

From Section 4: Alluring Idols

*"The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply;
their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names on my lips." Psalm 16:4*

Common Sin Struggles of Pastors and Their Wives: Desiring Protection in the Church

"How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!" –Psalm 133:1

A GOOD THING

Feeling safe in the church is a good thing. We were meant to live together in unity. It is an echo of the perfect fellowship Adam and Eve enjoyed before the Fall. "Naked and unashamed" was more than just the lack of clothes. It was a lack of hiddenness or need of self-protection. There was no selfishness or self-ambition. They were fully known to each other and were fully unified in their love for God and His good plans. And, it is the promise of the world to come, in which our hearts will know and enjoy each other fully and worship God together fully, without any fear or selfishness.

A GOOD THING, GONE BAD

But now, in the "Now and Not Yet," there IS selfishness and self-ambition. We all have sinful hearts. There are desires that war inside of us and put us at odds with our brothers and sisters in Christ. We look for safety to protect us from the very ones we are to enjoy unity and fellowship. And, there are choices as to where we go to find the safety we desire, not all of them God-pleasing. This is why longing for safety in the church can be a tempting sin struggle.

Why Are We at Odds with One Another?

What causes the sin struggles to arise between church members? You could write down most of the New Testament in answer to this question!

Here are three, major categories:

1. Trouble from the World

Racial tension, pandemic restrictions, political clashes may be part of the world, but they do not wait nicely outside the church doors. We bring them with us as we gather to worship God and love one another each week. Will the same ignorance, prejudice, mean-spiritedness, or even aversion of others be true of our treatment of one another? How do our pastor/husbands lead their local congregation in wisdom, charity and unity? How will we respond to those who consider our husbands wrong or uncaring in their response to world issues?

2. Christian Freedom

Praise God for the clear, black and white truths of the gospel! But oh, how we need help when it comes to all the matters of Christian freedom! Is it ok to drink? How much? Does the Bible tell us we must homeschool our children? Sometimes it seems there are as many opinions as there are members! How do our pastor/husbands help us be thoughtful and respectful of each other's exercise of freedom within the gospel? How do we deal with members who look down upon the way our family has chosen to exercise Christian freedom?

13. Baggage from Our Past

Even after we become Christians, made new in Christ, we unfortunately bring our “old man” with us to wrestle with, even as we are being transformed into likeness of Christ. This old man seems to especially ove to stir up trouble in the church when it comes to trusting leadership in general, and male “dominated” leadership in particular. Whether it was a father who misused his authority and neglected or hurt his family; or, some other person of influence who did not live worthy of the trust placed in them, many believers struggle with trusting the pastors/elders. Our husbands may be misjudged and distrusted not because of their actions, but because of someone’s past.

How will they respond when their leadership is questioned? How will we respond to those who hurt our husbands when we know they work so hard for the welfare of the sheep? How will they be tempted to avoid “tough love” that would be best for a particular member knowing that they may very well be misunderstood and attacked?

Sin Lurking in Our Hearts

Perhaps the biggest and most fundamental reason we look for safety in the church is because of the selfish desires in each of our hearts. James said it well:

“What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.” –James 4:1-3, ESV

How will we and our husbands respond to the quarrels and fights among members? How will we respond to those directed at our husbands and even to us? How will we deal with the selfish desires that war in our souls that tempt us away from what is best for the church or best for a particular church member? How do we avoid becoming bitter or closing ourselves off from members or giving into gossip about those who have mistreated us?

THE TEMPTATIONS FOR PASTORS/THEIR WIVES

No wonder we are tempted to seek for protection in the church in the wrong places! Pastors are called to follow Jesus’ example and lay down their lives for the sheep, but this is sometimes very hard and painful. No one enjoys being misunderstood, distrusted or unappreciated.

Our husbands and we alongside of them may be tempted to avoid the crush on our self-worth by raising up “yes men” who never correct or question. They may be tempted to go along with things, turn a blind eye, skirt around difficult issues or just settle to let those who are different find another church so they don’t have to help the congregation find unity.

We may be tempted to avoid hurt by striving for perfectionism and be seen as a “Do It All” woman that no one can find fault with. Or, we might be tempted to put up a façade and avoid letting people get to know us or our family. We might try to keep our problems to ourselves. Or as wives, we might pour ourselves into a “backstage” ministry to hide from the general membership.

When hurt, we may be tempted not to reconcile but to remain unforgiving, bitter and even vengeful. We may be tempted to slander and gossip others and pity ourselves. We may want to lash out against those who hurt our husbands. Or, to simply weave a thicker cocoon to insulate us better from future hurts, or simply despair.

RECOGNIZE THE ROOTS

Examine your temptations and look at your heart's desires that are at the root. These can help us see where we need to fight sin where it starts. You might find desires like this when you struggle with desiring protection in the church:

Fear of "Man"

It is tempting to let our desire for approval from others keep our husbands or ourselves from loving the congregation in hard, but good ways. Whether it is confronting sinful prejudices or enduring hurtful responses, our desire for the respect for others can tempt us to avoid difficult situations or try to shield ourselves from others as a way to be safe.

Forgetting God Is the Great Shepherd/Failing the Church

Pastors are only under-shepherds. They can never take God's place and "save" the church. At heart we can see that we are forgetting that we must rely on God rather ourselves for the church to survive and even thrive. He will have to be the one who equips His pastors He is the one who will have to give the wisdom needed. He is the one whose Holy Spirit is able to help us forgive, persevere, and grow in unity.

Pride that Sees Only Your Way as Correct

When it comes to matters of Christian freedom in lifestyle and issues related to topics like politics and racial tensions, it can be tempting to take a "my way or the highway" stance. These arrogantly, strongly-held opinions voiced between church members and especially from our husbands can turn the focus off of our unity in Christ.

Especially for our church located in D.C. where so many members work in politics, it has been of monumental importance to urge humility and respect for those whose opinions differ from you. Our pastors have had to watch their hearts and their mouths carefully in order to encourage the congregation to do the same.

Troubles with Our Old Man

There is nothing like difficulty to open the coffin on our old way of reacting and thinking. When faced with difficulty in the church, we need to examine our hearts for these sinful responses.

TACKLE LIES WITH TRUTH

However slick or legitimate our sin struggles look, we know that with sin, there is a good desire believing a bad lie. Look to God's Word for truth to replace the lies.

Wrongly Desiring People's Approval

We and our husbands are to love the church, but our hearts first belong to God.

"Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man." --John 2:24-25, ESV

"For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ." --Galatians 1:10. ESV

Forgetting God Is the Great Shepherd

Christ Is the head of the Church. He will equip our husbands. He will fulfill His plans. We can have confidence in His abilities every bit as much as we may doubt our own. We very well will suffer in caring for His people, but we can entrust our care into His hands.

‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.”--2 Corinthians 12:9

God Gives Power to Do What He Wants Our Husbands to Do

“So don’t be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord...Instead, share in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God. He has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.” --2 Timothy 1:8-9, ESV

We Can Entrust Our Hearts to God to Care for Us

“Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.” --1 Peter 4:19, ESV

It Is Hard to Confront Our Sin and Sin in the Church, But the Church Is Worth It

“Flee from youthful passions, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. But reject foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they breed quarrels. The Lord’s servant must not quarrel, but must be gentle to everyone, able to teach, and patient, instructing his opponents with gentleness. Perhaps God will grant them repentance leading them to the knowledge of the truth. Then they may come to their senses and escape the Devil’s trap, having been captured by him to do his will.”--2 Timothy 2:24-26, ESV

Opposition to Sound Doctrine Is Expected. It Doesn’t Mean Our Husbands Are Failing, But Often Shows that They Are Doing What God Wants Them to Do

“Proclaim the message; persist in it whether convenient or not; rebuke, correct, and encourage with great patience and teaching. For the time will come when they will not tolerate sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, will multiply teachers for themselves because they have an itch to hear something new. They will turn away from hearing the truth and will turn aside to myths. But as for you, be serious about everything, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”

“For the grace of God has appeared with salvation for all people, instructing us to deny godlessness and worldly lusts and to live in a sensible, righteous, and godly way in the present age, while we wait for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for Himself a people for His own possession, eager to do good works. Say these things, and encourage and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you. --Titus 2:11-15, ESV

“Remind them of these things, charging them before God not to fight about words; this is in no way profitable and leads to the ruin of the hearers. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who doesn’t need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth. But avoid irreverent, empty speech, for this will produce an even greater measure of godlessness.” --2 Timothy 2:14-16, ESV

God Will Give Our Husbands the Wisdom They Need to Lead Their Church

“All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” --2 Timothy 3:16, ESV

Even If We Face Difficulties More than We Bear, We Can Rely upon God to Be Enough

“For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.” 2 Corinthians 1:8-11, ESV

Jesus Is the Church’s Head and Savior, Our Husbands Don’t Replace Him, Only Work under Him

“He is before all things, and by Him all things hold together. He is also the head of the body, the church;” --Colossians 1:17-18, ESV

Jesus Gave Men Like Our Husbands to Equip the Church.

We can count on Him to equip them for the work He calls them to.

“And He gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ;” Ephesians 4:11-12, NASB

Seek Unity, Fight Bitterness and Unforgiveness with God’s Word and God’s Spirit

“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” --Colossians 3:12-17, NIV

Jesus Died that We Might Put Our Old Man to Death

“He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. –1 Peter 2:24, ESV

Clothe Yourself with Charity and Humility Rather than Pride

“Therefore, as God’s chosen ones, holy and dearly loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a grievance against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you are also to forgive.”

-- Colossians 3:12-13, CSB

RUN TO GOD

Ask God to give you and your husband more of His heart for His people--full of love, compassion, mercy and protection more than they could ever deserve. Ask Him to prepare you to react in love when mistreatment comes. Ask Him to grow the fruit of His Spirit in your hearts. Ask Him to remind you both of how undeserving you are of His mercy as members treat you in ways that will need your mercy. Ask God to give your husband and the other elders wisdom to the best decisions for difficult, potentially divisive issues. Pray for God's people to grow in trusting their leaders and in love and unity with one another.

Ask God to help you entrust your hearts to Him, letting His love for you be where you find safety rather than hiding your hearts from loving God's people. Ask God to help your husband stand strong for sound doctrine, even when it is very unpopular, giving him winsome words to help members not go astray. Ask God to help your husband grow in his confidence in God's sovereignty and headship of the Church and in His ability to equip your husband to shepherd well under Him.

Pray, pray, pray when you are struggling with bitterness or unforgiveness! It may take time, but God will do this work in your heart! Ask God to give you a heart of gratitude for all of the blessings you and your husband have received through the church; and, for all the ways He has helped you and your husband in past struggles.

REACH OUT TO OTHERS

Be a church of prayer! Ask others to join you in praying for unity and love for your church.

You and your husband seek out same-sex, trusted friendships with whom you can share your hurts without embittering them to other church members. Ask their advice in how to fight temptation to withdraw from church members to protect your heart from hurts. Encourage these friends to be honest with you if they see unforgiveness, bitterness, slander or gossip in how you are reacting to difficulties.

Ask God to raise up other elders to serve alongside your husband to better think through difficult issues, helping members with their difficulties, and building unity in the church.

Seek to know people who are not like you that God might grow your love and appreciation for them. There's nothing like understanding someone else's perspective to grow your desire for their good.

ARMED AND READY

In the Moment:

"But even if you should suffer for righteousness, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear or be disturbed, but honor the Messiah as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason[d] for the hope that is in you. However, do this with gentleness and respect, keeping your conscience clear,[e][f] so that when you are accused, those who denounce your Christian life[h] will be put to shame." –1 Peter 3:14-16

Set your mind to expect fellow members to be sinners and for difficulties to arise. Hurtful comments will happen. Difficult situations will come. Set your mind to expect God to help you as you face it.

If you tend to be slow on your feet or quick to be angry or unkind when someone criticizes you or your husband, take time to write down a God-honoring defense. Ask God to put those words in your memory and soak into the attitude of your heart. You might never use this "script" as written, but will bless your prayers and can prepare your mind with better words in the moment.

Social media is all too often used as a personal soap-box for particular political or racial views. Be careful about the attitude and the extent that you air your opinions. In this seemingly “out-of-church” arena. Often church members are each others’ friends on social media. You may unwittingly be making unity in the church more difficult by your comments. If you are offended by someone’s words, see it as an opportunity to encourage forgiveness and kindness, helping lead towards unity and commending the gospel.

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” –Ephesians 4:29-32, NIV

In the Church:

Hopefully, your husband will be one of a group of elders who can together pray and make good decisions for your church regarding response to difficult situations. Or, if a sole pastor, can be in contact with other elders/pastors at other churches facing similar difficulties for advice. Be serious about the Lord’s Supper as a meal of unity as we remember what Christ did to make us His people.

As Paul says,”

Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves.” 1 Corinthians 11:28-29, ESV

Keep your accounts of offenses short! Seek out those you are out of fellowship with before you take the Lord’s Supper. Encourage others to do this also! God would not call us to do this if He did not mean to help us forgive each other in the process!

In Your Strategy:

Learn the importance of the issues your husband and the other elders wrestle with. Appreciating their importance can help you support your husband as he makes hard stands. (See section on the Nine Marks for some common issues.) Learn each other and how you can beckon each other away from church concerns. Words of encouragement, a meal out with friends, a hike out in nature, intimacy in the bedroom are just a few ideas.

Learn the situations that tend to tempt you or your husband to fear your safety or seek your safety in someone or something other than God. Ask God to help you find His way through those situations in a way that honors Him.

Read

When People Are Big and God Is Small by Ed Welch

REPENT ON REPEAT PLEASES GOD

On this side of heaven, God's people will struggle to live together in love and unity. We will have to go back to our Savior again and again to forgive us and to help us to forgive others and treat them with more charity than they deserve. They will need to do that for our husband and us, too. God is pleased with our fight and is the One who will help us fight. And as we fight, we show the world who we will spend our lives aiming to love: our Savior and each other.

YOUR MERCIFUL HIGH PRIEST

Jesus knows your struggle! He knew what it was to be insulted and rejected by the very ones He came to save. He watched His disciples fight among themselves for the place of honor. He was weary with the sin of God's people.

"Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour."—John 12:27, NIV

"For to this you were called, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving an example for you to follow in his steps. He committed no sin nor was deceit found in his mouth. When he was maligned, he did not answer back; when he suffered, he threatened no retaliation, but committed himself to God who judges justly."

He who endured all of this is tender-hearted towards us and able to help us through the insults and suffering from the world we face.

Questions for You

1. How do you/have you desired to be protected from the church?
2. Has this led to any sin struggles for you? Have any of these been heightened by or caused by the fact that your husband is in the ministry?
3. What has helped you in these struggles?
4. Do you have any other words of wisdom for people with this struggle?