

COVENANT OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS – FINANCES

I recently heard it said that as professionals, we once had to act as though we had a “black box” in the event of a crisis. That way in the event of failure, we could go back to verify. Now, I am told, we need to act as though we have a “glass box.” In other words, in the past it was sufficient to be able to justify or defend oneself in the event of charges or criticisms. Today we need to act so transparently that those cannot even be laid, for just the voicing of misappropriation can already destroy our careers.

I have only met one man who made counterfeit money, and he did such a masterful job, that his printing plates were on display with the RCMP in Regina. I have met, however, more numerous cases where money made counterfeit men, even in ministry. Greed and foolish decisions cross all professional boundaries and pastors are not exempt. The stewardship of wealth, or even in its lack, has implications for the gospel message. A shortage of character in ministry soon leads to a shortage in cash, due to lack of integrity and trust. In II Corinthians 8:16-24 Paul talks about the stewardship of financial administration. In the first verses of the chapter he speaks of the stewardship of financial giving, but then he is equally concerned about its administration. The wealth of dollars he was delivering needed to be handled with a wealth of common sense. He wanted to be sure that no one could question his integrity in dealing with “the administration of this gift” (verse 20). So he kept himself at “arm’s length”, using Titus as his financial administrator. Titus took two others with him to ensure all was above suspicion. Let me suggest some financial principles that I have tried to follow in dealing with this in my own life and ministry. You may choose to differ with them but what is important is that you think through your principles and stand by them.

1. Financial compensation can only be negotiated by a pastor at the calling to ministry without someone imputing mad motives or greed. It is fair to be realistic with a church as to your financial needs but to be clawing for more once you have accepted a call leaves us open to charges of greed. Yes, churches should annually revisit compensation, at least to keep up with cost of living. But one is wise to heed John the Baptist’s advice to the soldiers who asked, “And what about us, what shall we do?” And he said, “Do not take money from anyone by force... and be content with your wages.” (Luke 3:14) Once in a church, we need to demonstrate contentment.
2. The “glass box” now means that we should never place ourselves in a position where we can be compromised in our decision-making or preaching because of indebtedness to others. Large gifts should be refused or asked to be directed through the church, so there is transparency. Could Nathan come to King David and say, “You are the man” if he had just received a significant gift from David? It is not uncommon for the pastor’s soul “to be purchased” by what the pastor thinks is just a gracious gift from a parishioner or community member. The way to ensure no expectation of return favors is to channel it appropriately. It is wise to set a limit of value and let your board know that any gifts beyond will be directed by you for them to deal with.
3. Pastors can readily use their connectedness for other financial ventures or to recommend people to others. One pastor I know was charged for a referral to a financier who then squandered his

parishioner's wealth. We are not usually known for our own financial acumen, but often for our connectedness and the trust people place in our recommendations. Use financial connections guardedly to avoid liability!

4. Model what you desire from your church. It is hard to preach on faithful or sacrificial giving when the pastor is known as someone who doesn't regularly give. If you preach tithing (10%), the church will be counting on your tithe as well. If you preach "storehouse giving", they will want to see your giving in the storehouse. Our actions will speak louder than our words for many people.

The "glass box" of our present culture demands that we be proactive in transparency and authenticity. I am reminded of Daniel 6:4, "Then the commissioners and satraps began trying to find a ground of accusation against Daniel in regard to the kingdom's affairs.... but they could find no ground of accusation or evidence of corruption, inasmuch as he was faithful, and no negligence or corruption was found in him." Daniel must have known the "glass box" principle! We need to as well as those who administer the kingdom.

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