

# 7 Negative Stereotypes 'Preachers of LA' Promotes

I just viewed three episodes of the new reality cable show *Preachers of L.A.* because I wanted to see how "preachers" were being depicted. (I have no intention of watching any more episodes because I deem it a waste of my time)

Unfortunately, the show caters to many of the negative stereotypes secular society portrays regarding the church and preachers. Preachers in the show seem to have a true desire to walk with the Lord and one episode shows one pastor grappling with how to deal with a former church member undergoing a sex change! Another shows a bishop attempting to win gang members to Christ. (These are very good parts of the show and both these leaders are portrayed as sincere Christ followers.)

Since my observations are based on the show's snapshots and not firsthand knowledge, I am not going to use any names but will speak in generalities. I also think these leaders sincerely believe they are promoting the gospel and glorifying God by doing this show. However, I believe the producers of the show are using them for their own worldly agenda and have somehow convinced said leaders to expose their personal life as a way of gaining more viewers by humanizing them to the audience.

Of course some of these leaders may eventually be shown in an even more negative or positive light in future episodes.

The following are my observations on how the show promotes seven negative stereotypes:

## **1. They live a lavish lifestyle.**

In one episode, a bishop lamented that that people call them "prosperity preachers," and another stated that they are entrepreneurs who produce most of their money outside of their

local church. I believe that is probably true, but that statement was only made in passing and the reality show makes a point of showing the lavish homes each of these preachers live in; thus, the meta narrative of the show only perpetuates the negative caricature of a preacher who ministers primarily for personal gain.

## **2. They exaggerate their humanity at the expense of the glory of God.**

I am against superficial religion and appreciate when a leader is transparent with his close friends and associates. However, when these leaders allow the media to publicly capture mere snapshots of their personal struggles within their own family and/or with other leaders without showing the whole context of their life, it can accentuate their issues to the point of making them seem like hypocrites who don't really have a life and ministry centered upon Christ.

## **3. Some seem emotionally detached and unable to relate to others authentically.**

One of the bishops was in a long-term relationship and every time his girlfriend attempted to bring up where it (relationship) was headed, he got uneasy, changed the subject and wanted ambiguity. I believe they even have a business together! I'm sure many viewers probably wondered how this bishop could possibly keep himself pure with a beautiful lady for so long! This same leader also admitted that he did not have a good relationship with his first family (I think he was previously married?) because he rarely spent time with them. He still seemed to be in the same rut of ministering so much there wasn't enough quality time to spend with his lady friend and his children. This can give the general public the impression that the evangelical church condones putting ministry before family (in some circles it probably does).

## **4. Some leaders have violated serious biblical ethics in marriage and family.**

It is well known that at least one of the bishops featured (I

will leave nameless) divorced his wife and re-married another woman seven days after his divorce. Another seems to have been divorced because he neglected his wife and children for the ministry (although the show doesn't get into the specifics of the divorce) and has been in a relationship for many years with a lady with no definite plans to get married (smells fishy doesn't it?). Then a young gospel singer was recently reinstated into the ministry after having a baby out of wedlock (which also came after a divorce). Why the media chose to feature these three leaders I don't know, but it seems to play perfectly into the negative stereotype secular culture has toward the church in which evangelical preachers fare no better in regards to their marriage and family than the Christ-less world does.

#### **5. Their ministries are depicted as being more hype than substance.**

The episodes only show sound bites of their preaching with much emotion, seeing people fall under the power, and other typical charismatic behaviors that can easily be interpreted by the viewing public as all hype and no substance.

#### **6. They showcase leaders with emotional immaturity.**

In one of the episodes, several of the leaders went into a "man cave" to have fellowship and within several minutes one of the bishops got into a heated argument with the well-known (newly re-instated) worship artist. Said worship leader seemed to be emotionally volatile and said the bishop seemed to have a hard time being confronted by anyone and just abruptly walked out of the meeting. (At least another episode showed that both were open to reconciliation.)

I guess what makes a reality show effective is conflict. However, in this case both leaders acted immaturely. Was this staged? Although we all have issues with other people, giving these kind of snap shots without gives the impression that this is the regular M.O. for ministers.

## **7. The show reinforces a distorted view of the whole church.**

In my opinion, most of the un-churched world will use these episodes as their framework for all preachers and as another excuse to avoid being in church. Why all these leaders would agree to putting their family and friends on a reality TV show is beyond me. *Preachers of L.A.* does not give a good overall picture of most of the pastors since the show primarily focuses on their quirks, conflicts and issues. Granted, some of these situations are blown out of proportion because they are snapshots that take situations out of context. Most of the pastors and leaders I work with in the body of Christ do not fit this description, and as a result I believe the show gives a distorted view of all preachers to the world.

In conclusion, the secular media wants to capitalize on the negative stereotypes of Pentecostal preachers by allowing them to uncover and exaggerate their humanness to such an extent that it can make all church leaders look merely like professional speakers that use the gospel only for personal gain. When the church leaders are as fleshly as the typical unbeliever, it abrogates the need for the unsaved to seek a church to find the truth and power of God.

**Joseph Mattera** is overseeing bishop of Resurrection Church, Christ Covenant Coalition, in Brooklyn, N.Y. You can read more on or connect with him on Facebook or Twitter.