

Moral Failure Guide

A Guide for Presbyteries Responding to Moral Fault in Ministers

Introduction

The Scriptures say to all Christians, *‘Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children, live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people’* (Eph. 5:1-3).

If these things are improper for God’s people generally, how much more then are they improper for those who have been appointed to positions of authority in His church.

Ministers are to be examples of godliness and observers form their impressions of God, in part, based on what they see in them. It is therefore of the highest possible importance that the models they observe must be God-honouring.

The cause of the Lord Jesus Christ has been damaged by the moral failure of church leaders. In this, the Presbyterian Church of Victoria has not been exempted. It has, historically, maintained a Code of Discipline to address occasions of ungodly behaviour. More recently it has developed a comprehensive procedure to protect children and young people and prevent the abuse of power. However, the church still needs a coordinated, coherent, consistent and accessible resource to guide presbyteries confronted with accusations (or actual occasions) of moral failure that might be brought against its ministers. Presbyteries should not have to ‘reinvent the wheel’ each time a situation arises. The church needs a defined process, particularly in view of the complexity of presbyterial church government, the dispersal of responsibility and authority across several jurisdictions, and the range of functions required to be performed in each jurisdiction. Such a process would see presbyteries provided with necessary support.

Executive Summary

When immoral behaviour involves a minister, the harmful consequences extend not just to the people immediately involved but also to their families, their congregations and the community at large. In addition, the glory of God, the claims of the gospel and the credibility of the church are seriously undermined.

This guide attempts to:

1. identify behaviour that constitutes ‘moral failure’ and help the church to recognise that such behaviours may be evidenced in varying degrees or levels;
2. elucidate the biblical framework for understanding and responding to ‘moral failure’ with particular regard to the nature of forgiveness and the need to restore penitent believers to fellowship while not necessarily restoring them to a position of ministry or leadership;
3. highlight the pivotal role of presbyteries within the unique operational structure of the Presbyterian Church, acknowledging that presbyteries will often benefit from resources and training in order to be equipped to address accusations of moral failure;
4. offer guidelines for presbyteries in that situation by way of a step-by-step process for dealing with accusations of moral failure when they are made against ministers – which process could be adapted by Sessions if called upon to deal with elders or other persons in leadership in congregations;

5. identify resource persons both within and without the denomination who could be acknowledged by the General Assembly and called upon by presbyteries to assist them when responding to any accusation of 'moral failure'.

Defining Moral Failure

Defining "moral failure" is a complex task; however, it generally refers to actions that demonstrate significant defects in moral character.¹ This includes, but is not limited to:

- Unbiblical (unethical) behaviour;
- Criminal activity;
- Conduct unbecoming of a minister;
- Sexual activity outside the sanctity of marriage.

It is important to note that certain immoral behaviours may also constitute illegal acts and may trigger mandatory reporting obligations. In all instances involving criminal or reportable behaviour, management must be conducted by the appropriate external authorities (such as the Police, Safe Church Unit Independent Investigators, or CCYP). All internal church procedures must not interfere with external processes and must be guided by the requirements of these external statutory and regulatory processes.

Moral Failure a Biblical Analysis

The character of God

Both Testaments proclaim of God: '*Holy, holy, holy*' (Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8). It is one of the fundamental affirmations of God's character. Not only is God holy (Psa. 99:3), he is also righteous (Psa. 145:17; Ezra 9:15; John 17:25), good (Psa. 145:9; Mark 10:18), wise (Psa. 104:24; Rom. 11:33-36), true (Num. 23:19; Psa. 96:5; Rom. 3:4) and full of love (1 John 4:8, 16). It is because God is holy that we are called upon to reflect his character, and to be holy (Lev. 11:44; 19:2; 1 Pet. 1:15-16). It also follows that God's law will reflect his character, so that it is described as holy, righteous, good and perfect (Rom. 7:12; Psa. 19:7).

There is life in keeping the law (Lev. 18:5; Ezek. 20:11; Rom. 2:13; 10:5), but only if we keep it perfectly (Matt. 5:48). Since God is holy, he cannot bear the presence of evil-doers (Ex. 34:7; Isa. 59:2; Ezek. 24:13; Nah. 1:2; Hab. 1:13; Rom. 1:18; Heb. 2:2-3). Ultimately God cannot co-exist with anything that is unholy. Nothing unclean will ever enter the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:27). He is light and in him there is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5).

Yet God is also slow to anger and willing to forgive - something that is true for his relationship with his covenant people of Israel (Ex. 34:6-7) and with Gentiles (Jonah 4:2).

Sinners before God

We are all conceived and born in sin (Psa. 51:5) and are children of wrath (Eph. 2:3). Our hearts are corrupt (Jer. 17:9; Prov. 4:23; Mark 7:20-23). We cannot please God (Rom. 8:8), and even our good intentions and our best actions cannot escape the effects of the Fall (Prov. 14:12; Isa. 64:6). Sin, sadly, is universal (Gen. 8:21; 1 Kings 8:46; Psa. 130:3; Prov. 20:9; Mark 10:18; Rom. 3:9-12, 23; Gal. 3:22).

Since we are all sinful, we are all under God's curse (Deut. 27:26; Gal. 3:10). That curse is death (Gen. 2:16-17; Ezek. 18:4,20; Rom. 6:23) – physical death (e.g. Gen. 5:5), spiritual death (Eph. 2:1) and eternal death (Rev. 21:8). The law which should have brought life has in fact brought

¹ An appendix to this document has wider list of examples of moral fault.

death (Rom. 7:9-13; 2 Cor. 3:7). So, it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:31).

We cannot redeem ourselves (Psa. 49:7-9; Job 9:2). We owe God a debt we cannot pay (Matt. 18:23-35); we need a Mediator to bring us together (Job 9:32-33).

All sins bring condemnation but there is hope

The Psalmist muses: *'If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?'* (Psa. 130:3) Of itself that is a recipe for despair, but the next verse reads: *'But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared'* (Psa. 130:4). God is able to remove his people's sins as far as the east is from the west (Psa. 103:12), and to hurl our iniquities into the depths of the sea, as it were (Micah 7:19). He promises to remember our sins no more (Jer. 31:34; cited in Heb. 8:12; 10:17).

The restoration of a right relationship with God

The offer of life goes out to all the world on the same terms: repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, particularly in his death to pay the penalty for sin, and his resurrection to defeat the last enemy itself. Repentance is necessary (Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 17:30), as is faith in Jesus (John 3:36; Rom. 3:26). Through justification, sinners who have sunk into the most degraded of lifestyles are brought into God's kingdom by means of Christ and the Spirit and are sanctified in evidence of their new status (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

What God demands of leaders

In both Testaments God has set apart a people for himself. His people are led by an assortment of leaders over time - such as kings, prophets, priests, judges. Some of God's severest strictures are reserved for leaders who mislead (see Jer. 22 for evil kings; and Jer. 23 for false prophets). When the sons of Eli the prophet descend into corruption and immorality (1 Sam. 2:12-17, 22-25), God judged them with death and the end of their priestly line (1 Sam. 4:17). Later, David was to declare as a leader: *'I will be careful to lead a blameless life'* (Psa. 101:2).

The restoration of a right relationship with God's people

The Christian life is not confined to our relationship with God. It also addresses our relationships with others. If we go to worship God and remember that a brother has something against us, we need to be first reconciled with our brother (Matt. 5:23-24). A rift between husband and wife will hinder their prayers (1 Pet. 3:7). We are to be those who are prepared to confess our sins to each other (James 5:16). This is not the open confession of all sins but the confession of those sins that have affected a particular brother or sister.

Where there is sin in the Christian camp, a brother is to show the offender his fault, in the hope that should there be repentance that would be the end of the matter (Matt. 18:15). However, should the offender seek to justify himself rather than accept God's justification, the testimony of two or three witnesses is to be gained, and if that fails, the church may declare the unrepentant offender to be outside the covenant community (Matt. 18:16-17). Indeed, *'whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven'* (Matt. 18:18).

Professing Christians who fall into such sin that the covenant community is harmed and the name of Christ blasphemed need to be confronted with the seriousness of the situation, but this must be done in a spirit of humility, gentleness and self-knowledge. In the words of Galatians 6:1, *'Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.'* Referring to this verse, Martin Luther declared: *'Therefore if you see any brother cast down and afflicted by occasion of sin which he has*

committed, run unto him, and reaching out your hand, raise him up again, comfort him with sweet words, and embrace him with motherly arms.'

We see this illustrated most wonderfully in the Corinthian correspondence where Paul exhorts the congregation to receive back a penitent brother (2 Cor. 2:5-11). John Calvin, Charles Hodge, Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, and Colin Kruse all say that this refers to the incestuous man mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5 (vv. 1-2, 4-5, 8, 13). Most modern commentators, however, say that it refers to a troublemaker who was leading the opposition to Paul. Tertullian suggested this in the ancient world, because he could not believe that the incestuous man could be forgiven. R.V.G. Tasker, F.F. Bruce and Paul Barnett do not believe that, but they think that it refers to a man guilty of rebelliousness rather than immorality. It is not unlikely that the man guilty of incest was also a focus for opposition to Paul. Whatever his actual identification, Paul urges the congregation to receive him back into fellowship (although without any reference to any position of leadership).

In responding to another's sin, Paul is consumed by grief more than anger (2 Cor. 2:5). Paul says that the church discipline administered to the man was sufficient (2 Cor. 2:6). He fears that the man may be overcome with excessive sorrow (2 Cor. 2:7). Paul has wounded in order to heal (Prov. 27:6). Sadly, the church has not always been good at this.

About the year 306 there was a church synod in Elvira in southern Spain. It passed 81 canons, dealing with matters such as idolatry, relations with pagans and Jews, usury, church attendance, divorce, sodomy, prostitution, fornication, adultery, abortion, and incest. We can get an idea of its approach by canons 47, 69 and 78, which deal with adultery. They declare that adulterers were excluded from communion for five years, and a relapsed adulterer was permanently excluded. That, however, is contrary to the biblical gospel. We are to reaffirm our love for, and forgiveness of, the penitent brother (2 Cor. 2:6-8).

It is wrong to be too soft. It is wrong to be too hard. Those who think that God is lax with sinners, must remember that he is so holy that he cannot look upon sin with favour. To those who think that gross sins place someone beyond the reach of salvation must remember that God's offer of grace is extended to the foulest of sinners. We have a shrewd foe in the devil, and he is always looking for opportunities to undo the church (2 Cor. 2:11).

Restoration to service

Any sinner who repents is restored to his relationship with God and should be restored to fellowship with God's people. **However, restoration to fellowship is not the same as restoration to service.** It is true that David remained king even after the darkest blot on his biography. Jonah after fleeing from the Lord, running into a storm, being swallowed by a great fish, and spat out onto a beach, received the word of the Lord a second time (Jonah 3:1). Peter, likewise, was restored to the task of feeding Christ's sheep. As Peter had denied Jesus three times, so he painfully rediscovered Christ's love in his threefold affirmation (John 21:15-17).

Nevertheless, the restoration to fellowship with God and his people is not identical with the restoration to service. Lust is as evil in God's sight as adultery (Matt. 5:27-28), but adultery has more severe consequences here on earth. Sin begins in the heart (Matt. 15:19), which is why Job made a covenant with his eyes not to look lustfully (Job 31:1). Though sins in the heart are as offensive to God as sins committed, this does not mean that they have the same impact. Not all sins are equal in their culpability (e.g. Luke 12:47-48; John 19:11), and not all sins are equal in their consequences. For example, if divorce is permitted on the grounds of sexual unchastity, it cannot be extended to mean divorce on the grounds of 'wolf-whistling' is permitted.

David was declared forgiven of the capital sin and crimes of adultery and murder by proxy (2 Sam. 12:13), but he still had to endure two dreadful consequences. He would live for the rest of his life with calamity in his household (2 Sam. 12:10-11) and the child born of the adulterous union with Bathsheba would die (2 Sam. 12:14-23).

It is not the case that all sins equally exclude a person from leadership. Were that to be true, the church would have no leaders. Repentance and faith in Christ alone will restore all sinners to God and his people, but the fact remains that an overseer (elder) must be 'above reproach' (1 Tim. 3:1). All Christians should be above reproach, but an overseer must be. This cannot mean that he is sinless, for Paul called himself the chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). Before God no one is above reproach. Indeed, the overseer must also have a good reputation with outsiders, meaning those outside the church (1 Tim. 3:7). Those who teach the Word of God will be judged more strictly than those who fail but do not lead others astray (James 3:1). It is a little like Luther's saying: 'Sin in front of a child, and you sin twice.' Partly because of this, the church should not be hasty in ordaining men into the eldership (1 Tim. 5:22) or restoring them to service.

In summary

Restoration to the body of Christ must follow immediately upon repentance. But restoration to leadership will depend on a number of other factors (not all of equal importance). Including:

- The nature of the sin. The more serious the sin, the greater should be the caution before restoring a person to leadership. Some sins may exclude a leader from ministry for the rest of his life.
- The likelihood of future failure. While no one can infallibly predict the future, a reasonable estimation needs to be made as to whether the penitent is likely to re-offend.
- The fallen leader's standing in the covenant community.
- The fallen leader's standing with the outside world.
- The length of time since the offence. While time does not heal all wounds, it can provide opportunity for evidence that repentance is genuine and repeated failure is unlikely. Time also enables a better evaluation of a possible future course.

The Role of Presbytery

When a minister is accused of moral failure, the Presbytery bears a significant weight of responsibility under the PCV Code (Rules 4.27, 4.28, 4.51, and 4.40).

Immediate Priority: External Reporting and Legal Compliance

The first duty of the Presbytery is to determine whether the alleged conduct requires referral to external authorities. If the matter involves criminal activity or reportable conduct, the Presbytery must prioritize reporting to the Police, Child Protective Services, Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP) and the Safe Church Unit (SCU). The Presbytery should await instructions from these agencies regarding whether a parallel internal investigation may proceed, ensuring that church processes do not interfere with civil or criminal proceedings.

Ecclesiastical Duties

Once appropriate legal and regulatory obligations are met, the Presbytery holds jurisdiction over the conduct of its ministers. Its duties include:

- Congregational Leadership: Providing necessary leadership and support to the local congregation to protect the interests of the church.

- Preliminary Assessment: Conducting an initial investigation under the Code of Discipline to assess the gravity of the allegations (noting that this is a matter of church discipline, not a substitute for criminal investigation).
- Disciplinary Proceedings: Conducting formal hearings under the Code of Discipline procedures if warranted.
- Adjudication: Determining the minister's status and applying appropriate discipline where the failure is proven (made out).

Pastoral and Moral Obligations

The Presbytery has a moral mandate to provide care and support to all impacted parties, prioritized as follows:

- Third Parties and Families: Ensuring professional counselling and ongoing support are provided to any third party and their family affected by the incident.
- The Congregation: Providing leadership and pastoral care to the local church community during the crisis.
- The Minister's Family: Offering support to the minister's family, who are often significantly impacted by these events.
- The Minister: Providing pastoral care and support to the minister, whether they are navigating a period of restoration or have been cleared of false accusations.

Challenges to Implementation

The fulfillment of these complex responsibilities is often hindered by:

- The difficulty of separating administrative, legal, and pastoral responsibilities;
- Competing interests among the various parties involved;
- The necessity of maintaining privacy, absolute impartiality, appropriate transparency and avoiding even the perception of injustice;
- Limited resources and personal available within presbytery; and
- A lack of specialized experience within presbytery in handling moral failure discipline cases.

Separation of duties

Presbyteries need to act, and be perceived to have acted, without bias. This demand is complicated by the fact that there will normally be six parties to an accusation of moral failure: the minister, their spouse, their family, the person with whom (or against whom) the moral failure took place (referred to as 'the third party'), the third party's family, and the minister's congregation.

It is difficult to answer a charge of bias if the same group of people is responsible for the ongoing support of all the parties as well as the discipline of any accused person. Unless there is some separation of responsibilities, parties in need of support may lack confidence that their fears and concerns are not being communicated to other involved parties. They may also struggle to find confidence in a process that requires a minister's peers to prosecute a case against him, adjudicate the case and, simultaneously, support that minister as he faces an accusation of moral failure.

Again, confidence may suffer if a person who has investigated an accusation of moral failure is then permitted to sit in judgment on that case.

To affect this separation and overcome any perception of bias a presbytery, when any appointment is being made in response to an accusation of a moral failure, should consider:

- asking those persons who investigated the alleged moral failure to recuse themselves from sitting in judgment on the case in line with the rules for prosecutors under the Code of Discipline 8.5.01(b);
- not assigning persons assigned to support an accused party to also support that person's spouse or the third party in the alleged moral failure. (Depending upon the age of the family, another group of persons should be considered to support the family although it should be noted that normally with school aged children or younger, this would not be needed); and
- not assigning a person assigned to support an accused minister to an active role in shepherding that minister's congregation in the period that follows.

If a presbytery is too small to be able to separate its responsibilities adequately, it should call on other people to fulfil necessary functions on behalf of the presbytery and, in any case, it should receive timely confirmation that the responsibility is receiving proper attention.

External Support

Presbyteries will rarely have the range of skills necessary to fulfil their responsibilities. To some degree, skill is developed through experience and few presbyteries (thanks be to God) have had occasions to develop such expertise. Likewise, the small size of some presbyteries limits their skill base and thus their capacity to fulfil their responsibilities without recourse to external means. Presbyteries would be wise to seek the appointment of assessors.

For these reasons, presbyteries should be encouraged, as well as seeking assessors, to seek help from outside parties which may include:

- the Clerk of Assembly (guidance on procedure);
- the Law Agent (assistance with legal issues);
- the Safe Church Unit (guidance on procedure, and protocols to be followed in instances involving child abuse, sexual abuse of children and young people, and/or abuse of authority);
- an experienced Christian counsellor (help for parties to understand and respond to their situation);
- an experienced Christian mediator (help for parties to reach an understanding or resolve a procedural difficulty); and
- other presbyteries – or even other denominations – that may have people of a legal, medical and pastoral background who may be able to act as advisers or consultants.

Other considerations

Sometimes, it may be the minister's spouse who fails morally or abandons the minister. In such situations, the minister should be given at least three months paid leave (using, firstly, recreational and long service leave entitlements) in order to receive professional counselling with a view to marital reconciliation. If the minister's spouse has failed morally, the Session should endeavour, with sensitivity, to discipline that person and the presbytery should endeavour to support the minister and congregation. In cases of abandonment, the Session probably does not need to be involved, but the presbytery should take all possible actions to maximise the possibility of marital restoration.

Guidance for presbyteries when dealing with moral failure

The following model, in so far as it is not inconsistent with the GAA Code of Discipline and the operation of criminal and civil law, is put forward as a guide to presbyteries if called upon to deal with accusations of moral failure by ministers under their jurisdiction.

It is proposed that:

1. A mechanism should be established by which persons concerned about moral failure involving ministers could be informed of:
 - a. the person or persons to whom an accusation of moral failure may be made;
 - b. the form that any accusation should take;
 - c. the process by which an accusation will be considered; and
 - d. what happens if a person is unable or unwilling to put their concern in writing.
2. The person bringing an allegation against a minister should be informed (usually by the Clerk) of the process that will be followed by the presbytery and be informed of progress.
3. As a matter of urgency upon receiving an accusation (within 72 hours), the Moderator and Clerk or a Presbytery Commission must consider all reporting requirements:
 - a. The Police in instances of alleged illegal activity
 - b. whether the matter alleged is subject to mandatory reporting as provided in the Policy, Procedure and Practice Manual of Safe Church and take the necessary action;
 - c. decide whether the accused minister should be suspended without any loss of entitlements pending an investigation of the accusation;
 - d. inform the accused minister in writing that an accusation has been brought against him; and
 - e. advise the accused person and the accuser to avoid contamination of evidence and any coercive or threatening behaviour.
4. The Presbytery should be meet at the earliest possible opportunity (an Urgent Meeting) in accordance with the rules of the Church, and At this meeting, the presbytery should appoint persons to support:
 - a. the third party;
 - b. the third party's family; and
 - c. the minister involved in the alleged moral failure;
 - d. the minister's spouse and family;
 - e. the congregation.
5. Preferably, each party should be supported, in alignment with Trauma Informed Practice. The gender of each party should be carefully considered when these appointments are made, with no person caring for multiple parties. Conflicts of interest should be considered in any appointment.
6. In considering its response to any occasion of moral failure, the presbytery should assess the integrity of an offender's repentance. That assessment will take note of both the phases and the fruits of repentance as follows:
 - a. the phases of repentance:
 - i. confrontation - facing up to sin;
 - ii. confession - owning up to sin;
 - iii. contrition - brokenness for sin; and
 - iv. change - turning from sin
 - b. the fruits of repentance. Where true repentance occurs, it will be accompanied by:
 - i. restitution - paying back what is owed;
 - ii. restoration - putting things back in order; and
 - iii. reconciliation - reconnecting broken relationships.
7. In considering its response to any occasion of moral failure, the presbytery may be guided the Law Agent, the Safe Church Unit and external authorities as well as noting Part 10 of the Code of Discipline.

8. Typical censures for moral fault:
 - a. Initial failure (low-level)
 - i. Admonish
 - ii. Rebuke
 - b. Subsequent failure (low-level)
 - i. Rebuke
 - ii. Suspension
 - c. Failure to heed rebuke (low-level)
 - i. Suspension
 - ii. Deposition (more systemic character issue)
 - d. Failure (high-level)
 - i. Deposition
 - e. Failure to repent
 - i. Excommunication
9. After each accusation of moral failure is addressed, the procedures in that case should be reviewed to ensure procedural fairness and a continual improvement in the applicable process.
10. The presbytery should encourage the session to seek specialist assistance to assist the congregation to respond to its new circumstances.
11. In the event of a serving moderator of the General Assembly (or any other Assembly official) being found in moral failure, the presbytery immediately request an Urgent Meeting of the General Assembly to make its report (see Code of Discipline 9.18).

Example Moral Faults

I. Low-Level Moral Failures

Defined as breaches of character or discipline that undermine a minister's witness but may be resolved through pastoral admonition and repentance (Galatians 6:1).

A. Behavioural Lapses & Character Flaws

- Intoxication/Lack of Self Control: Occasion of private drunkenness or inability to moderate substances (Proverbs 23:20; Ephesians 5:18).
- Minor Dishonesty: Exaggerating, misreporting minor data, or "white lies" (Ephesians 4:25; Proverbs 12:22).
- Grumbling and Complaining: Expressing discontent regarding life circumstances and church courts (Philippians 2:14; Numbers 11:1).
- Pride/Arrogance: Displaying an air of superiority or being unteachable (Proverbs 16:5; Galatians 6:3).

B. Pastoral Negligence & Stewardship

- Neglect of Duties: Occasional failure to meet ministerial obligations, such as missed appointments or lack of preparation (1 Timothy 5:8—applied to the stewardship of the flock).
- Unprofessionalism: Unbecoming conduct on social media or in public interactions that lacks "decorum" (1 Corinthians 13:1; Titus 2:7).
- Neglect of Spiritual Discipline: An observable decline in prayer and bible reading leading to spiritual dryness (Matthew 6:6; 1 Timothy 4:16).

C. Ethical Boundary Issues (Non-Sexual)

- Over Familiarity: Crossing social boundaries with congregants that creates "special" status or inappropriate emotional enmeshment (1 Timothy 5:2—treating others with pureness/respectful distance).
- Minor Conflicts of Interest: Accepting gifts or favours that create a sense of obligation or the appearance of partiality (James 2:1; Proverbs 29:4).
- Gossip/Idle Talk: Engaging in unwholesome talk or discussing the private matters of others (Ephesians 4:29; Proverbs 16:28).

II. High-Level Moral Failures

Defined as serious breaches of biblical mandate, law, or covenant that require formal discipline, removal from office, and/or legal reporting (Titus 1:10–11).

A. Criminal or Reportable Conduct

- Abuse and Violence: Domestic violence, physical, emotional, elder or financial abuse of any person (Ephesians 5:28; 1 Peter 5:2—the mandate to protect, not harm).
- Sexual Misconduct/Assault: Any non-consensual sexual contact, coercion, or predatory behaviour, particularly involving minors or the vulnerable (1 Corinthians 6:18; Matthew 18:6).
- Financial Crimes: Embezzlement, fraud, tax evasion, or the misappropriation of church funds (1 Timothy 3:8—not "greedy for dishonest gain"; Proverbs 11:1).

B. Sexual Ethics Violations

- Adultery/Sexual Immorality: Engaging in sexual relations outside the covenant of marriage (Hebrews 13:4; 1 Corinthians 6:18).
- Sexual Exploitation: Using a position of spiritual authority to solicit or engage in sexual activity (Titus 1:7—not "given to sexual immorality").
- Pornography Use/Distribution: Engaging in or facilitating access to sexually explicit material (Job 31:1; Matthew 5:28).
- Sexual Predation: Pursuing romantic relationships with subordinates or congregants where a power imbalance exists (Proverbs 6:32).

C. Theological & Ministerial Malpractice

- False Teaching/Heresy: Promoting doctrines that contradict the truths of Scripture (Titus 1:10–11; 2 Peter 2:1).
- Gross Neglect of Duty: Abandoning the congregation during a crisis or failing to provide essential spiritual care (Acts 20:28—the duty to "tend the flock").
- Repeated Incompetence: A persistent failure to uphold biblical standards of leadership despite repeated correction and training (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9).

D. Exploitation of Power & Authority

- Spiritual Manipulation/Coercion: Using spiritual "authority" to pressure members into financial giving, personal subservience, or lifestyle changes for the minister's benefit (1 Peter 5:2–3—not "lording it over" others).
- Bullying and Harassment: Creating a culture of fear, intimidation, or emotional abuse within the staff or congregation (Ephesians 4:31; 2 Timothy 2:24).
- Divisiveness/Sowing Discord: Purposely creating factions or schisms within the church for personal power or control (Titus 3:10; Romans 16:17).

E. Public Scandal & Reputational Harm

- Public Disrepute: Behaviour that brings the Gospel and the name of Christ into contempt in the eyes of the watching world (Romans 2:24; 1 Timothy 3:7).
- Hypocrisy: Presenting a public persona of extreme holiness while privately living in blatant sin (Matthew 23:27–28).