

Knowing that God will stand by you and provide for you gives you tremendous freedom—freedom to have the integrity to resign from any position or take a stand against any situation you feel is inconsistent with God's call for you.

There are no guarantees. God never promises you justice, fair play, integrity, and cool-headed rationalism in an imperfect world (Jn. 16:33). So don't expect it! And don't assume that your political skill or Machiavellian cleverness can protect you from injury or rejection. If you do, you're in danger of idolatry—substituting personal skill for dependence on Christ.

People are not perfect. We in church leadership are quick to validate our own decisions, equating them with God's will. Yet I suspect many decisions in church work are in truth judgment calls—decisions and educated guesses based on what is practical, convenient, or even expedient. God have mercy on us for a bankrupt theology that accepts all human action in the church (and even in the world) as proceeding fatalistically from the all-encompassing will of God.

Joseph's experiences should teach us that God's ultimate will is not necessarily accomplished (or defeated) by a wrong act. We don't applaud Joseph's brothers for selling him into

slavery just because God was big enough to redeem that action and use it to accomplish His ultimate purpose. In the same way, we need to accept the reality and responsibility of imperfection, even wrongdoing, in the Church while still believing that God is great enough to redeem *all* circumstances for His ultimate purposes and glory (Rom. 8:28). This acceptance enables us to face our own mistakes truthfully and courageously, rather than blame God for them. It's a freedom that equips us to endure, survive, and grow from our errors and shortcomings.

Honesty really is the best policy. Tell the people the truth. Remember, it's not just any truth that sets us free; it's the truth we *know* that liberates us. If sin is involved, confess it. If intolerable circumstances prevail, admit it. The church needs to wrestle with difficult truth, not bury it. Of course, you should keep it in perspective. Be balanced, peaceable, and—above all—loving. But don't lie. Scripture is clear—the growth and maturity of the Church is nourished by the truth, not by candied cover-up.

The church is worth blood, sweat, and tears—even yours. Jesus loved the church and sacrificed Himself to secure its birth, survival, and growth. So don't destroy the church to vindicate your personal sense of justice. Accept the decisions of those in authority and allow those decisions to be their responsibility before God. Be available to minister to hurting people—season your speech with grace, comfort, and encouragement. Be a peacemaker, not a rabble-rouser. Do your best to facilitate a smooth transition to new leadership by helping your people retain loyalty to the church and transfer commitment from you to their new leader.

Walking Your Talk

In short, teach your people the same principles you are learning by demonstrating them in your own attitudes and behavior. The point is simple: If you're committed to Christ and His church, your highest calling is to lead your people to Him and help them build their faith on the true Cornerstone by demonstrating a Christ-centered life in all you say and do. ♦