

It's Time to Confront

Confronting a Christian leader is difficult. But when we don't confront, the fallout is serious.

Maybe it's because I'm getting older that I grow less tolerant of the behavior I see in too many American church leaders. Or maybe it's because I'm spending more time in the Word and see a growing disconnect between what God says and what leaders do. Or maybe it's because I've simply seen and heard too much behind closed doors.

Not long ago, friends of mine had the courage to confront their pastor for the deceit and slander they encountered in his ministry. They had several witnesses and followed the biblical guidelines for confrontation in Matthew 18:15-17.

The pastor denied his ungodly behavior. Then he threatened my friends with loss of membership and more.

Not only did he rationalize his actions and launch an all-out effort to quash any dissent, but he tried to discredit them as well. The pastor's governing body stood by in silence, refusing to hold him accountable for his outrageous behavior.

In the pulpit, this man continued to preach about God's grace, love, mercy and forgiveness. Outside it, he tried to take his sheep to the slaughter. Though many admitted that his behavior was disturbing, they excused the disconnect because "he's such a gifted teacher."

Christians ranted and raved about the lack of integrity in Bill Clinton's life when he was president, yet many leaders in

the church live lives of similar hypocrisy. When it comes to power and success, many of our own have fallen prey to their own ambitions.

And many of our churches are run like Fortune 500 companies, with pastors acting as CEOs. Some of these pastors are void of compassion for their sheep, full of pride and arrogance, and concerned about growth for growth's sake. Success is measured not in souls but in numbers of sheep.

Have we forgotten that people can have an anointing from God without knowing Him intimately? The Word tells us the gifts of God are irrevocable—meaning that humans can operate in their anointing even when their personal lives are not right.

God, in His mercy, often allows us to function under our own power even while He gives us multiple opportunities to come to our senses. But there is a point at which He will no longer be mocked. We are warned that there will be those who, though they claim to have done their works in Jesus' name, will hear the Lord say to them on judgment day, "'I never knew you!'" (Matt. 7:23, NKJV).

The idols of power and ambition loom large in the American church. But God is looking for those who haven't been deceived and taken over by the lust for power and success. He wants leaders who will follow James' directive to be doers of the Word, not just hearers, and whose lives match the messages they preach.

The apostle Paul had major concerns about the sheep being deceived and wanted believers to discern the counterfeits in the church. We need to use our spiritual discernment and to

hold our brothers and sisters accountable when they fall prey to the lust for power. Any of us can fall; but we need to stop excusing the falling just because we don't want to rock the boat!

Confronting a Christian leader is difficult. Even if you act out of a pure heart, in love—as you should—you will face intimidation and accusations of being rebellious and of touching God's anointed.

Nevertheless, we should confront ungodly behavior out of love for our fellow believers and out of a healthy fear of the Lord. When we don't confront leaders, the fallout is serious.

Fortunately my friends are mature believers, and they kept their eyes on Christ during the crisis with their pastor. However, others have become disillusioned, fallen away and stopped attending church as a result of it.

Hypocrisy isn't new, but it's time for us to humble ourselves, live out a genuine faith, admit our failings and rid ourselves of idolatry. Our witness to a dying world is at stake.

Linda S. Mintle, Ph.D., is a Virginia-based licensed clinical social worker and author of the Breaking Free Series (Charisma House,). Her most recent book is *A Daughter's Journey Home: Finding a Way to Love, Honor and Connect With Your Mother* (Integrity). She invites your questions about the tough issues of life at .