

Dear Deacon Brothers,

I am writing this letter with 100% support of Dr. Steve Gaines, Pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church. He has done nothing wrong and I completely support every decision he has made as our pastor.

Our Pastor has been slandered. Slander is defined as "a false tale or report maliciously uttered, and tending to injure the reputation of another by lessening him in the esteem of his fellow citizens by exposing him to impeachment and punishment, or by impairing his means of living; defamation" (Noah Webster). Slander, a deadly poison, can invade the minds and hearts of many and cause great harm. Clearly this has occurred – many false reports of credit card misuse (witnessed to be untrue by over 100 deacons), a dream, and others, but mostly a subtle slander of the worst kind that condemns a man's character and integrity with no solid basis. All this continues to occur for the purpose of harming our pastor's reputation to the point that he would be forced to resign.

And, most recently those who oppose him feel that he may be trapped by his response to a situation of immorality brought to his attention, much like what occurred when the woman caught in adultery was brought before Jesus. The scripture says the Pharisees were "testing Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him." John 8:6 It is important to note that a spotlight has been placed on the Pastor rather than the person involved.

But, where is love in all of this? Where is love by those who claim superiority in righteousness over our pastor? Where is love for our pastor and his family or for the fallen staff member and his family? Love which is to be so conspicuous in those who call themselves followers of Christ? Love which is the highest law for those of the new covenant. I have seen this love in our pastor. I have seen it in the way he has honored our previous pastor and his widow. Also, in the way he handled a deacon body who has yet to take a stand for him publicly. Also, in the way he has responded toward individual people who have questioned his integrity. Also, in the way he handled the situation with a fallen staff member. I have seen this love in the way that he stood tall in our pulpit that Wednesday night, December 20th, and spoke of respect for Dr. Spradlin who had hurt him so wrongfully through the paper earlier that day. As a medical doctor, I was keenly aware of the affects that this has had on our pastor's health, when he had difficulty standing for long periods of time. The following Sunday, in a letter to our congregation, he said "I have the utmost respect and love for Dr. Mike Spradlin. Mid- America Baptist Theological Seminary does wonderful work and honors the Lord. Bellevue supports Mid-America and I do not see any reason why we should not continue to do so."

What is our responsibility as deacons in light of this? First, as deacons we should support our pastor, especially when he has been attacked wrongfully. Secondly, it is clear in the Bible that we are not to associate with any so called brother who is a slanderer.

"But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolator or a **slanderer**, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat." 1 Cor. 5: 11 (NIV)

Thirdly, I believe that we need to consider following the instructions given by our Lord in Matthew 18:15-17.

"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private: if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed."

"If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."

I ask you to seriously consider bringing this matter of slander on our pastor to the church so that it can be seen and acknowledged for what it is. And, so that the church body would have an opportunity to plead with these brothers to cease their wrongful accusations and return to support our pastor and our church. If however, these parties "refuse to listen even to the church" then we as a church are to be unified and have **no further communication with them or their website.** We should bring the names of those most responsible for initiating and maintaining (website) these attacks on our pastor before the church.

I am concerned that if we do not address this problem of sin against our pastor then not only will it not go away but likely it will continue to further damage his reputation and our church and the spread of the gospel. We have tried to not address it so far and things have gotten worse. I believe that if our church was to see this for what it is they would want to support and protect our pastor.

Sincerely,

Michael R. Pruett

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