

Letter from friends to Merlin Affleck

Jun 11

WINGS Note: The author sent this letter to those in the overseer position in North America, as well as to all the workers in BC, Canada.

To whom it should concern (*John 21:15-17*),

We have been going through a time of sorrow, all of us.

I am confronting a deep personal loss at this time, and there are many similarities between facing the death of a loved one and the loss we are experiencing here in our fellowship. A question I find myself coming back to often is: What is that loss we face here, exactly? Is it the loss of innocence? Perhaps. Certainly the loss of trust in the face of the betrayals we feel here. And as light has shone through the darkness, ignorance has been lost as well.

Not all is lost though. What we will fight to keep and to protect is our faith, our family, and our fellowship, remembering that *we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places (Eph 6:12)*. What these past weeks have shown us is that there is indeed spiritual wickedness in high places.

The gospel is the good news of Jesus, from his birth to his life to his death. The beautiful simplicity has been all the more evident these days. Jesus said: *I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me (John 14:6)*. To call anything other than Jesus "The Way" or "The Truth" would be disingenuous. "Sweet words of Jesus are life, life indeed." Peter in John 4 said "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." We are comforted to know that what man has built can fail, but our Saviour always has and always will be the one to whom we must go for life.

I joined this fellowship a decade ago, give or take, after experiencing corruption and conflict in several other churches. I felt something was different here for quite some time. Then as this all started coming out, I felt saddened. As evidence of further abuse and coverups came to light, I felt betrayed. But lately I feel immense hope through faith in Jesus. Not faith that the institutions of man will be preserved, but faith in the One who is unmoved and is unchanging. *That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth,*

though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ (1 Pet 1:7). There is much about this man-made institution that is being tried right now, and what does not measure up is rightfully perishing.

We do want to acknowledge that important and necessary forward steps have indeed been taken. Policies, procedures, and mandatory training are being instituted in many provinces and states, and we do not want to ignore this progress. However, we view the abuses coming to light now as the symptom of a deeper problem. Every community will have evil doers creep inside and prey on victims. But where there is truth and righteousness, this evil will not be allowed to remain.

We would expect God's servants to uphold a higher standard than the world. We would expect our children to be safer amongst our fellowship than in their schools. Yet that is not what happened; instead, this fellowship became a haven for predators. How can this be, when we have a "Spirit-led ministry"?

But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints. (Eph 5:3). It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles (1 Cor 5:1). Perhaps there was confusion by some in days past - "Let it not be once named among you". That does not mean to silence and cover up, it means to condemn it and cast it out. To abuse and to enable abuse is a betrayal. Betrayal of those in the ministry who are truly there to follow the Spirit. Betrayal of a flock so full of trust that the ministry will do what is right and moral. Betrayal of victims, crying out for support and understanding, wanting to protect others from the same experience. Betrayal of everything the cross of Christ stands for. Betrayal not only of man, but of God.

... the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart. (1 Sam 16:7). There is no defence for the silence, for the covering up, for the shuffling of perpetrators and predators to other fields where they could sink their teeth into fresh prey. The fruit of these actions clearly points to a concern for the outward appearance while forsaking the heart. *Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. (1 Tim 4:1-3).* What do these verses mean when they speak of "departing from the faith"? Leaving meetings? I think not. I believe they speak of the hearts of those who have put aside their faith in the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life and preach legalism over the Spirit, valuing appearances over the heart. Jesus said it best, in Matthew 23:24: *Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.*

As we are in BC, a part of this letter must be addressed to Merlin, but we do not want this to be considered an indictment of him alone. Please read yourself into any situation that could be considered applicable to yourself, whether you are in a position of authority or supporting those who are..

Merlin, this is a difficult time, one you likely never thought you would find yourself in. We have heard you feel like you are in over your head; that certainly seems to be true. We hear you don't like the island, where we live; is it because you have been asked some tough questions by those of us in those fields? We hear from you once a month at most, after your commitment to transparency, and only indirectly from messages distributed to the province. The most recent - five bullet points after weeks of silence. Merlin, you said:

"In Acts 6, seven people were chosen to help the ministry with some business so that they could be free to give themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. Here in BC, three professing / professional couples have kindly agreed to help Judy and myself with CSA decisions and communications. Their input was appreciated in this email and updates to come."

Why has there been no update that Judy and one of those three couples have so quickly stepped down after this group was formed? Why did Judy indicate she could not work with you because of things you said about individuals that were not true, saying "We so need to be building toward Truth and Honesty" instead?

You said:

"It has been comforting to have some Elders' meetings around the province during these stormier times. The meetings begin with a hymn and then a couple of elders pray. Each person then shares a thought regarding unity before the meeting is left open for discussion on current issues. We are thankful to be able to lean on our elders and their wives when decisions need to be made regarding folks in their areas."

This is not transparency, this is discrete conversations behind closed doors. How many months must we wait to hear a real update from the "oversight" in our province? As one in a position of authority in a province which has dealt with a recent "overseer" being accused of child sexual abuse, have you considered how this comes across to everyone not "privileged" enough to have one of these meetings? Have you considered that in the absence of communication and transparency, outside sources of information must be consulted to not be in the dark and to not be complicit to the evils that have crept into our fellowship? In communications with others that we have seen, you are quick to condemn social media, but you are slow to share openly with this province.

Merlin, you said:

"You will have recently heard of some workers in other parts of Canada and the USA who have been asked to step down from the work because of past sexual indiscretions that have come to light. These inappropriate behaviours are not tolerated. This is an effort to help any victims to heal and feel safe."

We ask you directly: is it appropriate to bring predators to a convention? Is it appropriate to lie about the details around this occurrence and other events? Is it appropriate to allow a predator to walk freely for years, ignoring the cries of the sisters to report him? Is it appropriate to not cooperate with the law, showing more care for a predator than for the innocent victims he hurt? Was it a worthwhile trade, those sister workers for these predators? Consider what was written to the church at Ephesus: *I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars (Rev 2:2).*

We saw your recent letter to a couple in Vancouver, talking without saying much, addressing the issue of the many sisters who have departed from the work in recent years. This line is particularly enlightening:

"I also want to remind you about the old saying 'there are many sides to a story' and I want to encourage you to do lots of first hand listening and learning from many sides about the history before coming to definite conclusions."

In this letter, it appears like you simply throw your hands up as if to say "it was everyone else, don't look at me". Yes, there are sides to a story, but the side you were asked about was yours. You have been given authority. What have you done to break this "graveyard" reputation since your arrival? As you advised in your letter, we have done lots of listening, and what we have heard about your actions in recent years tells a different story than the one you told in this letter.

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. (Matt 18:15-17). We have messaged you ourselves and never heard back. We have seen many voices coming to you bringing these faults to you - lies, coverups, and lack of empathy. We have seen and been dismayed by your responses, or lack thereof. This has been the church coming to you, over and over, and you have neglected to hear them. The next step is clear, and we echo the request already made to you by others that you step down.

This is an appropriate place to turn the conversation to those in the role of "overseer" in general. Maybe many of you in positions of authority and responsibility aren't sure what to do and what to say. We won't pretend it is an easy position, though for some of you it is a position of your own making. Yet when you are in a position with heightened authority and responsibility, the expectations and burdens grow with it. We are in a place where if we relied solely on hearing from the one appointed to be our "overseer", we would know maybe a little about Dean Bruer, a little about Mark Huddle, and a little about attempts at creating a process for preventing and dealing with CSA. This method of dealing with issues by either not addressing them, or by addressing them in the most minimal fashion is not working for so many of us. It is a failure to be transparent and a continuous betrayal of our trust. This is how organisational control is maintained: discuss controversial matters in private, deal with dissent in private, shut down any calls for accountability as quickly as possible.

The silence and the minimal lip service causes us and many others to infer from the ministry a desire to keep things hidden, to focus on maintaining the appearance of purity rather than to practise honesty and transparency. *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. (Matthew 23:27).* It causes us to infer from the ministry that there is more desire to return things to the way they were than to fix the wrongs, begin the process of healing the pain caused, and prevent the same issues from occurring again.

Consider by way of example a recent letter from an "overseer" to the workers and friends in his area. There was a section stating:

"As soon as Mark [Huddle] was approached with the allegations he stepped down from looking after the oversight in Washington. When more details became evident, he stepped down from his place in the work, which of course was the appropriate thing to do."

There is a major problem in this statement which clearly shows the issues present in so many of the communications. Yes, of course Mark stepping down was the appropriate thing to do. But this letter implies incorrectly that the order of events was correct and appropriate. The appropriate time to step down and confess would have been immediately after his predatory actions. *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins (1 John 1:9).* He instead chose to accept a role with authority and responsibility. This always was and always would be wrong and inappropriate. His actions, like the actions of many others, brought spiritual wickedness to high places. How did Mark respond when Dean's evil actions came to light? Was it not to say that one man's bad actions had been revealed, now let's drop it and focus on Jesus? Those were words and leadership driven by fear, not the Spirit. When allegations against Mark came out, did he step down immediately? No, he initially only stepped down from the "overseer" role, keeping place until the truth was fully revealed.

This was wrong and inappropriate. Where was the desire for truth and light? Admitting to what cannot be denied is more than nothing, but where were the fruits of repentance?

When our oldest son hurts his younger brother, we expect him to apologize sincerely and make things right. He is not even in kindergarten, yet he knows this. Even when the harm he caused was not intentional. Do we truly hold our children to a higher standard than these "overseers" and workers hold themselves to? All these years of hiding the truth, all these years of hurting the victims - sometimes unintentionally - and why are we seeing no repentance, no effort to make things right? Godly sorrow that leads to repentance would build trust that the actions taken to do the right thing going forward are done sincerely and in good faith. What was done in the dark has been brought to the light, and the past has been met with resounding silence.

When Jonah went to Nineveh and preached to them God's coming judgement, for "their wickedness had come up before him", their response was clear. *[The king of Nineveh] caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? (Jonah 3:7-9).* Someone living in Nineveh would not have been unsure if the people and the king were repentant or not. In fact, any outside observer would have been able to see clearly the fruits of repentance. There was no self-righteousness there. The king did not make any statement saying "there were wrongs done in the past, but they were few and we're dealing with new wrongs as they come now". *The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it (Matthew 12:41).*

We have heard John 8 misused several times recently. In these verses the woman is brought before Jesus accused of adultery, a sin where the punishment was death, and Jesus says that the one without sin should cast the first stone. What Jesus was showing was that condemnation unto death cannot be meted out by man. Jesus is the judge of our souls, not man interpreting the law, as no man is himself without sin. He forgives the repentant, contrite heart. He commands to go and sin no more. This situation simply does not compare to our current situation. In John's gospel the woman had no power or place, and was being dragged to judgement by the self-righteous religious leaders. In our present situation, we find these verses used by those in authority to say "Throw no concerns at us, you're guilty of sin too. If your motive isn't perfect, sin should not be exposed."

Consider Paul, forgiven of so much, but he was open and repentant of his sins. He did not conceal the past evils he wrought in God's name from the sheep.

Consider David and his affair with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah. Yes, in his circumstance God kept him in his place as king, and yes his sins were forgiven, but there were grave

consequences. The first child with Bathsheba died at birth, David's sons betrayed him, and much peace was lost for the rest of his days. To consider this as a general model for those in authority over God's people would be disingenuous. Removing David from his place was not a question of David's faithfulness, but of God's faithfulness in his own promises, involving nothing less than God's own plan for the lineage of Christ. That is not our place or our privilege.

Consider how David's first born son Amnon sexually abused his half-sister Tamar and David did nothing to punish his son who had committed a sin worthy of death. He failed to do what was right and this invited frustration and division.

Consider Nehemiah. God's people had turned aside from God and had been led astray by kings who did not follow God, causing them to be scattered and taken into captivity. It wasn't these same leaders who came back and rebuilt; it was a faithful few who worked together to rebuild after all had fallen apart. We have heard recently about how they rebuilt in unity and without division, each being faithful in their place on the wall. This is a true and wonderful picture, but consider the division that did come and threaten the unity in chapter 5. *There was a great cry of the people and of their wives against their brethren (Nehemiah 5:1).* The nobles, the ones with power, place, and authority were sinning against their very brethren, the vulnerable, poor, and needy. Nehemiah's response: *I was very angry when I heard their cry and these words. Then I consulted with myself, and I rebuked the nobles, and the rulers, and ... I set a great assembly against them ... Also I said, It is not good that ye do: ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies? (Nehemiah 5:6-7).* Prior to these past few weeks I had no clear picture of what it really meant for a people to cry out. It is mentioned multiple times in the Old Testament, but always felt somewhat abstract. But now I feel I understand very clearly what it means to cry out. For the people in Nehemiah, it was fortunate that there was a Godly man who heard their cries and was able to bring those who had done wrong to account; to cause them to repent and to restore, and agree that *God shake out every man from his house, and from his labour, that performeth not this promise (Nehemiah 5:13).*

In all this, there have been actions taken that at the surface appear positive. "Overseers", workers, and elders who have had allegations come in externally that can not be ignored have been removed from places of authority and trust, and distance has been placed between them and the vulnerable. Training and codes of conduct have been mandated in some places - not that these can correct the spirit of a predator, but they can help the innocent and trusting to understand precisely when a line has been crossed and trust has been violated. Yet in all this, months in, one thing is sadly lacking. These actions have been reactive to problems that are already known, visible, and cannot be denied.

In BC, was Walter removed from the work and reported to authorities when the allegations against him were made known, or only when the police had been notified and the information was coming out no matter what? Were Dean's abuses made known to the

fellowship when the ministry became aware, or after the police had been notified and the information was coming out on social media no matter what?

There are many credible stories we have heard of abuses and cover-ups, and the investigations and hotline documented at www.advocatesforthetruth.com note hundreds of allegations against workers, elders, and friends. If the ministry truly believes that CSA and other abuse is wrong and there is zero tolerance for that in our fellowship, then where are the proactive actions taken in bringing known predators from the past to light? *Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear (1 Tim 5:20).*

If there was truly a zero tolerance for CSA and other abuse, would there not be an attitude of appreciation toward the help received from outside the fellowship, bringing such horrific things to light that it might be dealt with quickly and appropriately?

Those who have shuffled and covered up and know the dark deeds that have been done - where are the fruits of repentance? *Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham for our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire (Matt 3:8-10).*

Consider the words of God: *What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground (Gen 4:10).* Do you truly ask, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned into the depths of the sea (Matt 18:6). These actions taken over the years have hurt, violated, and betrayed innocent victims while protecting predators, all in the name of creating a facade rather than casting out evil. *Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost...? ... why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God (Acts 5:3,4).*

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap (Gal 6:7). For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ (Phil 3:18). In a recent conversation with a brother worker, he indicated that perhaps the cover-ups came from a place of ignorance and good intentions; the misunderstandings of the older generation. If that is your stance, then we pose to you the same question we posed to him - the scandals of the Catholic church in recent years: can any of you in good faith say that despite the shortcomings, the Catholic church should be judged in these scandals as having come from a place of good intentions?

How much money is being spent in your fields on legal counsel and defence as you prepare to face prosecution for the very illegal activities that are being treated as nonexistent?

Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops. And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him. (Luke 12:2-5).

So then, where do we go from here? We find ourselves asking this question so often lately; in prayer, in conversations with those we trust and respect, with each other, and within ourselves.

Acts 5:29 tells us, "We ought to obey God rather than men". The men who stand in places of authority, who are perfectly content to say "we have the spirit of a child" but who have been complicit in the literal abuse of children, in breaking the spirit of a child, in the silencing of a flock filled with so much implicit trust - we cannot obey or support these men. We cannot support so-called "overseers" who have placed themselves in a position where they answer to no man and where so many have abused this power. One with the spirit of a child would recognize that even if they themselves will not abuse their privilege, eventually one will come along who will, and so true accountability must be built into any position of authority such as this. Do you say that the "overseer" answers to God, so we must trust that? Then what is to be done when this man turns his heart from God? Why are we seeing so many "overseers" who have been willing to harden their hearts and choose evil? Should we wait for God to strike down each as he struck down Dean? Should we wait for the institutions of man that God has put in place to bring these men to judgement when their abuse turns against the laws of the land? We welcome God's hand at work in this way, but we feel moved by the Spirit to not remain silent and complicit. *Do not quench the Spirit (1 Thess 5:19) and abstain from all appearance of evil (1 Thess 5:22)*. Can we not do what is right without God striking predators dead and without depending on the institutions of man to weed out our problems? If we cannot, then we are not a Spirit-led people.

We cannot support an institution that allows for abuse to run rampant and unchecked, that prioritizes the appearance of peace and lack of wrong-doing over truth and honesty. Though we are sure there are many individual workers with a good spirit who we could still enjoy fellowship with, we cannot support an institution that is complicit in this abuse and in this culture. We cannot support conventions and gospel meetings that are implicitly bound to the vast institutional failures facing us today, not until we see transparency, repentance, and a change in the culture that allowed these evils to fester. True transparency is open and honest, not secretive and selective, and is not driven by a fear of man or a fear of information being posted online. True repentance bears fruit and is not dismissive, does not show more

mercy to the predator, does not seek to absolve oneself of guilt, and rebuilds trust through accountability, honesty, and proactive actions to make things right. When those in authority can cast out on a whim, silence questions without open discussion, and stand in power without accountability, the culture this creates will always allow evil a place.

But we will not allow this to hurt our faith. We look to Jesus, the only Way, the only Truth, and the only Life; the Author and Finisher of our faith. No other.

We will not allow this to hurt our family. *What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder (Mark 10:6)*. This speaks of marriage directly, but applies to our children. God has joined us together as a family, and we will protect each other and our children.

Finally, we will not allow this to hurt our fellowship. *For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them (Matt 18:20)*. There is bread in our fellowship, and we look forward with faith, hope, and love to the day trust can be restored and all can join again together in fellowship.

These words have been strong, but we have felt moved by the Spirit to say them. They come from a place of love and a desire for true Spirit-led change. These words come through our human vessels and we stand willing for correction on any error contained therein. What has been said we say in good faith, trusting in its truth and accuracy. This letter can be shared and we welcome open dialogue around it.

With love and deep concern,

Daniel and Shanna Faulkner