

Ethics, Etiquette and Protocol in Ministry

Introduction

Churches must commit themselves to the Joshua 24:15 mindset, “As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” HB London: If a person does not have a code of ethics, he almost has a license to behave in any manner he chooses.

We are living in a day when ethical behavior is not valued. Business executives value the bottom line over ethics. There is one place, though, where unethical behaviour should never appear — in the lives of ministers. Those who have been called to preach the gospel should exhibit godliness and integrity.

What is the impact of unethical behaviour of a pastor?

HB London Jr states the following in response: Some churches become almost suspicious and mistrusting of their spiritual leader. Pastors come and go, but they never find a place of trust in that congregation because the church has been betrayed to a point where they determine they will never get close to a spiritual leader again. This not only affects the senior pastor, but also the youth pastor, music minister, and continues its ripple effect within the body of Christ. HB London junior goes on to say, I have experienced this in my life. I was 16, a senior in high school, and an only child. I remember an unbelievable sadness that came over me when my parents told me my father would no longer be allowed to pastor the church he was presently serving. We would be moving out of our beautiful house to a walk-up apartment on the outskirts of town until I graduated from high school. I remember looking in my parents’ eyes and seeing the shame there, especially in my dad’s eyes.

As I grew older and became privy to what other people were thinking, I realized that the influence he once had was significant, but that his failure had disappointed many people. Even though he was restored and became president of a seminary, I saw the shame and the hurt in his life. When he looked at me and my mom, he realized he had done something to us that could never be reversed.

My father’s failure continues to shape everything I do. I do not want to hurt anybody the way he hurt me. I do not want to disappoint anybody the way he disappointed me.

HB London: I would try to take away the trappings of prestige, power, position, and placement and become like Paul, who cried out when his heart was strangely warmed, “O God, here am I. I am not worthy, but use me however You want to use me. I will do whatever You ask me to do.”

Categories of Ethics

Honesty

Don't lie. Particularly about things that might result in a demotion in ministry. God can also demote you in the spirit.

Don't exaggerate. Lying from the pulpit is unethical. When preaching or sharing try to conduct and validate the research. Be careful of hearsay.

Preaching

Don't preach against people but rather for what's right.

Be careful about calling out names from the pulpit or in house groups. We don't want to be known for who we are against but rather for what we are for.

Don't proof text. That's abusing the scriptures to enforce your own doctrine.

Don't preach from a place of bitterness

Don't preach what is supposed to be for an individual one on one

Money Matters

Don't use the fact that you are a minister as your right to freebies and other benefits

Pay church bills if you are an administrator (if not the church can get a bad name)

Be careful because you represent the church so watch how you speak to outsiders (service providers etc). Ministerial PR people have sometimes given the church a bad name.

Never count money alone

Never take money home if you are a pastor. Rather let someone else do it

Always have an account of church money used

Be generous when it comes to claiming refunds from the church

Rather give money than lend

Avoid borrowing money from congregational members if you are a pastor or leader. Its very difficult to rebuke someone who you have borrowed money from.

Business

Never solicit business in church settings unless it's a business event that has the purpose of networking.

You can talk about business in response to requests made

Don't assume that everyone in Church with you is honest in business

Think through the consequences of a fall out in business. Often these fall outs are due to unfulfilled expectations in a deal or poor quality work.

Be careful about employer employee relations

Don't hire people on a welfare basis but think about it from a business perspective; are they good? are they trustworthy?

Guest ministry

Be generous with the honorarium based on the level of ministry coming to you

The honorarium should cover expenses and also be an encouragement to the minister

The visiting minister must be welcomed at their point of entry

Give visiting ministry the honour that is due e.g. fetching from airport, special seating and welcome, giving them space so they are not overcrowded, (some are introverts),

Refer to the visiting minister according to the manner they use in their church.

Give the guest minister adequate time to minister. Often you can allow them to go overtime. Remember they have travelled from afar.

If you are leading youth or a small group or any ministry you need to clear any external ministry with the pastoral leadership. Remember you are representational in your leadership. The flock do not belong to you.

Allow the inviting pastor to introduce the visiting pastor as opposed to the MC doing so.

Introduce the visiting pastor's wife and team too. You may be disregarding an Abigail or Elisha. Don't just focus on the Elijah or David.

Make sure you know how to say the name of their church otherwise it can seem very disorganised and distant.

Unless impossible be present at the service which you have invited the minister.

Honour visiting pastors even those that are not ministering

Travelling as a minister

You are accountable for your time

Don't be demanding but be humble

Be honest about your needs e.g. space needed

Be honest about the costs incurred. Don't be too proud to talk about this

Tell the receiving ministry your standards (e.g. they may not share the same view around meals with the opposite sex)

Flow with the programme you have been given

Try to stick to the time you have been allocated

Don't be presumptuous about what you have been given liberty to do. Have you been asked to also do an altar call? Are you doing a business seminar or a miracle service?

Show appreciation for the host minister and the church you are visiting. Don't promote yourself or position yourself as superior. The church should like their pastor more because of you. Let them promote your materials instead of doing it yourself.

Study the city you are travelling to eg it may be dangerous to do ministry at night there due to crime.

Don't invite yourself to minister. Let them invite you.

Make sure you are released to go by your own pastor. Your pastor may know things about them that you don't know.

Don't go based on the size of gift you will receive or luxury of the hosting.

Pastoral authority

Beware of taking sides – seen especially in ministering to couples. If you bad mouth one to another they might end up seeing you as the enemy to their marriage.

Exercise boundaries in counselling (you are not the decision maker they are and they should initiate the counselling)

Beware of heavy shepherding

Know your pastoral jurisdiction. What am I to that church?

Beware of spiritual abuse:

J. Lee Grady outlines some characteristics of spiritual abuse:

Lack of freedom (eg forcing you to come to church and making you feel guilty even when you have exams next day)

Shaming

An authoritarian leadership style. The apostle Paul told the Corinthians that he did not "have dominion over your faith" (2 Cor. 1:24), but that he served in humility alongside them.

A secretive atmosphere. The word occult actually means "secret." And secrecy is always a hallmark of a spiritually abusive church. Leaders are not open about their own lives, they don't allow members to question anything and the financial records of the church are closed. A healthy

pastor encourages openness, welcomes input and invites participation. You can be certain that if there is secrecy in a church, there is something to hide. Don't submit yourself to such a system. Be careful of ministries where everything is on a need to know basis.

Spiritual elitism - Spiritually abusive churches often bash other denominations, insisting that their doctrines are better. This becomes a breeding ground for strange teachings.

Financial manipulation. In unhealthy churches, people are coerced, berated or threatened at offering time. 2 Corinthians 9:7 says giving should be done cheerfully and without compulsion.

No respect for personal liberty.

Hyper-spirituality. Before too long, the super-spiritual leader will invent excuses for his bad behaviour by saying that "God told him" to do unreasonable or unbiblical things. When a leader claims an inside track to God but never surrounds himself with godly counsellors, watch out! He is headed for a train wreck.

Ministerial visits

Don't visit someone of the opposite sex alone. Rather go with someone else for accountability.

Don't overstay your welcome

Be careful how much food you accept. Rather be moderate. Don't come across like you like lots of food. Be careful about visiting people on an empty stomach.

Be careful about impromptu visits. You don't want to embarrass people who might not be ready for you. Try to arrive at the agreed time and not too early or late.

Don't go to private areas of their house unless you are invited to do so (sometimes people have only tidied one area of the house). Other times they are just sensitive about what is public and what's private. Also respect privacy when visiting church members in hospital eg visiting a woman after she has had surgery and isn't looking her best.

Pastoral Confidentiality

Take into consideration gender sensitivity (e.g. If you are a leader you don't need to tell your wife about a young man struggling with lust or pornography)

Prime the counselee that the senior pastors need to know the state of the flock so some things need to be communicated upward

You can't be confidential with things that might endanger someone

Promotion

Be careful of nepotism

Be careful of the halo effect in ministry

Deal equitably with all people

Be careful of cliques when you are a leader

Opposite Sex

1 Thess 5:22 Avoid the appearance of evil

- Do not give lifts to strange women or men you don't know
- Do not minister to someone of the opposite sex alone behind closed doors
- Do not discuss marital struggles with someone of the opposite sex. You might just be telling them what they are hoping and praying for.
- Do not touch someone of the opposite sex inappropriately whilst ministering. Be careful too of the types of hugs you give each other.
- Be sensitive when dealing with married people
 - Separate floors if travelling for business
 - Watch length of phone calls and topic discussed (stick to the business)
 - Watch timing of calls it can affect family time
 - Watch body language when you are with the person
 - Watch the type of compliments (clothing or body)
 - Greet their spouse after interaction
 - Cc their spouse where possible
 - Build intentionally with their spouse

Church services and prayer meetings

- Yield to the direction given by the prayer leader. Don't start praying about other things even if you are more senior in the church.
- Don't start ministering privately to someone whilst the flow is moving in a different direction
- Show enthusiasm and support for whoever is ministering (taking notes, saying Amen etc)
- As a mature minister try to see how you can build and fill any gaps
- Participate in the worship instead of being a spectator.

Ethics around leaving a ministry

Give your leaders ample notice of your departure

Don't tell too many other people before telling those in authority over you

Demonstrate appreciation for all you have received and gained as a result of their ministry

Don't leave in bitterness

Don't leave in conceit – maybe you were relying on a corporate anointing

Don't trespass in the spirit; maybe the blueprint you have is for what you will build one day.

Don't leave and start a ministry in a way that you know will hurt the church you are leaving

If you resign and leave then do so alone

Try to involve your pastors in the process., They might give you wisdom in how best it can work.

If you start a new ministry do so honestly without causing confusion (eg giving it a similar name – Go Movement International)

To Whom Are Pastors Accountable?

London: First, I am accountable to God and then to myself. We are also accountable to our congregation, our staff, our spouse, our children, our denomination, and the beliefs of our denomination. When we fall, it affects all these people.

Look after yourself

You are God's property. Don't endanger yourself unnecessarily. E.g. using public transport with reckless drivers. Not fixing your car.

Watch your health

Personal Devotion

Spend time with the Lord. Minister from a place of intimacy with Jesus.

Public appearance:

Dress code – adjust based on where you are ministering. Generally be a notch above the people you are speaking to. So, if its casual then you dress smart casual.

Don't dress in a manner that causes your brother to stumble.

Don't wear clothes that are revealing or too tight etc

Don't appear ostentatious

Don't brag on social media

Privacy

Don't just let anyone into your house

Be careful about having too much personal information on the website for safety reasons

Don't be public about your exact day of travel etc for the safety of your family.

Politics

Don't tell your people who to vote for.

Pray for the government leaders.

Don't alienate yourself by radical political ideas that hinder the gospel

The deeper you get into ministry be careful of public political affiliation

Preparation

Prepare well, whether for few or for many