



WHY LEAVE?: When Is It Time To Leave

We are asking the question

What Would Force You To Leave A Ministry?

The #1 reason is when Leadership Covers Up Of Sexual Immorality -- The purposeful refusal to deal with the sexual immorality of members, fellow pastors, administrators, faculty, or ministry staff .

I once asked a pastor, who did not dismiss from membership an admitted criminal pedophile, why he did not do that in the earliest days of that disclosure.

The question was not whether a year or more later, that individual could be welcomed back into the fellowship, when time may have proved that there was sincere repentance.

Rather, the question was . . .

why — when it was clearly known and understood that he engaged in criminal and sexually immoral activity — why he was not dismissed from membership

- ***until*** time proved genuine repentance
- until the passage of time allowed for proven patterns of change
- until the criminal prosecution revealed (whatever else may have been happening)
- until any other possible revelations had time to appear
- until appropriate and effective counseling established the extent of his actions, activity, and true repentance, and/or proper reconciliation could take place

why did you allow this to drag on as it did, without a clear decision to address it with removal from membership at its beginning?

why not take appropriate and meaningful church action, till there was unmistakable confidence in a sincere repentance — not human regret, sorrow, tears, embarrassment, or the obvious words of heartbreak and shame.

“What does it take to dismiss someone from the membership and fellowship of the local church. Would you discipline a member who had slapped around his wife?”

• “Yes — absolutely!”

• “Then why would you even hesitate to not address pedophilia? or even the issue of pornography — upfront — when it is clearly known and established?”

• We would take action when it came to being physically abusive to ones wife, but not when it comes to pedophile — with children — really pastor?!”

WHY?

You know what the answer is, don't you? After all the rationalization, justifications, circling around and back to the same arguments which I thought were addressed and negated — you know what the real and honest answer is — “RELATIONSHIPS.” [1]

The inability for leadership to hold fellow leaders accountable boils down to one word, “RELATIONSHIPS.” “Relationships” stops leaders, fellow leadership, and even church members from addressing all kinds of wrong-doing — sexual immorality, the abuse of power, self-serving ministry decisions, and more in ministries and in local churches. [1]

The Proof? The proof of an unwillingness to address sexual immorality can be found in the arguments, justifications, even actual references to friendship/relationship to the offended and/or the family, and the circling. around and around — and everything to support a terrible decision everything but . . .

“You know — we should have taken immediate action when it was admitted to and/or known at the very beginning!”

Refusing to deal with sexual immorality in the church, no less covering it up, no less covering it up repeatedly, should be the #1 reason you should consider moving onto a more genuine ministry, a ministry that does not operate on relationships. In such ministries, what action is taken, and what is allowed, depends on who you are — and be assured, it will be seen on others levels as well!

When you find out that pastors and church leaders hid [5], hide, or are presently shielding those who ought to be removed from the membership of the local church due to sexually immoral behavior — literally it is time to leave that ministry.

When you discover that there are those who are pastors, fellow pastors, teachers, deacons, leaders, administrators, who have been verifiably involved in sexually immoral behavior, but God's people have not been told about the situation and perhaps even of the danger — ASAP — it is literally time to leave that ministry.

The ~~argument~~ excuse used to explain the lack of action?? — their prophetic discerning abilities to know when someone, who has been engaged in sexually immoral behavior, is repentant — “I talked to them and talked to them several times, and they were truly repentant.” Such is a foolish confidence, at best, if not a willful blindness, and a dishonesty when their prophetic abilities have been wrong once and again.

To pronounce someone as “truly repentant” from the earliest days of awareness, and upon the evidence derived from one or more meetings with this-or-that individual, only reveals that this IS about relationships. It is about WHO you are.

Such individuals **may be** “repentant,” I don't know, **and no one else but God knows** either — not even the individual who has gotten into such immoral activity.

Time will reveal whether that is true repentance (and time may have already revealed it by a past mistaken evaluation of “They are truly repentant.” Sometimes, a second incident occurs, and then the “confident-prophetic-discerning-ability” is no longer so confident. And even then, some have the “courage” to attempt to cover it twice over.

At the moment that it is clear, the membership of a local church has the absolute and full right to know and be made aware of it in as sensitive, but accurate, truthful, transparent way as necessary. Using elusive and nuanced language as to what has taken place only deepens the darkness, leaves more questions, and leads to worse outcomes.

There is another option when pastors and leaders cover-up and conceal the sexual sins of those connected to “the church.”. Don’t leave!

Rather, seek the resignation of ALL the pastors and leaders who knew about it for months and never dismissed such individuals from the membership, and said and did nothing to alert God’s people about the issue.

Any reluctance to face and address issues of sexually immoral behavior, by church leaders, is inexcusable and it’s time to move on when your pastor and/or fellow leaders delay, cover, and/or conceal.

Covering, Containing, & Repackaging Information Is Part & Parcel Of Control.

The #1 Reason (Cont’d)

We are asking the questionWhat Would Force You To Leave A Ministry?

I use the word “force” because there are always a number of annoying factors that may well accompany any ministry. As it is often stated “There is no perfect church (or ministry).” [1]

Obviously, as previously stated, when “Leadership Covers Up Sexual Immorality,” it is time to leave that ministry. It is either time for you to leave, or for the members of leadership who were aware, to be asked to resign, when

- no appropriate disciplinary action is taken
- action is taken long past leaderships’ first awareness of the facts
- action is only taken when it is becoming a threat to one’s own position
- there a lack of will to take action because of WHO is involved
- there has been an attempt to cover or conceal the situation.

In recent days, the actions of John Ortberg (resigned from his church ministry), and Thomas White (remains as President and members of the board have therefore resigned) have been severely criticized because they put other believers at risk by their attempts to conceal and cover sexual immorality. Unfortunately, there are those in other ministries and churches which have not learned from their experiences. [2]

I myself have been subtly asked by ministry leaders to cover and conceal the confirmed sexually immoral behavior of others after having personally and directly spoken to them about it. I never make any promises when I speak to leadership about such issues — whether it be related to those in the pew, and yes — even in the pulpit. I refuse to support any attempt to avoid addressing such, or yielding to the subtle manipulation designed to cover and conceal

those who may be and/or are involved in everything from child molestation-to-adultery-to-pornography.

Unfortunately, while some pastors are willing to put their own reputation and even position on the line in order to cover for others, I refuse to support any attempt or subtle push to cover and conceal what should be and must be addressed in a clear and above-board manner by the church body. Typically, I ardently challenge them to take immediate action and call them out for not dealing with such issues immediately, upfront, honestly, transparently, and yes — sensitivity.

Periodically, I see the cracking-of-the-cover and revealing-of-concealment are already happening, and I just move away from such ministries. The revelational “wake,” which is coming up from behind, will wash away all involved — both the perpetrators and concealers — when it finally hits.

What usually happens when challenging leadership to take appropriate action is a lot of push back, weak-kneed arguments, a circling around to the same previous proffered arguments, relational arguments justifying the unwarranted delay, and/or a “loyalty-unwillingness” to take appropriate action. The result — God’s people end up having little to no idea of the situation and are left in the dark — and at times, are even left at risk.

I have also found it absolutely shocking that there are ministries, local churches, pastors, and/or leaders who are willing to invoke church discipline (Matthew 18) over what would not and should not be grounds for any such action, while at the same time willfully and purposefully choosing not to deal with what is unmistakably worthy of such action — the sexual immorality of fellow pastors, teachers, administrators, deacons, staff, or other church leaders.

“Grace,” “love,” “patience,” and “sensitivity” are the “virtue signaling words” of leadership when dealing with situations of immorality involving those who are “relationally” part of the in-group of ministry. Some people just quietly disappear from awareness; they are untouched by church discipline or membership removal (or may even still be on the membership rolls and/or may subtly and quietly be removed by the unilateral action of leadership only when serious questions begin to be asked).

But nothing said or done comes even close to addressing it by the step outlined in Matthew 18, that of addressing it by and as “the church.” That is reserved for others not as relationally connected or who have called-out the leadership about their wrong-doing.

In a not so quiet manner, when the leaders themselves are called-out by others for wrong-doing or as wrong-doers. Then a new series of words and wording are employed. Now the words used are — “sowing discord,” “unity,” “peace,” . . . because now leaderships’ actions, personal egos, and self-importance are involved. Now it is about their behavior, decisions, and/or possible violations of propriety or procedure. [\[LINK: Fruits of the Spirit\]](#)

When their wrong-doing is pointed out, then you will hear — “They — them there — *those members are sowing discord among the brethren!*”

- Even when the wrong-doing has been addressed with leadership personally and directly, but absolutely unsatisfactory to “those there “trouble-makers” who are sowing disunity.

- Even when sad and sorry answers are given and therefore the so-deemed “troubler” continues to refuse to sweep it all under the table and fall in line.

It is an unconscionable indictment of any ministry or church that willfully refuses to address validated sexually immoral behavior at the inception of its awareness. There is no way that any pastor has the discerning abilities to determine whether or not a person, who has engaged in sexually immoral behavior, has “repented” — without the passage of time, no less after the revelation and personal concealment of a prior incident.

Sexual immorality denies one of the right to be part of a church fellowship until a pattern of true repentance has been established — from the moment it is deemed true. Whatever that pattern is, it is not a pattern which can be discerned in the earliest days, weeks and months of its revelation. While Scripture argues that church action can be improperly prolonged (II Corinthians 2:7), that same Scripture clearly indicates that meaningful action has been and must be taken up front, and in such a way as to even be possibly faulted as being too long and now needing the due recognition of it now being true repentance. Such argues for the fact that the ability to detect true repentance involves time.

How often has it been said — and how many more times need the words be heard and repeated by spouses, families, members, and/or leadership

“I had no idea that he/she was involved with this-or-that . . . “

“I thought that was behind us/them, and now again “

“They were truly broken over it. They said and. . .”

“Could have fooled me.”

“Who knew? I am shocked!”

Scripture does not argue for allowing those who engage in vile, or publicly revealed, or repeated, or criminal, or unrepentant, or perverted sexual immorality to remain as a member of a local church fellowship. As most all well know, sexual immorality, like a few other addictions, has a drawing power far beyond many other sinful behaviors. And, the perpetrator’s ability and drive to cover it up is remarkable.

Those who believe that they have that unique prophetic discernment to detect true repentance, and therefore argue no action need be taken because they are repentant (or needed to be taken), are naive at best, or willfully disingenuous, or relational blinded, and/or blatantly dishonest power brokers – especially if or when they have covered it up once already.

Far worse — then some ministries weaponize Matthew 18 against those who seek to call out the wrong-doing of leadership on the grounds that one is “sowing discord.” [3] That is the “go-to” defense of those who seek to quiet, marginalize, squash, and/or remove those who call out wrong-doing and wrong-doers (I Kings 18:17-18) — “You are sowing discord! You are a troubler!” — when in fact, it is the wrong-doing and/or wrong-doers that are being confronted. [4]

Indeed . . . It is a broken system that allows such wrong-doing and wrong-doers to continue unaddressed, and those seeking to address wrong-doing and wrong-doers end up on the weaponized chopping block of Matthew 18.

**That only happens
when there is
a “broken, upside-down system”
in place.**

Indeed . . . It is a broken system that allows such wrong-doing and wrong-doers to continue unaddressed, and others are publicly pronounced to be “guilty” of a far less and so-claimed “trespass”, end up on the weaponized chopping block of Matthew 18.

**That only happens
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in place.**

The “Me-Too” movement may have faded into the background in our society, as those who were also guilty of sexual immorality decided that maybe this is not a really good issue to bring to the forefront any longer because it is beginning to touch them and their sins. But not so with “the church.”

Sexually immoral behavior by those in the ministry ought to be addressed by removal from membership as soon as it is verified, and a sincere openness to true repentance, reconciliation, and restoration can always follow.

Attempts to cover of it up by ministries, pastors, deacons, and church leaders is cause to leave that ministry, or to ask all the leaders who were involved in the cover and concealment to resign — just as immediately.



1. Be careful in allowing that argument to persuade you that there are no “good, better, best, and terrific” ministries or churches. The continuum of “no-perfect” runs from ugly – terrible – to got its glitches – to really pretty good – to terrific Don’t settle for ugly or terrible because there is “no perfect.”

2. CT (Christianity Today) just posted an interesting article on the resignation of John Ortberg. Over and over, we see the same pattern — The Inability Of Church Leadership To Hold Men Accountable.

As was said with the recent example involving Bill Hybels — Our church model for holding pastors accountable is repeatedly seen as unworkable and, in fact, broken. Relationships interfere with clear-mindedness and judgment.

“Once someone gains power in a broken system, then, they enter an elite subgroup within that system. Their fellow power-holders will do everything in their power to protect them. (This is why it was so important that Ortberg and Strobel spoke out against their former master Bill Hybels. It’d become perfectly safe to do so. He was radioactive by then, impossible to help or save.)

A broken system contains almost no provisions for reining in wrongdoers or removing them from power — because then all of these power-holders’ positions would land on the chopping block. None of the leaders in these systems really deserve to be there, and most of them behave in ways that would get them instantly removed from power in more functional systems. Not so, in broken systems.”

**Reject a leader's claimed prophetic discernment
as to whether a person was / is repentant
in order to excuse not having taken action,
when they actually lack the courage to take the appropriate action.
(especially when it comes to sexual sins)**

3. "Sowing Discord" must not be defined in such a way as to include "calling out" wrong-doing and wrong-doers at any level of power and position (I Kings 18:17-18 / Galatians 2:22 / Acts 15).

"Sowing Discord" must not be defined in such a way as to include "calling out" wrong-doing and wrong-doers directly and personally (Matthew 18:15-16; II Samuel 12:2ff).

"Sowing Discord" must not be defined in such a way as to include "calling out" wrong-doing and wrong-doers directly, personally, and with ardent and strident words of rebuke which hurt and wound (Proverbs 27:6).

"Sowing Discord" must not be defined in such a way as to include directly and personally engaging in passionate, unpleasant, extended, or painful argument (Proverbs 27:6; Acts 15).

"Sowing Discord" must not be defined in such a way as to include repeatedly, directly, and personally engaging in passionate argument with any and all members of leadership who resist doing the right thing, refuse to even listen to, address, and/or hear the truth of the matter.

"Sowing Discord" must not be defined in such a way as to include directly and personally rebuking, confronting, challenging, and/or correcting wrong-doers and wrong-doing, whatever their position.

Whatever "sowing discord" means, it does not mean that it can be used as a weapon, a means of retaliation, a club to silence those who have fair, honest, sincere, genuine, ardent, and strong differences and disagreements — as to not only what (policy decisions) was done, but also as to how it was and/or is being handled (people-handling issues).

4. Those who weaponize Matthew 18, use and/or twist a variety of passages in whatever ways necessary so that they can create another "Bible-bullet."

5. Sometimes you find out that it was "Hid" — By the time you find out and/or it is revealed, the argument of "no-action-there- was-repentance" is made . . .

"Well, they have "sincerely admitted their wrong-doing" and so we did not need to dismiss them from the church."

Yea— I guess so . . . NOW but that is because . . .

- it was allowed to continue for such a long period of time
- there was no will to address the matter from the onset (read the John Ortberg story).
- it was hidden all this time by leadership
- leaderships' purposefully put a positive spin on that which — "had-others-done" — would not have washed.

When it comes to sexual sin, those involved should have been removed from the membership

of the church when it was clearly known, regardless of a leader's claimed prophetic discernment as to whether this-or-that person was "Truly Repentant."

"We didn't do anything because I believed he/she was truly sorry and therefore I thought it was best not to recommend that he/she be removed from our membership rolls"

It Was Hidden: Time To Leave or Dismiss The Leaders Who Knew & Never Told God's People The Truth WHEN It Was Known and When Something Should Have Been Done!



The #2 Reason Is

When There Is A The Dangerous Concentration Of Power
– or –
Only The Appearance Of Congregational Church Government

It is time to leave when you are in a local church ministry, which has only the semblance, not the reality of congregational church government.

As stated

- I am not attempting to engage in the argument about what is typically called "elder rule." I understand the arguments, and it is fair to say that it is arguable -- by that I mean that there are legitimate and honest arguments which those who hold to elder rule, make. Because people disagree, does not mean that those who disagree are twisting the Scriptures, disingenuous, or worse yet -- heretical.
- I am committed to congregational government regardless of some of the inefficiencies and/or the hazards which accompany that form of church government. It is not as efficient, and the hazards are present and real.
- I am committed even though *I have experienced* some of those inefficiencies and hazards.

Who hasn't wanted to see an idea or proposal move along faster or better -
- without the time delays or transformation of what you thought was a good idea morphing into a far different creature.

Who hasn't experienced the sting of criticism or dissent when what you thought was a great, or at least a good idea, is being shot down out of the sky -- either at the leadership or the membership level, or both.

- I am committed because I value the input of as many voices, viewpoints, vantages, experiences, resources, possible unforeseen obstacles and difficulties, etc. as possible. As I often stated . . . We don't have to agree, but we all are expected to think as to why we are doing what we are doing.
- I am committed because the concentration of power and authority is a dangerous brew no matter where it exists among people of or in this world. Sinful, selfish, self-serving, or parochial thinking is part and parcel of our sin natures. In fact, the Scriptures state that even we do not grasp the level of our selfishness, self-serving attitudes, and sinful motivations -- "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" The answer is found in the next verse!

- I am committed to genuine congregational government because I can see what happens -- especially over time. Observation is a biblical and legitimate basis for determining behavior! [1] I see and continue to see what happens when power and authority are concentrated in a few, and worse yet, in a revolving body of a few. Unfortunately, most of the time, "the church" has no idea of what is actually taking place! If they knew – they would "**fire them all!**"

When you find out that there is

- only an artificial form of congregational government
- a wink-an-a-nod, but no real commitment to it
- a disregard for the input of the congregation
- a cycling and recycling of the same people in positions of leadership
- a disingenuous claim as seen by whom the leadership personally connects
- the covering and concealing of information -- or of wrong-doing-doers
- the covering and concealing of the budget items, the use or even misuse of funds

. . . . it is time to leave -- *really* -- *it is time to run!*

. . . . OR it is time to "*fire them all.*"

The Biblical Support For Congregational Church Governing

Congregational church government, the participation of "the church" in the general operation of their ministry is important for several biblical and obvious reasons

√ As it has been so accurately stated, "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. That maxim is biblical and in fact, it is foundational to the founding of America because the founders knew and understood that men are sinners. they understood that the crux of that sinfulness was selfishness, a self-serving heart and mind.-- men love themselves too much, and do not love their neighbor before and as much themselves.

√ The early church, as seen in the book of Acts and the epistles, made decisions corporately, and were called upon *as a body of believers* to maintain the purity, unity, and operation of the church.

– Acts 1:23-26 – "They" – "They" – "They"

– Acts 6:3-5 -- "And the saying pleased **the whole multitude**: and **they chose** Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch:"

– Acts 13:1-3 – “They” – “their”

– Acts 15:22 -- "Then pleased it the apostles and elders, **with the whole church**, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren:

– I Corinthians 5:4-13; II Corinthians 2:6-7, 7:11; and I Thessalonians 3:6-15 – Paul writes to and addresses the people, not to the pastors or deacons.

– Matthew 18 says, “the church” is the final groups that mediates a dispute or disagreement.

– Jude 3 – “**Beloved**, when I gave all diligence to write unto **you** of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort **you** that **ye** should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”
 (“You” plural in all cases).

Paul writes to the church regarding their responsibility for the preservation of church purity, specifically as it relates to issues of faith and practice. It is the seeming responsibility of the individual believes of the church.

– Jude 1 – “To **those** who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ” – Jude wrote his epistle to the members of the church, not to pastors or any other designated subgroup of the local church, about being aware of false teachers.

– It is the responsibility of every member of the church to oversee the unity of the church – 1 Corinthians 1:10; Romans 12:16; Ephesians 4:3; Philippians 1:27, not singularly the pastor(s), deacons, or other designated subgroup.

– The individual soul liberty and responsibility of the believer requires that they are party to the decisions made within their local church. they are called a royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9) who have access to the mind and will of God.

--The doctrine of the Trinity speaks against the power of any one individual or group of individuals as having the power to make unilateral decisions for the church.

Biblically, there is no individual or group of individuals which unilaterally made the operational and/or policy decisions on behalf of “the church.” A pastor may well cast and share his vision for a ministry, but the steps for implementing it, as

seen in the above passages, are presented to “the church.”

Again, I am not attempting to argue against “elder rule,” especially since, even with elder rule, the congregation is brought into matters, concerns, and issues as the body called by the Lord, “the church.” At the end, all realize that the congregation must make corporate decisions at some level and/or about many of the important issues which affect their local church ministry, fellowship, and finances.

√ Pastors do not and cannot make a lifetime commitment – “till death us do part” – to a ministry. Regardless of any intentions or stated promises, no such commitment can realistically be made since no one knows whether they are even going to finish out today.

The members of “the church” are the one who are employed, residing, raising their families, and participating in the activities of their local communities, and who must “live with” the decisions which are made by this-or-that pastor or leader, long after he is gone.

After the pastor moves to another ministry or ceases being their pastor, the church faces the implications and the fulfillment of the decisions which have been made under his leadership. They ought at least have a meaningful say as to how their church will operate, and be a testimony in that community.

√ The office of deacon is very restricted, biblically. Whether it be defined by Acts 6 where the office is first introduced, or Philippians 1:1 where they are but mentioned, or in Titus and Timothy, where the qualifications for being a deacon are stated, nothing more than that of being a servant (waiting on tables) concerning the menial, secular, but necessary activities of the church is authorized.

Too expand that role to include making official decisions, engaging in spiritual oversight, participating in church discipline, being spiritual counselors to a pastor, choosing, recommending, or nominating a pastoral candidate or other church officials, making financial decisions on behalf of the congregation, etc can be argued, but nowhere is there biblical support for any such activity. Whether it be a “board of deacons,” an established church committee, or any other selected group of individuals, they have no biblical authority over the will of “the church.”

Walk away from a church which operates on the premise that there is a select group of people, whether it be a group of pastors and/or deacons, who believe that they have – and/or worse yet – that they alone have the right and responsibility to

make decisions for the congregation, without providing time for an appropriate presentation and discussion of all the facts and details needed to make a godly and good decision. Walk away

- When church business meetings are seen as just a necessary hurdle to reach the goal of one's personal agenda.
- When having a church meeting is only what must take place to appropriately authorized an action, but the historic pattern is that of discouraged actual participation.
- When asking the church to meet only means that a decision will be announced, and which few have much of a clue as to what this-or-that was really all about.

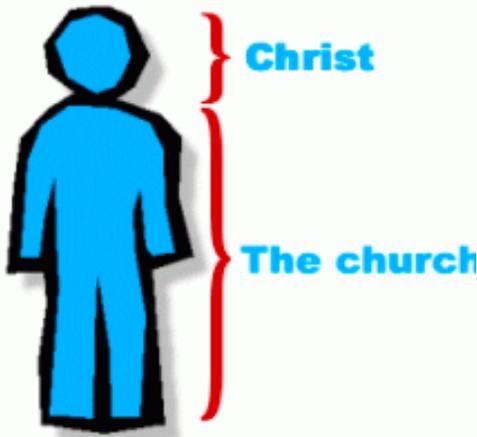
Walk away from a local church ministry, which believes that a small group of individuals have the power to decide as to who can and should be part of the membership, without the approval of the church. While most would heartily agree with the right of "the church" to decided on its own membership, few may realize that *the unilateral action of pastors and/or deacons to dismiss individuals from membership negates that right*. You vote in, but they, without your consent or understanding, "vote out."

When any select group of individuals has the right to "unilaterally" remove people from membership, and merely to announce their removal, the congregation -- "the church" -- has lost control of who is and who is not part of their fellowship. They have actually lost control of far more than that.

Walk away (Even think about running) from a church which has . . .

- pastors and/or deacons who think it is their church, or
- deacons who believe that they are there for the protection of the pastor and not for being a servant to members of "the church," or
- a pastor who thinks the deacons are 'his deacons,' or
- pastors and deacons who believe that they have the power to make decisions which affect "the church" short-range and even long-range, or
- leaders who subtly threaten action if they are called out for biblical wrongdoing or as wrong-doers.

How Can You Detect The Genuine?



We left off with the question . . .

How To Know If Your Church Is Built On Congregational Rule!

Is there a way to discern whether or not you are part of a church which is actually governed by congregational church rule?

Is there a way to easily recognize if you are, or are not, part of such a church which operates by and values congregational government?"

Yes, there is, and it isn't very difficult, but it takes a serious interest in and reading of that ministry's statement of faith, by-laws, and/or the church constitution states. The statement of faith, by-laws, and/or constitution will reveal (or in some cases, blow-the-whistle) where the authority of action and decision making resides!

The church constitution, by-laws, and/or statement of faith will not only reflect the operation of the church today, but may also be reflective of the various areas of ministry struggled in the past. What has doctrinally, positionally, and/or operationally been changed over the years?

The constitutional changes are indicators of what problems the ministry struggled with over the history of the church, whether there has been a moving of authority away from "the church," and/or how leadership has sought to resolve and control relational issues.

- Some of those changes were indeed necessary because of changing culture laws, and societal norms. There was a need to clarify issues and/or to legally protect the ministry[1]
- Other changes were necessary because there was a lack of clarity or specifics. Over time, the wording of a particular provision was confusing and it lead to difficulties when seeking to follow its wording. [2]
- However, some changes which have been made or proposed are changes designed to shift power from the congregation, to leadership, to move and morph the church from congregational rule, to a hybrid at best, if not elder rule in its practical essence.
- Some changes may reflect a move away from holding leadership, pastors, deacons, administration, or staff being accountable to "the church." To create a church governance which is more reflective of a rotation of leadership, and/or a consolidation of authority, and/or a weakening of accountability.

It would be an interesting endeavor to obtain a copy of the original church constitution, or various iterations of it, and compare its present iteration.

- Some changes in the by-law or constitution will reveal a desire by leadership to circumvent or dodge the challenges, difficulties, or problems which accompany the financial, operational, and relational currents which are just part and parcel of church ministry.
- Perhaps, a past financial difficulty has resulted in a change to the constitution. Now, the constitution states that there is no need for “church” approval of this-or-that expenditure. The pastor(s) and/or deacons can approve it unilaterally.
- It may be a change instituted by a previous or present pastor who wanted more control of the selection of deacons, and they must approve the final list of nominees.
- It may be a past relational difficulty, and a constitutional change now allows the lead pastor more authority over employ – They now have the sole power to who hire and/or fire.
- It may be a change in the statement of faith. For instance, more and more present-day statements of faith are very general and broad – i.e. “We believe in the return of the Lord for His people, and the establishment of His Kingdom.”[3] Or a change to the statement of faith may be a change which subtly redefines “the church” – as to its membership, structure, authority, operation, etc.

Nevertheless, regardless of those revelatory historical changes which can be observed by looking at the iterations of by-laws, statement of faith, or constitution, the present church constitution will reveal where the authority and power are located – leaning towards the congregation or being morphed and/or confiscated by the pastors and leadership.

What would and should you look for as you read the church statement of faith, by-laws, or constitution?

• What changes are there to the statement of faith?

As stated, some changes are due to a desire to provide more clarity. However, there are other changes which are designed to provide less clarity and more latitude. The more general the statement, the more it can be used, and too often it is used, to support, argue, explain, promote, or defend what is being done operationally, financially, or relationally.

• How is a pastor voted into the position of Sr./Lead pastor?

With most ministries, it takes a two-thirds or three-quarters vote of the membership. However, does that vote require a significant quorum of voting members? Do you really want three-quarters of a 20% quorum to be the basis for selecting a pastor?

- **Who forms the search committee to search for a pastoral candidate?**

Is the search committee well-balanced towards the congregation and inclusive of young and old, men and women [4], new and old members? Or is the search committee primarily or solely those holding or having held church offices.

- **What is the relationship between the pastor and those on the pastoral staff?**

Does the lead pastor view his fellow pastors as “his staff,” just as some pastors consider the deacons “his deacons,” or the church “his church.”

While there is a hierarchy of position, all of the pastors were called by “the church” and are employed by “the church,” by the will of “the church” that called them to that local church ministry. They are the pastors and servants of “the church.”

There should not be a demeaning of the vital role of other pastors who bring a different and need vantage on ministry. A fear by other fellow pastors as to their employ and continuance on “the church” staff subtly communicated by the Sr. or Lead pastor is a brew for power-driven leadership. A lack of genuine appreciation and input of the other pastors is a warning sign.

Such an attitude can be seen in subtle ways constitutionally. For instance, can a lead pastor summarily dismiss a fellow pastor, can he fire a fellow pastor and/or with the agreement of the deacons, or does it take a church business meeting and vote to make that decision?

If a Sr./Lead pastor can remove a fellow pastor (or most anyone) without going to the church and/or without providing an explanation and/or without seeking a vote by “the church,” you well understand where the authority and control of the church resides.

Something is broken and wrong when it takes a vote to call a pastor(s), or to vote in a church member, or to vote on the financial support for a missionary –but any one of them can be dismissed with little-to-no appropriate discussion with and by “the church,” only, or not even, informing of “the church” as to what and why, and at times even no church vote – just decreed! This is how twisted authority and power leads to a dysfunctional ministry. [5]

- **Who has the authority to nominate and/or select the various officers of the church?**

Is there a nominating committee of the church who nominates the leadership and officers of the church? If not, and the pastor(s), and/or any other selected sub-group of leaders take on that task, then you well understand where the authority and control of the church resides.

If there is a nominating committee, does the membership of that committee lean toward the congregation or towards those already in leadership?

Can someone nominate others to the office of deacon, from the floor, during the annual business meeting [6]?

During my years in the ministry, while we had a nominating committee which included “members at large” – “at large” were those who were not in any official position – anyone else could still be nominated from the floor as long as they were asked prior to the meeting. That permitted “the church” congregation the right (and it is their right) to nominate someone who even the nominating committee did not include on the ballot. [7]

What is not healthy, and clearly reveals where the authority of congregational government lies, is when

- the pastor(s), or
- deacons, or
- pastor(s) and deacons, or
- any sub or selected group not subject to congregational input
- or ultimately and actually only the pastor

. . . . have control of who the officers of the church are (and are not!).

When that is the situation, you well understand where the authority and control of the church resides. It is not with the congregation no matter what declared church polity is in place; it is not congregational rule!

And it is worse than elder rule, where in that form of government, at least the elders are virtually considered co-equals in leadership.

• **How is church discipline handled?**

This point has been extensively developed in a previous series of posts ([PDF Link](#)). Briefly, let me make the point that something is terribly broken when “the church” has the right and authority to vote who will be a part of their fellowship, but have no right or opportunity to vote them. Such is the result of the abuse of Matthew 18 when it is used as a weapon to intimidate, threaten, and retaliate.

• **How transparent is the handling of salaries and monies within the church?**

It is a dangerous and lethal brew when anyone, or group, outside of a heavily weighted congregational committee to have the say, or right of recommendation concerning salaries.

For the congregation merely to be presented with the final decision, or to not even know what the salaries are or how monies are specifically spent, is a clear indicator of whether you are in a church which is genuinely congregational rule. Presenting the congregation with a broad and very general picture of the use of monies and pastoral salaries and benefits (the nature of and the cost of health insurance, any allowances, travel reimbursements, and vacation) is a recipe for moving power from the church to those in an official position.

Is an audit conducted, internally or professionally? Is there a report to the church as to the results of such an audit?

• **What are the stated constitutional regulations concerning a variety or areas!**

- √ What are the provisions regarding congregational meetings?
- √ How are constitutional changes proposed and made? [8]
- √ What is the stated process for church discipline?
- √ What are the requirements for calling and for being designated as a “pastor”?
- √ How are deacons selected and determined?
- √ What are the limitations imposed on church office holders?
- √ What is the quorum for a business meeting to take place?
- √ Who can call a church business meeting? [9]
- √ How can wrong-doing of the deacons and/or pastor(s) be addressed?
- √ How can an item be placed on the church’s business meeting agenda?
- √ Who decides the salary of the pastor(s)?
- √ Who elects the chairman/vice-chairman of the board of deacons?
- √ Who presides during church business meetings?
- √ What “rules” are followed in the conducting of business meetings? [10]
- √ What is the role of the deacons and other church officers?
- √ When is the financial report communicated and how such detail is provided?
- √ Is there a procedure for “the church” to remove a pastor?
- √ Is there a procedure for “the church” to raise one of the pastors to a higher position?
- √ Is there a procedure for “the church” to decide if one of the pastors should be or is qualified to change how he serves in the ministry?

AND and are the policies and procedures *followed*?

The process of fairness and equity, require policies and procedures which are in place and that are consistently followed. When you do not have clear policies and procedures, and when a church does not follow those clearly stated policies and procedures, the result is randomness at best, and “it-depends-who-you-are” at its worse. Policies and procedures provide equity!



Yes, there are ways to detect whether there is genuine congregational church government. The church constitution is an accurate reflection of whether or not the authority of the church leans to the membership or the leadership.

A weighty leaning towards the membership is not a hindrance to leadership, but it is by

design a strengthening of leadership. Leadership which operates by an informed and consciously supportive membership is a leadership which is then given has clear mandate to follow through on the vision, decisions, procedures, policies, and actions they know about and have purposefully chosen to support.

Without that knowledge and understanding, passivity, uncertainty, confusion, justified dissent, and/or disunity is in the wings waiting to show up on stage and when problems arise.

- “Who decided that?”
- “How many weeks of vacation does the pastor have?”
- “Why did we not hear about that decision until now?”
- “When was that missionary dropped from support?”
- “Why weren’t we told about that until months later?”
- “How much is he pastor paid – compared to the other pastors?”
- “Whatever happened to . . . ?”
- “How come we are not or no longer supporting them?”
- “I thought it was announced that . . . and now”

One can operate in the “fantasy world” which too-often forms a bubble around pastors and/or those in leadership. They can choose to believe that these kinds of questions are not entertained and/or asked by the congregation, by those who pay the bills for the support of this-or-that ministry, by “the church” which has a full right to know if they are so inclined or interested.

Leadership, which desires an open and transparent form of congregational government, which

- genuinely allows and encourages questions, second questions
- is sincerely open to dialogue, privately and publicly
- is not protective and reactive in its demeanor or actions at a business meeting
- does not retaliate against those who dissent and/or disagree
- is willing to put off decisions so that more can participate
- follows the stated constitutional policies for a congregational mtg.
- is consistent in its operation from meeting to meeting
- rightfully informs “the church” about what they have a right to know
- does not run over the right and the will of “the church” to make decisions
- does not exert his will over God’s people

. . . . will find that they have the support and a mandate to lead that ministry.

“Neither as being *lords over God's heritage*,
but being ensamples to the flock.”



1. Examples: changes in the constitution concerning discrimination, sex and sexual morality, drugs-alcohol- marijuana, due process, divorce, etc.

2. “When it says “alcohol” or “drugs” does that include, mean”

or

“Does “dance” mean sexually exciting dance, or does it include ice skating, cheerleading, classical, father-bride?”

3. For Example: Whether the church believes in a pre-tribulational rapture, the gift of tongues, baptism by immersion only, an eternal Hell, etc. are less and less clear among American churches today.

4. “Women,” because a pastor and his wife, and/or their family have a significant ministry to all members of the church. Because “women” have a vital vantage and insight into a potential pastor’s marriage and family.

5. I say “dysfunctional” because that is what happens over time when any one (or group of individuals) has, slowly obtains, or assumes powers or authority which is not his, but resides in “the church.”

6. Typically, officers of the church are elected at the annual meeting.

7. We only required that they are asked ahead of the meeting so that it might be known to them, so that they could be there to accept, and so that they were able to tell the person who wanted to nominate them that he had already been asked by the nominating committee and turned it down.

8. Again, is there a heavily weighted congregational committee behind constitutional changes.

9. Again, can the congregation or an established number of members, request the convening of a church business meeting? Typically, church constitutions will require that at least 10 members be allowed to call for a church business meeting. That number probably comes from the fact that it took 10 people to allow for a synagogue meeting. You know where the authority leans when the congregation has no power or right to call a business meeting.

10. Typically, Robert’s Rules Of Order are the standard.