

# 3 Urgent Times to Confront Sin in Your Church

A man in our church came to me recently with a heavy heart. His daughter was married to a man who had recently been caught in adultery. The couple went to another church here in town and the father contacted their pastor to see if he would confront his son-in-law on this obvious sin. The pastor refused, not seeing it as his duty. What? Not his duty? If we're really pastors, it's actually one of our primary responsibilities, especially if we love the people we lead. Not surprisingly, fewer and fewer church leaders are willing to go to people who are living in open sin and confront them. Why? Do we lack the courage? Are we ignoring the biblical mandate as leaders to protect the innocent from the harmful? Many times in my role as pastor and elder, I have had hard meetings with people in the church. I never look forward to them and I certainly get no joy from them, but they are super necessary if the church is to remain healthy. In fact, some of the great spiritual breakthroughs I've experienced as a leader have happened after I had dealt scripturally with sin issues. God tends to show up in churches where there is repentance, grace and spiritual health. Primarily, I believe elders and pastors have a responsibility to graciously confront people in three key areas.

## 1. Unrepentant Sin

*“But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. Expel the wicked man from among you.”* **1 Corinthians 5:11-13 NIV** Paul is talking about people who **are aware of their disobedience**, but refuse to repent and change their behavior.

Obviously Paul is not talking about moral perfection, but he is challenging us to confront people so they can turn away from the very things that will destroy their lives. Compassion, not angry judgment, is the motivation for challenging their behavior. Notice, also, that Paul is not talking about confronting unbelievers, who show up to explore Jesus in our churches. We must love them and model grace, by all means. **He is talking about people who call themselves Christians, but are purposely being deceitful.**

## **2. Divisive Behavior**

*“Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him.”* **Titus 3:10 NIV** Nothing welcomes the work of the Holy Spirit into a church more than unity. That’s why it is so important to protect it. Divisiveness occurs when people are more concerned about winning an argument than building a friendship.

*Divisive people do not want an honest debate or to possibly be enlightened by new information, they want to win at all costs.* Divisive people are the most difficult to confront because they normally enjoy angry debates, but we still must go to them for their sake and the health of the fellowship.

### **3. Heresy or false teaching**

*"As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God's work - which is by faith."*

#### **I Timothy 1:3-4**

Story from a staff member at Gateway Church. - In the early days when only a few hundred were attending, a young couple asked to meet with me. We were sitting at an I-Hop restaurant, and they told me they did not believe in the virgin birth, but they still wanted to lead one of our small groups. I told them as nicely as possible that they were certainly welcome to attend, but they could not lead or influence others while believing such doctrine.

I never saw them again, and that is a bummer, but I am also thankful that the flock I was assigned to protect was able to hear sound teaching from group leaders. As a pastor, I get to participate in a lot of great events like weddings, baby dedications, sermons on Sunday, leading worship at the Lord's table and singing together as a worshipping family.

However, shepherds are not only suppose to lead sheep beside still waters, but ***also protect them from wolves when needed.*** It is not warm, fuzzy or fun, but it is a clear mandate from the Chief Shepherd, without a doubt.