

No More Monkey Business in the Ministry

In this day of compromise, we must restate the obvious: God requires leaders to play by the rules.

Almost two years ago a dynamic preacher from a growing church in the Southeast was caught in adultery. His distraught wife talked with the “other woman,” an exotic dancer from another country, and shared Christ with her. Meanwhile a small group of pastors “covered” the situation and hurriedly sent the embarrassed pastor to a few weeks of counseling. In the end, the pastor and his wife divorced and members of the congregation who didn’t have all the facts blamed her for the breakup.

Today this pastor is still in the pulpit—although his preaching has a hollow tone. Some members of the church left when they learned of the pastor’s unfaithfulness. Yet many others stayed because they felt they shouldn’t judge the pastor for his sin.

“As painful as it is to remove a gifted leader from his or her position, it must be done to preserve the fear of the Lord.”

This situation has been repeated over and over in recent years. Jamal Harrison-Bryant, pastor of the 10,000-member Empowerment Temple in Baltimore, was accused of fathering a child out of wedlock. His wife, Gizelle, citing adultery and cruel treatment, filed for divorce in 2008. Yet Bryant preached a now-famous sermon in the church in which he used King David’s story of adultery with Bathsheba to defend himself.

“I am still the man!” he shouted from the pulpit as

worshippers stood and cheered. "The anointing on my life is greater than any mistake." He made it clear that he had no intention of being defrocked or disciplined. To Bryant, anointing surpasses character.

All this moral failure among leaders today has average Christians confused. Is there ever a time when leaders are disqualified? Is restoration always immediate? Are we acting like Pharisees if we demand that leaders sit on the bench for a while to recover from their mistakes and prove their character again? It is time for us to restate some obvious rules:

1. There are definite qualifications for Christian leadership.

The apostle Paul made it clear that there is a litmus test for leaders in the New Testament church. In 1 Timothy 3:2-7 he says a leader must be (1) above reproach; (2) the husband of one wife; (3) temperate (not an abuser of alcohol or other substances); (4) prudent; (5) respectable; (6) hospitable; (7) able to teach; (8) a good manager of his own family; (9) respected in the community; and (10) not a new convert.

In his letter to Titus, Paul offers a similar list and adds further qualifications, including (11) not self-willed; (12) not pugnacious; and (3) not fond of sordid gain.

Notice that only one of these qualifications ("able to teach") involves anointing. Paul says nothing about a leader's ability to prophesy, heal the sick, see visions, talk to angels, raise funds, sing, shout or make audiences swoon. Neither does he require certain academic credentials. Character is the key.

Many scholars agree that "husband of one wife" was a New Testament-era way of saying "he must be a one-woman man." In other words, he cannot be an adulterer. (Nor can he be polygamous.) Leaders must walk in sexual purity. They must adhere to the biblical definition of marriage and stay faithful in that context.

2. Those who do not meet these qualifications must step down.

If Paul demanded character of his leaders, it stands to reason that those who fail in any of these areas should be removed from office—at least until they regain the character quality after a time of rehabilitation. When leaders failed, Paul also recommended that they be strongly rebuked “in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning” (1 Tim. 5:20, NASB). Their sin was never to be minimized, excused or swept under a rug.

This strict approach was not optional—and Paul warned Timothy about the temptation to be partial. He told him: “Maintain these principles without bias” (v. 21). Biblical discipline cannot be sloppy. We can’t remove one guy for adultery and then offer kid-glove treatment to another guy just because he is our friend. As painful as it is to remove a gifted leader from his or her position, it must be done to preserve the fear of the Lord.

3. The church will not thrive if discipline of leaders is neglected. Paul sternly warned Timothy about ordaining any church leader prematurely. He wrote: “Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thereby share responsibility for the sins of others” (1 Tim. 5:22). In other words, leaders actually incur a strict judgment from God if they ordain a leader who does not meet biblical qualifications. If ordaining unapproved leaders becomes a habit, corruption will take root in the church and we will eventually face God’s corrective judgment.

The Corinthian church was warned that the deceitfulness of sin would infect them all if they did not deal with the immorality in their midst (see 1 Cor. 5:7-13). John told the church in Thyatira that they would lose their influence because they tolerated false teaching that led to immorality (Rev. 2:20). Sin has sobering consequences.

We can’t rewrite the rules. I pray that leaders in the

independent sector of the church today will stop the monkey business and restore biblical order.

J. Lee Grady is editor of *Charisma*. To see the video clip of Jamal Bryant's "I'm Still the Man" sermon, [click here](#).