

Leadership in Crisis

Trust is important. When it's broken, it's hard to restore.

Look what happened recently when the CEOs of several large U.S. corporations such as WorldCom and Enron cooked the books so their stock prices would rise—confidence fell and prices crashed instead. That's because our financial system operates on trust.

To maintain trust, Wall Street has rules about how companies conduct business—rules that are enforced. When John Rigas, founder and former CEO of cable-TV giant Adelphia Communications Corp., and his two sons allegedly stole hundreds of millions of dollars from the company, they were arrested and charged with conspiracy to commit fraud.

The sad thing about the accounting scandal at Enron is that it didn't cause the values of only Enron stock to disappear. It indirectly affected all of Wall Street, causing billions of dollars of equity to evaporate overnight.

Trust is important. When it's broken, it's hard to restore. Yet there are those in the church—where trust ought to be most important—who apparently don't see the significance of it.

Look what's happened in the Roman Catholic Church. Attendance and offerings are way down due to the scandal about sexual misconduct among priests. For many Catholics the real problem isn't only the individual pedophiles—as bad as that is—but the lack of response of leadership. They are hurt and disillusioned by the reluctance of bishops to take action that would protect their children.

I've seen a similar reaction among charismatics. People who love God and say they are Spirit-filled stop attending church because they have been hurt by leaders who have broken their trust.

And where the trust was greatest, the hurt is greatest. So in the body of Christ, when a pastor takes off with his choir director or engages in financial improprieties, the sense of loss is sometimes devastating.

Of course not everyone is affected to the same degree. But the Bible says when one part of the body is hurt, the entire body suffers. A scandal in one church causes all churches to suffer because people become disillusioned about all clergy and just stay home rather than entrusting their spiritual growth to someone who may prove to be ungodly.

When scandals occur on Wall Street, the guilty parties are brought to justice. In the church at large, on the other hand—and especially in independent charismatic churches—there is usually very little accountability. Leaders, even godly respected leaders, choose to look the other way, ignore the problem and hope it doesn't affect them.

It does.

Take John Jacobs of the Power Team, for example. I believe that when a youth evangelist such as Jacobs divorces his godly wife, remarries and then quickly annuls his second marriage, his behavior raises questions in everyone's mind—questions that affect the ministry of everyone else out there who, like Jacobs, is reaching out to youth.

Or take Clarence McClendon of Los Angeles. When he divorced his wife of 16 years and then remarried someone else within a week, his actions affected many other pastors and hurt many church members.

At one time McClendon was one of the up-and-coming leaders in the Pentecostal arena. Now his national influence is a fraction of what it was. And because of the visibility of his divorce, believers are scrutinizing other up-and-coming leaders and wondering, Will they be the next to fall?

I believe betrayal of trust is a serious problem in the church that can be corrected only when respected Christian leaders who have proven themselves over the long haul such as Jack Hayford, Tommy Barnett or Paul Crouch speak up and set a standard for dealing with sin among church leadership.

If we want to see revival in this country, the church must get its act together. We must restore trust in leaders. We must disciple believers and point the unsaved—who are looking for answers—to the church. We must hold the ungodly among us accountable so that disillusionment is no longer a concern—and the vicious cycle we've been in is broken once and for all.

Stephen Strang is founder and publisher of Charisma. He invites you to attend the Charisma 2002 Conference Oct. 31-Nov. 2, 2002. Call (800) 837-0378.