feels the pressure from these difficult situations like the pastor. In many churches, after a pastor has been there for several years, there is a move to get rid of him. If he gives in and leaves, he feels like a loser. His self-respect weakens. If he tries to ride it out, he may

undergo merciless opposition. He may have the vast majority with him, yet they are unwilling to speak up against louder, stronger voices.

As strange as it may seem, it is easier to get people to face bullets than to face words. This can be seen in the large numbers of volunteers when the country goes to war. Yet few people will stand up and speak out on behalf of a pastor. They may not like what is happening, but they would rather not get involved.

7. Sometimes, there is the problem of an unhappy wife. I am glad more resources have been provided to help the pastor's marriage and family needs than in previous generations. However, I believe some problems have developed from this close attention to the marriage relationship. An idealized picture of what a husband "should" be has caused many wives to become more aware of their own husbands' shortcomings. It is crucial to communicate that no husband possesses all the ideal qualities shared in marriage resources. Also, pastors' wives should be encouraged not to dwell on the difficulties and challenges that accompany ministry life but to focus instead on the many blessings that come from a life of ministry.

8. The pastor and his family do not have a pastor. Family members can do many things for one another better than outsiders. But in the strict sense of what counseling means, one family member cannot counsel another family member. They are too involved emotionally.

When a pastor counsels a church member, tension does not develop between them. He could say to somebody else's wife, "You need to get control of yourself."

It is unlikely she will raise her voice in response and remind him of his own problems. If he were to try that on his wife, she will tell him about changes he needs to make, and the tone will not likely be sweet. A husband may be able to help his wife, but it will not take on the form of a true counseling relationship. This means his wife sees that he can help other women, but he cannot help her like he helps them. She runs the risk of thinking it is because he does not love her like he should.

If the pastor's wife or children develop needs that cannot be met within the family, where do they turn? Any other family in the church could go to the pastor. If the pastor cannot help his family as husband or father, he cannot shift to the role of pastor and have them come to his office and expect different results. The pastor may need the help of a professional counselor and pay professional fees to get help for his family, when he provides the same for others at no cost. If he is financially unable to do so, his family may resent the lack of care.

The pastor often does not have another pastor to whom he can turn to relieve his stress. This means the pressure of ministry may build. He may not feel free to go to another minister for a number of reasons. Even if he does confide in another pastor, unless it is an older, highly respected minister, it is hard for the pastor to receive the same kind of help he usually gives to others.

Sadly, one of the reasons pastors do not share problems with other pastors is the lack of confidentiality. A fellow minister once told me about a mutual minister friend who was having family trouble. He suggested that he talk to someone about it. The struggling pastor replied, "I will tell you one thing: I am not going to talk to a preacher about it. I have been around them too many times when they were talking openly about other people and their problems."

Many other things could be listed that add pressure and stress to the ministry, but I think I have mentioned enough to demonstrate that if a pastor is not careful, he could find himself in a low state of mind. Over a period of time, this unhappiness will be damaging, and will put him at risk of acting against his Christian values.

If the pastor does understand the danger of casual discussions with members of the opposite sex, he may encounter many opportunities for temptation before he knows what is happening.

This is true because the pastor comes in contact with many women as he carries out his responsibilities. In many cases, these ladies want to discuss their problems. If the pastor does not realize the dangers, he

will run the risk of dealing with these conversations casually rather than in a professional manner and setting.

If the pastor does not understand the dangers of emotional intimacy and does not recognize when it is about to happen, his contacts with women will put him at great risk.

It is more dangerous for ministers to counsel women than for doctors to examine women physically because of the risk of emotional attachment. Ministers' wives are prone to unhappiness due to the challenges of being a pastor's wife. Women unhappy in their own marriages are prone to think about how kind and compassionate ministers are. Troubled people are at a higher risk of violating their values. This problem is compounded when a troubled woman turns to a troubled pastor for counseling.

Counseling sessions have a way of creating false impressions. Both counselor and counselee are kind as they converse. It gives a false impression of how husbands and wives should be able to talk to one another. They begin to wonder why they cannot talk to their own spouses as easily as they talk to one another. If they are unaware that it is far easier to talk to someone outside the family about problems, they might begin to wonder whether if they had married each other, they could have talked about their problems with the same ease felt in counseling.

If the pastor is unaware of these dangers, and if he does not work to safeguard himself and the woman counselee, he will run the risk of developing emotional intimacy with her. If that happens, they both may be overcome by temptation that leads toward immorality. Problems often occur this way between ministers and women they counsel. Both pastor and counselee start with the best of intentions, and the pastor does not realize the danger until it is too late.

Suggestions to Help Pastors Avoid Sexual Immorality

He must learn to deal with the pressures of life and of the ministry.

The pastor must be aware that if he remains depressed or down for a long time, he runs a higher risk of violating his values. He needs to make

himself familiar with the contributing factors that lead people to seriously violate their moral values. It is a must for him to find basic happiness, peace, and satisfaction.

He needs to develop strong convictions. In spite of his best efforts, at times, he may find himself weighed down by the load of life. The pastor must be aware that he is more vulnerable to the attacks of sin during these times. He must prepare himself ahead of time for these moments. Remember that storm shelters are built while the sun is shining, not while the storm is raging. We must decide while things are good how we will live when we encounter life's storms.

The pastor can never afford to think he is immune to moral failure. Too many public moral failures make this clear. The only protection is a plan for prevention. While the going is good, the pastor needs to count the cost of moral failure. He needs to think of the devastation that would be brought upon his family and upon his own life. He needs to realize that moral failure will probably cost his ministry.

Some of the people he could have won to Christ may not be won by anyone else. His moral failure could create havoc in his church and could become a stumbling block to many. When a respected minister falls into sin, it may shake the very foundation of the faith of those who know him.

The pastor also needs to consider that he, as a man of God, is doubly responsible for protecting the women to whom he ministers. They should be able to count on him for help. He needs to consider the devastation he would bring into the life of the woman and her family if he were to commit adultery with her. Usually, so much attention is given to the minister and his family that people overlook the hurt experienced by the woman and her family.

The pastor must have such strong convictions that no amount of suffering will cause him to violate them. These convictions are developed. They do not come automatically with conversion or call to the ministry.

He needs to learn and practice appropriate conduct around women, including the following:

- Avoid flirting.
- When possible, avoid being alone with a woman in casual settings. If it cannot be avoided, he should be sure it does not last long and is not repeated with the same woman.
- Conduct himself properly around the female employees of the church as their protector, not their betrayer.
- Avoid developing an emotional attachment for a woman other than his wife. If he ever feels the beginnings of emotional attachment, he must realize he is playing with fire and halt the relationship immediately.

He must learn to safeguard himself while counseling women. The work of a pastor often involves counseling women. This is as it should be. However, it is imperative for the pastor to understand the risks involved, both for him and the women he counsels.

- **Counseling must be professional rather than casual.** If the church has an office staff, it is easier for counseling to be kept professional if it is done in the office. It is always better to have someone else in the building when the pastor is counseling a woman. It is also advisable to keep the desk between him and the counselee. Discussion of problems with women in casual or informal settings should be minimized and must not be repeated often with the same person.

The pastor needs both a horizontal and a vertical relationship with his people. A horizontal relationship helps people know the pastor is approachable. A vertical relationship helps people respect the pastor. A pastor needs both closeness and distance with the congregation. The vertical relationship helps people look up to the pastor and believe he has something to offer. It also helps him avoid the development of emotional intimacy, which is inappropriate and extremely dangerous.

In recent years, there has been a trend away from addressing the pastor by an appropriate title and toward calling him by his first name. When

the pastor is addressed with a title, it helps develop a vertical relationship and reduces the risk of emotional intimacy.

- **It is more important for a pastor to protect himself than to help another person.** If he falls into sin with a counselee, in all likelihood, it will end his counseling and his ministry. The cause of Christ needs men of God. We need more instead of fewer. It hurts deeply to have moral casualties in the ministry.
- **It is extremely important for the pastor to avoid introducing his own problems into the conversation when counseling a woman.** When he does so, the woman will be very understanding. The two may begin to feel or even say, “We understand one another.” This is a dangerous experience for people hungering for someone to understand them.
- **Pastors should avoid discussing details about sex with women counselees.** If it becomes necessary to deal with details of sexuality, the pastor should refer the person to a medical doctor or a trained professional counselor. This kind of counseling is best done by someone in a professional relationship only, as distinguished from a person within the person’s social structure.

I am not saying the subject of sex should not come up at all. However, great discretion should be used. Anyone who does much counseling observes that sex is mentioned frequently. Sexual sins and sexual impropriety have a unique way of creating problems for people. I believe that is a part of what Paul was describing in 1 Corinthians 6:18.

- **It is imperative a pastor avoid touching a woman during counseling.** Even when he means to console her, she may interpret it as flirtatious. She also could be a very suspicious person. If she tells others he made an advance toward her, and he has to admit he touched her, he will never be able to explain it to the satisfaction of all concerned.

Conclusion

This is a sensitive area and one of deep concern. It is imperative that pastors remain pure and have an impeccable testimony when it comes to sexual purity. However, if a pastor will live by these principles and

guidelines, and will be a man of the Word and prayer, with God's help, he will be able to live a pure life.

About the writer: F. Leroy Forlines (1926-2020) was professor emeritus of theology at Welch College, where he served more than 50 years. After concluding studies at Welch, he earned an M.A. from Winona Lake School of Theology, a B.D. from Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, and a Th.M. from Chicago Graduate School of Theology. A prolific author, his works include *Biblical Ethics*, *Systematics*, *The Quest for Truth*, *Classical Arminianism*, and a commentary on Romans. This booklet has been adapted from material originally published in *Contact* magazine.

Preventive Principles for Pastoral Purity

By Melvin Worthington

Pastors today face unique pressures. The demands on time and diverse ministries clamoring for their attention produce a sense of frustration. There will never be enough time to fulfill the tasks they face. Something is always left undone. They are immersed in their work 24 hours a day. Sooner or later, such hectic schedules produce devastating effects on a pastor's physical and psychological wellbeing. Family and church suffer when the pastor loses focus.

The pastoral role is a biblical ministry that requires balance, breadth, and blending in the area of relationships. Giving attention to relationships serves as preventive protection from the stress and strain of ministry. Pastors with biblical balance give emphasis to relationships in five areas. These are listed below in the order of their importance as safeguards against mental, moral, and ministry failure.

Relationship to Their Creator

When the pastor maintains a right relationship with the Lord, he gives adequate time to personal Bible reading and prayer. In the midst of ministry demands, the pastor must carefully guard his relationship with the Lord. A pastor who fails to guard personal time invariably flounders in the ministry—sometimes morally, sometimes spiritually.

When the pastor's relationship with the Lord is maintained, he will clearly understand his task. The task God mandates for the pastor is not more than can be done. When a pastor loses focus, he will get bogged down in less important things and end up doing nothing well. God's task can be done without neglecting other responsibilities incumbent upon the pastor. He need not neglect his family, friends, or finances to do the work God has assigned him.

When pastors maintain a proper relationship with the Lord, they are reminded of the trust God has given them. Converted, called, compelled, and commissioned, they serve a unique role in the life of the church. Gifted by God, they have the responsibility to evangelize, educate, and edify the church, equipping it for ministry.

Relationship to Their Companion

The pastor's second priority is his relationship with his companion. First Corinthians 7 reminds us marriage was given in order that men and women can live pure and chaste lives. Developing intimacy with his wife provides the basic safeguard against sexual sins for the pastor. Many ministerial causalities can be traced to a lack of intimacy in their marriages.

Intimacy between the pastor and his wife should be a lifetime goal. God's design for marriage is that the husband and wife meet each other's physical, emotional, psychological, and social needs. The pastor should love his companion with an unlimited, unselfish, and unending love.

The greatest gift the pastor can give his church family is to love his companion. Pastors and their wives serve as role models to men and women in their congregations.

Maintaining the proper relationship with his wife enables the pastor to pray, preach, and pastor effectively. It also will spare him the disaster of moral misconduct and sexual affairs.

Relationship to Their Children

The effective pastor maintains a proper relationship with his children. He must teach, train, tend, and treasure them. One of the biblical requirements for a bishop is that he must rule his own house and have his children in subjection. This demands discipline and discernment. He must take the necessary time to lead, lecture, love, and listen to them.

Pastors' children need not grow up hating the ministry. Perceptive pastors give attention to the needs of their children. Churches expect

pastors to spend time with their children. Children who grow up in pastoral families and love the ministry had a daddy who, as the pastor, made time for them.

Relationship to Their Church

The pastor who develops and maintains the proper relationship with his Creator, companion, and children will not neglect his work as pastor. Duties do not conflict. Pastors have enough time to do their pastoral work without neglecting their families or shirking other responsibilities.

Pastors must learn to deal with time pressures and demands. Discipline requires saying yes *and* no. It is not a sin to say no when necessary.

Organization and objectives will help the pastor manage his time and use it wisely. Delegating to others is a good start. The pastor cannot do everything. God gifts and calls others to serve in the church. Let them!

Pastors need to remember it is the Lord's Church, and He will build it.

Pastors are required to be faithful, remembering God worked in that church before they came and will continue to work after they leave.

Pastors must learn limits, overcome weaknesses, and develop strengths.

Relationship to Their Community

Another requirement of a bishop in 1 Timothy 3 is that he have a good report of "them that are without," or those beyond the walls of the church. The pastor's testimony in the community makes a significant impact on his effectiveness as a pastor and preacher.

Recognizing the influence that a holy, honest, and humble life has on the unsaved community will help the pastor avoid behavior that would destroy his public testimony. Pastors must not allow their "good [to] be evil spoken of" (Romans 14:16).

Some sins disqualify pastors from serving in the pastoral office. One preacher who had an adulterous affair said the worst day of the week for him was Sunday. He said with deep sadness in his eyes, his voice flat and dead, "Every Sunday I am reminded I cannot do the one thing I was born to do—preach."

Another said, "You do not have to punish me. Not being able to do what I was called to do is punishment enough."

These men have joined an ever-increasing congregation of fallen ministers who no longer can do the one thing they were born to do.

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Step-by-Step Procedure for Local Church Disciplinary Action Concerning Church Members

Care shall be used by the local Free Will Baptist church in disciplinary matters to follow the *Treatise* of the Faith and Practices of the National Association of Free Will Baptists, Inc., and the biblical admonitions to respect the rights of the offenders in judging his or her actions, always expecting redemption and restoration, as is appropriate.

Each procedure involved should judge the offender and the circumstances with mourning and contrition, with the body continuing to extend restoration to the repentant, realizing all are condemned except for God's grace and forgiveness.

These recommended procedures are an extension of those found in the *Treatise* of the Faith and Practices of the National Association of Free Will Baptists, Inc., Part IV, Chapter I, Section VIII, which are biblically-based and to be conducted in accordance with the Scriptures cited therein: Matthew 18:15-17; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; and 2 Corinthians 2:6-7. The local church has the authority and is scripturally admonished to "purge out therefore the old leaven" (1 Corinthians 5:7).

Preliminary to any disciplinary procedure is the careful establishment of primary evidence (rather than hearsay or rumors) the alleged offense has occurred and is a trespass against Scripture. This determination shall be made by the pastor and deacons. This procedure shall be consistent with Matthew 18:15-17.

1. Private procedure: First, the offending member shall be dealt with privately by the pastor and deacons. The offender shall be advised of the offense and confronted by the witness or witnesses with the primary evidence of the offense. Should the member be repentant, then the offense will be appropriately and scripturally dealt with privately, if

possible, provided such private approach be consistent with the biblical prescriptions for the church.

2. Public procedure: If a formal trial is necessary, then by public discipline the church procedures should be followed:
 - A. The hearing shall be in the presence only of the membership, the offender, and a representative selected by the offender.
 - B. Written notice containing the specific offense shall be furnished to the offender at least two weeks in advance.
 - C. The pastor will be the moderator unless he is a necessary witness, and then he shall appoint an impartial moderator. The moderator shall read the offense without comment.
 - D. The moderator shall call for evidence and/or witnesses who can and will present evidence to sustain the offense, allowing with good order and discipline the offender or his representative to cross-examine the witnesses.
 - E. The moderator shall allow the offender or his/her representative to respond, presenting counter-evidence and offering witnesses as he wishes to sustain his position.
 - F. When the moderator determines that a full presentation of both sides has been presented, the moderator shall ask whether there is a motion from the body concerning whether the offenses against the offender have been reasonably sustained. Upon seconding, the matter shall be fully discussed and voted upon. If, by majority vote, one or more of the offenses against the offender is sustained, then the moderator will ask for a motion calling for appropriate discipline of the offender.
 - G. All votes will be by secret ballot.
3. Church discipline may include a break in fellowship with a disorderly member (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15) and/or expelling a member (1 Corinthians 5:11-13) because of conduct or profession irreconcilable with the nature of a Christian or with the biblical proscriptions of the Church.

4. After the trial is over and the verdict has been reached, any disclosure with reference to the proceedings and/or the verdict reached shall be guided by integrity and a proper concern for the welfare of the offender. Disclosures shall not be: 1) defamatory in nature; 2) designed to cast the disorderly member in a false light, even though containing truthful information; or 3) made with malice, ill intent, or for the purpose of impeding appropriate redemption and restoration of the disorderly member.
5. The church, its leaders, members, and employees shall at all points refrain from any intentional harm or emotional distress.
6. The offender and/or any church member voting against the findings shall have the right to appeal the action of the church to the broader association to which the church has united itself for a hearing among sister churches. The association's authority in such cases is set forth in the *Treatise*, Part IV, Chapter III, Section IV, (4).
7. The offender, in accordance with the *Treatise*, Part IV, Chapter I, Section VIII, (D), is expected to submit to the discipline of the church.
8. The local church should always stand ready to forgive a genuinely repentant member and restore the member to full fellowship in the congregation.

Step-by-Step Procedure in Association Disciplinary Action Concerning Its Ministers

Care shall be used by the broader or district associations of Free Will Baptists to follow the *Treatise* of the Faith and Practices of the National Association of Free Will Baptists, Inc., and the biblical admonitions to respect the rights of the minister when judging his actions, always expecting redemption and restoration as is appropriate.

Each procedure involved should judge the minister and the circumstances with mourning and contrition, with the body continuing to extend restoration to the repentant, realizing all are condemned except for God's grace and forgiveness.

These recommended procedures are an extension of the *Treatise* of the Faith and Practices of the National Association of Free Will Baptists, Inc., *Treatise*, Part IV, Chapter II, Section II, which are biblically-based and are to be conducted in accordance with the Scriptures as cited therein: Matthew 18:15-17; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; and 2 Corinthians 2:6-7.

The Free Will Baptist churches have delegated their disciplinary authority in order to obtain the assistance of their sister churches, to the broader or district association to which they have united themselves, *Treatise*, Part IV, Chapter III, Section IV.

Preliminary to any disciplinary procedure is the careful establishment of primary evidence the alleged offense has occurred and is a trespass against Scripture. This determination shall be made by the association's ordaining council/presbytery. This procedure shall be consistent with Matthew 18:15-17.

1. Accusations known to the local church against its minister, which are offered concerning his conduct, character, profession, doctrine, or affecting his good standing as a minister of the gospel, are to be

brought to the association by said church. When the local church fails or refuses to take disciplinary actions concerning its minister whose conduct is offensive to the association, or when the situation is unknown to the local church, then shall such accusation involving a minister be brought to the association's ordaining council/presbytery jointly by three ministers from churches in the same association after privately and fully appraising the minister's local church of the accusation.

2. Private procedure: The offending minister first shall be dealt with privately by the association's ordaining council/presbytery according to the principle outlined in Matthew 18:15-17. At the private procedure, witness and primary evidence shall confront the minister in the presence of the association's ordaining council/presbytery. Should he be repentant, the matter may be privately and lovingly disposed of by the association's ordaining council/presbytery as is consistent with biblical principles and associational procedures.
3. Public procedure: If the minister remains unrepentant, or if the nature of the offense requires, the association's ordaining council/presbytery shall refer the matter to the delegates of the association in accordance with the local church disciplinary action concerning its members under *Treatise*, Part IV, Chapter II, Section II, including the following:
 - A. The formal hearing shall proceed solely in the presence of the unrepentant minister (unless he refuses to attend upon due notice), a representative who is a member of a church in the association selected by the minister, and the delegates of the association who are to hear the matter.
 - B. The association moderator shall preside at the hearing of the public procedure before the delegates of the association. However, if the association moderator is a necessary witness, then the association shall designate an impartial moderator. The moderator shall read the charges without comment. The delegates to the association shall hear and dispose of the matter.
 - C. The moderator shall provide written notice containing specific charges to the minister at least two weeks in advance.

- D. The moderator shall call for evidence and/or witnesses who can and will present evidence to sustain the charges, allowing with good order and discipline the minister or his representative to cross-examine the witnesses.
 - E. The moderator shall allow the minister or his representative to respond presenting evidence and offering witnesses as he wishes to sustain his position.
 - F. When the moderator determines a full presentation from both sides has been presented, the moderator shall ask whether there is a motion from the body concerning whether the charges against the minister have been reasonably sustained. Upon seconding, the matter shall be fully discussed and a vote taken. If, by majority vote, one or more of the charges against the minister is sustained, the moderator will ask for a motion calling for appropriate discipline of the minister.
 - G. All votes will be by secret ballot.
4. The association's disciplinary action shall deal solely with the minister's credentials and fellowship in the association as a minister.
 5. The association's discipline cannot deal with the minister's relationship to the local church, either as pastor or member.
 6. If an intermediate or temporary act of discipline is required, the minister may be retained on the roll of ministers, but listed as "not in full fellowship" and denied the right to vote as a standing delegate. This also may be a final finding of discipline by the association.
 7. The association's discipline may consist in the revocation of the minister's ordination and the withdrawal of fellowship as a minister in good standing in the association.
 8. The association shall make recommendations concerning the offending minister along with its findings to the local church and may advise that the church's fellowship in the association is endangered if the recommendations are not followed, but no force can be applied.
 9. Upon ordination, all ministers are advised and expected to submit to

the decision of the association and to agree to relinquish their credentials of ordination upon call. However, if credentials are not relinquished, then the call of the association, as set forth in its minutes, nullifies the credentials of ordination the same as if they had been relinquished. No further action is necessary to the relinquishment of the minister's credentials of ordination.

10. The said minister, in union with at least one other delegate of said association, may appeal to the next session of the broader association, *Treatise*, Part IV, Chapter II, Section II, (G), of which his association is a member for a hearing among the sister associations. The authority of this broader association is described in *Treatise*, Part IV, Chapter III, Associations of Churches. The decision of said broader association shall be final. The appeal hearing by the broader association shall follow, as nearly as possible, the procedures outlined herein and further set forth in *Treatise*, Part IV, Chapter II, Section II.

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