

Cause for Alarm

A national scandal began to unfold last year when the pastor of an East Coast church known for its extended revival services admitted that he had been sexually involved with multiple women in his congregation. Charisma had to report on the sad situation, and it was an exceptionally difficult story for me to work on—not only because I knew the pastor but because two years earlier I had experienced the Holy Spirit's touch while standing at the altar in his church.

Unfortunately, ministry scandals such as this one became a trend during the year 2000. In another case, a prominent pastor (who is seen often on Christian television) divorced his wife, then seven days later married another woman. Around the same time the leader of a respected evangelistic organization that has advertised in this magazine divorced his wife amid allegations of adultery. Then another pastor of a large, independent charismatic church sent

his wife packing and started dating a much younger woman. His church applauded when he announced that he felt more anointed than ever.

Each time we reported on these unfortunate incidents, some of our most vocal readers complained that we had stepped out of bounds. Their letters and e-mails accused us of “casting the first stone” or “acting like The National Enquirer.” Some even predicted that God would judge us for judging these leaders.

I hope you believe me when I tell you that we do not enjoy reporting on scandals, nor do we publish gossip. In fact, we don't report on most of the scandals we investigate, either

because they do not involve nationally known leaders or because we don't think the church would benefit from knowing the information. But our editorial policy, which is shaped by Christian compassion for both the guilty and innocent parties, states that there are times when the public must know that a minister has violated the public trust.

When it became obvious to us last summer that ministry divorces had become an alarming trend, we asked pastor Jack Hayford to tackle the subject because we knew he could bring the kind of fatherly, apostolic correction that is so lacking in the church today. His article, "Don't Marriage Vows Matter Anymore?" (page 60), is a prophetic "all points bulletin" that should be read by every pastor and layperson in every church in the country. Hopefully we will heed Jack's advice before this epidemic spreads any further.

It's scary enough that a pastor can preach sermons about revival while he's carrying on three or four secret extramarital relationships. It's even scarier that a so-called "Spirit-filled" pastor can teach eloquently about holiness and then announce that God told him to divorce his wife and marry another woman. But we should be especially concerned when an entire congregation abandons biblical discernment to follow a leader into apostasy after he rationalizes his sin in public.

Beware. There are leaders out there with lots of seductive charm, plenty of "anointing," best-selling books and huge TV audiences. These people think they can bend the rules and still enjoy God's favor.

We don't need their brand of success.