

# Ministerial Restoration Policy

## Introduction

We all understand that no matter how hard we try to live a holy life, we all sin and fall short of the lifestyle that God desires us to live. Leaders in the Body of Christ also sin, and when a leader sins, especially if it is an egregious sin, there can be grave consequences for themselves and the congregation. God has directed the Church to make sure that the leaders who guide them have exemplary character, and it is also important to have proper guidance on how a person should be restored if they fall.

Often, religious organizations are guilty of failing to openly and honestly address the weaknesses of their leadership. This Ministerial Restoration Policy addresses why it is important that if a leader sins, the situation is dealt with honestly and lovingly, and that restoration to a position of authority in the organization only occur when the appropriate restoration process is followed. It is our desire that adherence to this policy will result in the greatest opportunity for God's blessing for all His people, which includes both the faith community and its leaders.

## Leaders are Held to a Higher Standard

God has made it very clear that Christian leaders, which include all elders and overseers, must be people of exemplary character. God provides very specific details about the character traits and qualifications that all leaders must possess. These qualifications include: being above reproach, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money, a good manager of the family with obedient children, not a recent convert, and having a good reputation with people outside his group (this list is adapted from 1 Timothy 3:3-7, and more requirements are in 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:6-10).

Admittedly, these are high standards, which is why God says leadership is a "noble task" (1 Timothy 3:1). The word "noble" is translated from the Greek word "*kalos*" which means "commendable" or "admirable." It is a noble task to be a leader, and Jesus said we should pray to God that there would be leaders; workers in the harvest (Matthew 9:38). However, not everyone who has the desire to lead has the right temperament or is qualified to lead. Elders and overseers are charged with the care of God's most precious possession, His people. Every leader must understand that when it comes to the care of God's people, much will be required from them. Jesus made this very clear:

### **Luke 12:48b**

From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

There is burden of trust that accompanies leadership roles, which is why God clearly establishes higher standards of character for those who serve as overseers and elders. As a blessing and incentive for leaders, along with the burdens of leadership come rewards.

### **1 Timothy 5:17**

The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.

### **1 Peter 5:4**

And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you [leaders] will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

It is truly admirable whenever anyone desires to serve God's people, and it behooves us to prepare them so they serve with the heart of the Chief Shepherd.

### **Leadership Vulnerabilities**

There are a number of things that make leaders vulnerable to sin. First, sometimes people, including leaders themselves, tend to forget that those in leadership positions are not any less vulnerable to sin than the rest of God's people. Placing leaders on a "holy pedestal" sets them up for pride and a potential fall. It is a serious mistake to think that leaders in the Church walk on a higher spiritual plane than the rest of the church membership. Often, one of the unintended consequences of that kind of thinking is that if a leader does sin, his or her actions are not properly addressed.

Another issue is the way that many people become leaders in the first place. Leaders tend to be people who have a desire to see something done for God, and have the energy and commitment to make it happen. Much less common is the leader who has first worked on his or her character to the point of being qualified according to Timothy and Titus, and then seeks a leadership position. Satan is crafty and patient, and will exploit the leader's personal vulnerabilities and weaknesses. We must work to ensure that the Church helps, supports, and disciplines leaders so that they, and the congregation, grow and flourish.

### **The Church Must Deal with Leadership Problems**

There has always been a need for there to be leaders in society, and the Church is no different. There is a need for leaders in the Church, and God, in His grace and mercy, has provided men and women who are naturally equipped to lead others. Leaders with whom most of the Church is familiar include apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, and evangelists, but these are not the only leaders in the Church. God has provided an assortment of gifts and callings beyond the "equipping ministries" who provide a variety of service in various eldership and oversight roles.

There are many different reasons why a leader's sin may not be addressed and dealt with. Sometimes people act as if by ignoring the transgressions, the offender and the situation will become better on their own. Thus, "hopefully," the offender will learn from his or her mistakes, and the situation will return to "normal" again. People also resist having their leader-idol torn down because it makes them feel more vulnerable and helpless, believing that if someone as dedicated as the leader sinned, then they do not stand a chance of living a holy life. Or they may be afraid to confront and discipline the leader because of fear that he or she might leave, causing them to be lacking spiritual oversight.

Whatever the motive, failure to properly address the situation when a leader sins has a number of unintended consequences, one of which is that in almost every case there is more sin. God said that when leaders sin and are confronted, then other leaders learn.

**1 Timothy 5:20**

Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning.

If Church members, especially other leaders, do not have the goodness and courage to confront a leader about the sin in his or her life, there will be more sin in the Church. Sin is always caustic, and if it is not dealt with properly in ministry leadership it creates an environment that breeds spiritual disease and lethargy. Unchecked sin in the Church, especially when people know about it, always results in a loss of the blessings of God. Ministerial sin also devastates people's lives, and negatively impacts the whole faith community. Finally, we must acknowledge that when we do not deal properly with sin in the ranks of leadership, Christianity once again receives a black eye in the minds of those yet to be won for Christ.

**Grace versus Righteousness**

It is proper to recognize that we are not "saved by works" but by God's wonderful gift of grace. Our salvation is something no one deserves nor can it be earned; it is a free gift of grace to all who call on the name of the Lord. There is much emphasis on grace in the New Testament, and so when a leader sins the temptation exists that some people may expect that the leader "be given grace," and his or her sin be overlooked or dealt with by simply accepting an apology.

The Apostle Paul understood that some people would begin to relate improperly to the concept of salvation by grace, which is why he wrote the Romans and reminded them that we are never to use grace as an excuse for sin.

**Romans 6:1-2**

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?

Grace is not an excuse for sin, and it has never been the solution for hardheartedness or lack of godly character. When we improperly relate to grace we see it as a "quick fix" for sin, which it is not. If it were, God, who is much more loving than we are, would have extended grace many times when the Bible makes it clear that He did not. God knows that man has free will, and changing the heart and developing godly character takes time. It would be wonderful if a person's true character was always visible to the Church, but many character flaws only show up under pressure, or in the "right" circumstances. The Word of God acknowledges this:

**1 Timothy 5:24 (New Living Testament)**

Remember, the sins of some people are obvious, leading them to certain judgment. But there are others whose sins will not be revealed until later.

We take great care to not promote into leadership those people who have obvious sins, but history is full of men and women whose sins were not revealed until after they experienced the successes and pressures of leadership. When sin appears in a person's life, it is indicative of a character flaw and a need for a change of heart. That is one reason why God does not deal with leadership sin "by giving grace," but through righteousness. God is righteous, which means that He upholds the standards that He has set. Psalms tells us that righteousness and justice are the foundations of His throne (Psalm 89:14) and from God's righteousness flow His rewards when we act uprightly, or correction and discipline when we do not.

The wise Christian knows that we serve a holy and righteous God, and His righteousness requires that there be consequences for sin. In part, it is fear of those consequences that keeps Christians, and Christian leaders, walking on the path of obedience and being diligent not to stray. If Church congregations subvert the process of righteousness, character development, and heart change by giving quick grace, then leaders will not change, individuals will continue to be hurt, and the congregation will suffer. When a leader sins, his or her heart and character must be changed and the trust of the congregation must be rebuilt, all of which take time.

### **Rebuilding the Trust**

Trust is the economy upon which all godly relationships are based. Spirit & Truth Fellowship invests the highest level of organizational trust in those who serve in leadership, and the community must be able to trust its overseers and elders. In essence, overseers and elders represent Christ to the people they serve.

Whenever elders or overseers sin, it affects them, those they serve, and the ministry at large. In cases of grievous sin, the trust in the relationship is damaged to the point that the leader must step back from serving as an elder or overseer. There are even times when a leader sins in a way that it disqualifies him or her from ministry.

There are many reasons why it is important that the leader step away from leadership responsibilities. For one thing, the leader needs to receive the spiritual care required for his or her healing. Redemption and restoration are almost always possible, but only when it is done on the basis of genuine healing, which involves much hard work and time for character building. Also, it takes time to rebuild trust and reconcile relationships that have been strained or broken. In some cases, while forgiveness is needed, reconciling friendships is not possible or wise, and in those cases people need time to figure out how to move ahead with their lives. Also, the trust of the congregation as a whole needs to be rebuilt, which also takes time. Furthermore, there needs to be time to assess if restoration to a former group or position is wise or godly, and perhaps the fallen leader needs to move on to a different field of responsibility.

### **Five Phases of Restoration**

We believe that genuine and lasting healing requires a process. God has given us a variety of ways to deal with our temptations. One way is to confess our thoughts and sins

to others, seeking out help as we find people in the Body of Christ who will help us bear our burdens.

**James 5:16a**

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.

**Galatians 6:2**

“Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

When overseers and elders sin egregiously, God tells us it is not because of a one-time temptation. The nature of sin, especially egregious sin, is that it develops over time. It is conceived, nurtured, fostered, and then, because it was never properly dealt with, birthed.

**James 1:14-15**

(14) But each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.

(15) Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”

People are prone to repeat their sin unless they deal with the underlying issues that are allowing it to take root and germinate. We must deal with the issues of our heart to stop the cycle of sin. In the same way that we would not expect an arrow-wound to heal without first removing the arrow, we cannot expect to stop repetitive sin without healing the heart cause. The root cause of sin must be discovered and removed and then the individual can genuinely heal.

## **Ministerial Restoration Process**

We of Spirit & Truth Fellowship International will adhere to the following process because we believe it will afford ministers who sin the greatest opportunity for restoration. In the case of grievous sin, each stage cannot be accomplished in a period of days, weeks, or months. Rather, this process could be thought of as a multi-year plan, many of the phases often taking a year or more to accomplish. Depending on the kind and severity of the sin, the individual may be removed from ministerial duties and responsibilities.

### **Phase One: Recognition and Repentance**

The beginning of all restoration must start with a person's recognition of his or her sinful behavior followed by deeply felt sorrow for the action and the harm it has caused. In this stage a person realizes both the wrong and the harm he or she has committed against God and others. The effect of our sin generally involves those we have directly transgressed against in addition to spouses, family, peers, or others we may be responsible for. Genuine repentance therefore also incorporates the acknowledgment of our sin and the desire to make things right again. This will involve seeking forgiveness and a resolve to do what is necessary to insure wrongdoing does not continue.

### **Phase Two: Discovery and Removal**

The transgressions are the result of a root cause, which must be revealed, and then the necessary work done to eradicate it. Experience indicates that many times multiple causes can be present, not just one, and it often takes time to discover them. If the root cause is not ascertained, the person is likely to repeat the behavior in the future. This phase often involves professional counseling, especially when pastoral sexual abuse, narcissism, or other personality disorders are present.

### **Phase Three: Healing**

Phase Three may sound similar to Phase Two since both occur in a similar fashion and generally in close association with one other. In Phase Two the focus is on discovery, whereas in this phase the focus is on healing. Once the root cause is discovered, additional time is then required for the wound to heal. I may know what I do and even why I do it, but in this phase I work on interrupting the behavior. For instance, a person knows they have a problem with anger, and they discover it is related to having an abusive father, but their knowledge does not mean they will stop acting out with anger. To do that, they must learn alternate ways to handle their anger without acting out abusively. This phase also likely involves the help of professional counseling, pastoral care and even perhaps medical intervention and the use of medications. The individual should continue to be monitored by the ministry with progress checks occurring and care extended to assist them in their healing.

### **Phase Four: Observation and Testing**

When we are physically injured, say with a broken leg, we need to slowly walk and test the leg to rebuild its strength. In a similar way, we need to allow people time to move among the community as we observe their behavior. Care should be taken to not “dangle the carrot” of restoration in front of the person, nor should they be given any significant responsibilities. This is a time for them to serve and volunteer as they rebuild trust and reconcile relationships.

### **Phase Five: Growing in Responsibilities**

At this stage the individual should be slowly integrated back into ministry, preferably by working closely with mentoring and accountability relationships. He or she should be assigned a peer group that can support them as they slowly step back into the weighty load of leadership.

## **In Conclusion**

The goal of this Restoration Policy is to provide a framework that functions to protect the people that ministers serve, as well as to provide the minister the greatest opportunity for redemption.

The amount of time it takes for restoration to occur will vary in each instance, depending on the type of offense committed and the posture of the offender’s heart. The bottom line of all restoration is dependent on the healing of the perpetrator and the needs of the victim. We must recognize that some sins are so egregious that they result in such a large

breach of trust that restoration to a position of leadership or ministerial position will be rare.

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## Let Us Give Grace

There is no question that grace is a huge part of the New Testament Church. Reading through verses that have “grace” shows us that we are all saved by grace, our individual gifts and ministries are by grace, the blessings of God to us are by grace, at times there was “great grace” upon people, (Acts 4:33), and much more. Furthermore, it is grace when we ask for, and receive, forgiveness for our sins. However, it is important that before we assume that grace be given to someone in the form of forgiveness, we must understand grace more fully.

Grace is conditional. God does not give it equally to all people, which is one of the things that makes it “grace.” For example, God gives grace to people who are humble, but does not give it to people who are proud (1 Pet. 5:5). Also, the grace that God gives in forgiving sins is always effective in the spiritual world, but only sometimes removes the consequences of the sin here on earth. For example, a person who gets drunk, yet drives his car anyway and kills another person may be very sorry and ask forgiveness of God, who immediately forgives in the spiritual realm, but that person still faces consequences in the physical world.

To keep God’s blessings flowing in the Church and to protect the congregation, the Church should be very cautious about “giving grace” to a leader who has sinned. There is a reason God demands that leaders have high standards, and if they do not, then they must be removed from leadership. While this may be viewed as a “punishment,” it should more properly be viewed as simply assuring that leaders have the proper qualifications while in positions of authority.

We must make no mistake: a leader, like everyone else, often sins because of a weakness in his or her character. “Giving grace” to such a person in the form of overlooking the sin often does not help the situation because there is no positive growth in his or her character. The sin will reoccur, and more people will be hurt. Furthermore, the other leaders and the congregation never grow in their fear of God.

The Bible has many examples of leaders sinning and God not extending grace to them. For example, God did not extend grace to Adam and Eve when they sinned in Eden, but expelled them. Nor did He extend grace to Moses when he sinned and disobeyed God, hitting the rock with his staff (Numbers 20:7-12), nor to King Saul when he sinned concerning Agag (1 Samuel 15:12-28). He also did not prevent negative consequences for David when he had sex with Bathsheba; the child died and his kingdom suffered.

Also, on another occasion David took a census of Israel against God's command. In spite of his pleas, there were serious consequences for his sin (1 Samuel 24:1ff; 1 Chronicles 21:1ff). These examples could be multiplied, but what makes them important for this study is that in each case we can be sure that the leader involved asked for forgiveness. In contrast, the Apostle Paul received grace even though he had killed Christians, but he did it ignorantly, and while still an unbeliever (1 Timothy 1:13).

In conclusion, if the people of God are to be imitators of God (Ephesians 5:1), we must not extend grace and forgiveness to a leader who sins just because he or she asks for forgiveness or feels badly about the situation. Neither is it right or godly to extend grace because we are afraid no one else will rise up and replace the leader, or because we personally like the leader, or even because we do not want the emotional pain that always accompanies confronting and disciplining a leader. Justice, not grace, is always God's first response to sin, which is why no one is saved without coming to Jesus. If grace is extended to a leader who has sinned, Church leaders and congregations are to extend it only after much prayer and wise counsel, and only to the degree they feel genuinely led by God to do so.