

Our Credibility Crisis

It is time for leaders in our movement to show some tough love.

Suppose you go to the hospital and your surgeon accidentally removes your spleen instead of your appendix. Then you learn that this same doctor cut out the wrong organ from Mrs. Johnson's abdomen and amputated Mr. Smith's right leg instead of his left one. Oops!

I guarantee a quack like that would lose his medical license no matter how friendly he seemed during office visits. And he couldn't move to the next town and open a surgical practice. We have professional standards that apply not only to doctors but also to dentists, bankers, teachers, lawyers and even cosmetologists.

Unfortunately in our quirky world of independent churches, there is no such thing as an enforceable standard of professional behavior. A hairstylist has to obey the rules, but some of our preachers don't. They make up the rules as they go.

Case in point: Paul Cain, the celebrated charismatic prophet who appeared in countless conference pulpits during the 1990s, stepped down from ministry in 2005 after he was publicly confronted by three high-profile church leaders. Mike Bickle, Rick Joyner and Jack Deere brought disciplinary charges against Cain because of a pattern of homosexual behavior and alcoholism.

Cain admitted his failures, stepped down from ministry and agreed to a regimen of accountability prescribed by a group of

men who knew him. But a few weeks later he announced that he was moving to California to find restoration from some ministers that Bickle, Joyner and Deere knew nothing about.

Then, 12 months later, voila! The church in California announced that Cain was “restored” and ready to preach again.

Bickle, Joyner and Deere did the right thing by releasing their own statement on January 21, which said, in part: “We cannot say with confidence that this is a genuine restoration. ... It will be harmful to [Cain] and others if he is released prematurely and then relapses into his past failures.”

Thank God somebody demanded a higher standard—at a time when so many Christians have gone squishy on biblical morality.

It is time for leaders in our movement to show some tough love and adopt some stringent policies about biblical restoration.

Cain’s situation is an opportunity for us to examine our movement’s credibility crisis. We need clearer guidelines on how to handle a leader’s moral failure. Here are four:

1. Forgiveness is immediate. God’s mercy is amazing, and He is quick to forgive a fallen leader who repents. God does not require any sinner to wallow in shame.

2. Personal restoration is a process. Repentance is not just feeling sorry for making a mistake. A leader must show a genuine sense of brokenness for the way his or her sin hurt others. If the leader is in denial about his failures, true friends must confront his deeply rooted pride, deception and

self-justification.

3. Restoration to ministry should never be fast-tracked. Many experts suggest that a fallen leader should step down for a minimum of three years to find full healing. Some denominations require only two years of rehabilitation, but those of us in independent churches have required even less time. As a result of our hurry, many unhealed, unhealthy leaders are in the pulpit today.

4. Restoration should involve people who know the fallen leader. A fallen leader may be tempted to run across the country and find new friends who are wowed by his charisma but don't see his dark side. But true restoration must include reconciliation with the people hurt by his or her actions.

I know some will complain that I am being "judgmental." The truth is that I know several ministers who fell morally and then returned to their pulpits in God's time, not theirs. Restoration is possible and should be our goal.

But I intend to stand with the apostle Paul, who demanded godly character of church leaders and warned early Christians to avoid the self-restored Lone Rangers of that era. If we don't draw some lines today, the flaky prophets and the carnal con artists will bring us all down to their level.

J. Lee Grady is the editor of Charisma. Check out his weekly online column, along with many other exclusive Web features, at [jlee.com](#). You can also post your comments about this article on our Web forum.