

Accusing a Pastor

Written by K B Napier
Wednesday, 16 May 2018 19:45

Can a pastor be accused? If he is sinning, yes. However, we have to carefully define what we mean. We must define 'pastor'; and we must define 'accusation' and what we mean by a response. This is needed because there are very few genuine pastors, and very few genuine accusations.

Bringing a charge against a pastor is a very serious action to take, and must be handled with extreme care. Though a pastor is equal to every other member of a local church, he is acting on behalf of the Lord and is not a whipping-post to be attacked by anyone with a grievance, even if the complaint is genuine.

One reason for this careful consideration is given in 1 Timothy 5:17

"Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine."

This is followed by verse 19:

"Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses."

Those who bring accusations, then, must do so before witnesses; accusations should not just be angrily blurted out to someone other than the pastor. To be more precise, the accuser should speak first with the pastor; only go to others if he refuses to face the charges, and, even then, the pastor must be present with the witnesses. In other words, accusations may not be made privately to others. The pastor is too important in God's eyes to be kicked around with words, and especially words that are part of an accusation (spiritually, an accusation is the same as a charge).

Thus, making a 'private complaint', NOT to the pastor, but to someone else, is an act of betrayal, mere gossip, against a man chosen by God to pastor, and whose role means his life is devoted to the well-being of the flock, even when what he says might not be liked by some.

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Those who bring a complaint before someone else about the pastor is not showing the respect due to the pastor demanded by God. (It is assumed the pastor in question is genuinely called by God).

When a pastor is thus attacked (which is what a private complaint really is) without having the opportunity to defend himself, the complainant is unknowingly acting on behalf of Satan, the accuser of the brethren, doing his job for him. Such complaints or accusations are often false, and the net result is to hurt the pastor and to divide the local church... something that can be very hard to put right. Many genuine pastors have thus been hurt deeply, along with the local church.

Also, the one the accusation is made to (not the pastor) should rightly challenge the accuser for proof, and advise the complainant not to be so rash, when God demands a proper respect for the man who shepherds His flock on earth. To accuse such a man with no regard for his office can injure very badly.

John Calvin once said about this kind of attack against pastors: *"It is a sign of a perverse and treacherous disposition to wound the good name of another, when he has no opportunity of defending himself."*

The trouble arises when the accuser does not speak to the pastor face-to-face, but does so behind his back. Then, it is a form of betrayal. Personally (and probably like most true pastors), I have no problem at all with direct opposition or even accusations, UNLESS they are made without my knowledge, because such accusers are akin to hit-and-run drivers leaving the scene of an accident they has caused.

I am not too keen on John MacArthur, but on this matter he speaks rightly:

"There are always people eager to falsely accuse a man of God. They may do so because they resent his calling, reject his teaching, resist biblical authority, resent virtue, or are jealous of the Lord's blessing on his life. Ultimately, however, they demonstrate by making such accusations that they have become messengers of Satan. Such false accusations are one of his most dangerous weapons. Joseph, Moses, David, Jeremiah, Nehemiah, and our Lord Jesus Christ all suffered from false accusations." (The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, 1 Tim, p221).

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Usually, the accuser has no idea he is acting on behalf of Satan and might even be startled to hear it. Yet, for reasons they do not give, they act rashly: *“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.”*

This is again emphasised in 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13:

“And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves.”

If you do not agree with this or do not comprehend, then please take time to study and meditate on the word, because it is commanded by God, not because a pastor wants blind obedience to himself!

To accuse a pastor in his absence is not just ‘bad form’, it is rebellion against his rightful calling by God. By bringing the accusation the accuser is openly saying he does not trust his own pastor and does not listen to what the pastor teaches, rejecting his guidance; and, he does not understand the pastor’s calling and role. The mere fact that a person does not agree with the pastor does not warrant bringing accusations against him. Rather, he should quietly discuss what troubles his mind, so that accusations do not spill out in anger or spite, and the issues can be dealt with calmly and courteously.

Now, the above refers ONLY to a pastor who is (a) called by God (b) strives always to maintain the wellbeing of his fellow believers in the local church (c) teaches scriptural truth (d) lives a holy life. Also, the accuser is either saved, or he/she is not. If he/she is not, the accusations take on a lower-order of priority (but must still be thought upon). If he/she is saved, well, they have entered into error by making the accusation in gossip form and not discussing the grievances with the pastor, who becomes a victim.

We must also define what is an ‘accusation’. Firstly, we must separate the pastor’s biblical stance and loyalty to scripture, from ‘other’ issues. Is the accusation to do with pastoral corruption of scripture, or something improper? Or, is it to do with something the accuser simply does not like or agree with and has his/her own opinion? If the latter, we must ask if what the pastor is saying is based on truth and fact (i.e. a biblical principle). If it is proved NOT to be so, then the pastor is only giving an opinion – but so long as such opinion is not put out as biblical fact, his opinion remains just that and is no reason to make an accusation.

However, it is part of the pastoral remit to read scripture and to apply its principles to everyday life. So, if the accuser thinks the pastor is making unjustified interpretations or applies them wrongly, he must discuss it, *biblically*, and not make accusations. None of these things gives a

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reason to make accusations.

The true pastor will respond as follows (this is not a final list):

1.

Whenever anyone falsely accuses a pastor – which is a frequent occurrence – the pastor's response depends on the knowledge the accuser has of him. If the accuser is distant and does not know the pastor, he should be referred to all existing teachings so he can gain a better idea of what the pastor stands for. Or, if something is specific, the accuser should be challenged from scripture. Sometimes, they must be simply rebuked. All of this is because a true pastor dares not speak or write publicly unless convinced it is God's wish to do so. EVERY accusation, whether from someone close or someone unknown to the pastor, is treated seriously. For myself, I am called by God to my ministry, and MUST act wisely and properly: I would be too afraid to do otherwise! Thus, I examine myself, my motives and what I say. On a few occasions I have apologised for being hasty or curt. ALL true pastors are like this (those not called by God to office will react differently).

2.

Accusations from those close to the pastor can be devastating, even when the pastor KNOWS he is right, biblically, morally, socially, intellectually and ethically. This is because though the accuser has perhaps heard the pastor teach for a long time, he/she has been having secret bad thoughts about him, smiling to his face but not in their heart, accusing him to someone else. To say it hurts is an understatement. Even so, it does not stop a true pastor examining himself (just in case); but, does the accuser examine him or her self? There seems little evidence of it.

3.

If a pastor KNOWS he is right, and especially if convinced by scripture and the testimony of the Holy Spirit within, he should not back down, nor apologise, just to keep the peace... because such a 'peace' will be false and very uneasy. In these circumstances the accuser will rarely speak with the pastor about what he or she has said, so he can do nothing to rectify the situation. He or she MUST approach the pastor first of their own volition, otherwise they will just continue to resent him and his role as pastor; nothing is then resolved. If this means the accuser never returns, well, the pastor is not responsible for that... until he or she discusses the matter with the pastor he can do nothing. Whilst I the pastor might be deeply hurt, it is not an excuse to hit back in anger. There may be no hate and no holding of a grudge; if someone who has accused the pastor is willing to talk properly about an issue that concerns them, then the true pastor will do so without prejudice, so the issue can be dealt with. Then, both accuser and pastor can start over again.

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Let me get it straight – in our small church I am accountable for everything I think, say and do. Some outside our church think members of our small church are ‘brainwashed’. If they only attended our meetings they would see a very different thing! Anyone at any time can stop me in our study session and make a comment, or ask a question, or to disagree, and I will make an answer. If this is acceptable then we move on. Otherwise, the person retains their opinion and I leave it there, so long as it does not contravene God’s word. This is how all true pastors minister.

In such an open and honest environment, there is every opportunity for members to get their disagreement into the open. If they do not, but bring an accusation before someone else, well, that speaks of a number of things... rebellion against the proper office of the pastor, rebellion against the word, the nurturing of anger, which then can become spite and hatred, and the division of the congregation.

As a Nobody a Real Pastor Does Not Pretend to be Somebody!

When I tell people I am a nobody, I really mean it. I know myself. I know myself inside out. I know my failings and know my strengths. If I am wrong I will say so. If I am not, I will say so. This is what genuine pastors think. But, many Christians cannot cope with this openness and prefer to just lash out, or walk away. This is not the pastoral way of dealing with things. I, and fellow pastors, are nobody because we only have office and anything at all because of God’s mercy and grace. If we enter into error we will repent and get back to truth. In this none of us is better and no worse than those who accuse, so we are equal! Just get it over with and move on!

If others wish to throw out accusations and will not discuss them, the pastor should not feel knocked down, especially if he is right. By that I mean ‘right’ in the eyes of the Lord and scripture. If a matter is outside scripture and is a matter of personal understanding, then so be it – both pastor and member will have to learn to differ. But, personally, I will never differ on scripture itself.

So, by all means accuse your pastor, but take very great care, even if the charges are provable (and they MUST be proved). If they are about personal attitudes towards something non-scriptural, then be man or woman enough to allow each to have his or her own opinion. Be careful, friends, and be cautious, towards genuine pastors.

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An Important Fact Not Understood

The pastor's office, person and faith are one and the same. Therefore, to accuse one aspect is to accuse all. This integration of person and God's gift is not understood by most Christians. It is as if being a 'Christian' is an add-on feature one can separate from the self. Many Christians think a pastor just carries out his own thoughts!

Though every pastor is imperfect and still sins, he is God's servant, reborn and remade for His own pleasure and will. Everything about the real pastor belongs to Him, from the moment he awakes to the moment he goes to sleep... and every part in between! He can do with us what He will, and whether or not a person does not understand this, or even believe it, this is what He does anyway. To God scepticism is irrelevant: He exists and He acts as He wishes. What we think about this is of no relevance to Him. We must just comply, and those who understand their situation will do so happily and with love. It is a compliance of love because we recognise what our relationship to God is.

I know most Christians do not understand this, because of the way they live, the way they think and what they say. My pastoral life was, and is, my saved self-coupled to my earthly person. I see no difference between them.

Now most Christians have no idea what I mean by this. For them, their 'Christianity' is what they 'do' at any time, usually on Sundays and a few times during the week. They might chat about Christian things on occasions, and maybe even have thoughts about God or scripture. But, none of it infuses them. So, it remains an exterior 'add-on'... and it shows.

This is why they care greatly for their work and status, their income and car, their house and everything to do with this life, including their thoughts. With me, touch me and you touch my spirit; touch my spirit and you touch my mind and heart. Ah! You might argue, you are called to be a pastor and teacher – I am not. Sadly, this is not a reason. I am no different from you, and the way I live my life is how you should, too. We are all equal in the Lord's Church.

I can speak with authority on this (on behalf of other pastors) because I was just the same. But, the Lord edged me more and more into reality – HIS reality. I saw Him in everything I thought, said and did... except for my errors, which belong to me alone. And the more I merged spirit, soul and faith, the more I realised it was all one thing. People who have not yet reached that

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point will make many mistakes and will not be constantly living as the Lord wants.

The above has been said to bring us to the fact that few Christians understand the reality of who and what a pastor is. A true pastor does not live his own life; he lives as God demands. It can often take him into uncharted territory, and this usually opposes what is in the world and, sometimes, the thinking of the local church. This is why a pastor might seem 'out of sync' with what 'standard' Christians think is 'reality', which, for them, is their life on earth with an added bonus of faith when they think they need it. But, true reality is living in God's space on this earth, which is very different from what human beings think living is.

Which is why most Christians do not live authentic Christian lives. It is also why they do not comprehend why or how a pastor might say this, or do that. If what they say and do does not correspond to their human (mis)perceptions of what the Christian life is, well, they shoot the messenger - the pastor or teacher!

They think by doing so they are right, and that the pastor 'must' be wrong. So, they denigrate the pastor. But, they sin against God's command which states a Christian may NOT accuse a pastor without doing so before several witnesses, and without letting the pastor speak in his defence.

Sadly, because the accuser does not live the life of God as He demands, he or she does not understand this serious breach of truth, thereby placing their own spiritual lives in jeopardy. And until, and if, they themselves reach the same position as the pastor, where their person and spirit are truly one in EVERY aspect of life, they will never understand, nor will they accept that a pastor is called by God and is His agent in this world, to do His bidding. Thus, what the pastor is *really* accused of, is that he obeys God.

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