

Elders' Statement Regarding Gary Ezzo's Church Discipline

Preamble:

Church discipline is a very serious matter. Scripture tells us that the actions of a local church leadership in discipline extend to the very courts of heaven (Matt 18:18-20)! This is true whether the discipline involves a new believer or a prominent church leader such as Gary Ezzo. Scripture constrains church leadership to investigate carefully any accusations of sin brought against a brother to ensure that an innocent man is not condemned by either malicious intent or a misinterpretation of events. If evidence is found that a brother is acting in a way that is contrary to Scripture, then out of love for that individual, we are compelled to reprove him. At this point, our desire is that our brother will see his sin, confess and turn from it. However, if the sinning brother refuses to hear our reproof, we are obligated to confront him with a plurality of witnesses. If he refuses to listen to this plurality, then we call upon his fellow-believers to exhort him to turn from his sin. If he refuses to listen to them, then due to his impenitence, he is to be treated as "a Gentile and a tax-gatherer" - in other words, excommunicated. Gary Ezzo refused to listen to his friends, his elders, and to the members of Living Hope Evangelical Fellowship when he was repeatedly exhorted to turn from a pattern of sin.

The elder board of Living Hope is made up of men who have known Gary for years - some for over fifteen years, co-laboring with him in the very important responsibility of raising up the next generation of believers. All of our families have benefited from Gary and Anne Marie's friendship and teaching and none more than Pastor Dave Maddox. He has personally known Gary for nearly fifteen years on both a ministerial and personal level. Moreover, for almost ten years Gary identified Dave as his personal and theological advisor. Throughout his relationship with the Ezzos, Dave tried to be a godly influence - providing encouragement, counsel, instruction, and even on occasion admonition. It was on the basis of this relationship that Gary approached Dave in September 1999 to seek counsel on the now-public revelation that his son-in-law, Robert Garcia, had misappropriated funds from GFI.

Dealing with such a matter was not easy. It involved the misuse of money within a church resource company specializing in family relationships, of which Gary was the founder and president and the mishandling of funds was by his own son-in-law. A period of extensive investigation and counseling ensued in order to determine the full extent of the state of affairs. As a result, in December 1999, the elders of Living Hope approached Gary and recommended that he take a temporary personal and spiritual sabbatical. The sabbatical was suggested so that Gary could focus his energies on dealing with the current crisis within his company and on repairing broken relationships within his immediate family. We were also aware that people not directly involved were becoming acquainted with these events at GFI. We believed that in time this would no doubt lead to a public spectacle. Thus, the elders' recommendation was rooted in the belief that the sabbatical would guard Gary against challenges about his spiritual fitness to be a leader. But more importantly, the sabbatical was needed to protect Christ's name. Once the events took on a public life, the elders believed that the sabbatical would uphold Gary's

personal integrity, the integrity of GFI, and the integrity of Christ, His Word, and His church.

Unfortunately, Gary refused our counsel. It was distressing that he rejected the recommendation of the elders - men in spiritual leadership, to whom he had voluntarily submitted. He defended his decision to continue in leadership by downplaying, redefining, and eventually even denying the nature of the problems which existed in his life, business and family. What is more, after we recommended that Gary take a sabbatical, he started to express what Gary now refers to as "unnamed concerns" about the leadership of his elders. He claims that it was those "concerns" which led to his "voluntary" departure from Living Hope. These "concerns" were, in fact, the start of a pattern of lies, slander, gossip, and false accusation that precipitated a process of church discipline instituted by the elders in accordance with Scripture. Rather than presenting just "concerns" in a godly manner, Gary instead chose to spread an ever widening circle of lies in a sinful manner. Christ tells us that a man's words reflect the spiritual condition of his heart. Gary was excommunicated because of failed character which revealed itself by his lying and malicious words.

Church Statement (released April 30, 2000):

One way God calls upon us to love one another in "fulfilling the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:1-2; Matt. 22:39) is by our humble effort to restore a brother when he sins. The Bible does not describe church discipline as a form of punishment inflicted upon those who refuse to conform but rather as a positive ministry which is designed for the benefit of the individual, the church, and the glory of God. Just as God's discipline of Christians is for their welfare and as every father disciplines his own children whom he loves (Heb. 12:6-7), so also church discipline is a ministry of love in which the entire church family must participate. In our understanding of Scripture, biblical discipline will be exercised wherever the local church truly seeks to be a family of families (1 Tim. 3:14-16).

Though it grieves us to speak of our brother's failings, our greater commitment to God's glory, the authority of Scripture and the purity of the flock which God has entrusted to us to shepherd compel us to bring public rebuke when a public minister continues in sin (1 Tim. 5:19-20).

When a pattern of sin surfaced in Gary Ezzo's life, as his elders we sought to restore him in accordance with God's Word (1 Tim. 5:19-20; Matt. 18:15-18; 1 Cor. 5:12-13). Speaking to him in the authority of Christ's name (1 Cor. 5:4), we lovingly called upon our fellow church member to honor God by acknowledging and turning away from his deceitful speech by which he was inflicting harm upon others. Over a period of many weeks we pleaded with Gary to repent, in the hope and prayer that he would turn from sin and begin to walk in truth and integrity.

It saddens us to know that Gary failed to repent of former sins which we confronted, and even sadder still we have learned that he continues to widen the circle of his lies, slander, gossip and false accusations. Because of his persistent unwillingness to respond to biblical admonition (1 Tim. 5:19-20; Matt. 18:15-18; Luke 17:3) which he received from

his elders and church family, we are fearful that Gary's heart has been hardened by the deceitfulness of sin and as a consequence he is resolved to continue in disobedience to the will of God (Heb. 3:13-14). Confronting Gary in a biblical process has revealed that when it comes to himself and other matters that reflect upon the question of his integrity, there is a pattern in Gary of not being truthful. Rather than waiting on God's provision, when confronted in his sins Gary readily sets aside integrity and seeks to protect himself and the financial viability of GFI by lying. Sadly, by such conduct he rejects the very spiritual authority God placed over him for his own spiritual welfare. Furthermore, by the fruits of his life, especially his words, Gary has manifested a lack of Christian character essential to leadership in the church.

Therefore, upon the authority of God's Word and the authority God invests in the church and upon the basis of facts established by biblical process, Gary Ezzo has been excommunicated from Living Hope Evangelical Fellowship (1 Cor. 5:13; Matt. 18:17). In the end, it was his impenitence that caused us to put him out of the church. The pattern of sin which made that measure spiritually necessary also explains why as Gary's elders we believe he is biblically disqualified from all public ministry. Although excommunication places Gary outside the fellowship of our church, we continue to pray that God will use this measure to win back Gary's heart and restore truth and integrity to his life.

The Elders of Living Hope Evangelical Fellowship November 1, 2000