Failed Pastors and Effective Ministry
Scripture: Titus 1
Code: BQ082912

“For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, namely, if any man be above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. For the overseer must be above reproach as God’s steward.” (Titus 1:5–7)

No trend in the church is more damaging to Christ’s work than that of failing to discipline and permanently disqualify pastors who have committed gross moral sins. And if a pastor is disciplined and removed from the ministry, he often is readily accepted back into leadership as soon as negative publicity subsides. Many of the best known and most visible church leaders today utterly fail to measure up to biblical standards. While growing in worldly popularity and prestige, a leader can spiritually and morally corrupt the very people who eagerly support and idolize him. Churches can rarely survive a failure of leadership. A pastor who has sunken spiritually, doctrinally, or morally, and is not disciplined and removed, inevitably pulls many of his people down with him.

God offers forgiveness and spiritual restoration to all believers, including pastors and other church leaders, who sincerely confess and renounce their sins, no matter how heinous and public. God’s gracious promise is to all Christians: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). But the Word also makes clear that the Lord does not accept such a person—no matter how gifted, popular, formerly effective, or repentant—back into a position of leadership. Nor should the church.

Lowering God’s standards for those He calls into the ministry and who uniquely represent Him before the world, as well as before the church, is tragic. It disobeys and dishonors God and weakens the church. A man who has squandered his integrity, stained the pulpit, and destroyed the trust and confidence of fellow believers does not forfeit salvation or forgiveness, but he does, before God, forfeit the privilege of church leadership. Although moral or doctrinal purity has been publicly forsaken, so has the divine prerogative to preach, teach, or otherwise rule and shepherd Christ’s church.

Some Christians argue that falling into a terrible sin and then being forgiven and restored exalts grace and makes a person more sympathetic with and effective in serving others who have committed similar sins. But the implications of that sort of thinking are frightening. It suffers the same kind of logical and theological error as the notion that “we [should] continue in sin that grace might increase”

(Rom. 6:1). Paul’s response to that depraved absurdity is “May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?” (v. 2).

Some church members want to lower the standards for ministers in order to make their own sinful living seem more acceptable. Others want to lower the standards because of a distorted and unbiblical concept of love, foolishly thinking that overlooking or excusing a believer’s sin will somehow make him more inclined to turn from it and to pursue righteousness. But that approach inevitably makes a person more complacent and becomes a barrier to genuine repentance and holy living.

Godly love is never compatible with sin. “The one who says, ‘I have come to know [God],’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him,” John declares; “but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected …. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments” (1 John 2:4–5; 5:3; cf. 1 Cor. 13:6). Not only is it *possible* to be loving while not compromising God’s standards of righteousness, it is *impossible* to be truly loving if we *do* compromise His standards.

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