

Let's Support Paul Crouch

Christians must have the highest standards of righteousness.

To anyone who has read the recent press reports, it's obvious that Paul Crouch is the victim of attempted extortion. A convicted felon with a history of child molestation and drug abuse accused Crouch of sexual harassment in 1996. I believe the charge is bogus.

First, the alleged incident had no witnesses. Second, the accuser has zero credibility, whereas Crouch has a lifetime of ministry achievements to his credit. Third, Crouch has never been accused of sexual misconduct at any other time, and since this accusation was made public, no one has come forward with other charges. Finally, he has denied this charge in the strongest way possible in court and to other Christian leaders.

So if Crouch is innocent, why did he pay his accuser \$425,000? Crouch says it was to avoid embarrassment to the ministry he founded and loves, and because he believed the man would "go away."

Sadly, the man didn't. After receiving the huge settlement, he threatened to sell a biography he wrote to a publisher unless Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) paid him \$10 million.

If that isn't extortion, what is?

I believe Christians should rally around Crouch and TBN. If Crouch says he's innocent, that's good enough for me. He has years of credibility as a man of God.

It's too early to tell what kind of long-term damage these charges will bring to TBN. Some Christians are quick to throw a brother in the pit at the first allegation. Yet it's possible the man lied about what he says happened with Crouch.

God is the judge. If there was wrongdoing, He will expose it.

Meanwhile, each of us must judge ourselves. What is in our lives that is not pleasing to God? Self-assessment is especially important for large ministries with high visibility that often become a laughingstock for their showmanship and extravagance. That's because what they do affects the rest of us in the body of Christ.

Long before the Los Angeles Times reported on the charges against Crouch, prophetic voices had been warning that a new season of judgment is coming to ministry leaders who don't walk in righteousness. We've raised concerns in previous issues about ministries with a haphazard attitude toward divorce, remarriage and other lifestyle issues. Immorality in leadership is more common than any of us wants to admit.

God has brought down ministries before that lacked integrity. Consider Robert Tilton, Larry Lea and Praise the Lord (PTL)—the ministries they had no longer exist.

If anything, the media buzz over the accusations against Crouch should be a warning to other ministries in which unrighteousness exists. Surely the media realize the attack against Crouch is extortion. But they seem to take great delight in rehashing reports of extravagant living, well-stocked wine cellars and behavior unbecoming to Christians—especially those in leadership.

I know Satan would like to bring down an effective ministry such as TBN that is beaming the gospel into places not otherwise reached. But I also believe God is judging His church. The fact that a ministry is big and successful doesn't mean it is blessed by God—and success is not a license to do whatever the leadership wants to do regarding money, morality, pride or arrogance.

This is a time for humility and repentance. All ministries are subject to media attention and attack. If it's unwarranted, it will backfire on the media, just as the unfounded charges against President Bush backfired on CBS and Dan Rather.

But there is another side too. The Christian community must have the highest standards of righteousness among its leadership. At a time when there are so few values in the culture and a plethora of failed leaders in government and corporate America, we must live by a higher standard. Otherwise, how can the world look to Christians for answers?

If the unthinkable is true and Crouch did what his accuser says, then for the good of TBN and the larger body of Christ, Paul must step down. Otherwise, God cannot bless that ministry.

Let's support Crouch and pray for him during what must be the most difficult time in his life. And let's pray he discerns God's will.

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