

What to Do When Church Leaders Sin

April 28, 2015 by Bill Blankschaen

Pastors are perfect people, right? Church leaders don't sin do they?

Some of you laughed when you read that. Especially you pastors and church leaders who know all too well how human you are.

But others of you immediately thought of painful situations caused by a church leader's sin. You remembered the destruction caused by it and — what makes it worse — the frustration you felt when no one seemed willing to do anything about it.

A recent comment by a reader identified as Dan Graves on my post [Why I've Stopped Singing in Your Church](#) raised this question:

Some songwriters have openly embraced a life of sin (e.g. adultery, homosexuality, or greed), yet churches perform their works as though nothing were amiss. I am troubled doing overhead projections in these cases and wonder what to do. When I speak up, I'm told we are all sinners. However, it seems that a sinner resisting and fighting sin and putting it to death is in a different category from someone embracing sin. It seems to me if a person's life shows an open embrace of wrongdoing, their music cannot be of the Holy Spirit and we shouldn't be doing their songs.

I feel your pain, Dan. Often church leaders don't know what to do about the sins of other church leaders, and so they hide behind unbiblical foolishness like, "Well, we are all sinners." What nonsense. Of course, we are all sinners. We're all breathing, too. What's your point? Such a response reveals either cowardice or ignorance — neither of which are desirable traits in church leaders.

According to the Word of God, **leaders are held to a higher standard than everyone else.** They are to be above reproach — not perfect, but not engaged in a lifestyle of unrepentant sin. And if they continue in sin, they should be removed from leadership until they are fully restored.

This problem of church leaders sinning is bigger than music leaders, of course. I and my family have been on the receiving end of church leaders who abuse their position to get their way. I've been part of a church where the worship pastor stumbled into sexual sin (it was dealt with speedily and

biblically, in a way that brought healing to all involved), and seen another church split by the senior pastor's attempt to conceal his sexual sin behind endless deception. I've also seen one of the key female leaders in a church become entangled in a same-sex relationship — and the church leadership look the other way because they didn't want to deal with it.

When church leaders sin, those following their lead suffer. That's the nature of leadership. Their sin brings consequences on the rest of the congregation. Not guilt, necessarily, but consequences.

And the name of Jesus Christ gets trampled.

Six Steps You Can Take When Church Leaders Sin

There's a lot to be said about this topic — most of which isn't being said from pulpits these days. But here are six action steps I would suggest to those trying to figure out what to do when church leaders sin:

1. **Check your own heart.** Jesus warned us to remove the plank in our own eye before trying to take out the splinter in someone else's eye. Ask yourself why you are concerned about the sin. Is it out of concern for God's glory and the unity of His church, or do you have another agenda? Perhaps that pastor confronted you previously and you want to see the tables turned. Maybe you think their musical style is sappy so you see a chance to switch out worship leaders. Whatever your motive may be, discover it prior to taking any action.
2. **Make sure you know what you think you know.** Disturbing the unity of the church is a big deal. And bringing a charge against a church leader is a big deal. That doesn't mean you shouldn't do it. But never forget that one of the Ten Commandments specifically addresses being a false witness. If all you have is gossip or suspicions, think twice. And remember, you cannot judge someone based on what you think is in his or her heart. That's God's territory. So greed, for example, is a tough charge to bring against anyone.
3. **Talk with the person directly.** Notice I did not say talk *to* or *at* the person. If you are truly motivated by love, set an appointment to share your concerns with the person privately. Privately. And just to repeat for clarity: *privately*. (Exception: If your concern is about sexual sin, it may not be wise for a female parishioner to meet with a male church leader privately. Use discretion in such matters. If you're married, go

with your spouse, etc.) Yes, a direct conversation will be uncomfortable. Yes, it will require courage. No, it may not end pleasantly. But we are called to live by faith — to do what we believe to be true, often in spite of what we see, sense, or feel. Do what you believe to be true based on Scripture — as lovingly as possible — and leave the outcome to God.

4. **Trust God’s methods, not your own.** Speaking the truth in love is how the body of Christ is built up and edified according to Paul in Ephesians. “*Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head.*” [Ephesians 4:15](#) Many of us falter when we try to out-think the Holy Spirit. We concoct a strategy to handle the issue as if we could somehow manipulate someone’s heart. I confess to having been down this road myself — and failing miserably. Figure out the biblical path and just do it, trusting God to act as He sees fit.
5. **Give leadership a chance to address it behind closed doors.** If the person refuses to hear you, you need to enlist others. The biblical model for confronting a stumbling brother or sister is to keep the circle of people involved as small as possible. Go to the person one-on-one. If he or she refuses to hear you, return with witnesses. If the same result occurs, then take it to the church leadership if they are not already involved. (Exception: If the sin is of a public nature, the church leadership should already be acting on it. If not, they need to be lovingly confronted, as well.) Then give the leadership room to handle it while you keep your mouth shut about it.
6. **Walk away.** If the sinful lifestyle continues after you have taken these steps, and church leadership has failed to act after having ample opportunity to do so, I would suggest you check your heart one more time to make sure you are not the problem. And then walk away. If the leadership demonstrates a refusal to act biblically, it’s time to leave. Others may give you a different perspective, but my advice — born from painful experience — is NOT to engage in protracted “custody battles” or power struggles in a church where leadership refuses to follow God’s Word. At some point, you need to “shake the dust off” as Jesus admonished His disciples and seek fellowship with another local body that is committed to being faithful to God.