

February 10, 2011

Dear Barry,

I read with sorrow your letter of January 14. I just met a deadline on a book project, so am now making the time to respond. My first thought was that I shouldn't do so, given the fact that I'm not involved in this. But I felt your pain, and God prompted me to respond. Though I don't know you, brother, I am seeking to write this in your best interests. No doubt some of what I'll say is misguided because, though I'm sincere, I'm also fallible. I've prayed about my response and seek to be biblical and Christ-honoring. As I write this prayerfully, I'd ask that you read it in the same way. I hope that the length of my response at least demonstrates how seriously I take your letter. Understand this: I am *not* saying you haven't been wronged by Ken. I don't know that story, and cannot address it. That's not what this letter is about.

First, I believe you were mistaken in several important points in your letter. In the first paragraph you said your letter's subject matter "concerns your [my] leadership role at Good Shepherd Community Church." In fact I am not a leader at my church. I have not been in a leadership position since I resigned as a pastor and elder in 1990. I've not been a deacon, a Sunday School teacher or anything else, other than a participating member of the body, serving now and then to speak to the church or a class when asked. None of these has involved a position or ongoing role.

Your handwritten note attached to your letter calls upon me to exert "some fatherly pressure" on "your daughter's husband to do the Christian thing." This is inappropriate. First, I know nothing about this situation beyond what you have said in your letter. Second, I do not have the right to know anything about it. Third, I respect my son in law, Dan Franklin, as a mature adult and a godly man and a follower of Christ. He is not an adolescent who has gone astray, he is a man and is my pastor. To distrust him and his leadership and bring pressure on him on your behalf, in matters I know nothing about, and have no business knowing about, is wrong on multiple levels, biblical and ecclesiastical and familial.

I do not know what your issues are with Ken Myers. I don't know him personally nor do I recall ever meeting him, though he could be one of many people I've met and said hello to at church, but don't know.

I do know Dan Franklin, Jim Dawson, and Bob Dorsey, though Bob has not been a pastor at Good Shepherd for nearly two years. If you have indeed taken this to Dan and Jim, since I know them to be trustworthy men, I would naturally tend to trust their judgment. You say that two leaders of Mt. Hood Household of Faith were also in agreement with not pursuing a further meeting. You name them also. I don't know these men. Since I assume they believe Scripture, as do Dan and Jim, I suppose they believe they have a Scriptural basis for not pursuing this further. Obviously you strongly disagree.

For me—someone who hasn't met with those involved and knows nothing of this, and who does not know you—to step in from the outside to take up a case on your behalf would be inappropriate. I believe it would violate Scripture. And I'm quite certain it would be unwise.

I am a firm believer in Matthew 18, seeking to practice it and always encourage people to live by it. This means taking your concerns to the parties involved and in authority. I am neither involved nor in authority, so, respectfully, I believe it is doubly inappropriate for you to come to me with this. This is between you and them and you and Ken.

I assume the church leaders you met with think they followed Matthew 18 by meeting with you and Ken, asking for the appraisal of others, and then drawing a conclusion. They did not refuse to meet with you. Rather, if I understood your letter, they met with you and Ken, heard the case, inquired, and came to a conclusion different than yours. That their view differs from yours does not violate Matthew 18. It means that when Matthew 18 was practiced, their conclusion didn't match yours. You say you will continue to pray for them until there is "open repentance." Are you so certain it is sin that they don't agree with you? Over the years as I've been involved with different people and situations, I've become less confident in my own assessments. Though at times I had strong feelings, in some cases time proved me wrong. But I had to have an open mind for that to happen. Brother, is it possible either that: 1) you are wrong in some of your thinking about Ken Myers and/or 2) you are wrong about the leaders of two churches who you are convinced have also wronged you?

You don't *think* you're wrong, obviously. But is it possible you have blind spots as significant as those you think you see in not only Ken Myers, but Jim Dawson, Dan Franklin and the elders at Mount Hood Household of Faith? (I know I have blind spots and if my response to you reflects any, I'm asking God to show me and you to forgive me.) Are you asking Him to show you your blind spots? If you don't see any, keep in mind there is a reason they are called "blind spots." If you don't believe you could have any blind spots in this situation, what is your biblical basis for an unswerving confidence in your own judgment?

Barry, I have to say I am deeply concerned that you quoted in your letter John 3:19-21, which I will repeat here: "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

I kept rereading your letter to make sure I understood who you were applying this passage to. In context you make it clear: "your [my] undershepherds." You use this passage in reference to men I know to be Christ-loving Bible-believing church leaders. But Barry, this passage is speaking about unregenerate evil-doers who love the darkness not the light. What were you thinking of when you applied it to these men?

I don't know Ken Myers or the elders of the other church, and am not in a position to vouch for them. But I do know Dan Franklin and Jim Dawson. I can vouch for them. They are not men who love darkness and hate the light! They aren't perfect, of course, but they are true followers of Jesus who bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

Brother, I believe you are taking Scripture out of context and applying it inaccurately and harshly to godly church leaders. To disagree with their conclusion or how they conducted the process is one thing. But to characterize them as loving darkness and hating the light is...well, inappropriate, to say the very least. I'm sure you are a nice guy and a good brother. But to be honest, that you would do this does not inspire trust.

Jesus said in Matthew 12, "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." I take these words very seriously. I hope you do too.

Am I thinking Jim and Dan are incapable of error? Of course not, and neither do they. I know my church leaders are fallible, just as I was when I was a church leader, and just as I am now, and just as you are. The

fallibility club, of which I could be president, has a large membership. Do I trust my leaders' appraisal of the situation more than I trust yours? Yes, because I know them, I have seen the fruit of the Spirit in their lives. They are my church leaders to whom God calls me to submit (Hebrews 13:17). I can disagree with them, but if they were men who love the darkness more than the light, trust me, I wouldn't respect them nor could I put myself under them.

Barry, over the years I have seen many people go to someone they believe has sinned against them. I've then seen them call in church leaders to get involved, just as you did. I've also seen some of them be dissatisfied with the outcome because the leaders didn't take their side. They professed to be seeking a biblical solution, when in fact they were seeking vindication of their particular viewpoint. That they couched it in biblical references did not change this fact.

I would ask you to consider something, as a brother in Christ. Suppose you had been happy with whatever these church leaders decided and it was Ken Myers who had been unhappy. Wouldn't you have thought Ken was blind and should have submitted to or been willing to live with the leaders' conclusions even though he didn't like them? Is it possible that you are not seeing this situation with objectivity?

Please don't take this as an accusation. Most likely you have some valid points that your brother Ken needs to hear. I assume you shared some of those in the meeting with him and the leaders. What you said may have had more effect than you realize, in that the issue was raised and could affect future perspectives and behavior.

But I would caution you not to be so confident that you are absolutely right. Sometimes I am dead wrong. Other times partly wrong or mostly wrong. But even when I'm right, I am seldom *absolutely* right. Yet I sense from what you say in your letter you haven't the slightest doubt that you're right about every claim you make, including some that, as I've said, I know to be inaccurate. That makes me wonder how in touch you are with your own weaknesses and errors in judgment.

You say that Dorsey and Franklin investigated the situation by speaking with others who have dealt with Ken Myers. You say they did this by "their own authority." I'm not sure I understand what you mean by this, but I suppose they probably were trying to test your word against Ken's, and the people they spoke with confirmed Ken's. Likely there were others who would have agreed with you. Did you submit those names to them? Since I'm not involved in this, I'm not seeking an answer, just raising a question. If you have a problem with them, then they are the ones you should be writing to, not me. I am not looking for follow-up correspondence with you, because I would simply be inviting you to violate Matthew 18 by discussing with me what is none of my business. That discussion needs to take place with them, not me.

Your letter raises some red flags. Sometimes we hold on to offenses and insist that all must be made right according to our understanding of what's right. But if you live that way it will become an obsession. God calls us to be obsessed with the grace and glory of God and the person of Christ. 1 Corinthians 6 asks, in the matter of grievances Christians wish to press against their brothers (even in court, though I trust that's not your desire), "why not rather be wronged?"

Barry, I've had situations over the years in which I believe various people did wrong to me. Not all of them required mediation, but when it was attempted and unsuccessful, I needed to let go and forgive. I prayed for those people, forgave them, took ownership of my own failings, and now have good relationships with them. Are you praying for God's work of grace in Ken's life?

Is Ken in a leadership role in our church? If so, I've never heard it. If he is a member of the church not in a leadership position, then perhaps, having taken your concerns to his church leaders, your job is done. To insist that they agree with you and take your side, and that they are doing wrong and not doing "the Christian thing" and living in darkness and hating the light unless and until they do, is not, in my opinion, reasonable or helpful.

I would encourage you, my brother, to be careful that when you quote Scripture you apply it accurately. For instance, you say you don't trust the leaders of these churches because in 1 Timothy 3 it says that a man who doesn't know how to rule his own house won't be able to lead the church of God. But what does that verse have to do with this situation? Are you saying these church leaders have failed to lead their children in the path of godliness? That is the meaning of the passage you quoted, but I don't think that's what you meant by quoting it, is it?

You go on to say that the leaders have failed to demonstrate Ken's "obligation to be above reproach, according to the Scripture mentioned." But that Scripture you mention is 1 Timothy 3, which speaks of elders. Is Ken an elder at our church? If he were, I think I would know it. You appear to take the moral authority by repeatedly quoting Scripture, yet your citations reflect an inaccurate understanding of it.

In your letter's fourth paragraph, you offer a long list of bold faced Scripture references. These total 26 verses, which supposedly support your claims. This appears impressive as long as someone doesn't look them up. I looked up every one of them. In most cases I couldn't see the slightest relationship between the passages cited and the issues addressed in your letter. Your first passage cited is Matthew 4:4,7 and 10. Great verses, which I wholeheartedly believe but I failed to see any connection whatsoever to your grievances with my church leaders. These are men who believe God's Word, hate Satan and worship God. So I am simply at a loss to see how the verses pertain. You cite verses about not adding to God's Word. But who is adding to God's Word? I see no connection. You cite Luke 24:27 where Jesus expounded to the disciples on the Emmaus road the Scriptures concerning himself. Wonderful passage, but how in the world does it relate to your concerns about Ken Myers or the Good Shepherd leaders? You cite 1 Timothy 3:16-17. There is no verse 17. Verse 16 says "great is the mystery of godliness." Great too is the mystery of how this verse even remotely relates to your letter.

The effect, at first glance, of seeing all those boldfaced Scripture passages is, "Barry knows Scripture and cites it, and bases his claims on it." But the effect of actually *reading* the passages is exactly the opposite. I read them, and hope the men you gave the letter to did so. If they did, I think they might wonder why you cited them. In all fairness, I think I could randomly choose any 26 verses of Scripture, without knowing their content, and find them equally relevant to the issues of your letter. My fear, Barry, is that by citing all these passages and references you are giving yourself, and perhaps others, the illusion of being biblical. But being biblical requires far more than citing a quantity of verses. Were Dan Franklin to cite 26 verses, I'd expect them to actually pertain to the subject at hand. The fact that your verses, while fully God-breathed, do not appear to relate to your arguments is both puzzling and disappointing.

Brother, I would encourage you to ask yourself if you are approaching this matter in the spirit of 1 Peter 5. Are you acknowledging local church authority? Are you seeing the hard job of church leadership, in which context Peter calls upon leaders and all of us to be humble. Humility often includes not only allowing ourselves to be wronged, as Jesus did, but recognizing that we are not always correct in our appraisal of those we believe have wronged us.

A passage to meditate on: "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against

another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.” (Colossians 3:12-15)

You say you believe it is “reasonable to afford you [me] 30 days to discuss this among your church leaders, *to arrive at the scriptural conclusion that...*” Well, it seems you have predetermined that there is only one possible legitimate outcome to whatever our church leaders should decide! They must decide what you have decided, or they are unscriptural. When I was a church leader, twenty plus years ago, I sometimes shook my head in wonder when people told us we must do what they wanted or we were morally and biblically wrong. We believed the Bible as much as they did, and sometimes more. But our understanding of those passages and others wasn’t always the same as theirs.

As for Peacemakers, I am a big fan of this ministry. A year and a half ago I recommended that our own church be involved with them, and our leaders decided to do this. If our leaders decide to call them in on this situation, that’s great. If they don’t, I’ll trust their decision. Certainly you can’t argue that our leaders are afraid to take the time and spend the money to pursue biblical reconciliation with PeaceMakers, since in fact, as Scott will attest to, that’s what they already did on a far wider and more costly level than what you are proposing.

As for you giving me thirty days to discuss this with them, as I’ve said, it is not my place to do so. Perhaps I will become one more person you have a grievance against because I am not complying with you. But your conversations should be with them, not me, and in my opinion, not others. And as for your instruction to me, “Please have [Scott Cliff] contact me with a meeting date that works for he and Ken Myers,” that is clearly inappropriate for me to do. This would require me going to Ken Myers about a situation that I have no authority concerning, no knowledge of, and no right to know about.

Your issues are with the parties directly involved in this process. Your dissatisfaction concerning the handling of it is between you and them. If you are determined to go to all the elders of both churches with this, I would urge you to tell this in advance to the leaders who met with you and Ken (since Bob long ago left as a pastor, I suppose that would involve Dan and Jim). That’s only fair, so that if they have any further thoughts for you concerning this, they can express them.

You say that you copied this letter to Scott Cliff and the elders and deacons of your church. (If Scott is who I think he is, I met him when he served with Peacemakers at our church, and he seemed to be a fine brother.) My objection is not at all about Scott, who in the right situation—including perhaps this one—could be a great asset to the process. What I do object to is you writing a letter to me that shouldn’t have come to me in the first place. But you complicated it further by copying it to others. Since they read your letter to me, they could be tempted to pass judgment on others when they, I assume, have not spoken with Dan Franklin or Jim Dawson and likely don’t know them. You could have just written to me brother to brother so I would need to respond only to you instead of having to respond to all of them.

I am sad it has come to this, Barry, and I genuinely wish you the freedom that comes with forgiveness. I would encourage you that if this situation does not work out as you have desired, that you would trust not simply the church leaders involved, but the Lord Himself, the God of providence, who extends grace to forgive and to move forward in life, focusing on Him.

Twenty years ago this month I was in a courtroom day after day for four weeks and heard abortion clinic employees lie under oath, accusing me and others falsely, and winning a lawsuit of 8.2 million dollars. 1

Peter 2:23 became very dear to me: *When they hurled their insults at him, Christ did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, **he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.***

If you are correct that you have been seriously wronged by your brother, remember that God is the righteous judge and He will do what's right. We should always seek resolution, but sometimes we must give up on vindication. We will not always be satisfied with people's responses, or the responses of mediators. But in the end we will not find peace in insisting that others see things our way. That is a dead end street, one that leads to never-ending turmoil, not the peace of Christ.

Oswald Chambers warned against the distraction of "our passion for vindication." St. Augustine prayed, "O Lord, deliver me from this lust of always vindicating myself." Barry, I am your brother, not your judge. I don't know whether these words are for you. I offer them only in case they may be.

I pray, brother, that whatever does or doesn't come out of your attempt to pursue this further, that at some point you will be able to find rest. May you know the peace of Christ, entrusting yourself and your brothers and this situation to Him who judges justly.

Your brother,

Randy Alcorn