

Dear John and Julie,

Thank you for being willing to read through this, to hear my apology. I have not served well as a good pastor or friend to you. I have not well exhibited the fruit of the spirit. I have not loved you sacrificially like I ought to have. I have not sufficiently followed the pattern set by Christ, and laid out for us in I Corinthians 13.

First, I have failed to rightly shepherd the sheep at Saint Peter in several matters. You witnessed brothers using their liberty to slip into sin. You have not heard me give suitable warnings about the practice of our liberties. You have seen me delight that we have got these things right. Had we had these things right, we should rejoice in all humility. But we did not have these things right, and still I had pride.

Second, I have failed to teach with sufficient clarity and caution. It is no wonder that you grew troubled with me and with our session, if you thought that we affirmed or taught a doctrine of baptismal regeneration. It would have been a great concern to me as well, were I in your shoes. Given the raging controversies of our age, I should have been especially careful and clear to teach faithfully and clearly, such that no mistake could have been made. In addition, given the delicate nature of my relative visibility, and the fact that I planted this church, it was in turn unwise for me to even quip about the insignificant note that I had been informed of, that in our denomination the founding pastor in a given area may be called the bishop of that area. It should have always been clear to all members of the church that I am but one member of the session, and not even the moderator of the session.

Third, I failed miserably to teach clearly on the nature of church membership vows. (And in fact, misunderstood them myself, but more on that later.) A more wise shepherd would have made clear to those taking a vow exactly what the nature of that vow was, especially in a day when membership vows are taken so lightly. If we at Saint Peter are not going to take them lightly, then prudence would require that we let people know that we see them differently than most churches.

Fourth, when we began to discuss areas of disagreement, I failed to handle those disagreements with sufficient gentleness. It was unfair and unkind of me, when meeting with John to turn our meeting into a debate on how we look at our covenant children. A more pastoral response was in order, and I did not provide one. This especially true given all my failures above.

Fifth, I then turned a disagreement over the nature of church membership vows into an occasion for more debate, and eventually into the beginning of the process of formal church discipline. Even had I been correct from the beginning about the nature of the membership vows, the more gracious and pastoral response would have been to discuss peacefully, outside the context of discipline, these competing understandings. I turned your different understanding of the vows into, in my own mind, rebellion and schism when that was never your intent.

Sixth, I failed to study and understand the nature of the vows you had taken. This, while perhaps not the most damning in terms of the darkness of my heart, is the most troubling because had I not failed here, we would not find ourselves in this situation. We would have, I pray, found ourselves in good and cordial relationship while you joined a church more in line with your beliefs and practice. The heartache that we caused your family, which I believe would be centered here, because we did not simply let you go, is what grieves me so.

Seventh, I failed over these many long months to see my culpability in all this. I am ashamed that I missed this log in my eye while looking for the mote in your own. I am ashamed that while teaching others of the importance of making judgments of charity, I was looking at your decisions in the worst possible light. I am ashamed that while I was teaching others of the folly of weighing the motives of others, and the importance of weighing our own motives, I was weighing your motives, and overlooking my own. These things I should have taught. Better still, these things I should have learned.

Though this does not diminish or cover my sins, I do hope that one day you can believe, despite all the above mentioned failures, that my intentions were to shepherd you. It grieves me that my failures make this difficult for you to believe. I wanted for us to be able to agree together, and baring that, to separate in peace as you transfer to a church likeminded with your new convictions. I hope that you will find such a church, and that you can forgive me so that we might enjoy peace in our Lord together.

John and Julie, I am a sinner. I'm a sinner who has sinfully accused you of sin, who has sinfully been slow to see my sin. By His grace, and through the hard providences of these past few weeks, God has been showing me my sin, my failures. Just as with Him, I come only with my sins, and seeking His forgiveness, so I come asking you for your forgiveness. Will you please, for the sake of our Savior, forgive me for the many ways in which I have wronged you?

In the King's Service,



R.C. Sproul Jr.