

GNITN

#489

More Scandals In The Church

Nothing New Under The Sun

The thing that has been—it is what will be again, and that which has been done is that which will be done again; and there is nothing new under the sun. (Ecc 1:9, AMPC)

According to King Solomon, nothing we see now is new. And when it comes to the behavior of men and women, things we see happening today have happened over and over again by others since the beginning of time. But when a man or woman who is in leadership falls in sin it is always hard on those who looked up to them. Unfortunately we live in a day and age when these people are also thrown to the lion's den of public opinion often by those who know little to nothing about how the church is told to handle such matters. And every case becomes another example for critics of Christianity to point out and use to make the point that the church of Jesus Christ is full of hypocrites and religion is a sham only used to make people rich off the backs of blind followers. We know that Jesus told us that He came for those who need a savior and that doesn't stop after they receive salvation because as long as we live in these mortal bodies we will be tempted and will miss the mark. And now, in the last week two prominent ministers have stepped down causing another firestorm of finger pointing and the usual derision of all things Christian.

One Size Doesn't Fit All

Those who know me know that I've been part of a large Christian ministry that went through a time where the lead pastor of the church was also the head of an international evangelism ministry. This was back in the late 1980s so it's been almost 40 years since the storm of public opinion turned on him for having an inappropriate relationship with a woman. He did publicly confess but refused to step down for two years and go through a rehabilitation process that anyone else would do in his fellowship. Trust me that myself and other Bible college students went through what some call the various stages of grief as we tried to make sense of it all. But while the proverbial big targets always cause the biggest waves in the media, this isn't a new thing at all and we can find numerous examples of it happening in the pages of Scripture. In the most recent examples I've been asked to weigh in on what happened and how we should view them. As the heading suggests, both situations are different and shouldn't be lumped together. I might also add that both appear to be cases of how things should be handled Biblically regardless of how the general public views them. I may be in the minority in my opinion, but from what I've learned both men either are doing or did what their leadership required them to do.

A More Recent Moral Failing

Of the two examples one apparently happened [recently](#) and the minister was asked to step down to go through a rehabilitation process. Nothing legally wrong happened according to the comments but a moral failure occurred, nevertheless. Until more information is released we don't know the actual nature of the sin other than it required that a leave of ministry position was requested and accepted. Usually, two years appears to be the prescribed period of time for some reason, but there isn't any Scriptural basis for how long a person needs to step down before they are ready to come back to minister again. The main point is that the whole purpose of getting spiritual help is to get healthy as God always offers grace and mercy if true repentance occurs. Unless I hear otherwise I have to let that process play out. Healing is the primary goal and restoration should flow from that. Depending on the sin, keeping the personal relationships at the top of the list is also a priority. We can be prone to be more judgmental than God at times and the

old adage that goes that but for the grace of God we'd be just the same applies. From what I've heard so far, that's the case with one of the two situations. The other one is a little more complex.

The Sin Occurred A Long Time Ago

In the [second example](#) the minister engaged in inappropriate behavior with a minor, was confronted and confessed and repented. He was a young minister in his 20's and resigned from his position as pastor and, according to all accounts, got the counseling help needed to deal with his sin. The known timeline puts things happening around 1982 and the now woman who was 12 at the time was abused for 4 years before things came to light. I'm not sugar coating this in any form or fashion because it was child abuse and it was abhorrent behavior. The question I immediately had was how it was handled. Did the church leadership try to hide things? Were things handled professionally and Biblically? I can only go with the information available, but it looks like no one was trying to hide things and the minister was required to get help which he says he did. He says he has been living uprightly ever since. While some inside and outside the church dispute his assertion that it has all been dealt with, we can only accept his story for now. The major difference here is that the child, now a grown woman, contends that he only stepped down because he was caught and is insinuating that he never repented. She also wants to be reimbursed for the counseling she went through and is accusing the leadership of his rather sizable congregation of ignoring her requests. It is now a classic case of "he said/she said" with both sides disputing the other of not telling the truth. It is messy and may become even messier as the accuser is getting a lot of attention from secular media. In any event, this one is giving critics a lot of fodder to make fun of and deride all Christians even though the vast majority of the Church isn't behaving the same way.

What Does The Bible Say?

Lost in all of the uproar is that the Bible gives us examples of similar or even worse cases of leaders or congregants who have committed serious sins. One case is that of King David who had an affair with another man's wife and then had that man killed in battle. That's pretty serious stuff and he tried multiple times to cover things up as the woman, Bathsheba, was pregnant from their actions. It wasn't until God used the prophet Nathan to address the situation and David did repent. The well-known **Psalm 51** was [written](#) by David after he was confronted and is the epitome of repentance:

O loving and kind God, have mercy. Have pity upon me and take away the awful stain of my transgressions. 2 Oh, wash me, cleanse me from this guilt. Let me be pure again. 3 For I admit my shameful deed—it haunts me day and night. 4 It is against you and you alone I sinned and did this terrible thing. You saw it all, and your sentence against me is just. 5 But I was born a sinner, yes, from the moment my mother conceived me. 6 You deserve honesty from the heart; yes, utter sincerity and truthfulness. Oh, give me this wisdom.

7 Sprinkle me with the cleansing blood and I shall be clean again. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. 8 And after you have punished me, give me back my joy again. 9 Don't keep looking at my sins—erase them from your sight. 10 Create in me a new, clean heart, O God, filled with clean thoughts and right desires. 11 Don't toss me aside, banished forever from your presence. Don't take your Holy Spirit from me. 12 Restore to me again the joy of your salvation, and make me willing to obey you. 13 Then I will teach your ways to other sinners, and they—guilty like me—will repent and return to you. 14-15 Don't sentence me to death. O my God, you alone can rescue me. Then I will sing of your forgiveness, for my lips will be unsealed—oh, how I will praise you. (Ps 51:1-15, TLB)

If either or both of the current examples of moral failure came to God like this, we should treat them as we would King David. However, there were consequences to David's actions as the child from their union died and he had strife in his own family along with not being able to build the first Jewish temple. There is a New Testament example as well.

Kick Him Out

Everyone is talking about the terrible thing that has happened there among you, something so evil that even the heathen don't do it: you have a man in your church who is living in sin with his father's wife. (1 Cor 5:1, TLB)

The apostle Paul had to address this situation as the Corinthian church apparently wasn't. In fact they somehow tolerated it:

2 And are you still so conceited, so "spiritual"? Why aren't you mourning in sorrow and shame and seeing to it that this man is removed from your membership?

3-4 Although I am not there with you, I have been thinking a lot about this, and in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ I have already decided what to do, just as though I were there. You are to call a meeting of the church—and the power of the Lord Jesus will be with you as you meet, and I will be there in spirit— 5 and cast out this man from the fellowship of the church and into Satan's hands, to punish him, in the hope that his soul will be saved when our Lord Jesus Christ returns. (1 Cor 5:2-5, TLB)

So Paul said to excommunicate him so he could deal with the sin. And the Corinthians did just that. The situation doesn't come up again until Paul writes to them again and tells them now that this man has repented and they need to let him back in. I like how an [article](#) from *bibleref.com* explains it:

A man in the church in Corinth had apparently confronted Paul in some way. Given the divisions of that church (1 Corinthians 1:10–12) he probably challenged Paul's authority as apostle and whether he had authority over the church in Corinth. In any case, this made for a painful visit for Paul when he was last in Corinth. In fact, it had brought hurt to the entire congregation (2 Corinthians 2:5). Paul had written a painful letter to the believers, explaining the need for the church to confront and deal with this sinful man. They had done so using some kind of "punishment by the majority" (2 Corinthians 2:6), and the man seems to have repented from his sin. Paul now writes that the time has come for forgiveness.

A Place For The Repentant

A healthy Church should set an example of not tolerating sinful behavior but also to deal with this behavior in such a way that when a penitent sinner comes back that he or she can be welcomed back to the body. In our day and age this can be more difficult since excommunication can simply allow a moral failure to be left unaddressed when not all churches in an area agree or even know about what happened. The man or woman could just relocate and go to another body of believers and the next church wouldn't even know why they left the last church. Rather than kicking the sinner out, it would be better if things were dealt with openly and honestly within that body of believers. It is my prayer that both of these high profile cases can be dealt with within the current church they are in and even inside of the current fellowship body. This would be a healthy outcome where a true triumph over sin is seen by the congregation and even those outside the church can see that forgiveness is a good path to follow.

Another goal is that the victim or victims needs are also addressed so that all sides are made healthy and whole. As the saying goes, hurt people hurt people and that is a sad cycle that also needs to be broken. My prayer is that the world sees how the process should be done and even if they don't understand or agree with it, they still see it. Hope and healing are the overall goals and restoration to ministry remain the other goals. It is possible for all of these things to occur and that is how I pray.