

## Forgiveness for the Past

As present Head Elder and past Head Elder, we desire to make a statement before we lead the congregation in a commitment/ prayer of Forgiveness regarding our Pastors of the past.

As we contemplate the actions of the Elder Board in times past, we have tried our best to do what is honouring to the Lord and best for Bethany Baptist Church. We have wanted to be prayerful and godly in our endeavours. However, it can be said that there have been times when we did not listen to the concerns of the body as we should have. We did not do our duty to direct and protect the Body of Christ at Bethany as we should have. We did not deal with sin properly and played favourites with some as compared to others. We were afraid to speak into issues that we should have dealt with but believed they would cause too many problems. There have been times when we acted in a manner that can well be perceived as arrogant and proud. There have been times when we wanted our own way and not the way that the Lord Jesus would have us work.

Because of this and on behalf of the present Elder Board and for those men who have been elders in times past, we submit ourselves to you and ask before almighty God for your forgiveness. Please will you forgive us?

## Asking Forgiveness From the Pastors of the Past.

As present Head Elder, and past Head Elder, we take seriously our responsibility to lead the congregation in a commitment/prayer asking for forgiveness for our dealings with the Pastors of the past.

In this discussion we are thinking specifically of Pastors Tim MacIntosh, Roger Grose, Lyle Schrag, Andrew Stanley, Dennis Memmott, Ian Lopez and even Rick Lazer and the other pastors who have been a part of our body in years past. The pastors and their families are being considered here.

As we consider our dealings with our former pastors and their families we recognize that we have been responsible for causing real hurt by the means by which we dealt with them. Despite the biblical indications that the man of God is special instrument of God and is called of God to his post (indicated by the call from the body), we have more often dealt with them as hired hands or employees than as respected leaders and mouthpieces of the message of God. We have ignored the injunction of Hebrews 13:17 which reads, *“<sup>17</sup>Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.”* Work at Bethany often became joyless for them because we found it so hard to follow them but instead went our own way. More than that, the pastors were not regularly given the “benefit of the doubt” because of our love for them, but instead we were murmuring, nit picking, gossiping and backbiting about them, to their and our detriment. This behaviour was, as the passage says, *“of no advantage to us”*.

Further, we often acted as though the pastor was the foreigner who came for a while and then would leave, and only we knew best the culture of our church, and how ministry should and must be done at Bethany. The real struggles that our pastors faced as men, as husbands, as fathers and as neighbours have not been the concern to us that they should have been. In the midst of conflict, (and because the ministry is a spiritual battle there is always conflict from

the world, the flesh and the devil) we, more often than was appropriate, sided with the adversary than the godly leader that was placed before us.

As to the families of these men, the expectations we added to what a pastor's wife already faced were sometimes heavier and more difficult than they could bear. We did not appreciate, as we should have, the spiritual and theological struggles some of our pastors' wives faced in the context of being an example here at Bethany and a "helper suitable" to the husbands.

The children of these men, far more sensitive than we knew, felt the pressures on their parents. They responded in ways that caused them difficulty and reactions to some formal church settings even to this day. Their tender hearts were not cared for as they should have been.

When the pastors left our midst, they often left under a cloud of acrimony and not of blessing. The struggles that lead to the conclusion of their ministry have often been allowed to cloud our view of these faithful men to this day. The fact that few of our former pastors visit our congregation in these days is a cause for concern.

It is on the basis of these things that we corporately, as a body knit together, and parts one of another, come to a time of repentance and our requesting forgiveness, first before God, then before the pastors of our past who we have dealt with in these ways.

***Will you join with us by standing and assenting to these things that we have read? By standing, you will indicate your desire to have a delegation of the elders take these things we have read and the prayer we will pray together to the pastors of our past, on your behalf, directly asking them to forgive the congregation of Bethany Baptist Church for the sins we have together committed against them.***

**Will you join us as we seek the Lord in a prayer of Commitment? If you agree, please stand in humility and bow with us as we lead you in prayer.**

Dearest Lord and loving heavenly Father, You know the hearts of all the people who stand before you here this morning. You know how very hard it is for us to see our sin and confess it. The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked – we don't know our hearts as we should. As we have meditated this week and sought you in prayer, we have seen our pride and our sin together, and we do not want to live like this as a body any more. We confess that we have done wrong to the pastors that you led us to call into our midst as undershepherds, with their wives and families.

We confess that we have not submitted to the pastors of our past and that we were not able to see them joyfully minister before us. We gossiped and grumbled and backbit and attacked the work of these men of God. For this we ask for your forgiveness.

We confess that we often treated our pastors as hired employees more than spiritual leaders, foreigners who did not know how to lead us, and people who did not need our support, help and encouragement in the hard work they carried on for us. We confess we sided with their opponents often, as opposed to them. For this we ask forgiveness.

We confess that we placed burdens on the families of these men that the wives and children should not have had to bear. We confess that our attitudes and actions may have damaged the work of God in the lives of some of these family members. For this we ask forgiveness.

We confess that we have not made Bethany an inviting place for the return of our former pastors, nor have we had attitudes toward these men as they left that were wholesome in your sight. For this we ask for forgiveness.

Lord, forgive us and hear our prayer, we pray. *“Create in us a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within us. Cast us not away from your presence, nor take your Holy Spirit from us. Restore to us the joy of our Salvation”* This we pray in Jesus' name.

Now, Lord, by your Spirit give us the courage to take these things and give them feet. In Jesus' most holy name we pray, Amen.

*And All God's People said "Amen"!*