

The Wright Report

Why does God Allow Pastors to Fall?

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Yesterday I looked at the questions: [What does it mean to be “disqualified” and how does a pastor find himself there?](#) Today I want to look at the question: Why does God allow pastors to fall?

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When a pastor falls morally, it has an outsized effect on his congregation. There is an uncommon bond between a pastor and his flock. If the gospel is the most important news in the world, and if the gospel transforms a person’s life from the inside out, then it makes sense that people would develop a spiritual relationship with those who minister the word of God to them.

This uncommon union is helpful—it shows the joys of following Christ and experiencing the ordinary means of grace. In fact, it is even commanded in the New Testament. The Hebrews are commanded to consider the outcome of their leader’s faith, and emulate it (Hebrews 13:7). Paul tells us that we are to share “all good things” with the ones who teach us the word of God (Galatians 6:6). This sharing produces a spiritual communion and bond.

When that bond is violated, it can have solemn and sorrowful effects on Christian’s lives. When a pastor falls morally it makes Christians wonder, “If he can’t hold on to his faith, can anyone?” It makes people reluctant to believe that any Christian leader is genuine.

With all of those negative effects, I have heard people ask, “Why would God allow a pastor to fall?” This is a reasonable question, given the spiritual pain such a fall can cause.

But if we step back for a second, there are answers. Here are four of them:

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GOD ALLOWS PASTORS TO FALL TO PURIFY THE CHURCH

Obviously, the integrity of church leaders validate the transforming power of the gospel. This is why there are elder qualifications. When a leader is unqualified but hiding it, it rots the church from the inside out. A disqualified leader functioning in ministry is like a termite-ridden tree. From the outside, it looks healthy, but the inside is being eroded, and eventually it will fall. When the Lord exposes a pastor's secret sin, it purifies the church—and like sanctification in general, it purifies the church from the inside out.

Thus, this kind of exposure can be compared to pruning. It may be painful for a moment, but it produces growth. This was the model in Acts 5, when Ananias' and Saphira's exposure provoked commotion in the community (Acts 5:11-13). Yet after that pruning, the church experienced tremendous growth (Acts 5:14).

The church I pastor is a testimony to this. Early in our church history, the Senior Pastor was disciplined out of the church. Of course that caused a rift, and many people left the church. But those that remained were like-minded and committed to building a church that follows the biblical pattern of public discipline while upholding the qualifications for elders. This year our church celebrates its 60th anniversary, and the elder's courage forty years ago is one of the tools the Lord used to grant our church health and longevity.

GOD ALLOWS PASTORS TO FALL TO PROVOKE SELF-EXAMINATION

This is perhaps the main blessing of a fallen pastor. Paul tells Timothy to not admit a charge against an elder except those that can be confirmed, but if they can be confirmed, the pastor is supposed to be "rebuked in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear" (1 Timothy 5:19-20).

When you hear of a fallen pastor it is natural to immediately examine yourself. Pray Agur's prayer, "Lord, remove falsehood and lying far from me" (Proverbs 30:7-8). After at least three letters, this is Paul's closing argument to the Corinthians: "Examine yourselves to see if you are in the faith" (2 Corinthians 13:5). His larger argument in chapter 13 is that if they are convinced Paul is disqualified (which he wasn't, but for the sake of argument), then at least used his supposed failure to provoke themselves to self-examination (2 Corinthians 13:7-9).

If a pastor who leads a church of 1,000 members disqualifies himself, and his congregation turns to self-examination, how many marriages might be saved? How many sins confessed? How many families rescued from destructive behavior? The truth is, the Lord uses these events to sanctify and purify the church.

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GOD ALLOWS PASTORS TO FALL TO REMIND US WHOSE CHURCH IT IS

The Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008 (sometimes referred to as TARP) defines a business as “too big to fail” if that business’ failure would cause “disastrous” effects on the rest of the economy. In those cases, the law says, the government cannot allow such a business to fail.

Sometimes we can buy into that thinking inside the church. We can be guilty of imagining that a particular pastor is “too big to fail” and then wonder why God would allow it to happen.

But the truth is, the church only has one builder (Matthew 16:18). Of course he uses pastors, preachers, and evangelists to do the building (Ephesians 4:11). But the key phrase is “he uses.” We are only being used by him. He is the actual builder. Yes, he gives his pastors keys to the church (Matthew 16:19). But keys can be changed—there is only one owner, and sometimes God allows a pastor to fall to remind us of that basic fact. We are all replaceable.

By the way, that truth is true even for pastors who finish their race well. Those who labor for decades in faithfulness will also die. Calvin asked to be buried in an unmarked grave to keep people from thinking he was anything other than replaceable.

GOD ALLOWS PASTORS TO FALL TO REDIRECT OUR TRUST TO JESUS

It is a basic Christian principle that Jesus never fails.

David abdicated, Solomon compromised, Peter and Paul quarreled. Jesus didn’t do any of those things.

Hebrews 13 reminds us to examine our leaders and emulate their faith. But that command is sandwiched between the reminder that God is our ultimate help (Hebrews 13:6), and that Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever (vs. 8).

We can all be guilty of trusting men too much. Some of that is unavoidable, and of course, confidence in the integrity of our pastors can be a sign of a strong and healthy church. There are pastors who have shepherded my soul and taught me the word of God whom I greatly admire. That being said, Jesus is the one who never fails.

Jonathan Edward’s dying words to his daughter were to seek the Father in heaven who would never fail them, and by extension, who would never die. Sometimes God allows pastors to fall in order to redirect our affection to himself.

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These four reasons should remind us that God is at work through our failures, sins, deceptions, and hypocrisy. The fact that God is working of course does not excuse them, any more than the rainbow excuses the antediluvian violence. Nevertheless, I hope they encourage you to follow Edward's advice and seek the God who has never failed.

This and yesterday's posts are adapted from [this sermon](#).



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