

Phoney Rabbis, Lost Discernment and the Eddie Long Disaster

Question of the week: What should you do when a **megachurch pastor** is accused of serious financial and/or sexual misconduct?

- A. Ask the pastor to step down so he or she can receive ministry, and then conduct a thorough investigation.
- B. Flatly deny all allegations and wait until the storm blows over.
- C. Use church funds to pay off the people who made the sex abuse accusations.
- D. Ask a guest preacher to call the pastor to the stage, wrap him in a 312-year-old Torah scroll and ask an “expert” in Old Testament language to declare him a “king” so he can be exonerated of all wrongdoing.

Until Jan. 29, when **Bishop Eddie Long** of Atlanta was coronated on the stage of **New Birth Baptist Church** in front of thousands of his congregants, I would never have dreamed of option D in the list above. I thought I had seen it all. Yet the odd ritual (I hesitate to call it a “Jewish ceremony”) performed by Denver minister **Ralph Messer** is now officially the most **bizarre religious video** ever posted on YouTube. (If you are one of the 16 people in the world who have never seen it, [click here](#).)

After the 14-minute video clip went viral, it pretty much angered everyone—the Jewish community, especially, but also many Christians who don’t believe it is kosher to put a pastor in a chair and parade him on a stage like he is The Most Highfallutin V. When Long and Messer realized the video had sparked an embarrassing controversy, Long apologized for it

while Messer downplayed the ceremony as a sincere attempt to “honor” the embattled bishop.

Watching recent events at New Birth play out in the media is like viewing a train wreck in slow motion. I hurt for the innocent people trapped in this mangled mess—people who deserve better leadership than this. Here are three lessons I hope we learn from it:

1. We must guard our pulpits. The apostle Paul warned that the church would be preyed upon by imposters, liars, false teachers and greedy opportunists. He also told Timothy to be on the lookout for men who focus their teaching on “speculation” and ear-tickling doctrines. “For some men,” he said in 1 Timothy 1:6-7, “have turned aside to fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are talking about or the matters about which they make confident assertions. (NASB)”

For some reason, many **charismatics** today are wowed if a Bible teacher pulls out a Jewish **prayer shawl**, wears a yarmulke, recites a Bible verse in Hebrew or claims to know the numerical value of an Old Testament word. He gets extra points if he understands biblical feasts (or can show you how to obtain financial blessings through a “Day of Atonement Offering.”) I believe there is certainly value in understanding the **Hebrew roots of Christianity**. But if we aren’t careful this can also become idolatry—or an opportunity for charlatans who have lots of “Jewish” products to sell. Note: If someone’s teaching does not point his hearers 100 percent to Jesus, don’t buy it.

2. We must raise the standard of holiness. When a church leader falls into serious sin or scandal, those around him should—if they truly love him—cover and rehabilitate him. But covering a leader who has sinned should not involve cover-up. True restoration requires a lengthy process of repentance,

restitution and inner healing. If we practiced **biblical restoration** on a wide scale, the cancer of immorality that is eating the church alive today would go into remission.

3. We must reclaim biblical discernment. What appalled me most when I watched the Eddie Long coronation video was the fact that people in the audience applauded this **blasphemous spectacle**. It is bad enough that a leader allowed it to take place on his platform; it is even worse that thousands of people watched without flinching, and went home thinking their pastor was now a king in God's eyes. Lord have mercy.

The people should have immediately fallen to their knees and begun **praying against deception**—or run out the doors in disgust. With so little discernment among “Spirit-filled” believers today, it's not hard to imagine that an anti-Christ figure could boldly march right into a church, climb in a leather chair and be anointed as a king. Oh wait ... I think that has already happened.

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