

Pastors must sacrifice...

... rather than expecting the sheep to sacrifice themselves for the protection of the pastor.

Tony Ranvestel has taught many times that Christians are not called to lives of safety and security. I think he believes it to be true, and I think I believe it true. After all, Jesus calls Christians to take up their crosses, and the cross isn't a pleasant or safe metaphor. Peter writes not to be surprised when the fiery trial arrives in our lives. Jesus promised his disciples "you will have trouble."

Steve Morgan's old "prophecy" is pretty well documented elsewhere, in which his wife woke up and supposedly prophesied over him "build a big foundation and you won't have to protect yourself." ([this can be found here](#)). Pastors are not called to lives of safety and security. Pastors are not entitled to protect themselves at the cost of the sheep.

And yet this is exactly what the Network Leadership Team and Steve Morgan are doing for themselves right now. South Grove Church's overseers asked – very gently – for an investigation into Steve Morgan's honesty since 2020 when the specter of his past sin began to show itself and show signs of becoming public. Instead of conducting an investigation into his truthfulness, sought by the sheep that the Network Leadership Team was supposed to be leading, the Network Leadership Team responded that its members and Steve could not handle the emotional toll that an investigation would take on them.

This is profoundly selfish and is sinful. It is showing partiality to themselves and their own suffering, allowing those in their flocks and under their care to suffer instead. The people at South Grove were suffering as a result of Steve Morgan's past sin, his dishonesty about it, and the Network Leadership Team's protection of him. Many other Network churches have people suffering as well – I know, I've talked to them. Other Network churches simply don't talk about it.

Pastors are not called to lives of safety and security, they are called to shepherd their flocks like Christ. How did Jesus do that? Did he allow Peter to protect him with the sword? No – he rebuked Peter and healed the hurt that was done in the name of his protection. Imagine that – imagine if the Network Leadership Team stopped protecting itself and instead set itself about the work of *healing* those who had been harmed by their self-protection?

To be sure, even Network pastors and the Network Leadership Team make some sacrifices. I have little doubt that many could be making more money doing other things. I believe that they would be relieved of substantial emotional burdens if they were not pastors. But if they are called by God and obedient to their calling, that does not render them unaccountable. In fact, they should consider themselves *more accountable*.

It is catastrophically bad judgment and sinful partiality for the Network Leadership Team to prioritize their own emotional well-being over the needs of their flocks.

I'll say it directly: if the Network Leadership Team cannot withstand an investigation into whether Steve Morgan has been honest since 2020 about his past sin and how it was brought up with Vineyard and other leaders, they should resign from the Network Leadership Team. If Steve Morgan cannot withstand scrutiny of being investigated for truthfulness in the last 2.5 years, if he cannot handle the emotional and psychological toll of being held accountable, he must resign or be removed.

Instead, the "prophecy" is fulfilled. Steve's "big foundation" is protecting him in an un-Biblical, un-Christ-like way. The Network Leadership Team is acting as Peter, metaphorically swinging swords in Gethsemane in an effort to protect. But a Christ-like leader would give himself up for the sheep, submit himself to whatever suffering might come.

To be sure, charges should not be admitted against overseers / elders willy-nilly. 1 Timothy 5:19 indicates that there is a threshold for admitting charges against overseers. In this case this is not a charge of dishonesty leveled against Steve by a single witness. Instead, it is by at least a group of the overseers of a Network church. In reality, it is also leveled by numerous Vineyard leaders and others along the way.

In asking for investigation and accountability, we were not seeking to persecute or crucify Steve. Instead, we felt a responsibility to shepherd the flock well and acted accordingly. Part of that is ensuring that the leaders of the Network – leaders that Network churches follow and the pastors of local Network churches follow – meet the God-ordained qualifications for elders. There was sufficient reason to question whether Steve meets those qualifications.

The Network must reform to stop showing partiality toward the protection of pastors over the protection of the sheep. This sort of partiality is sinful and wrong, and the leaders must repent of it and seek to restore the relationships that they've damaged protecting themselves. Network pastors should be above reproach in their behaviors. But they should never be considered immune from being reproached or immune from the consequences of their actions. They are treated that way presently, and it must change.

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