

# 1 Timothy Appendix A

---

The following is a personal position paper on the topic of Pastoral Restoration.

---

## ***The Issue***

The issue of pastoral restoration, particularly in the area of moral failure, has recently become a central issue in the church at large. We have the unfortunate opportunity of watching leader after leader fall today, many of whom held significant positions of visibility in the professing church. Jim Bakker, Jimmy Swaggert, Hal Lindsay, and many other well-known evangelists and authors have fallen prey to this sin, and the impact on the church has been significant.

In reading and thinking about this issue, two diametrical positions quickly emerge. On the one hand we have those who vigorously state that once a pastoral leader has fallen into this sin, they are forever disbarred from holding the office of Pastor again. Those in this camp would affirm that it is the privilege, and even duty, of the church to forgive those leaders who repent, and to even allow the fallen leader to minister in the church in some capacity, but to lift him back up to the pastoral office is to go beyond the Scriptures.

Others believe that it is the church's responsibility to forgive a fallen leader and would see nothing wrong with leaving a fallen leader in office, or at the minimum, restoring him to his former position of leadership. Those who disagree with this position are seen as unforgiving, unkind, and censorious.

As with any question of this nature, it is essential that we go to the Word to see what we can find to help us in our quest for understanding. We need to set aside our traditions and prejudices, and see what the Scriptures say. All too often we say that the Bible is our final authority while ignoring its clear teachings or making up our own traditions. We cannot afford to do this as the purity and holiness of the church is something God is very serious about.

## ***Fallen Leaders - Examples in the Bible***

When it comes to the issue of moral failure we can find few examples in the Bible. Perhaps the most well-known example would be David and his sin with Bathsheba, but if we are looking at moral failures only, we can find no other real example. If we look, however, at failure in general in the area of leadership, other examples surface. Two such examples would be Saul and Peter. Although we would be quick to point out the fact that neither Peter nor Saul fell morally, they did fail as leaders and, therefore, we can draw some principles from their lives.

One thing we need to mention at this point is that we cannot make a strong, airtight, case regarding moral failure from the lives of any of these men. In David and Saul's case, both men were civil leaders and not spiritual leaders. In the case of Peter, one could argue that his failure occurred prior to his call as an "elder" and hence has no bearing on his qualifications. We must make sure we do not go too far in drawing conclusions from the lives of these individuals, but we must also realize that some principles do manifest themselves and it is incumbent upon us to examine those principles.

## Saul

Saul's failure is found in 1 Samuel 8-16. In order to draw some insights on the failure of Saul, we need to trace the major events in the life of Israel, and in the life of Saul, prior to his fall and subsequent rejection as Israel's king by God.

In 1 Samuel 8 we find Israel demanding to have a king to be like all the other nations around them (1 Samuel 8:4-5). In spite of Samuel's warning regarding what life would be like under a king (1 Samuel 8:6-18), the people insisted on having a king and God reluctantly grants their request (1 Samuel 8:19-22).

In 1 Samuel 9-10 we find the anointing of Saul as king of Israel. We read in 1 Samuel 9:2 that Saul was "taller than any of the people" and "there was not a more handsome man than he among all the children of Israel." This was God's choice for king, one that externally would command the respect of Israel. Saul is then anointed king by Samuel in 1 Samuel 10:1, and later confirmed as king to Israel in 1 Samuel 10:17-27.

In 1 Samuel 11 we read of Saul's first great act as king, the saving of Jabesh-Gilead from Nahash the Ammonite. This great victory solidifies the nation of Israel behind Saul's leadership which is confirmed at his coronation in 1 Samuel 12.

After two years of reigning over Israel, we read in 1 Samuel 13:1-2 that Saul selected three thousand men to be a personal army. His son Jonathan attacked a stronghold of the Philistines with the result that the anger of the Philistines was raised against Saul. They marched against Saul who was encamped at Michmash, some thirty-thousand strong, and prepared to make war against Saul (1 Samuel 13:5). When the Israelites saw this great army, they became afraid and hid themselves in the caves and thickets, some even running away. Things were deteriorating fast, and Samuel was taking his time to arrive and make an offering before the Lord (1 Samuel 13:7-8). Instead of waiting for Samuel to show up, Saul calls for a sacrifice to be made, and just after he finishes offering the sacrifice, Samuel shows up (1 Samuel 13:9-12). Samuel is extremely dismayed by Saul's actions, who usurped the position of priest by offering a sacrifice, something only Samuel should have done (1 Samuel 13:11). Because of this, Samuel told Saul that the kingdom would not be given to him, nor his sons, but would be given to someone else, a man after "God's own heart." (1 Samuel 13:13-14) Saul's one act of disobedience disqualified him as Israel's king. This disqualification was later confirmed when Saul spared king Agag of the Amalekites and brought back spoils from that battle, something God specifically forbade (1 Samuel 15:1-9). In fact, we are told that God "greatly regretted making Saul king." (1 Samuel 15:10) This act of disobedience confirmed God's reject of Saul (1 Samuel 15:17-23). When Saul heard this he tried to repent of his actions, but it was too late, God had rejected him as king (1 Samuel 15:24-35).

### Principles from Saul

- 1. External qualifications for leadership mean nothing compared to a man's heart. Saul stood head and shoulders above everyone else in Israel, yet his heart was not after God's. Externally he was the one men would choose as leadership material, internally he was a failure. On the other hand, we read that externally David was a man no one would have selected as king, nevertheless he was God's choice because of his heart (1 Samuel 16:1-13).**
- 2. A single act of disobedience or sin can lead to permanent disqualification. In the case of Saul, his failure with the Amalekites caused God to permanently and irrevocably remove the kingship from Saul, even though Saul was apparently saddened by God's judgment and**

even “repented.” God may give someone a second chance, but he is certainly under no obligation to do so.

3. **Repentance may be superficial.** Saul apparently “repented” of his sin, but if one reads the text carefully his repentance did not reach his heart. It was more of a sadness of failure and rejection, but not a sadness of having violated God’s commandment. In the same way we read that Judas “repented” of having betrayed innocent blood, but his repentance did not lead to life, but to suicide. Even today, people can be sorry that they were caught, and sorry about the penalty of their sin, while at the same time being ignorant of the fact that they violated the commandments of a holy God. The real issue in repentance is not the consequence of the sin, but the violation of the relationship.

### *David*

David’s fall is found in 2 Samuel 11-12. As we have noted above, Saul was rejected as Israel’s king because of his sin with Amalek. Samuel is then called in 1 Samuel 16 to anoint another king from the sons of Jesse. He works his way through all of Jesse’s sons only to eventually anoint David, one that was the least likely to have been selected from man’s viewpoint. Why? It is because David was a man after God’s own heart.

However, David fell into sin just like Saul. In David’s case it was not the sin of offering a sacrifice to God outside of God’s commandments, or of failing to enact God’s judgment on a nation, but it was a sin of passion and murder.

In 2 Samuel 11 we find that during the time kings made battle David was in Jerusalem on the top of his house (2 Samuel 11:1). As he walked around enjoying the evening, he noticed a woman on an adjoining house bathing and he was struck by her beauty (2 Samuel 11:2). Being overcome with passion, he inquired who this woman was, invited her to his house, and had intercourse with her resulting in pregnancy (2 Samuel 11:3-5). We then follow the sorry tale through 2 Samuel 11 where David tries to cover the sin by recalling Uriah to Jerusalem to get him to lay with Bathsheba, all to no avail (2 Samuel 11:6-13). Finally, running out of options, David has Uriah killed in battle (2 Samuel 11:14-25), and subsequently marries Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:26). God’s postscript to this story is found in 2 Samuel 11:27, “but the thing David had done displeased the Lord greatly.”

After Bathsheba’s pregnancy ran its course, God sent Nathan the prophet to David to confront him over this sin (2 Samuel 12:1-12). We know from Psalm 32 that this year was a miserable one for David (Psalm 32:3-4). His relationship with God had been violated, and the joy of his salvation had been removed. Finally, nearly a year after his sin with Bathsheba, David repents (2 Samuel 12:13). David’s sin was compounded, not only in its effect on David, but that it gave the enemies of God cause to blaspheme God’s name (2 Samuel 12:13-15). Since David repented, and since God had already promised David that he would never leave him or remove the throne from David as he had done with Saul (2 Samuel 7), David was not stoned as required by the law but was forgiven by God. However, his sin did not go unpunished as the child sired by David died (2 Samuel 16:16-23). Later, David’s family life was one disaster after another starting with the rape of Tamar (2 Samuel 13:1-32), the murder of Amnon (2 Samuel 13:23-33), and the rebellion and death of Absalom (2 Samuel 13:34-38).

### **Principles from David**

1. **Moral sin does not go unpunished.** In David’s case, his sin with Bathsheba resulted in the death of three of his sons, the rebellion of Absalom, and the rape of Tamar.

2. **Just because God forgives sin he may still require natural consequences to be paid. A person who has been an alcoholic all his life and is dying of cirrhosis of the liver does not get miraculously healed when he becomes a believer. God has built in natural consequences to sin, and it is the exception, not the rule, that those consequences are removed upon repentance.**
3. **Since God had previously given David the Davidic Covenant, he did not exact the just penalty of death. In David's case, there was the existence of an unconditional promise that affected God's treatment of David's sin. However, we must also remember that David did repent, and if one reads Psalms 32 and 51, they can see this very clearly. In David's case, God exhibited mercy, not justice.**
4. **David's sin did not result in permanent disqualification, but it did result in severe penalties that affected David, his family, the nation, and the enemies of God.**
5. **We must be careful to not draw too many conclusions between David's moral failure, and that of a spiritual leader today. In David's case he was the civil leader of Israel, not a priest or prophet. Additionally, there was the existence of the Davidic covenant. Finally, the office of the King was significantly different than that of the priests. We must be careful not to allow the case of David to significantly affect our understanding of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.**

### *Peter*

Peter is our final example of failure in leadership. In his case it was not the failure of direct disobedience to God, or the failure of immorality, but the failure of pride. "Even if I have to die with you, I will not deny you" (Matthew 26:35). His words sounded so final, so courageous, yet he did not understand that Satan desired to have him, to "sift him like wheat" (Luke 22:31-32). Peter's sin was one of overconfidence.

Well, we all know the story. After Peter's proud boast Christ told him that before the morning he would betray Christ three times. He did just that, first by denying Christ to the servant girl (Luke 23:55-57), then to another man (Luke 23:58), and finally to another (Luke 23:59-60). Immediately the rooster crowed and Peter knew what he had done. The Bible tells us he went out and wept bitterly over his failure.

But God was not done with Peter. After Christ's resurrection he appeared to the eleven in the upper room, and later personally restored Peter to the apostleship in John 21:15-23. Peter's failure was not one that resulted in permanent disqualification, but one that reminded him, and us, of the frailty of depending on our flesh instead of Christ.

### **Principles from Peter**

1. **We cannot rely on our flesh to keep our promises with God. Unless God protects us through the temptation, we will all fail.**
2. **Peter was broken over his sin. His was a repentance to life, not death as was Judas's. In fact, Peter was certain Christ would not take him back, and as a result had to have a personal visit by Christ to restore him to ministry.**
3. **God is a God of second chances. In Peter's case he got a second chance to stand for Christ, and as we observe his actions in the Book of Acts, he made good on his second chance.**

*Some Final Comments on Saul, David, and Peter*

What can we glean from these three examples about failure? What conclusions can we draw about restoration after failure? I suggest following:

1. God may give a second chance, and then again he may not. In Peter's case God gave him another chance to prove his loyalty. In David's case, God forgave his sin, and in Saul's case there was no second chance.
2. There is a real possibility of disqualification. This should be one of the motivating fears of those in ministry. Paul made sure to "beat his body" in order that he not be disqualified from the race (1 Corinthians 9:27).
3. Repentance opens up the way for God's forgiveness, but it does not remove the necessary and normal consequences of sin. In both David and Saul's case, their sin resulted in subsequent penalties. For Saul, it was rejection as God's king, an evil spirit from the Lord, and eventual depression resulting in suicide. In David's case, it was the meltdown of his family.
4. There is a repentance that worries only about the penalty, not the relationship. In both David and Peter's case, their repentance was that of one who understood a relationship had been violated. In Saul's case, it was a repentance because of the penalty that was being exacted, and in fact, in 1 Samuel 15:30-21, he tells Samuel to "honor him" by not turning his back on him and embarrassing him in front of Israel. Note in verse 30 that Saul talks to Samuel regarding Samuel's God, not Saul's God.
5. There may be restoration after failure, and again, there may not. Saul was never restored as king, David was restored, and Peter was eventually restored to leadership.

Unfortunately, as we examine these examples we cannot come to any solid conclusions about restoration. Apparently God is in the recycling business, but sometimes our sin has the result of permanent disqualification from certain positions of leadership. Sometimes there is restoration to leadership, and at other times there is not. In order to flesh this out more, we need to turn to the New Testament and look at what is said of spiritual leadership.

***What the Bible Says About the Character of a Pastor***

As one reads of the character of a pastor in commentaries and the Scriptures, the overriding character quality that keeps coming to the top is that of being above reproach. In every way, the Pastor needs to be a man against whom no significant accusation can be made in all areas of his life, moral, physical, financial, and relational. He is to be a man of character, not only in the eyes of the church, but in the eyes of society as well. He is to be a model for the church to follow. It is not that he is to be a "spiritual superman", never making mistakes, but that he is to be one that can be followed as to the way he deals with the issues of life. If a man has failed as a model, then he has failed as a pastor.

Note that this does not mean that a man who has fallen into reproach can never again regain the title "above reproach." It is just that the way back may be a long and difficult one, in which he must once again earn the respect of the congregation and society. Once again those who know him have to be able to say with all sincerity "this man is above reproach, I can trust him." If his sin is such that this respect can never again be earned, then he would not be "above reproach" and would be disqualified from pastoral leadership. He may be used in many ways

in the church, and his gifts may be employed again in the service of the Kingdom, but the office of the Pastor is reserved for those men with proven character, who are above reproach.

With this in mind, let us examine some principles gleaned from the above resources and some corresponding dangers we can encounter as we deal with the topic of restoration.

### ***Principles Regarding Pastoral Restoration***

From our study so far we can draw only a single, inescapable conclusion:

*No where in the Bible does it clearly say that a pastor who has fallen into moral sin can never again hold the office of a pastor. The best we can say is that restoration to the pastoral office is difficult, but not impossible.*

At this point many would say, "Wonderful, since it is not forbidden for a fallen pastor to be restored, let's restore him!" They would take the lack of prohibition as an exhortation, and even a command, to allow the fallen pastor to again assume office. After all, since it is not forbidden, then it is acceptable. We must exhibit grace and forgiveness, after all, God has forgiven the fallen pastor, so should we!

I think, however, we need to look beyond the mere lack of a prohibition and ask ourselves some tough questions about the restoration of a fallen pastor and about the process required to bring about restoration. If we move too quickly, we may cause further harm to the office of the pastor and to the body of Christ. If we don't move at all, we may be guilty of being unloving and unforgiving. Somewhere in the middle is where we need to land, and in order to land safely we need to examine some principles regarding spiritual leadership and restoration as well as some potential dangers. I list these as follows in no particular order.

*Principle 1      Whatever we say about restoring a fallen pastor, the Bible teaches that there is a real possibility that one could be permanently disqualified from ministry.*

Paul makes the statement in 1 Corinthians 9:27 that "I discipline my body and bring it into submission, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified." The word he uses for discipline, *hupopiatzo*, refers to one who literally "strikes beneath the eye." It was a boxing term used to refer to the act of striking an opponent so as to give him a black eye. Paul is stating that he daily beats himself so that he would not become disqualified due to some failure in his life. Since he refers to beating his body, we can safely say that the failure in view is some failure having to do with the flesh. Certainly this would include moral failure.

Using this passage, we cannot say that moral failure always results in disqualification, but that Paul saw that moral failure could result in disqualification. It was his desire that he do everything possible to make sure that he would not be disqualified, and the term he uses is an extremely strong term. He metaphorically states that he beats himself "black and blue" in order to avoid disqualification.

Paul uses the concept of sports several other times in his writings. One that comes to mind is 2 Timothy 2:5 in which Paul uses the metaphor of a sporting event when he says that "if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules." I remember the time in the 1993 Winter Olympics in which the winner in the men's speed skating contest broke a world's record, only to be disqualified because he accidentally touched the ice. It is clear from 2 Timothy 2:5 that one can lose their reward and be disqualified if they compete outside of the rules.

One such example of disqualification in the Bible is Moses. We read in Numbers 20 that the children of Israel again complained about the lack of water, accusing Moses of bringing them out into the wilderness to die. Moses, being commanded by God to speak to the rock, instead struck the rock twice with his rod. Water did come out, and Israel was satisfied, but Moses was barred from taking Israel into the promised land. This one act of disobedience by a man, who on every other occasion was faithful, resulted in his permanent disqualification in leading Israel into Canaan.

Another form this disqualification can take is that of rendering a man unable to again be “above reproach.” This disqualification would result when the sin committed is of such a nature that the people can never again esteem the pastor in question to be above reproach. Because of this, his leadership would not be respected by those he led and by the society at large. He may be forgiven of the trespass, but the reproach of the sin will forever cling to him.

*Principle 2* It is the general observation of many that one who has morally compromised themselves on one occasion will, most likely, repeat it again in the future.

In stating this we must be careful not to “shoot a man before he commits a crime,” but, on the other hand, we need to be mindful that it is the general observation of many that once a man fails morally, it is almost certain he will repeat the failure later again if given the same opportunity. Once the first puff of a cigarette is taken, the next is easier. Once the first bottle of wine is consumed, the next comes easier. This is the deception of sin. Just one more, it can’t hurt, after all, God will forgive me.

In discussing this issue with other pastors and leaders, this is one of the major points made again and again. All of them have said that once a man fails morally the first time, it is an almost certainty he will do it again given the right circumstances. Is it a certainty one will fail again? No! But it is a real possibility.

Therefore, while we need to be careful to give a fallen pastor the benefit of the doubt, and not treat him as a certain “repeat offender,” we must keep in mind that statistically it is very probable he will repeat the offense in the future. Whatever process or method of restoration we pursue should take this into consideration.

Additionally, any restoration process needs to deal with the root issues that may have resulted in the moral failure in the first place. Moral sin does not occur in a vacuum, and unless the root causes are exposed, confessed, and forsaken, the actions will once again be repeated. This leads us to the next principle.

*Principle 3* Moral compromise is not the sudden blowout we think it is, but is in fact the end product of a slow leak.

It is highly improbable that one would wake up some day and say, “I think I will have an affair today!” It just doesn’t happen like that. Moral failure never occurs in a vacuum, and it is not a sudden, impetuous sin, but rather the end product of a long process. Long before the physical act is consummated, the imagination has played out the sin again and again. This is what is clearly taught in James 1:14-15. In that passage we find the pathology of sin. It starts out by being drawn away “of our own lust”. The draw to sin is not external, but internal. We sin because there is some “lust” within us that draws us to an area of temptation. James then says that this drawing causes us to be tempted. Temptation, in and of itself, is not sinful, rather it is the response to the temptation that brings about sin. If the temptation is immediately rejected, the test is passed and sin does not occur. Only when the temptation is dwelled on does “sin conceive.” The word used by James is interesting, it means “to impregnate.” We then begin to

imagine ways in which to fulfill this temptation, and sin becomes more and more enticing. After a long process of this, the sin conceived in the imagination is borne out in actions, and the act is committed.

The same holds true morally. A single act of immorality is the end result of a long process of imagination, in which the sin was replayed time and time again in the mind. Little by little one's defenses are eroded, thoughts are entertained, until one day the entire dam collapses and moral failure is a certainty. Once this sin has occurred in reality, it is impossible to again purify the imagination as the sin is forever etched in the memory of the one who committed it.

In the case of moral failure in the pastorate, the act of adultery is the culminating act of a long process. Somewhere along the way one's guard was let down, and the immoral thoughts began to take over. Perhaps pornography is involved, perhaps immoral movies, perhaps the internet, perhaps a strained relationship with one's spouse, perhaps a host of other things become included in this process, but the point to be made is that it is a process.

Because of this, the way back is a process as well. It involves dealing with the areas of temptation that caused the sin in the first place. It involves the re-establishment of the relationship the fallen pastor has with his wife. It involves the re-establishment of broken relationships with others because of the sin. In summary, it takes a lot of time to undo the damage of immorality. One must essentially start over again in the area of sanctification learning to walk day by day in the Spirit, and learning all over again how to deal with the flesh and with temptation. Just as the sin took a long time to work its way out into an act, so it takes a long time to undo all of the bad thinking, bad theology, and self-deception behind the sin. This is not to say that the Holy Spirit cannot completely and totally transform a life. He can! It is just that often deeply ingrained patterns of sin take years to correct as one learns how to day by day walk in the Spirit. In some cases the process of victory is instantaneous, in others it is a long process.

*Principle 4 Moral sin is unique in that the reproach of the transgression abides forever.*

One of the interesting things to note about immorality is that it is a unique because of its far-reaching effects. Whenever one commits adultery, the effect is devastating, not only in the life of the one committing the sin, but in the lives of that person's family, extended family, and in the families of the other partner. This is voiced in Proverbs 6:32-35 which states, "*Whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding; He who does so destroys his own soul. Wounds and dishonour he will get, and his reproach will not be wiped away. For jealousy is a husband's fury; therefore he will not spare in the day of vengeance. He will accept no recompense, nor will he be appeased though you give many gifts.*"

Now many will say, "Wait a minute. That's Old Testament. We are told to forgive and forget in the New Testament." True, we are to forgive, but that does not mean we are to forget the transgression. Consider the case of a baby-sitter who may violate a child. That baby-sitter may be forgiven, but the wise parent will never again allow that baby-sitter to watch their child. Consider someone who embezzles thousands of dollars from a business. That person may be forgiven, and they may even be able to pay back the money, but no wise president would ever allow such a person access to the corporate treasury again. Finally, consider a high-ranking government official who sells national secrets to a foreign power. That person may receive a presidential pardon for their crime, but never again will they be given access to national secrets. Why? In all these cases the answer is simple, trust has been violated.

The same is true in the case of immorality. One may be forgiven of the crime, and one may be restored in one's relationships, but never again will one be trusted. It is not an issue of forgiveness, but an issue of trust. Trust is a commodity that must be earned. One excellent quote I



heard along this line is “Integrity takes a lifetime to build, and a moment to destroy.” Whatever is said about one in spiritual leadership, one thing is sure, they must be a person who can be trusted. When that trust is violated, it must be earned again, and that may take a long, long time.

Can the pastor who has fallen morally ever again be above reproach? I think the answer is yes, but I also think the answer can be yes only after an extended period of time in which trust is once again earned and in which a person is once again tested for faithfulness.

*Principle 5*      *Whatever is said about the possibility of restoration, one thing is certain. A man must be able to once again prove himself and be requalified for the pastoral office.*

How is one granted the office of pastor in the first place? According to 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 they must be tested. They must be able to prove over an extended period of time that they have the qualifications for the pastoral office as outlined in the section above and the appendices at the end of this paper.

The same holds true for one who is a pastor, and who falls into immorality. Not only must they be able to prove themselves again worthy of trust, but they must be able to overcome the stigma of failing. It is one thing for someone who is innocent of the sin of immorality to prove themselves morally, it is quite something different for one who is fallen to prove themselves again morally.

So whatever one wishes to say about the possibility of restoration, any restoration must insure that the one who is restored meets the qualifications for pastors as found in the scriptures. This requires an extended period of time for testing, in which the fallen pastor is again proven to be a man of character and godliness. It is not sufficient to short-circuit the process by giving him “points” for his prior qualification.

*Principle 6*      *It is the responsibility of the leaders in the Church to protect the office of the Pastor and insure that only those men who have proven themselves occupy that office otherwise they become partakers of another man’s sin.*

We find the process of dealing with sinning elders in 1 Timothy 5:17-25. The office of a pastor is a high office, and accusations against those who occupy the office should not be considered without sufficient proof of the sin. Once the sin is exposed, however, the elder is to be rebuked publicly for that sin so that “others may fear.” Paul then tells Timothy, “Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people’s sins; keep yourself pure. (1 Timothy 5:22)” The point Paul is making to Timothy is to be very careful about who is ordained as an elder, since if an unqualified elder is ordained because due diligence is not exercised by those who do the ordaining, then they are guilty of the unqualified elder’s sin.

The point is very simple. God is very much interested in the purity of the church, and holds those in leadership personally responsible to make sure that only qualified men occupy the office of an elder. It is not an exercise to be taken lightly, but is a very serious duty. When someone who has been an elder falls morally, then it is even more necessary to insure that proper time has passed for that man to again prove his character.

*Principle 7*      *Immorality is not the only sin which can result in disqualification.*

This, of course, goes without saying. Often when we think of Pastors falling into sin, the first thought that comes to mind is that of the sexual area. However, if one reads the texts dealing with the qualifications of elders carefully, moral failure is only one area which may result in

disqualification. For example, if a man has a violent temper, he is not self-controlled and hence would be disqualified as an elder. A man who loved money, or indulged in inappropriate uses of money, would be disqualified as well.

The point to be made here is that we need to be careful not to single out the man who has fallen morally and “nail him to the wall” while at the same time ignoring those who have fallen in other areas by giving them “a slap on the wrist.” God is very serious about the character of one who is to lead his flock, and we must be as well.

### ***Dangers to Avoid in the Restoration Process***

How about some dangers? Wherever one lands on the issue of Pastoral restoration, there are some dangers we need to be mindful of. I list these as follows in no particular order:

*Danger 1            Whatever is said about restoration, one real danger is that a man be restored too quickly without proving himself again.*

If any error is made, it is probably made right here. The tendency for us is to shorten the time required to requalify an elder since there are a host of issues which must be dealt with, such as “what about the fallen pastor’s financial needs?”, “what about the need to fill the vacated position?”, “what about extending forgiveness and grace?” and a host of other questions. We are often so desirous to “forgive” that we push for restoration, since in our mind we think that forgiveness is incomplete until full restoration has been accomplished.

In looking at this further, this problem usually arises because we fail to understand the difference between forgiveness and necessary penalties of sin. We sometimes equate forgiveness with the removal of the penalty. We think that until the person is restored to their former position, we have not really forgiven them. I think this is a wrong conclusion. We are to certainly forgive the pastor who has fallen into immorality, but we must also understand that the consequences their sin remains. Karla Faye Tucker was forgiven of her sin by God, but the State of Texas still exacted the death penalty for her crime of murder. Forgiven, yes, but the penalty still must be paid.

One of my major concerns in this area is that I do not believe a person can requalify for the office of a pastor in the matter of a few months. I believe it takes years for requalification. In our great desire to be forgiving and kind, we often circumvent the clear commandments of the Bible. Anyone can be godly for a few months in order to gain the office of pastor again, but that does not mean they will stick it out over the long haul.

But also, on the other extreme, we must not make it so difficult for the fallen pastor to requalify that he never is able to accomplish our demands. Our requirements for restoration must be high, but not impossible. Somewhere in between these two extremes lies the right balance, and we need to pray for wisdom and guidance in order to find this balance.

*Danger 2            Whatever is done in the process of restoring one person, needs to be done with all because of the legal precedent that has been set.*

This is an important danger in our litigious age. Whatever actions we take in the restoration of a pastor who has fallen into immorality needs to be applied the same to all others guilty of the same crime. When someone falls, it is easy to try and work through the issues without realizing that every decision made is forming the basis for all future decisions in the same circumstances. We must be careful to not set precedents which may result in future lawsuits.

This is perhaps echoed by Paul in 1 Timothy 5:21 when he says, “*doing nothing by partiality.*” We must not have multiple standards for multiple pastors. It is easy to be hard on those we do not like as well, and easy on those we love. We cannot do this. God is not a God of partiality, but one of fairness. Whatever we do for one Pastor, we must do for all or else we become guilty of this sin.

*Danger 3      If we are not careful, we can send the wrong message.*

This, I feel, is another of the great dangers encountered if we restore someone too fast. People today are looking for justification to live their lives the way they do. Any excuse, no matter how flimsy, is grabbed by those desiring to justify their own sin. If a pastor is restored to the office too quickly, it is easy for the average person to think that immorality is not really that big a deal.

I remember back to the Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart scandals. Here are two high-profile “Christians” who showed the watching world that there is really nothing wrong with immorality since God will forgive one of any sin. In the case of Jimmy Swaggart, he was given three months off by his church. The Assemblies of God thought that was too light and gave him a year off. What is the message? Commit this act of sin and at the worst you get a year off? Where is the scandal? Where is the understanding of sinning against a holy God?

I remember talking to a woman in the church after an incident of pastoral immorality was made public. She said something to me that really made me stop and think. Her words were, “You know, it is a good feeling to be in a place where adultery is still wrong!” Her words should cause us all to stop and think. Certainly we would not want to unduly punish one who has fallen into immorality, pastor or otherwise, but we must be careful to make sure that everyone understands the seriousness of the sin.

When a pastor falls into immorality and our response is to give them a few months off to work through their sin, we are inadvertently transmitting the message that sin is all right. Sure, we can make the sin public thus bringing shame on the perpetrator, we can say that the fact they lost their job punishment, but when we restore them too quickly we are sending a wrong message.

*Danger 4      Foxhole conversions.*

Another danger falls under the heading of “foxhole conversions.” We all know the situation. A man is in a foxhole in the middle of a vicious firefight. He is almost certain to lose his life, and in desperation he promises God to become a preacher. Once the battle is over, however, the promise is quickly forgotten and the soldier returns to his former ways.

Whenever we shorten the time for restoration, we are in danger of finding those who will comply with any and all requirements given, for a time, in order to regain their job. Their faithfulness over the short term is made possible by the realization that they will get their job back after the process. The real question to ask is would they comply with those same requirements if they knew they would not get their job back? That is where the truly penitent sinner is weeded out from the foxhole convert. One who is truly broken over their sin and realizes the seriousness of their offense will make it right even if they never get their job back.

This is not to say that one can be quickly. It is to say that it is too easy to miss the foxhole convert from the penitent sinner in such a short period of time. The stakes are too high to make a mistake.

*Danger 5**Unwillingness to forgive*

A final danger we need to avoid in considering this subject is that of allowing ourselves to become so angered or embittered about the moral failure of a Pastor that we lose the ability to forgive him. We all have a deep streak within us that desires to see ourselves better than everyone else. For those of us who have not fallen into the sin of immorality, it is very easy to become censorious towards those who have. After all, we are better than them, we didn't fall into immorality.

We find an excellent example of this issue in the Bible. In 1 Corinthians 5 Paul addresses the issue of a man in the Corinthian congregation who was living with his step-mother. Instead of dealing with the man's sin, the Corinthian church took pride in the fact that they tolerated this man's behavior. What made this so scandalous, is that this type of behavior was even frowned upon by the society at large. When the perverts in society think you are perverted, you have real problems. Paul was so angered by this church's response that he essentially ordered them to turn this man over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh. In short, he commanded the Corinthian church to initiate church discipline against the man.

Later, in 2 Corinthians 2 Paul tells the church to bring this man back into fellowship since he had repented of this sin. What evidently happened is that church discipline was enacted, the man was put out of the church, but when he repented of his sin and tried to again get back into the fellowship, he was rebuffed. Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians 2:10-11 is most appropriate here, *"To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to who I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ; Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices."* When we fail to forgive the penitent sinner, no matter how awful his sin, we are allowing Satan to take advantage of us. We are allowing bitterness to spread and invest the body, and when that does, God's power is stifled. In fact, if we refuse to forgive men their trespasses against us, why should we expect God to forgive our trespasses against him?

The danger is clear. When we withhold forgiveness we are endangering our relationship with God and allowing ourselves to be taken advantage of by Satan. This is not to say there are no continuing consequences for the offending believer's sin, but that we need to forgive him and restore him to fellowship.

### ***Some Final Thoughts on Restoration***

This has been a difficult subject to deal with. There are passionate men on both sides of the issue, and if we are not careful we can allow our judgment to be clouded by that passion. What I have attempted to do is look at the Bible and see what we can learn from its pages.

As I have done this, I have come to the conclusion that Pastoral restoration is not impossible. There is no text that would lead me to conclude that when a Pastor fails morally, he is forever disqualified from ministry. On the other hand, I have been led to believe that the office of a Pastor is a high office, and one of immense responsibility. Those who hold that office need to have been able to prove themselves worthy of the respect and responsibility of that office. As a result, those who fail morally need to be able to re-prove themselves. This is not an impossible task, but a difficult one.

In closing, I suggest the following questions to be asked whenever considering Pastoral restoration. These are not exhaustive questions, but do get at the heart of the matter. Of course, the answers to these questions are subjective, but I do believe they will give insight into the heart of the one being considered for restoration.

1. Can the fallen leader's spouse say, with a high degree of certainty, that they trust their spouse again?
2. Can the fallen leader's peers trust him again? Can those whom he ministers by say with a high degree of certainty that they can again trust his character and counsel?
3. Does the church feel comfortable submitting to the spiritual leadership of the one restored.
4. Has the fallen leader had sufficient time to prove his character?
5. Has the fallen leader been able to prove that the issue that caused his fall in the first place been dealt with?
6. Has the fallen leader been able to exhibit a consistent, spiritual walk for a period of time sufficient to prove that he is exercising the spiritual disciplines of prayer and study of the word?
7. Can the fallen leader say with all conviction that what he did was sin, and make no excuses for it?
8. Can the society in which the fallen leader lives be able to once again see him as a model of character and virtue?