

# RIGHT or WRONG? Firing the pastor

July 18, 2008

**Churches terminate pastors and staff members every week. If we really believe God calls ministers to a church, is it right to fire them?**

In Baptist churches, we deeply believe in the priesthood of the believer, which also leads us to congregational decision-making. Each believer has the privilege and responsibility to seek God's direction and make decisions together accordingly.

We do this when we hire our ministers. Each individual member of the congregation and the minister who is considering coming into our midst together pray for God's guidance before asking the minister to join the congregation. While the minister has a particular role, he or she is not solely in the position of determining God's calling.

Much the same process should exist when determining if it is time for a minister to be dismissed. The church members together with the minister should have the opportunity, in most cases, to seek God's direction. Certainly, there are circumstances when this may not be possible—for instance, when moral failure occurs and trust is broken between pastor and church.

Often, however, ministers are asked to leave because of differences of opinion, conflict between factions in the church or small mistakes that become bigger over time when not addressed. In these cases, it is important to remember 1 Timothy 5:17-22. In these verses, the Apostle

Paul encourages Timothy and the church to be careful in accusations of those who preach and teach among them. He asks that they not lay blame without hearing from multiple witnesses and not be too hasty.

Instead of avoiding conflict or difficulty in the church and with our ministers in particular, we must learn to have honest and grace-filled conversations about our differences. These conversations can lead to healing rather than deeper division.

Often, churches fire their ministers because they have not made efforts to keep communication open to discuss differences in love and grace before insurmountable conflict erupts.

We read in 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13, “We request of you ... appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work.” Even when difficulties arise, we ought to approach ministers with love and respect. This doesn’t mean we bury our difficulties. Instead, we address issues with real honesty and integrity.

Churches may not always be able to resolve conflicts with pastors. Often, however, if we seek to treat one another with grace and love, we will find that whether the minister stays in the church or leaves, the experience can be one where Christ is glorified as we treat one another with love.

Emily Row Prevost, team leader/coordinator leader

Communications/spiritual formation specialist

Baptist General Convention of Texas, Dallas

*Right or Wrong?* is sponsored by the T.B. Maston Chair of Christian Ethics at Hardin-Simmons University’s Logsdon School of Theology. Send your questions about how to apply your faith to [btillman@hsutx.edu](mailto:btillman@hsutx.edu).

