

Pastor Reproves Lakeland Leaders

Dutch Sheets, founder of Dutch Sheet Ministries, has responded to the post-Lakeland, Todd Bentley fallout. He also repented on behalf of the charismatic community.



[] In an extremely personal letter made public yesterday, Colorado megachurch pastor Dutch Sheets admonished those who publicly commissioned revivalist Todd Bentley in June for allegedly ignoring concerns shared with them about Bentley and for performing an “apostolic alignment” ceremony with Bentley in front of an international audience on GOD TV.

“Those who ‘aligned’ Todd with spiritual fathers [should] have realized to do so publicly was a mistake,” Sheets stated, “and could be interpreted by those watching in no other way than as a complete endorsement.” He said the alignment should’ve been carried out privately.

The letter, entitled “A Statement and Appeal Regarding Lakeland,” marked the first time Sheets publicly shares his opinion about the revival meetings in Lakeland, Fla. He especially lamented the apparent failure of Bentley’s “spiritual fathers,” who appeared on stage in Lakeland during the “alignment” ceremony, to discern and act properly.

Sheets wrote the letter one week after Bentley announced he was separating

from his wife and that he had been involved in an emotional affair with another woman—two scandalous revelations that came days before Bentley's departure from Lakeland to take his anointing on the road.

Sheets said the purpose of his writing was threefold: "To see healing begin for the body of Christ; to initiate a process that can remove the reproach brought to Christ and the Church; and to do these things while preserving and honoring my current relationships."

Even though the apostolic alignment ceremony and Bentley's various doctrines and practices made him extremely uneasy over the past four months, to the point of a "sickening feeling deep in my spirit," Sheets said he never felt released by the Lord to voice those concerns, at least not publicly, until now.

He self-agonized over his own intentions in writing the letter, even candidly asking: "Who among us clearly sees all [that's] hidden in our own hearts?"

"Personally, I've been right at times with my discernment and decisions, wrong at others," he stated. "It would be worse than hypocritical for me to point the finger of accusation—I have no stones of judgment to throw."

But he said that after many hours of prayer and thought he decided to do what "will be arguably one of the greatest risks of my ministry to date, but one I feel must be taken."

“When something has the potential of setting precedent, birthing a movement and being reproduced as a prototype, we are no longer simply endorsing good brothers, good intentions and miracles,” he stated. “Doctrine and foundations will be built on these events. Teachings and paradigms for future ministries will be formed ... the next generation of the church and the move of God in the earth could be greatly impacted.”

Sheets took time in his letter to particularly emphasize his deep love and respect for C. Peter Wagner and his wife, Doris. Wagner leads the International Coalition of Apostles, of which Sheets is a member, and he attends services at Sheets’ Freedom Church in Colorado Springs, Colo.

Wagner was the one who helped organize the June 23 apostolic alignment service that publicly commissioned Bentley in Lakeland and placed him under the authority of pastors John Arnott, Bill Johnson and Ché Ahn—three senior leaders of an apostolic group called Revival Alliance—all of whom reacted with shock last week after hearing Bentley had separated from his wife.

Despite Wagner’s involvement in the ceremony, and despite many others who participated in the Lakeland Outpouring, Sheets said they are all “some of my closest friends.”

He offered strong affirmation for the “hearts and character” of those friends, but said criticism was necessary as well. “All of us lose credibility

at this point if we're not completely honest," he said.

"It is completely appropriate—when true—to defend a person's heart and integrity while disagreeing with their actions," Sheets stated, referring to the June 23 public commissioning service. "I think the blunder of that night was huge and very damaging to the body of Christ, but I also realize that in their hearts, those involved honestly felt they were doing the right things."

In response to Sheets' open letter, Wagner told *Charisma* today that he appreciated the overall sentiments expressed by his longtime friend. "I think Dutch's statement is a very positive step forward in bringing order out of chaos [in] the big picture," he said.

In addition to pointing out his issues with the Lakeland Outpouring, Sheets said "the bigger picture" of his letter was to point the body of Christ and himself toward honesty, healing and repentance.

"My primary purpose, and I believe my assignment from the Lord," he said, "is to identificationally repent on behalf of the leadership of the charismatic body of Christ."

Sheets said that for many years the leaders of the charismatic community have operated in an extremely low level of discernment. "We assume a person's credibility based on gifts, charisma, the size of their ministry or church, whether they can prophesy or work a miracle," he said.

"When a spiritual leader we're connected with violates trust, is exposed for immorality, or falls below other accepted standards of behavior, it does not exonerate us simply to say we don't condone such behavior. Those we lead trust us to let them know whom to trust. We have failed them miserably in this regard.

"For this lack of discernment, and for employing and passing on inappropriate standards of judgment, I repent to the Lord and ask forgiveness of the body of Christ," he said.

He compared the "spin" of church leaders to that of politicians in Washington, D.C., caught in scandals. "Every time another embarrassing and disgraceful situation is exposed, the dancing begins," he said of leaders in the charismatic community.

"For not accepting and acknowledging our responsibility, for caring more about our own reputation than Christ's, I repent to God and ask forgiveness of the body of Christ."

Sheets also blasted, and subsequently repented of, the charismatic church's "incredibly inadequate" accountability, as well as its leadership that has "built on hype, sensation, innovation, programs, personality and charisma."

He said such immaturity has produced, among other things: "shallowness," "false movements," "novice leaders [who are] gifted but

immature and untested,”
“a deficient understanding of God’s word,” “self-centered
Christians who don’t
understand sacrifice and commitment,” “superstar leaders,” and
“prayerless and
anemic Christians.”

Despite the adamant, unflattering, often self-critical nature
of his
critique, Sheets closed the letter by telling the charismatic
community that his
“passionate prayer” was to see Bentley’s marriage “survive and
thrive,” to see
the 32-year-old evangelist put on the path to “complete
restoration,” and to let
the world know that he thanks God for all those who were
touched by the Holy
Spirit through the Lakeland Outpouring.—**Paul Steven
Ghiringhelli**