

Open the Books

If God is conducting His own heavenly audit, let's welcome correction.

Depending on how you look at it, Sen. Charles Grassley of Iowa is either a crusader for righteousness or a devil with horns. The ranking Republican on the Senate Finance Committee made startling headlines in late 2007 when he launched an investigation of six major charismatic ministries and how they spend money.

The preachers who received the U.S. senator's initial letter on Nov. 5 were Kenneth and Gloria Copeland; Joyce Meyer; Randy and Paula White; Creflo and Taffi Dollar; Eddie Long; and Benny Hinn. All were questioned about their spending practices and were asked to send the senator numerous documents.

At press time, Copeland and Meyer had obeyed Grassley's request while Hinn and the Whites asked for more time. Dollar said he will not submit his finances to Senate scrutiny—claiming privacy rights—while Long's lawyers said the senator's request is out-of-bounds.

Judging by the reaction from some sectors of the Christian public, you'd think Grassley had donned a black hood and launched another Spanish Inquisition. Some Christian leaders have openly suggested that Grassley is preparing to send IRS henchmen armed with clubs, hatchets and instruments of torture to every church in America.

"We must keep the government out of the church, or everything our founding fathers fought for is lost!" wrote Paul Crouch Jr. of the Trinity Broadcasting Network in an open rebuttal to

one of my online columns about the investigation. Crouch even implied that Grassley's probe resembles Hitler's persecution of Christians in 1930s Germany. Huh? Must we be so paranoid?

Let's cool off. We don't need to demonize anybody. When asked how I view this crisis, I point out the following:

1. Grassley is a Christian with a reputation for integrity.

The senator told me in a recent interview that he was saved at age 11. He and his wife have attended the same Baptist church in Cedar Falls, Iowa, since 1954. This man is not the Antichrist.

Grassley recently conducted an investigation of several secular nonprofit organizations. Those entities were not shut down because of his inquiry, but they made internal changes in order to correct financial abuses. That's a good thing.

2. We shouldn't rush to judgment. As a result of Grassley's inquiry, we now know that Joyce Meyer has a marble-topped chest of drawers in her office. That is not a scandal. I doubt her supporters are alarmed that she bought some nice furniture.

Meyer pumps hundreds of thousands of dollars into global missionary projects, and the IRS recently notified her ministry that she is operating according to tax rules. She and the Copelands did the honorable thing by submitting to Grassley's request on time.

3. This is not a conspiracy against churches. I don't believe the state should tell a church how big a minister's salary can be or what kind of car he can drive. But the government does

have the responsibility to enforce laws. If a preacher is using a ministry plane for private pleasure or paying off his gated mansion or Rolls Royces with funds from a mystery account, then the government has every right to demand compliance with tax codes.

If Long and Dollar have nothing to hide, why are they balking at Grassley's request? Wouldn't it be better to obey the senator's orders? After all, the Bible says we don't have to fear the government if we aren't doing anything wrong (see).

4. We should embrace scrutiny. I've been praying about all the uncomfortable shaking that is taking place in the church today—from the embarrassing moral failures to the cavalier ministry divorces to the ORU scandal. I believe God is raising His holy plumb line over all American ministries, and He is demanding that we come in line with His higher standards.

Before we blast Grassley for asking questions, maybe we should consider whether God might be conducting His own heavenly audit. Perhaps the Lord is offended that our beloved gospel of prosperity has created a cult of selfishness. If so, our best response is to open our account ledgers and welcome correction.

J. Lee Grady is editor of Charisma. To read his online columns about the Grassley investigation and Paul Crouch Jr.'s open letter, go to