

Baffled in Boise

Several months ago I was asked to speak at a charismatic conference in Idaho. I had never met the evangelist who was sponsoring the meeting, but people were raving about his zeal and spiritual gifts. They poured on the accolades: “He’s so anointed. He has a powerful prophetic ministry. His preaching is so stirring.” I was eager to meet this guy, thinking that perhaps we might write about him in Charisma.

When I got to Boise, however, I learned that this evangelist had decided not to attend his own conference. He sent word that “revival had erupted” in the small Southern town where he had been visiting the previous month.

The couple he had appointed to run the Boise conference tried to do damage control by assuring confused conferencegoers (some of whom had traveled from France and Nigeria) that the meetings would continue.

Something smelled fishy. I felt betrayed, and I could sense that God was not pleased that so many trusting people had been misled. After probing some more, I discovered that this evangelist—the one who was so “powerfully anointed”—was wanted by the police in another Western state for failure to pay child support to a previous wife.

I don’t know what baffled me more, that this man could stand in a pulpit without a guilty conscience or that so many sincere people could be deceived by his crafty excuses. I came to some conclusions after returning from Boise:

1. We must value character above the anointing. We

charismatics are champions of the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit, but we must not allow our yearning for miracles to trick us into embracing cheap substitutes. Just because a man or woman can whip a crowd into a frenzy doesn't mean God is impressed with the sermon. If a man lacks integrity in his personal life, no amount of "anointing" can overcompensate.

We're on dangerous ground when unsanctified church leaders start winning applause for their healing gifts, their prophetic accuracy or their ability to make audiences swoon. In the apostle Paul's guidelines for church leaders in 1 Timothy 3, only one out of the 15 qualifications listed has anything to do with spiritual anointing ("able to teach," v. 2). Everything else in the list deals with character. That's because miraculous power gifts are hollow without the fruit of Christlikeness.

2. We must insist on accountability. In many segments of the charismatic church today there is a resurgence of the lone ranger spirit. A growing number of these self-appointed mavericks insist that in order to be "free in God" they don't need to submit to any man-made form of church discipline. That's tragic because any true leader knows that he must surround himself with wise counselors and friends who care enough to get in his face and confront sin when necessary.

3. We can't tolerate flagrant sin in leadership. People in the pews share the responsibility for the craziness we see in the church today. We would have fewer con artists and unrepentant adulterers in our pulpits—or on Christian television—if church folks weren't supporting them. What we need to do is change the channel, vote with our feet and send our money elsewhere.