

Jesus Has a Whip

We've all seen him on television. The slick-haired evangelist in a shiny gold suit who grabs a wireless microphone, points into the camera and declares with feigned sincerity: "God is telling me that if you will give a gift of \$1,000 tonight, He will release your hundredfold miracle!"

Everybody claps. Women swoon on the front row. The telephone lines light up. And thousands of people start writing checks.

I don't write a check because I am sick to my stomach. I change the channel and whisper to God: What is happening to us?

Everywhere I turn, blatant financial corruption is parading up and down the aisles of charismatic churches in this country. The prophets of profit are busy manipulating us—and the Bible—to get bigger offerings. It seems they stoop to a lower level each time they rob God's people. For the most part they go unchallenged.

Consider, for example, the pastor who encourages his congregation and TV audience to write checks "by faith" for amounts that are not in their bank accounts. Excuse me? That's illegal.

Or consider the preacher with the gated mansion and private plane who teaches that a Christian can "buy" the Holy Spirit's anointing with generous offerings. (Didn't Philip rebuke a sorcerer for suggesting such blasphemy?)

And then there's the guy on the endless Christian telethon who tells people that if they will give a certain amount "in the next 30 minutes," God will send a "special blessing" to them—such as the salvation of a wayward child. The same preacher regularly tells his audience that if they give in certain offerings—to him, of course—"God says He will release you from all debts." (Warning: This is called "taking the Lord's name in vain." Not a good thing.)

Why do we tolerate this stuff? While lawmakers are sending Enron and WorldCom to the corporate woodshed for flagrant financial abuse, we allow the same craziness to go on in God's house with no questions asked. Many of us even applaud the money changers because we equate their self-centered message with a holy gospel.

Jesus is not clapping. In fact, He's gone to get His whip. When He comes back to purify the charismatic church, tables will fly across the room, and coins will scatter. Ministries propped up by greed and goofy fund-raising gimmicks will go out of business. He won't let us build His church on a rotten foundation of spiritual fraud.

Please don't misinterpret what I'm saying. Prosperity is biblical. But it can't be bought simply by throwing money in an offering plate or by giving to the most "anointed" preacher.

True wealth, according to the Bible, comes in response to wisdom, integrity, diligence, faithfulness and parental blessing, as well as generosity. Preachers who suggest that you can "have it all" just by giving in their offerings are misrepresenting God, defrauding you and maligning the church's reputation. And they will answer for it.

So the next time somebody promises you a personal prophecy in exchange for a \$200 "love gift," don't participate in his shenanigans. Vote with your feet, and get out of there fast. And watch out for flying tables.