

A. Practical Theology for Ministry

1. How do you deal with the problem of egregious sin committed by Christians who profess Christ and are involved in ministry? There are many examples – of child abuse, sexual misconduct, even murder and financial misconduct. When the world looks at us they scoff and rightly accuse our hypocrisy. When we look at ourselves we may accept the truth that we are all sinners and capable of wrongs we wish we were not, or try to ignore the problem. Not long ago a Sunday school teacher was accused of murdering a young girl... how do we deal with the tragedy of a Sunday school teacher and professing Christian who committed murder and rape of an 8 year old girl?
 - a. How do we as Christians explain/deal with the inconsistencies of faith and action?
 - b. This accused murderer is not alone... there are numerous examples of Christians claiming victory in Christ who behave badly – Jim Bakker, Ted Haggard, & Jimmy Swaggert are prominent examples... but there are a huge number of lesser known offenders.
 - c. You are compelled to ask if this person who could commit such an act really saved? Was her commitment to Christ real? If you really know Jesus, how can you do such a thing to someone who is so trusting of you, innocent, and vulnerable?
 - d. Do we know if this person is mentally sound or ill? Were they experiencing delusions? If they are found to be sound, that is one discussion.
 - e. Presuming she was mentally competent, what do we say? Claiming that “Christians aren’t perfect only forgiven” is a copout. Christians [not unlike the nation of Israel in the OT] are expected to live differently and be subject to a higher standard of conduct... this is part of our Spiritual birthright.
 - f. Pre-cross there was no indwelling Spirit to convict and provide supernatural power to conform the faithful to Jesus’ nature. As Christian’s indwelled by the convicting and empowering Spirit, we do not have that excuse.
 - g. Post-cross shouldn’t we do better? What factors do we need to consider?
 - i. We still have the inner-man/outer-man conflict, and this will go on until Christ’s 2nd advent and the restoration of all things we hope for.
 - ii. Being led by the Spirit denotes one as a child of God. Can one being led by the Spirit in a bad moment do such evil? Of course! The Spirit [like the Law before it] is an effective restraint when we walk with God. With the Spirit we also have supernatural help. However, when we deliberately turn our back and do what we want anything is possible.
 - iii. The Spirit regenerates our inner self, and our transformed nature constrains our actions. All of this acts to restrain evil, but it is not eradicated in this life.

Theology 2.12 – Word made flesh

- h. With regard to people we have placed in positions of responsibility in serving others in the church do we really know if are a ‘Gospel Centered’ believer? Do they really know the truth about God, but not of His Spirit [not indwelt]? If someone wasn’t Spiritually dependent, couldn’t they have more easily done wrong? Of course!**
- i. Was the matter accidental followed by a cover up? That could be possible.**
- j. Is the person truly repentant? This is probably the biggest question and the clearest test.**
 - i. Anyone can do bad things, but when you are caught do you admit your guilt and pray for forgiveness and make restoration? David did so and was forgiven by God.**
 - ii. Repentance is a huge matter to God – the response God always wants from us when we are confronted with our sin is repentance and restitution.**
 - 1. Bernie Maddoff apparently stole billions of dollars... he hasn’t denied his guilt... but he has made no effort at restitution.**
 - 2. Jimmy Swaggert and Ted Haggard initially denied wrong doing, but they came clean at some point and admitted their error.**
 - 3. Those who are truly repentant should confess it and also make restitution in some tangible and appropriate way – repentance and restitution go together.**
 - 4. When confession or restitution fails to be forthcoming, it is more likely the person isn’t truly repentant, just sorry they got caught.**
- k. Let’s be real – all of us are capable of doing things we don’t want known by others, all we need is a weak moment and a timely opportunity and anyone can fall.**
 - i. However, many more of us have done things or even continue to do things that we know aren’t right or acceptable that we don’t want known.**
 - ii. How we deal with grace and forgiveness in our life needs to be held up to the Scriptural standard, and applied with love and concern for others.**
 - iii. The goal of any confrontation of wrong doing or failure should always be repentance and forgiveness, and include the appropriate legal ramifications coupled with the restoration of relational intimacy.**
- 2. 80% of the U.S. population identify themselves as being ‘Christian’ – but what does that really mean? How do we as Christian leaders help our Christian and non-Christian friends deal with such disparities between the profession of belief and conduct?**
 - a. Probably ½ half of those who profess a Christian belief are really saying they have a Christian church identity or heritage.**
 - i. Many are “Cultural Christians” who accept faith by default more than choice.**
 - ii. Many have been “Spiritually awakened” [that is they made a confession of faith in Christ] but not “Spiritually reborn” [that is to be committed to Jesus**

Theology 2.12 – Word made flesh

- and actively maturing as a disciple into His nature and standard]. It is one thing to become aware of God and Christ, another to be relationally committed and dependent upon Him.
- iii. “Knowing the truth” is not the same as “living by faith” – Satan and his demons know the truth, and it hasn’t done them much good.
 - iv. There are also those who are “wolves in sheep’s clothing” – they profess faith, but their motivations are for their own benefit.
 - v. When we engage someone we don’t know who profess Christ, it is expected that we accept them at face value. But it is also wise to observe them and know that their walk and their talk are in line. Performing reputable background checks for anyone in ministry is a wise and responsible policy. Those who resist it may have something to hide.
- b. Most church leaders admit that the American church is “a mile wide and 10 miles long, but only an inch deep.” Many make the profession of faith, but true maturity and committed discipleship is not the norm. These leaders also estimate that probably ½ of our church attendance and membership are cultural or marginal believers.
 - i. They may be awakened but are not yet committed.
 - ii. Many may respond to an “Altar call” having accepted Jesus’ offer of forgiveness and eternal life, but do so in essence as a get out of Hell free card, not out of love or devotion or any expectation that their life should change. As leaders, what does God really expect of His followers? How should our efforts include discipling as well as evangelism... this is at the heart of this dilemma.
3. God’s forgiveness – is always available to the truly repentant... and the truly repentant always seek to make restitution in meaningful ways, as well as living their life differently as a result of Spiritual transformation and accepting new ethical and moral values.
- a. Taking responsibility involves accepting the penalty and making restoration. If they circumvent either their repentance is questionable.
 - b. When we fail to do what’s right – the Body of Christ suffers... when we fail to be truly repentant – we sin against the Spirit and we malign the Name of Christ.
 - c. True repentance is Spirit induced shame and guilt – this is conviction and is a necessary component leading to forgiveness and restitution in fellowship with God. The social realities of self-interest pale against the Spiritual reality of walking with God.
 - d. Spirit led penitence is an ongoing matter – whenever we find something the Spirit convicts us of, we are expected to repent... it is not a once and your done sort of thing.
 - e. Penitence and forgiveness as well as repentance and restoration go together in the Spirit... it is the means to endurance and perseverance.
 - f. Christians are often a “walking contradiction” – 1 Cor 6:9 is a limiting governor.

Theology 2.12 – Word made flesh

- g. Of those who call themselves Christians... some know about God, but their faith is challenged. Some have faith but they are Grace challenged. As disciplers what we can do to promote real Spiritual transformation through active discipleship training and encouraging increased relational dependence upon God – this is the goal and true test of faith.**
- h. There are different levels of sin – Jesus said the lowest-most despicable sin was to cause “a little one to stumble” it was better for a millstone to have been tied around your neck and be cast into the depths... pretty harsh. From the context of child-like-faith it can be presumed that causing one to stumble would be to discourage or rob such an innocent of their faith. Heady warning for all leadership.**
- i. Gospel-Centered transformation understands the development of faith from “root to fruit” – salvation begins as a journey that God Himself leads us through, though we should seek out and be accompanied by faithful friends and mentors along the way.**

Questions for believers:

 - i. Is there evidence of change?**
 - ii. Is there growth and development?**
 - iii. The Spirit’s Presence will change you... thus we should expect evidence. If there is no change and worse no desire to change, then something is amiss.**
- j. We are all saved by Grace not by works... we cannot earn salvation. But doing evil deliberately and unrepentantly brings one’s salvation into question... it should be hard if not impossible for a believer to perform evil acts. Grace undergirds our actions.**
- k. We can’t repay the Grace of God... the material things we most value mean nothing to God.**
- l. What evidence of God’s Life and Presence should we expect to be expressed in our life?**
 - i. In Cain’s murder of his brother Able – it is clear that God provided grace to Cain. It is also clear that Cain was not repentant and represents the fallen line of humanity.**
 - ii. It is possible to for anyone to fall and do something wrong – it is easier to understand such action in a fit of passion or an unpremeditated act... but cold and calloused acts from believers are hard to understand.**
 - iii. God disciplines those who He loves – He will bring pressure to bear to change the person... making them increasingly uncomfortable with their wrong doing.**
 - iv. It is not by accident that 6 of the 7 churches in Revelation are under some form of judgment. Then as now the church is not perfect – though the indwelling Spirit is perfect and the Bride that Christ is nurturing [the organism] is already perfect in God’s sight, though the institution of the church [the organization] is part of the fallen world state of being.**

4. **General Vote – on a believer committing child abuse, killing, or some other egregious sin – there are several theological positions to take:**
- a. **Extreme free grace – there are no theological or behavioral qualifications necessary for forgiveness – God has already forgiven us and no repentance necessary. 1-vote.**
 - b. **Free grace with repentance. 10 votes.**
 - c. **Qualified grace – no theological qualifications (don't necessarily need correct theology), but there is the necessity for moral conformance. Believers won't necessarily lose their salvation but they will enter heaven as through fire, and we don't know for sure if they really are saved. In this position grace works to limit depravity on both the theological and moral level – God would not allow one of His children to deny Him and murder another. 11 votes.**
 - d. **Grace-works in balance – perseverance of the faithful holds that one can lose their salvation. Thus if someone is truly regenerated and commits egregious wrong they can lose their salvation. 1 vote.**

B. Grace and Leadership

1. **Example of an affair between a pastor and music director – both are married. The pastor leads the congregation and the music director also leads women's ministry. What is the appropriate approach to address such serious moral/ethical failure?**
- a. **1st step is the rebuke by leadership – this probably excludes public proclamation in the body:**
 - i. **They know what they are doing is wrong.**
 - ii. **Rebuke from leadership puts them on notice that their sin has been exposed and something must change.**
 - b. **2nd step is to offer grace:**
 - i. **Goal must be for restoration – this honors God.**
 - ii. **The expectation is that repentance will result, and behavior will change.**
 - iii. **Friends need to take a supportive role, not to excuse or condemn. Too often the church is considered the only army that shoots the injured... this is a great sin as well.**
 - iv. **If repentance occurs – move along with restoration.**
 - c. **3rd step presuming no repentance or change – is formal rebuke – this involves a public proclamation within the body:**
 - i. **Some will say “I know this is the wrong thing but...”**
 - 1. **I can't help myself – personal struggle.**
 - 2. **I like it and I don't care – rebellion & defiance.**
 - ii. **Prayer & leadership in confrontational support...**
 - 1. **Can work with an honest and repentant heart to deal with the struggle.**

