

Four Fatal Flaws That Ruin Ministries

Our movement began unraveling a few years ago because of flawed leadership. We will not recover until we clean up our act.

I spend a lot of time investing in young leaders—and I constantly urge them to learn from the mistakes we made in the previous move of God. I appreciate the positive things the Holy Spirit did during the charismatic movement, but we made a mess because we didn't lead with integrity.

The apostle Paul gave us a crash course in leadership in his second letter to the Corinthians. While studying that epistle recently, I identified four of the biggest mistakes we made during the charismatic revival. I pray we've learned our lesson so we can avoid these flaws in the next season.

1. Charlatanism. We charismatics lost our credibility during the past 30 years because certain greedy preachers manipulated their audiences to pad their own pockets. Just as a little leaven spreads to the whole lump of dough, the charlatans ruined it for all of us.

The apostle Paul told the Corinthians, "For we are not like many, peddling the Word of God" (2 Cor. 2:17, NASB). The Greek word for *peddling*, *kapeleuo*, means "to make money by selling; to corrupt; to get gain by teaching divine truth." How many well-known charismatic preachers started out well but ended up as pitiful peddlers, begging for dollars to pay for luxury cars and mansions they felt they needed to prove their importance? (And now some of these guys have their own reality show, *The Preachers of L.A.*, which airs in October and features Noel Jones and Clarence McClendon.)

2. Entitlement. Paul continually reminded the Corinthians that

he was a servant: “For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor. 4:5). Servanthood is the most fundamental requirement for any leader. Yet in our movement, we celebrated the opposite attitude by allowing leaders with out-of-control egos to demand special treatment.

I know of one conference speaker who routinely sends a 23-page list of requirements to churches that want her to speak! In the past, some charismatic preachers have demanded shopping money (in addition to their honorariums) and luxury accommodations; others insist they can’t travel without their “armor bearer”—basically a minion who carries a preacher’s briefcase, handkerchief and water bottle to make him look important.

News flash! Paul did not have an armor bearer, and he would have rebuked any minister who insists on acting like a fat cat.

3. Arrogance. The apostle Paul modeled teamwork. When he went to Corinth, Thessalonica or Crete, it was not *The Paul Show*. He traveled with Luke, Silas, Timothy and many others. He told the Corinthians, “As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you” (2 Cor. 8:23)—and Paul exhorted the church to view Titus with the same respect they showed him.

Yet in our movement, we put men on pedestals and under spotlights. We created a culture of preacher worship. Leaders began using titles. Then came the limousines and private jets. Some high-profile speakers went so far as to promote the use of bodyguards. And I know of at least one preacher who demanded that a church fly special beef to his hotel so he could have the steak he required. Pride turns men of God into monsters.

4. Professionalism. Somebody got the bright idea a few years ago that churches should be managed like businesses. So

pastors became CEOs, and ministry was put on an assembly line. Congregations became franchises competing with each other to see who could offer the coolest music, the hippest sermons and the best lobby coffee bar. But a funny thing happened on the way to the megachurch: We lost the relational touch.

I'm not against big churches, cool music or coffee bars. But my fear is that leaders today might assume they can buy success by copying the style of this month's most popular rock-star preacher. I don't care if you have strobe lights, fog machines, killer musicians and a home-run sermon every week. If people don't see true brokenness in the pulpit and experience real pastoral care, they will never grow into disciples. Shallow, professional leaders produce shallow Christianity.

Leaders must be real. Our ministry must flow out of passionate love for God and genuine love for people. The apostle Paul never wore a mask. He was touchable and affectionate. He never went through the motions. He was broken. He knew he was nothing apart from Jesus. He told the Corinthians, "Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me" (2 Cor. 12:9).

Paul told the Corinthians he was careful not to offend in any area "so that the ministry will not be discredited" (2 Cor. 6:3). I wish we had been that careful to guard what God gave us in the charismatic revival. Our flaws have grieved the Holy Spirit. Let's trade in charlatanism for financial integrity; entitlement for servanthood; the celebrity syndrome for teamwork; and professionalism for touchable authenticity. Let's become leaders who act like Jesus.

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