

CHAPTER 16

DEALING WITH WICKED CHURCH LEADERS – SOME INTRODUCTORY POINTS

¹⁷ *For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.*

2 Corinthians 2:17 (ESV)

² *But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.*

2 Corinthians 4:2 (ESV)

³¹ *the prophets prophesy falsely,
and the priests rule at their direction;
my people love to have it so,
but what will you do when the end comes?
Jeremiah 5:31 (ESV)*

*Your prophets have seen for you
false and deceptive visions;
they have not exposed your iniquity
to restore your fortunes,
but have seen for you oracles
that are false and misleading.
Lamentations 2:14 (ESV)*

⁸ *The priests did not say, 'Where is the Lord?'
And those who handle the law did not know Me;
The rulers also transgressed against Me;
The prophets prophesied by Baal,
And walked after things that do not profit.
Jeremiah 2:8 (NKJV)*

¹ *"If a prophet arises among you, or a dreamer of dreams, and gives you a sign or a wonder, ² and the sign or wonder which he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, 'Let us go after other gods,' which you have not known, 'and let us serve them,' ³ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or to that dreamer of dreams; for the Lord your God is testing you, to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.*

Deuteronomy 13:1-3 (RSV)

¹⁴ *And the Lord said to me: "The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I did not send them, nor did I command them or speak to them. They are prophesying to you a lying vision, worthless divination, and the deceit of their own minds.*

Jeremiah 14:14 (ESV)

¹¹ *And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray.
Matthew 24:11 (RSV)*

¹² *And what I am doing I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do. ¹³ For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ And no wonder, for*

even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.¹⁵ So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

2 Corinthians 11:12-15 (ESV)

What if the wicked are in leadership positions in your own church? Are you to keep away from them even then?

As your eyes begin to open and your discernment increases, you will start to discover wickedness in the church. Actually, it has probably been there all along, without you seeing it. You need to know what to do when you make that discovery, so let's consider some basic principles. Firstly, you must not remain under the leadership of any false or wicked men. Therefore ask yourself whether the person leading your church is false or deceitful, or involved in any sexual sin or financial wrongdoing. Is he manipulative, controlling or domineering?

Ask yourself those questions directly and seriously and don't fudge your answers. Such behaviour can only be described as wickedness if it is done by one who claims to be a Christian, and especially by a leader. At the very least, it is a clear sign that such a leader is heading in that direction. If so, all you can do, realistically, is to come out of that church and go elsewhere. It won't change, regardless of what you may try to say or do to get it to change.

Just leave and seek another church immediately. It is not disloyal or unfaithful to leave a church in such circumstances. You need to be part of a good and genuine church, led by faithful men, and it is your duty to try to find one. Or, if that is not possible, then perhaps you could start one. Use all the discernment you have and never continue to support any church which is apostate, teaches false doctrine, or is led by worldly men who live sinfully:

¹ But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. ² Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; ³ and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

2 Peter 2:1-3 (NASB)

A leader cannot be classified as a "false teacher" merely because you disagree with his theology, not even if you can prove he is definitely wrong on some point. He could simply be mistaken, as we all are at times. We need to be careful not to accuse sincere men of being false teachers merely because we disagree with them. A 'false teacher' is not a man who makes a mistake in his theology. If that was the definition, every Bible teacher would be false, because we all make mistakes. We all also have opinions with which other sincere people disagree. A 'false teacher' *deliberately* teaches things which he *knows* to be false.

Or he is *reckless*, or *indifferent*, as to whether it is true, but still teaches it anyway. He might do so to make money, or to keep the peace, or to avoid upsetting people. All of those are wrong motives and would reveal that his heart is false. It hinges on the heart-attitude of that man, i.e. whether he is sincerely seeking for the truth or not. I emphasise this because I have heard people make extremely quick pronouncements, whereby they unfairly condemn honest leaders who are merely mistaken, or with whom they simply disagree. Such things are not what Peter was referring to in his second letter.

It is wrong to adopt a position of 'neutrality' between the wicked and the godly, i.e. between the wrongdoer and his victim.

People often opt out of the duty to discern. They say they are "not going to take sides" and will "remain neutral" in some dispute within a church. In our dealings with Rhoda and Stephen and then with Philip

and Sonia, this became a live issue. We had been dealing with Rhoda's misconduct, especially the lies she told about Charles. Later on a couple in the church, 'James and Eve', became agitated and asked to speak to Philip about the way Rhoda had been dealt with. They had been lied to by Rhoda, who spoke ill of Charles, and also of me.

Rhoda was enraged that I had asked for a meeting to discuss her gossip and slander. But that wasn't how she described it to James and Eve. They were told that we had mistreated her and, as is usually the case, they believed her, without checking any of her allegations. James did not call me but he did speak to Philip, who was an elder, and asked him for an explanation of how Rhoda had been treated. When he was questioned, Philip didn't explain the situation or criticise Rhoda's misconduct. He also chose not to support me, or to explain what I had done or why it was needed.

He just read out a brief written statement which we had prepared some weeks earlier. That statement said Rhoda had left, but gave no details of her misconduct and did not address any of James' questions. However, when pressed by James for an explanation, Philip refused to say any more and just read it to him again. His refusal to answer questions, and his failure to defend me, caused James to conclude that my actions must have been wrong. To make matters worse, Sonia said she and Philip were "*keeping out of it*" and were "*neutral as between Rhoda and Sean*".

I felt very let down. Philip was an *elder* in the church and had a duty to defend the church and to prevent people being deceived. He also had a duty to defend me, and my reputation. If he felt unable, in good conscience, to approve of my actions, then he had a duty to say so, and to explain why. But he never did that either. He simply decided to "*stay out of it*". That was bad enough, in itself, but in reality he was supporting the wrongdoer, because his very silence was an implicit condemnation of me.

The cowardice shown by 'Gareth', an ineffectual elder, who was afraid to take sides or to speak up openly. He didn't even dare to confront his own wife about her misconduct.

'Gareth' was also an elder in that church, though in name only. He was totally ineffectual due to his weakness and cowardice. When we tackled Rhoda I was deeply unimpressed by Gareth. We had to coax him to disclose what he knew about her gossip, whereas he ought to have come forward with those facts voluntarily. It was his duty, not only to tackle Rhoda, but also to tell us what she had been doing. He did eventually tell us about some of Rhoda's gossip. But when her husband, Stephen, went to see him he was so scared he denied saying the things he had told us.

One can understand Gareth being afraid, as Stephen was younger and bigger than him. But it still doesn't justify him denying what he had said to us. Even if he had been overwhelmed by fear at the time, he should have told us afterwards that he had been bullied into retracting what he'd told us. Instead, he kept quiet, just as he had before we questioned him, because Gareth wanted to avoid all controversy and stress for himself. But that is not acceptable. It is the first duty of an elder to protect the flock, not to protect himself, let alone to avoid hassle.

What Gareth did was wicked in my view, as it was a repeated failure to do his duty. He put himself, his own convenience, and his wish for a quiet life, ahead of the needs of the church. Gareth also failed to tackle his own wife, 'Belinda', whose behaviour was atrocious. She too was a gossip like Rhoda and a controlling and a malevolent influence in the church. It was she who rang round telling people not to come to the monthly teaching day when I was due to speak.

She told them the scheduled speaker had been cancelled and "*some student*" was speaking instead. Belinda told that lie purely from malice. She was fully aware at all times that I was the replacement speaker not "*some student*". Yet she intentionally misled all those people, causing many of them not to attend, while knowing it was all a lie. That incident was bad enough, in itself, but it was by no means the first time she had done such things.

Gareth had a duty to tackle his own wife about that incident and also the many other wicked things she did which harmed the church and individuals within it. Gareth knew more about these things than we did. But he did nothing. Instead, he let his wife rule over him, and kept quiet about her misconduct, rather than risk antagonising her. So, Belinda's behaviour was wicked, but Gareth's was too, for *doing nothing about it*. Some might excuse him on the basis that he acted out of fear, but I don't think that will be accepted as a defence, or even a plea in mitigation, at the Judgment Seat.

Cowardice is a sin, not just a 'weakness'.

Cowardice is an extremely serious sin, not just a little weakness for which we can't be held responsible. It is our fault if we fail to do our duty because of fear. That is why apostle John includes the cowardly in his list of people who are heading to the Lake of Fire:

⁸ But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, as for murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death."

Revelation 21:8 (RSV)

The cowardly rightly belong in that list because cowardice is a sin in its own right and is also the cause of other sins. It leads to things being tolerated that should never be. A coward puts his own welfare ahead of his duty and ahead of the needs of others. Therefore cowardice is a form of selfishness. But it is not just about physical danger or death. Most of the time, it is simply about not wanting to be disapproved of or criticised, as with the Jews in John chapter 12, who believed in Jesus but didn't say so publicly, for fear of people's reactions:

⁴³ for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.
John 12:43 (RSV)

Cowardice also involves not wanting to risk losing a promotion, or even our job, due to being faithful to God. It is mainly over things like money, job, popularity, reputation and career prospects that most of us buckle and compromise. Therefore, cowardice is a heavy-duty sin. It will cause many to be classified as wicked, either due to the sin of cowardice itself, or the other sins which it *leads us into*. What Gareth failed to do was perhaps worse than the things Rhoda and Belinda did. He was an elder, and a husband, and will therefore be judged more strictly.

The problem of church leaders who are too cowardly, or too indifferent, to tackle other leaders within their church who are acting wrongly

An elder is meant to be a shepherd of the people entrusted to him. That means he needs to watch out for false teaching and false teachers, both outside and inside the Church. By definition, most false teachers, wolves, abusers and deceivers are *within* churches. That is the obvious place for them to be because, if they want to deceive and damage the flock, they have to get close to them. However, a high proportion of church leaders are too cowardly to confront them, especially if the man doing the harm is a fellow leader.

Tackling a fellow leader is stressful and can be costly in personal terms. Therefore most leaders won't do it. They look the other way and let their colleagues get away with things that should never be tolerated. A small example of this is 'Patrick', the leader of a church we were in years ago. He failed to deal with an incident involving 'Rod', one of the junior leaders, who was looking after the work among students. I went to Rod to volunteer for work, as the church had just requested extra helpers. Rod was interested and asked what experience I had.

I told him I had a lot of experience of student evangelism plus Bible studies, mentoring and general discipleship training. As soon as I said all that, Rod's face dropped and he began to make excuses and became flustered. He said they had already had a lot of volunteers and didn't need any more, but that I was welcome to make a financial donation! Rod was newly appointed and felt insecure. He was threatened by the prospect of someone joining his team as a part time helper who had more experience of student ministry than he did.

It showed in the panic in his eyes and voice, in contrast to the calm and eager tone he'd had only a few seconds earlier. But I had no wish to take over his ministry. The 'threat' was just in his imagination. I couldn't take over anyway, as I was running a law firm and was too busy. I only wanted to help part-time like the other volunteers. But Rod saw a threat and couldn't cope with it. Church leaders are probably the most insecure of all professions. Everywhere I have worked, in the Police, law firms, or summer jobs, managers never had the paranoia that so many church leaders feel.

Later Patrick, the senior minister, happened to come over and I told him I felt upset about Rod's response. Patrick just nodded and never contradicted me. He had already seen this trait in Rod for himself, so it was not news to him. Patrick then replied, in a jocular tone, "*Ah yes, he's just feeling threatened - that's what it is*". He spoke as if it was a minor foible, which we just have to put up with. Then he did nothing at all about it. He didn't even apologise on Rod's behalf. Either it never occurred to Patrick to do anything, or he wasn't willing to.

He was meant to be the Senior Minister and had a duty to act, for my sake, the students' sake, and even for Rod's sake, so as to help him to change. Yet he did nothing, which was a serious failure on his part. Yet the sad fact is Patrick only did what most church leaders would do. He didn't want to confront Rod, as it would be a difficult conversation. He knew Rod wouldn't change anyway, even if he was told to, and also that Rod was no different from most other church leaders. He was just more transparent about it, because he was younger and had been taken by surprise.

Rod was also a fellow 'clergyman'. Thus Patrick felt Rod was entitled to his support when in a disagreement with a mere 'lay person'. Quite apart from all that, Patrick probably felt he had more important things to do and couldn't be bothered. Insecurity and paranoia are commonplace amongst leaders. If Patrick tried to tackle such things, it would be a never-ending job, not only dealing with Rod, but with most other leaders. He would sympathise with Rod anyway, since most church leaders regularly feel threatened, including himself.

For Patrick to oppose Rod's behaviour would also set an unfortunate precedent, as it would imply that manipulative or controlling behaviour by other leaders is also wrong. But that would call the whole hierarchical, clergy-based system into question and very few 'clergymen' are willing to do that. This mild example of Patrick and Rod is at the shallow end of the pool when it comes to being cowardly about tackling fellow leaders. There are far more serious examples of blatant abuse, where nothing was done by the other leaders. We shall look at some of those in the following chapters.

The cowardice shown by other church leaders in the town where I lived when they failed to tackle 'Rick', a leader of a church

Another example of cowardice by fellow leaders arose in the case of 'Rick'. I tried to tackle him when I was Chairman of the Trustees of a particular church and he was the Senior Leader. He did some bad things, for which there was clear proof. But the whole senior leadership team backed him, obstructed me, and tried hard to cover it all up. Two other leaders from two separate churches in the town were then brought in to 'mediate'. But it quickly became apparent that they also just wanted to cover it all up. They had no desire to bring anything to light or to tackle anybody.

Their main aim was to protect Rick himself because he was a fellow church leader, albeit of a different church. I told them they were like shop stewards from the "church leaders' trade union" and were

seeking to protect Rick, regardless of what he had done. They just laughed ironically. One admitted that that was, pretty much, what they were doing. The other didn't contradict him. It would have been hard to deny it anyway. It is normal for leaders to cover up the misconduct of other leaders, even in other churches. It is partly because they feel they *need* to, but also because they *want* to.

It's also because it doesn't matter enough to them to do anything about it, or because they are too afraid to do so. Wading into a dispute, telling the truth, and opposing the wrongdoer, would get themselves into hot water. So, covering things up is not done solely to protect each other. It is also about self-preservation and avoiding flak for themselves. Church leaders who turn a blind eye to each other's wrongdoing will face a severe judgment. God will hold them accountable for their failure to act and saying that they were "afraid" will not be accepted as a valid defence.

By contrast, note the boldness with which Jeremiah directly confronted Pashhur, a priest who was prophesying falsely.

Having seen those examples of cowardly leaders who won't confront fellow leaders, note what Jeremiah did when he came up against Pashhur the priest, who had been prophesying falsely. He had also opposed Jeremiah's genuine message and had him imprisoned and beaten:

Now Pashhur the priest, the son of Immer, who was chief officer in the house of the Lord, heard Jeremiah prophesying these things. ² Then Pashhur beat Jeremiah the prophet, and put him in the stocks that were in the upper Benjamin Gate of the house of the Lord.

Jeremiah 20:1-2 (RSV)

Jeremiah is very direct and tells Pashhur exactly what he is and what God is going to do to him:

³ On the morrow, when Pashhur released Jeremiah from the stocks, Jeremiah said to him, "The Lord does not call your name Pashhur, but Terror on every side. ⁴ For thus says the Lord: Behold, I will make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends. They shall fall by the sword of their enemies while you look on. And I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon; he shall carry them captive to Babylon, and shall slay them with the sword. ⁵ Moreover, I will give all the wealth of the city, all its gains, all its prized belongings, and all the treasures of the kings of Judah into the hand of their enemies, who shall plunder them, and seize them, and carry them to Babylon. ⁶ And you, Pashhur, and all who dwell in your house, shall go into captivity; to Babylon you shall go; and there you shall die, and there you shall be buried, you and all your friends, to whom you have prophesied falsely."

Jeremiah 20:3-6 (RSV)

Consider also how direct and bold Jeremiah was when speaking to the people about false prophesy in general.

It was not only with men like Pashhur that Jeremiah was blunt. He also gave clear, direct warnings to the people about false prophets in general, and repeatedly warned them not to listen to them. He evidently did not take the view that it was 'divisive' or 'judgemental' to speak out against false prophets and false teachers, as so many people today claim that it is:

¹⁶ Thus says the Lord of hosts: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes; they speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. ¹⁷ They say continually to those who despise the word of the Lord, 'It shall be well with you'; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, 'No evil shall come upon you.'"

Jeremiah 23:16-17 (RSV)

²⁵ *I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, 'I have dreamed, I have dreamed!'* ²⁶ *How long shall there be lies in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart,* ²⁷ *who think to make my people forget my name by their dreams which they tell one another, even as their fathers forgot my name for Ba'al?*

Jeremiah 23:25-27 (RSV)

³² *Behold, I am against those who prophesy lying dreams, says the Lord, and who tell them and lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness, when I did not send them or charge them; so they do not profit this people at all, says the Lord.* ³³ *"When one of this people, or a prophet, or a priest asks you, 'What is the burden of the Lord?' you shall say to them, 'You are the burden, and I will cast you off, says the Lord.'* ³⁴ *And as for the prophet, priest, or one of the people who says, 'The burden of the Lord,' I will punish that man and his household.* ³⁵ *Thus shall you say, everyone to his neighbor and every one to his brother, 'What has the Lord answered?' or 'What has the Lord spoken?'* ³⁶ *But 'the burden of the Lord' you shall mention no more, for the burden is every man's own word, and you pervert the words of the living God, the Lord of hosts, our God.*

Jeremiah 23:32-36 (RSV)

⁹ *So do not listen to your prophets, your diviners, your dreamers, your soothsayers, or your sorcerers, who are saying to you, 'You shall not serve the king of Babylon.'* ¹⁰ *For it is a lie which they are prophesying to you, with the result that you will be removed far from your land, and I will drive you out, and you will perish.* ¹¹ *But any nation which will bring its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him, I will leave on its own land, to till it and dwell there, says the Lord."*

¹² *To Zedeki'ah king of Judah I spoke in like manner: "Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people, and live.* ¹³ *Why will you and your people die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence, as the Lord has spoken concerning any nation which will not serve the king of Babylon?"* ¹⁴ *Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are saying to you, 'You shall not serve the king of Babylon,' for it is a lie which they are prophesying to you.* ¹⁵ *I have not sent them, says the Lord, but they are prophesying falsely in my name, with the result that I will drive you out and you will perish, you and the prophets who are prophesying to you."*

Jeremiah 27:9-15 (RSV)

⁸ *For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams which they dream,* ⁹ *for it is a lie which they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, says the Lord.* ¹⁰ *"For thus says the Lord: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfil to you my promise and bring you back to this place.*

Jeremiah 29:8-10 (RSV)

Church leaders who behave immorally and prey on women in the church

Another form of wickedness, which is less widespread, but which occurs more often than many assume, is for leaders to be sexual predators and to take advantage of women in the church. There was a case on social media of a Nigerian pastor who committed adultery with over 50 women. That is at the top end of the spectrum, but there are many leaders who, on a more modest scale, are behaving immorally. The fact that the women are often willing participants, or even throw themselves at these men, does not excuse it. The leaders remain accountable for their own actions and so do the women.

The question of who started it is a side issue. The women may be guilty as well, but that does not excuse the men. I remember a case when I was a student and part of a good fellowship as far as I could then see. The pastor was accused of having an affair with the wife of one of the members. When I first heard of it I couldn't believe it. I assumed it was a lie designed to damage the church. I was very naïve and trusting in those days, so I went round to see the pastor and, without even asking him whether it was true, I told him he had my full support.

I added that I thought it was terrible that people were saying such things about him. As I said this, I felt that his reaction was odd. He didn't seem encouraged at being supported. He actually looked uncomfortable, and even seemed to be squirming. His wife was there too and she was ashen-faced throughout. She stuck by him, at least in public, but there was evidently more to it than I had assumed. Some days later a friend of mine, who knew the pastor far better than I did, and who also knew the other woman and her husband, told me that, actually, the allegations were entirely true.

I was stunned, as I was young and had not seen much of what goes on, either in the world or the Church. Shortly after this the church fell apart and the pastor resigned and got a job as a salesman. That adultery incident opened my eyes a little more to the realities of life and how badly even church leaders can behave. Then, about three years later, when I was a policeman, in another town, another scandal broke involving a leader. He had what seemed to be a successful youth ministry, but it emerged that he had been engaging in sexual activity with some of the girls.

The hostile reaction of 'Peter', an assistant leader in a church, when I tried to tackle the senior leader, 'Rick'

Many years after that I was Chairman of the Trustees of another church and was trying to tackle Rick, the senior leader. I faced bitter opposition from 'Peter', one of the other leaders on the senior leadership team. He led the children's ministry and was aggressive on Rick's behalf when I said that Rick, and the church as a whole, was behaving carnally. He didn't like me saying that and, some months later, I found out why. My comments had touched an exposed nerve-ending in Peter.

Throughout this time he had been having an adulterous affair of his own. When I learned of this it suddenly made sense. It explained why he didn't want me talking about issues of personal holiness and integrity. It was all too close to home and made Peter lash out at me as a reflex reaction, as if someone had tapped him under his knee. He left his wife when the scandal broke and the church reduced drastically in size. Accordingly, those who don't think there is wickedness in the Church need to take sexual misconduct into account. That may alter their view.

That is not to say that all men who fall in that way are necessarily wicked. But many are. They have had a lot of revelation, due to being Christians but, even more so, by being leaders. Those who know more will be judged by a higher standard. The things they do are more serious, and more likely to be classified as wicked, than if the same things were done by unbelievers, or by immature new believers. Many leaders fall into sin because they are pursued, not only because they are the pursuers. If so, the women who entice them are also behaving wickedly, whether the men are leaders or not.

Situations where a church is teaching false doctrine

Let's now consider how wicked it is for leaders to teach false doctrine, or just to fail to teach true doctrine. In either case it could be due to dishonesty, laziness, cowardice or indifference. The absence of true teaching can be just as damaging as the presence of false teaching. More leaders harm God's people by the *truths they don't preach about* than by the false things they do say. Let us focus first on the direct preaching of a false gospel or of other false doctrines. What should a Christian do and how false does the teaching need to be in order to leave a church?

It is a matter of individual conscience, and will depend on all the facts of the case, but we can formulate some general guidelines. One question is whether the teaching is of primary importance. That is does it promote sin or relate to the fundamentals of the Gospel, the identity of God, or the status of the Bible? Or is it about secondary issues which are important, but not foundational? A stage may be reached where the error goes too far and your conscience will not let you stay in that church. Take the Church of England as an example, as its errors are in the public domain and well known.

If you were a member and were observing its decline, at what point would you feel you have to leave it? It could be over their stance on women leaders, or women bishops. Or, it may be over gay marriage, homosexuality, Israel or any number of other issues. Perhaps you had felt able to remain in it for many years, despite a succession of increasingly liberal Archbishops, but you had to leave when Rowan Williams was appointed, as he was a druid. He was thus involved in the occult, as well as being more liberal than any of his predecessors.

It can vary from church to church, even within a denomination. Churches can also become gradually more unbiblical in their doctrine and practice, by a series of seemingly small steps, rather than in one sudden collapse. If the decline occurs slowly, it can make it harder to perceive when a line has been crossed that requires you to go. You may have already tolerated previous lines being crossed, yet without leaving. If so, those past compromises can dull your conscience. Then you become less able to recognise subsequent issues.

An example of a particular Anglican church, which had degenerated very badly in its doctrine and practice

A woman in a large Anglican church wrote to me for advice as to whether to leave it. The issues were more to do with the local leadership, rather than the wider Church of England. She listed a number of problems, such as their unbiblical practice of infant baptism and their lack of focus on repentance. They were also running the 'Alpha' course, which pays hardly any attention to sin and repentance and even less to God's judgment, Hell and the Lake of Fire. Those crucial issues are all watered down or removed, so as to make Christianity more attractive and less 'negative'.

Her church also invited visiting speakers with seriously unbiblical beliefs, such as Rick Warren and even Roman Catholic priests. Catholicism is a blend of paganism, man-made philosophy and traditions mixed up with some elements of Christianity. Lastly, her vicar was encouraging people to engage in 'meditation' and 'contemplative prayer'. Those are unbiblical practices, arising out of Hinduism, and other Eastern religions, and have nothing to do with the biblical concept of meditation.

Biblical meditation is about focusing on a passage of Scripture at length, examining it from many angles, and thinking deeply about God's Word. It has nothing to do with "*emptying one's mind*", let alone filling it with false, occultic ideas from Hinduism, Buddhism or the New Age. This lady was unsure whether to leave and go to a more biblical church, or to stay and try to persuade her vicar to change. She wanted to go to him and recommend good books and point out what was wrong with his teaching and approach.

I advised her that it was much too late for that. Any leader who is promoting, or even permitting, such unbiblical things is too far gone to listen to advice. I also warned her to beware, because false teachers don't like to be questioned or corrected, let alone rebuked. Thus she might be undermined and attacked if she was to speak up. I said she just ought to leave immediately and try to find a good, honest, biblical church elsewhere. That would be far more realistic than for one person to try to change a church that had degenerated as far as hers had.