

Christian Leadership, Sin, and Restoration: Reflections on 1 Timothy and Titus Seven Devotional Reflections

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Last modified: July, 2017

Reflection #1

What can you, as a participant of a local church community, expect from your leaders?

As the leadership team of Neighborhood Church of Dorchester, we are excited to be writing our much-needed By-Laws, along with job descriptions for church elders. These documents will help all of us be clear about this very important question, and many others. Obviously, we hope this will help you see how we are trying to honor Jesus and Scripture here at NCD. But we also want this to benefit *you* for a lifetime: Even if you move away from Boston one day and join another church body, we hope this series of reflections will be helpful to you in your Christian journey.

So, what are the leadership standards for Christian character? Why are those standards important? What's the difference between sinning while you're a member and sinning while you're a leader? And what process is best for a Christian leader who breaks those standards?

These questions are important to answer for any church community moving forward. Ultimately, the Scriptures that are most important are 1 Timothy 3 – 5 and Titus 1. This is because they contain the material about the character and ministry of the New Testament *elder*. So we thought that writing up some short reflections on those Scriptures would be important.

In New Testament times, when Christians met in house churches, the term *elder* was used to designate trustworthy leaders in the broader community. In each of these letters, Paul is writing to a younger protégé how to identify leaders for Christian communities. These instructions to Timothy in Ephesus and Titus in Crete are almost identical.

^{3:1} It is a trustworthy statement: if any man or woman (the Greek pronoun is *tis*, which means 'anyone, male or female') aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work *he* desires to do. ² An overseer, then, must be above reproach, monogamous (literally 'one-woman man,' or monogamous), temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. ⁴ *He* must be one who manages *his* own household well, keeping *his* children under control with all dignity ⁵ (but if that one does not know how to manage *his* own household, how will *he* take care of the church of God?), ⁶ and not a new convert, so that *he* will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. ⁷ And *he* must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that *he* will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. (1 Timothy 3:1 – 7)

I'd like to make one observation here, for now. High character standards are appropriate to *protect the church community*. For example, if a pastor/elder is not 'free from the love of money' (verse 3), s/he will likely treat rich people much more nicely than less rich people, which will lead to pain in the community. This is why sinning while being a leader of a church is different from sinning while being a member. Some people may feel quite loved by the leader and are protective of her/him. Meanwhile others feel utterly hurt and betrayed. Some may feel mad at those who feel hurt, claiming they are exaggerating. Still others might feel guilty that they covered something up for some period of time. Others might be angry at those who knew something and didn't say something earlier; etc. These divisions in the community reflect the fact that people have had to relate to that church leader in very different ways. That is why consistency and demonstrated freedom from addictive tendencies are called 'self-controlled' in Titus 1:8 and 'temperate, prudent, respectable... not pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable' in 1 Timothy 3:2 – 3.

The Christian leader strives to treat people consistently so that the community is not divided based on their experience of her or him. This person is proactive about telling others about any weaknesses or areas of growth because it helps people in advance have an easier time reconciling any differences in how they felt treated. He or she has learned to submit to Jesus in hard times of personal challenge, even when there was no apparent social or financial reward for doing so. This is someone who has dealt with conflict, suffering, and disappointment faithfully, prayerfully, and even-handedly so that the larger church community is not a casualty of its leader's uneven emotional life.

Next time, I'll talk about the word "monogamous" and why that's important.

Reflection #2

What can you, as a participant of a local church community, expect from your leaders?

I'd like to reflect on the sensitive issue of a church leader committing sexual sin. This topic continues to illustrate why high character standards are appropriate to protect the church community.

Consider the situation of a single, heterosexual woman who leads a small group for women. Let's say she sleeps with her boyfriend on one occasion. But she confesses it immediately, apologizes to the women in her small group by identifying it as a sin, and commits to an accountability structure while the boyfriend does, too. Depending on various factors, she may or may not be asked to step down from her position as small group leader at that time, or at some later point depending on what happens. But this woman is ostensibly not in danger of committing sexual sin with **the women in her small group.**

By contrast, an elder/pastor of an entire congregation **is in precisely that danger.** He (or she, as the case may be) is a type of coach and care-giver to people of both genders. He is in a relationship of authority to them, as he can invite people to meet with him while he asks deeply personal questions, conveying the appearance of safety with the authority of a moral guide. His encouragement and counsel affect their understanding of what is emotionally and ethically healthy. He shapes people's self-perceptions and other-perceptions. This is a type of trust, and it is sacred.

A woman, especially one with past hurt from fathers, coaches, teachers, brothers, or other authority figures (which is increasingly common these days), is typically drawn to such a man because he is well-regarded by the community within an atmosphere of trust. In most cases, it is his job description as a Christian leader to notice and develop her God-given gifts, and to interpret her story. Because of his leadership role, he has power: the power of access to people. He can invite her to coffee and conversation. He can do this based on his job and the presumption of trustworthiness.

This highlights the difference between sinning while being a member of a church, compared to sinning while being a leader. The difference is power.

Making matters more complicated, an elder may be the person with whom the 'buck stops' – or one of them – for the local church community. In most work situations, if you have a problem with your supervisor, you can go talk to the Human Resources Department or your supervisor's supervisor. But in a church body, who do you go talk to when you want to register a concern with your pastor, or church elder?

By the way, this is why I believe that the healthiest model of church governance is not a single pastor model, but a board of elders who share the responsibility of holding each other to account, and shares the hiring, supervision, and firing of paid pastoral staff. As we can see from other examples in life, self-monitoring, self-policing, and self-enforcement doesn't usually work.

Furthermore, sex with an illicit partner is typically kept hidden for some time. To do that, one must use deception and other deeply problematic motivations and behaviors. At least for a time, he must encourage at least one other person – his illicit sexual partner – to be deceptive as well, just to keep the charade going. Thus, a person who commits sexual sin almost always is self-deceived in some way. Deceiving others tends to flow out of that place in one's self.

If a male pastor (in this example) cannot be trusted to recognize when a woman needs support from other women, or from a formal counselor, then that is an issue of professional competence, and he is a danger to those he leads. Or, if he cannot be trusted to keep God-given mental, emotional, verbal, and physical boundaries, then that is an issue of character, and he is also a danger to those he leads. Those in local or denominational leadership over him would be irresponsible to place him immediately back in any such role, especially without a very slow, incremental re-earning of trust, along with a very clear structure of accountability and supervision transparent to all. Consider: Would you want this person to meet privately with you or your spouse, your children, your friends, and non-Christian acquaintances who you want to come to Jesus?

In the next reflection, I'll look at high character standards for Christian leadership being designed to protect the person in that role.

- Note: Paul says that an 'elder' must be 'monogamous' (1 Tim.3:2). Now the apostle Paul was single and advocated singleness (1 Corinthians 7), so I don't think that an elder needs to be married, or have children. When he says that an elder must be 'monogamous,' I think he refers to the leader's standard of sexual ethics being in line with Jesus' teaching (Matthew 19:3 – 12), not marital status per se. Elders could be single.

Reflection #3

What can you, as a participant of a local church community, expect from your leaders?

The apostle Paul said that the person must be 'not addicted to wine' and, equivalently, 'not accused of dissipation' (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:6). That certainly includes a person who uses recreational drugs and substances as a replacement for finding relief and rest in the Lord. People abuse substances to cover over pain, stress, and anxiety. Money and spending can also become an addictive substance, and the candidate must be 'free from the love of money' and 'not fond of sordid gain' (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7). Deeper patterns of self-soothing, self-protection, and self-deception lie underneath addictive behaviors. Addictive behaviors can emerge under the attractions and pressures of ministry. The church leader must demonstrate sustained freedom from addictive substances and behaviors, even under personal pressure.

A person with an addiction-prone personality can use ministry itself as a vehicle to try to meet his or her own needs. The person may feel a deep, unexamined desire to be at the center of things, to be needed, to be respected, to be in control and be certain about something rather than accepting uncertainty, to be appreciated by the opposite sex, to be seen as competent or in a certain light which was not obtained in a non-ministry career, to resolve parent issues, or some such thing. So when someone has sinned against the character requirements given in 1 Timothy and Titus, resignation from a church leadership role is appropriate to *protect the person*. Something about the role itself is hurting the person, because something inside the person is not right.

High character standards for Christian leadership don't just protect the church community; they protect the *person*. That may sound counter-intuitive. Many people don't think of Christian ministry as burdensome. For instance, ministers tend to have a fair degree of autonomy to set their own schedules, and are typically given a wide latitude of trust and respect by others.

But on the other hand, ministry is saturated with disappointment. Christian elders receive lots of criticism, mediate conflicts that sometimes end in disappointment, counsel people about their trauma and take on secondary trauma themselves, preside over funerals when old tensions between family members erupt at delicate moments, watch evangelism happen offensively or unsuccessfully, supervise kids programs when parents treat it like childcare, log long hours just setting up chairs, schedule meetings with people who wind up cancelling, etc. Growing a church community is fraught with challenges.

So when an elder (or equivalent, like a senior pastor, denominational superintendent or bishop) or anyone in ministry leadership, is asked to step down because of evidence of addictive behaviors, it's not because the church community wants to shame that person. It's because the church community believes that her/his more basic relationships – with family and close friends, with one's self, with Jesus – need to be developed and maintained first.

Reflection #4

What can you, as a participant of a local church community, expect from your leaders?

A careful leadership selection process.

Paul tells us, in 1 Timothy and Titus, that a candidate for eldership (or any senior level church leadership, whatever it's called) must have demonstrated proven character **for quite some time**. Time is a critical factor that is marked

by each of the key relationships that are considered important to demonstrate Christian character. Being ‘the husband of one wife’ is literally in Greek, ‘a one-woman man’ or ‘monogamous.’ (see note below) The term does seem to rule out someone who has not been ‘monogamous’ (or, if single, celibate) at least for some significant period of time.

How long? There may not be one answer to that. But Paul does refer to the candidate parenting children into the faith in an emotionally healthy way (1 Timothy 3:4 – 5; Titus 1:6), not being a new convert (1 Timothy 3:6; Titus 1:9), and having credibility in witnessing to non-Christians (1 Timothy 3:7; Titus 1:9) indicate that Timothy is to look for a person who has had a fairly substantial time period to establish proven Christian character. How many years must pass before a person is not a ‘new convert’ any longer? Or show that s/he can mentor someone in the faith? There might be a range of faithful ways to answer that question, but surely a few years.

Connected to that, a candidate for eldership must be able to teach Scripture. That is the non-negotiable element of the job description of a New Testament elder (1 Timothy 3:2; 5:17 – 18). Of course, all Scripture is important, especially to teach others and to protect the community from theological error. But two threads in Scripture seem especially important in the formation of Christian character.

(1) There is the common pattern of God placing a person through a ‘wilderness experience.’ God ministered to people through these long and difficult periods where people felt alone and like it was hard to trust God: Abraham and Sarah waiting for three decades for a child; Rebekah at home waiting for Jacob to return; Jacob laboring for his romantic love and then being willing to let go of Joseph and Benjamin, his favorite sons; Leah aching to be loved; Joseph being faithful in Egypt; Moses spending forty years in the wilderness leading sheep, and another forty years leading Israel without entering the promised land; David spending years in the wilderness as a king waiting for enthronement; Elijah and Elisha getting their lives threatened; Isaiah and Jeremiah preaching without positive response and being scorned; Daniel and Esther faithfully obeying God while in exile; Jesus growing up patiently and then being tempted in the wilderness; Saul of Tarsus spending fourteen years in Arabia probably sorting through everything he had ever known. God met with these people in deep ways during these ‘wilderness experiences.’ They seem to be indispensable to shaping one’s ‘identity in Christ.’ Even when we are surrounded by Christian community, we must cultivate an aspect of our journey with Jesus which is profoundly alone: it is a sacred journey.

(2) A candidate for church eldership must surely be rooted in Jesus’ transformative teaching in Matthew 5:1 – 7:29 about anger, sexual temptation, enemies, pride, anxiety, uncertainty, greed, etc. in one’s heart. The Gospel of Luke spreads out Jesus’ ethical teaching into blocks: Luke 6:12 – 49 is about loving enemies; Luke 12:13 – 34 is about generosity and resisting materialism and anxiety; Luke 14:1 – 35 is about table fellowship and community; etc. In fact, the Gospels of Matthew and Luke suggest that the teaching within those pages were meant to accompany the rite of Christian baptism. When the disciples were sent out to baptize and teach all nations, they were to teach ‘all that Jesus commanded’ them (Matthew 28:18 – 20; Luke 24:44 – 49). Anyone who wishes to be fruitful in Jesus’ kingdom movement must be anchored in Jesus’ teaching, not because one is rewarded by others for doing so, but simply because it is Jesus himself who commands it.

Regarding selecting leaders for the first time in 1 Timothy 5:22 – 25, pastor Stephen Cole remarks:

‘The manner in which Timothy can avoid appointing unqualified elders is to take his time (5:22) and observe the lives of these men carefully. Careful observation will reveal two classes of men: (1) Those unfit for office (5:24). There are two categories here: Those obviously unfit—their sins march on ahead of them for everyone to see; those not so obviously unfit—their sins follow after them, but eventually come to light. At first glance, they may seem qualified, but time will show their track record, that they are not godly men. (2) Those fit for office (5:25). Again, there are the same two categories: Those obviously fit for office—their good deeds are evident; those fit for office, but not so obviously. The last half of the sentence is a bit confusing, but I take it to be parallel to verse 24, so the sense is, “Those good deeds of other men are not so evident at first, but they can’t be hidden in the long run.” So Paul is saying that people aren’t always what they appear to be on the surface. Men should not be selected for leadership in the church on a superficial or hasty basis. They don’t always turn out to be what they seem to be at first. Carefully observe their way of life, especially in their home (3:2, 4, 5). Also, how is their public reputation (3:7)? Don’t put a man into church leadership unless he has a proven record of godly character and good deeds.’ (Steven J. Cole,

'Lesson 18: Church Leadership: Keeping It Godly (1 Timothy 5:19 - 25),' Bible.org,
<https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-18-church-leadership-keeping-it-godly-1-timothy-519-25>

Cole's everyday language is helpful in highlighting the importance of time. Time shows a candidate's 'track record' or 'proven record of godly character and good deeds.' Selection for leadership is not to be 'hasty.' And this is for a candidate being considered for church eldership for the first time.

Note: The term 'one-woman man,' or 'monogamous,' could also be a shorthand that includes the case of a woman being considered for eldership as well, as the non-gendered pronoun in 1 Timothy 3:1 indicates. Philip B. Payne writes: "Two of the most prominent complementarians acknowledge this phrase does not clearly exclude women. Douglas Moo acknowledges that this phrase need not exclude "unmarried men or females from the office . . . it would be going too far to argue that the phrase clearly excludes women" from being elders. See Douglas J. Moo, "The Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:11–15: A Rejoinder," TJ 2 NS (1981): 198–222, 211. Thomas Schreiner acknowledges, "The requirements for elders in 1 Tim 3:1–7 and Titus 1:6–9, including the statement that they are to be one-woman men, does not necessarily in and of itself preclude women from serving as elders. . . ." Thomas R. Schreiner's "Philip Payne on Familiar Ground: A Review of Philip B. Payne, Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul's Letters." JBMW (Spring 2010): 33–46, 35." See <https://www.pbpayne.com/does-one-woman-man-in-1-timothy-32-require-that-all-overseers-be-male/>

Also, the character requirements placed on an 'older widow' make clear that women could be elders. (See my paper, The Implications of the Chiasmic Structure of 1 Timothy on the Question of Women in Church Leadership; http://nagasawafamily.org/paul_1timothy-chiasm-&-women-as-elders.pdf). These godly widows would have been heads of their households – and also the church groups that met in their homes – and could be placed on a 'list' of those who are financially supported by the church community (1 Timothy 5:3 – 16).

Reflection #5

What can you, as a participant of a local church community, expect from your leaders?

Leaders who love Jesus and the church so much that, if they no longer met the character requirements, they would willingly step down and become members.

Paul gives Timothy some instructions about how to handle an elder's sin while he or she is in leadership.

^{5:19} Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. ²⁰ Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning.

Those in senior levels of church leadership sign up to be public witnesses to Jesus and publicly transparent about their lives. Their sin also is to be understood publicly. This builds the expectation in the church community that leadership is built on transparency and accountability to Jesus.

While no one is expected to be 'perfect' in the heart-level issues that go deeper than the minimum behavioral standards already listed in 1 Timothy 3:1 – 7 and 5:3 – 10, leaders 'who continue in sin' need to be addressed in some manner so that it is clear to the whole congregation what happened, why it was wrong, and why the person is being removed from leadership (5:19 – 20).

But, you might ask, didn't King David keep his job, even after he sinned with Bathsheba and Uriah (2 Samuel 12)? Does that mean that a church elder or pastor should remain in that role even after a sexual sin (or some other serious moral offense)?

Yes to the first question, but No to the second. The reason God kept David on his throne is because He had already made a promise to David about a future dynasty, eventually resulting in the final, messianic king (2 Samuel 7). So God was stuck with David. God could not break His own promise to David because of His character as a promise-

keeper (Hebrews 6:13 – 18) and also because Jesus would be an heir of David. So He kept David on the throne. Eventually, Jesus would claim it.

By comparison, no elder or pastor has a promise directly from God about having a child who would be another Messiah!

Jesus is the founder of his church, and its leader. He cannot be replaced, which means everyone else can be.

In fact, if there is an appropriate model in the Old Testament for a fallen leader who is removed from office because of sin, it would be David's predecessor, Saul of Benjamin (1 Samuel 8 onward). God placed Saul in the position of king despite the fact that Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin, and the fact that the kingship was to rest within the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:8 – 12). In other words, God always meant for Saul to be king for only a season, and not to establish a dynasty built on his sons. Because of the shallowness of his character, Saul grew addicted to his own authority and role. He sought to manage appearances despite his lack of faith in God and sinful disobedience.

When God anointed Saul's replacement, the young David, to be the next king of a united Israel, Saul refused to resign. It drove him mad. He refused to see how stepping down from the throne not only would be good for his own faith and character, but also good for Israel because they needed a new faith-filled leader. He also refused to read the pattern of the Old Testament before him. He did not see that the scepter rightfully belonged to the tribe of Judah, according to Jacob's prophecy (Genesis 49:8 – 12). He did not see how stepping aside for young David fit a biblical pattern from Genesis where God gave leadership to a younger sibling and removed it from an older one:

- Seth replaced Cain as the 'firstborn' (covenant-bearing heir and leader of the family) of Adam and Eve (Genesis 4:25 – 26);
- Isaac replaced Ishmael as the 'firstborn' of Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 21 – 22);
- Jacob replaced Esau as the 'firstborn' of Isaac and Rebekah (Genesis 25 – 35);
- Judah replaced his older brothers Reuben, Simeon, and Levi as the 'firstborn' of Jacob and Leah (Genesis 37 – 50), because Reuben, Simeon, and Levi had all failed morally.
- When Israel became a nation and not just a family, the great leaders *Moses, Aaron, and Miriam were all replaced for their failures as well*. God replaced Moses with Joshua, and made the Israelites wait in the wilderness until Moses climbed up Mount Nebo to die there while looking out over the promised land (Deuteronomy 34). With the exception of Joshua and Caleb, God replaced the entire first generation of Israelites who came out of Egypt, because they sinned and failed to trust God to lead them against the Canaanites (Numbers 13 – 15). God was perfectly content with waiting until almost every single adult Israelite – including Moses, Aaron, and Miriam – died in the desert before advancing His plan to bring Israel into the promised land.

That should also inform any church leadership question when leaders who have disqualified themselves do not voluntarily step down.

Only the final heir of David, Jesus of Nazareth, could be trusted to be humanity's true and eternal king. And with Jesus, the Davidic monarchy was fulfilled, and also removed from any other human descendants of David to claim. This is why King David and his heirs simply cannot serve as models for leaders who sin.

Once again, *Jesus is the founder of his church, and its leader.*

He cannot be replaced, which means everyone else can be.

Reflection #6

What can you, as a participant of a local church community, expect from your leaders?

You can expect that leaders would honor the first 'elders' that Jesus appointed: the apostles. And their understanding of Jesus' standards.

The apostle Paul believed he could have been disqualified from ministry. He says, 'I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified' (1 Corinthians 9:27). Because

of Paul's overarching emphasis on 'the body' throughout 1 Corinthians, commentators believe that Paul is speaking of disciplining *his body* with regards to avoiding sexual sin, which he had discussed in 1 Corinthians 5 – 7. But even if Paul is speaking of *more* than sexual sin in 9:27, he is not speaking of *less*. If an apostle like Paul thought he could be *disqualified*, how seriously do we need to take the character standards that he and the other apostles set?

But wait: Didn't Jesus restore the apostles – minus Judas Iscariot – fairly quickly into apostleship, even though they failed him at his trial and crucifixion? Let's stop to think about that.

Now it is true that, before Jesus' resurrection, the apostles made a mistake about the shape of Jesus' mission. They thought Jesus would be a military revolutionary-Messiah, which is perhaps why Judas Iscariot sought to force Jesus into a military revolt and also profit by it (Matthew 26:21 – 25; 27:1 – 10), and why Simon Peter reached for a sword thinking he needed to defend Jesus (Matthew 26:51; John 18:10).

But Jesus seemed to think that in all other matters of faith and character, the apostles were qualified. In John's Gospel, Jesus called the eleven remaining disciples 'clean' (John 13:10 – 11) and seems to have regarded his ministry with them up until that point to be a success (John 17:6 – 19). Jesus, through his death and resurrection, quickly corrected the apostles' limited understanding of his mission. Henceforth, he could trust them. And henceforth, Jesus could hold them accountable to uphold his standards for church leadership, by the Spirit.

So other sad examples of disqualification exist in the New Testament, too. Ananias and Sapphira lied about their generosity. For that, God did not hesitate to take their lives, not just whatever leadership role they had (Acts 5:1 – 11). He apparently did this because their integrity was essential to the spread of the gospel message. They had 'filled their hearts' with something evil (Luke 6:45; Acts 5:3). If Ananias and Sapphira were part of the group of seventy disciples sent out in Luke 10:1, or the hundred and twenty disciples gathered in the upper room in Acts 1:15, or some extended group of disciples who had also seen Jesus, then they were probably church leaders – or up and coming leaders. Lying disqualified them in the mind of the Holy Spirit.

Moreover, apparently, God sat disobedient Christians down on the proverbial bench for taking communion with an unholy attitude. Paul says to the Corinthians, 'For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep' (1 Corinthians 11:29 – 30). 'Sleep' means 'are dead!'

In fact, the early church provides us with an example of Christians deposing one of their own leaders. In Polycarp of Smyrna's *Epistle to the Philippians*, dated around 120 AD, we have a fascinating example of a congregation deposing one of their elders. In chapter 11 of that letter, we find that the Philippian church community had deposed one of their own elders, Valens, because he had demonstrated *covetousness*. Polycarp, a senior church leader in nearby Smyrna, affirms the Philippian Christians:

'I am greatly grieved for Valens, who was once a presbyter among you, because he so little understands the place that was given him [in the Church]. I exhort you, therefore, that you abstain from covetousness, and that you be chaste and truthful. 'Abstain from every form of evil.' [1 Thessalonians 5:22] For if a man cannot govern himself in such matters, how shall he enjoin them on others? If a man does not keep himself from covetousness, he shall be defiled by idolatry, and shall be judged as one of the heathen. But who of us are ignorant of the judgment of the Lord? 'Do we not know that the saints shall judge the world?' [1 Corinthians 6:2] as Paul teaches. But I have neither seen nor heard of any such thing among you, in the midst of whom the blessed Paul labored, and who are commended in the beginning of his Epistle. For he boasts of you in all those Churches which alone then knew the Lord; but we [of Smyrna] had not yet known Him. I am deeply grieved, therefore, brethren, for him (Valens) and his wife; to whom may the Lord grant true repentance! And be you then moderate in regard to this matter, and 'do not count such as enemies,' [2 Thessalonians 3:15] but call them back as suffering and straying members, that you may save your whole body. For by so acting you shall edify yourselves.' (Polycarp of Smyrna, *Epistle to the Philippians* 11)

I assume Valens committed an observable infraction: favoritism towards rich people, embezzlement, theft, perhaps even ostentatious living. Some commentators believe that Valens had committed some kind of sexual sin, but others maintain materialism, which I regard as more likely because his wife is mentioned as a *collaborator*, not a victim.

This decision must not have been easy. What if Valens was your father? Brother? Cousin? I'm a person of Japanese descent, and I know that in traditional, non-Western cultures, it's hard to publicly challenge a biological family member over a small issue! It's almost impossible to imagine doing that over a formal leadership position, publicly. But Jesus calls us to place loyalty to Him and His family over loyalty to our own immediate family, when he said to his disciples, 'These are my mother and brothers and sisters' (Matthew 12:49 – 50; Luke 8:19 – 21). Family over everything? Only if you're submitted to Jesus' definition of 'family.'

Polycarp hoped that Valens and his wife would return as 'members,' but not leaders, in Jesus' spiritual family. This is a great example of how the early Christians put biblical teaching into practice. Jesus is the founder of his church and its leader. He is the only indispensable one. Everyone else can and should be removed from positions of church leadership if they do not meet his character requirements.

Once again, *Jesus is the founder of his church, and its leader.*

He cannot be replaced, which means everyone else can be.

Reflection #7

What can you, as a participant of a local church community, expect from your leaders?

That church elders would remove a disqualified fellow elder according to 1 Timothy 5:19 – 20, 1 Corinthians 9:27, and the overwhelming pattern God laid in Scripture. And that they would be careful and cautious about any kind of re-appointment of that person back into leadership.

Let's frame that question against the New Testament picture: *Christians used to die for taking communion in an unworthy way (1 Corinthians 11:29 – 30) or lying about financial giving (Acts 5:1 – 11). Apostles thought they could be disqualified from ministry (1 Corinthians 9:27). Given that, how serious is it for elders to fail the character requirements given to them? Is re-appointment to that kind of leadership role possible?*

How churches and denominations handle the situation when an elder or paid pastor sins gives us a sense of the seriousness of Christian leadership. John MacArthur, pastor at Grace Community Church since 1969, appears to believe that, for sexual sin, for example, there is ****no**** possibility of return to a position of church leadership, at least on a senior level:

'There are some sins that irreparably shatter a man's reputation and disqualify him from a ministry of leadership forever. Even Paul, man of God that he was, said he feared such a possibility. In 1 Corinthians 9:27 he says, "I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified."

'When referring to his body, Paul obviously had sexual immorality in view. In 1 Corinthians 6:18 he describes it as a sin against one's own body—sexual sin is in its own category. Certainly it disqualifies a man from church leadership since he permanently forfeits a blameless reputation as a one-woman man (Proverbs 6:33; 1 Timothy 3:2)...

'What about forgiveness? Shouldn't we be eager to restore our fallen brethren? To fellowship, yes. But not to leadership. It is not an act of love to return a disqualified man to public ministry; it is an act of disobedience.' (John MacArthur, 'Should Fallen Pastors Be Restored,' Grace to You, 1991; <https://www.gty.org/library/articles/a256/should-fallen-pastors-be-restored>)

Steven J. Cole, pastor of Lake Gregory Community Church in Crestline, California from 1977 – 1992 and Flagstaff Christian Fellowship in Flagstaff, AZ since 1992, suggests that re-appointment is possible after a long period of time and proven character:

'Depending on the seriousness of the sin, the man may need to step down from his office until he rebuilds a godly reputation. While moral failure need not disqualify a man from public ministry for the rest of his life, he can't possibly restore the necessary qualifications of being above reproach, a one-woman man, and

having a good reputation with outsiders in a few months (1 Tim. 3:2 – 7).’ (Steven J. Cole, ‘Lesson 18: Church Leadership: Keeping It Godly (1 Timothy 5:19 - 25),’ Bible.org, <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-18-church-leadership-keeping-it-godly-1-timothy-519-25>)

What does ‘reputation’ mean here? Why are restoration and reputation considered so seriously in both Scripture and in real life? One’s ‘reputation’ is public knowledge about already proven character and deeper issues as recognized by other people. It is not, ‘But I have potential.’ It is not, ‘But I have intentions to do better.’ It is already public knowledge about already proven character. Most likely, it is evidence that he or she has endured faithfully the temptation that led to sin before.

Either way, godly character must support giftedness, and comes before it. They are not the same thing. Thabiti Anyabwile, church planter and pastor, in his specific exploration of the African American church, *Reviving the Black Church: A Call to Reclaim a Sacred Institution*, writes:

‘In such cases [of sin], action needs to be taken to remove leaders to disqualify themselves. Leading the church is not a right. Giftedness does not indicate fitness. Even swelling crowds is no indication that God approves of a man and his ministry. Some of the world’s most notorious cult leaders have been surrounded by throngs of fawning followers.’ (Thabiti Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church: A Call to Reclaim a Sacred Institution* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), p.146 – 147; see all of chapter 8)

R. Kent Hughes and John H. Armstrong, in an article in *Christianity Today* titled ‘Should Adulterous Pastors Be Restored? The Bible’s Teaching About Returning Fallen Ministers to the Pulpit,’ from September 4, 2015, write:

‘The typical pattern goes like this: The pastor is accused and convicted of sexual sin. He confesses his sin, often with profound sorrow. His church or denominational superiors prescribe a few months, or often one year, in which time he is encouraged to obtain professional counsel. Then he is restored to his former office, sometimes in another location. He is commonly regarded as a “wounded healer,” one who now knows what it means to fall, to experience the grace of God profoundly.

‘While each situation must be handled with pastoral wisdom, and some fallen pastors indeed might someday be restored to leadership, we believe this increasingly common scenario is both biblically incorrect and profoundly harmful to the well-being of the fallen pastor, his marriage, and the church of Jesus Christ.’ (R. Kent Hughes and John H. Armstrong, ‘Should Adulterous Pastors Be Restored? The Bible’s Teaching About Returning Fallen Ministers to the Pulpit,’ *Christianity Today*, September 4, 2015; <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1995/april-3/should-adulterous-pastors-be-restored.html>)

The editors of *Christianity Today* preface the article with this statement:

‘Genuine forgiveness does not necessarily imply restoration to leadership,’ former *CT* editor Kenneth Kantzer once wrote after the moral failure of several prominent evangelical leaders. Yet the impulse to link forgiveness with restoration to ministry remains strong. Here two pastor-theologians argue for the importance of keeping separate the restoration to the body of Christ and restoration to pastoral leadership.’

Is it possible for fallen pastors and elders to be reconsidered for pastorship and eldership a second time? I know from personal acquaintance, and anecdotally, that restoration of men and women into ministry roles has happened, in some cases to great fruitfulness. But unfortunately, other cases led to a second heartache. Thabiti Anyabwile recommends:

‘Church leaders and congregations must develop a framework for deciding which offenses permanently disqualify a person from church office. Some infractions require lifelong suspension from church leadership. Whenever a leader’s sin results in never being able to again satisfy the requirements of 1 Timothy 3:1 – 13, that leader should be restored to Christ but not to the offices of the church.’ (Thabiti Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church: A Call to Reclaim a Sacred Institution* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), p.151)

I would reason that reconsideration to eldership or a senior-level pastorate or a paid ministry position of some sort is possible in theory. However, I think it is most responsible to give a second chance to someone in a very slow and incremental way, long before the church reconsiders that person again for an elder-level or pastor-level role. The person can serve as a layperson in a volunteer capacity. Then, provided things go well, he or she might be considered in some paid capacity, because part of the long process of rebuilding trust is acknowledging that other members of the church will need to feel confident about the structure of accountability and evaluation so that they will be confident to give financially and support this person to minister in their midst.

A collaboration of six authors, who teach on the sin and restoration of Christian leaders, based on having experienced the sin of one of the men and their team effort afterwards to restore him, make this helpful statement:

‘It is not enough just to repair buildings and roads; they must be made stronger than they were before the quake. Engineers call this “retrofitting” – bringing physical structures to a place of greater strength and stability after they’ve been built. Retrofitting bridges, buildings and freeways is necessary due to the possibility of future natural disasters. A building weakened by one earthquake could easily crumble with the next quake unless improvements are made. The goal is to be prepared so that future shocks will not result in total destruction.

This concept presents a visual image of what happens inside a person whose choices cause the devastation of a major life earthquake. It also pictures the extensive efforts needed to rebuild that life. Hebrews 12:12 – 13 tells us, “Strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. Make level paths for your feet, so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.” This passage teaches the principle of spiritual reconstructions, which leads to healing.’ (Earl & Sandy Wilson, Paul & Virginia Friesen, Larry & Nancy Paulson, *Restoring the Fallen: A Team Approach to Caring, Confronting & Reconciling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), p.41 – 42. See also Gordon MacDonald, *Rebuilding Your Broken World* (Thomas Nelson, 2004) and Jan Winebrenner and Debra Frazier, *When a Leader Falls, What Happens to Everyone Else?* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1993))

My friend Larry Ward, pastor of Abundant Life Church in Cambridge, MA since 1994, once commented to me in conversation, ‘Rest is not enough. You can break your leg, and get some rest, but after that, you’d still be trying to get around on a broken leg.’ A fallen Christian leader must engage in a deep process of unearthing idolatry and fixing one’s resistance to Jesus. He or she must commit to renewed practices of transparency along with internal and external boundaries. He or she will need to reestablish trust, and trust is based on proven character, character demonstrated over the course of time.