

Poison in the Pot

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During a time of severe famine in Israel, a group of prophets who were desperate to eat dinner prepared a curious meal. Because the crops had failed and bread was scarce, they sliced up some wild gourds in a kettle and cooked a mushy vegetable soup with an exotic odor and an unmistakably bitter aftertaste.

This stew may have looked tempting, but the recipe was untested and the ingredients were lethal. These hungry guys were clueless when it came to cooking, and they got very concerned after they wolfed down the first few spoonfuls. The Bible says the men cried out to the prophet Elisha: “‘There is death in the pot!’” (See 2 Kings 4:40).

Elisha saved the day when he threw some grain into the mix. Suddenly the poison stew was edible.

Before this episode, this same prophet had supernaturally purified toxic water by throwing salt into the spring near Jericho. Now he had decontaminated the food in Gilgal. Nobody went to the emergency room that day because the man of God had an instant cure for food poisoning.

Why is this story in the Bible? We might be tempted to laugh it off, as if it were warning us to beware when men get near the kitchen. But this is no joke: Elisha’s mealtime miracle has serious implications for us today.

I believe the American church is languishing in a season of

spiritual famine. While revival is stirring in many parts of the world (see our cover story on page 24), church growth in our country is stagnant. Though New Testament-style miracles are triggering waves of conversions in Africa and Asia, we have empty altars.

To make matters worse, some leaders have responded to this famine by cooking up their own mess of gourd goulash. Rather than staying within the bounds of biblical integrity, they have concocted a false gospel made of wild and deadly ingredients. This stew appeals to hungry people but leaves them spiritually sick after the first swallow.

It is time for a taste test. We desperately need the Holy Spirit to visit us and purify what is on our stove. I detect at least three toxic substances that are poisoning churches today:

1. Greed. I'm grateful that Christian television takes the gospel to the masses. But I must confess that sometimes I get the dry heaves watching some of the antics used in religious fund-raising. If this stuff makes me gag, imagine how it affects the channel-surfing unbeliever who just happens to watch these embarrassing sideshows.

One Christian leader recently told his TV audience that they would likely go to hell if they didn't give "right now" in the offering. Do we honestly believe this kind of spiritual extortion will go unpunished?

Elisha stepped in and corrected the problem in his pot. But who will confront the unrestrained greed that is spoiling our witness to the world? We must demand a higher level of

integrity in Christian media.

2. Immorality. The apostle Paul warned the Corinthian church that sexual sin spreads like a plague if it is not confronted vigorously (see 1 Cor. 5:1-13). Yet in today's church, renegade pastors have figured out a way to jump from one bed to another and remain on the church payroll. Anyone who dares to call for discipline is labeled legalistic.

The Catholic Church has had its share of scandal caused by pedophile priests. What will happen when God lifts the covers off the unconfessed sin in our ranks? We will live through another PTL-style spectacle if we don't deal with the problem.

3. Arrogance. We Americans have perfected the art of pompous preaching. So much of our message focuses on how great we are, and this pride produces a subtle swagger that is contagious.

On one recent religious TV broadcast, a preacher announced that donors who mailed checks to the ministry would no longer experience suffering. "Today is the end of the suffering saint," he declared. I wonder if this man's message has reached Chinese or Pakistani Christians who are in prison for their faith.

One of the leaders who contributed an article to this issue of Charisma is Kevin Turner, a relatively unknown evangelist from Oklahoma. The first time I heard Kevin speak, he preached his entire sermon through tears. I know a lot of fancy preachers who display silk handkerchiefs in their suit pockets, but Kevin actually used his plain white handkerchief to wipe his tears while he told of ministering to persecuted Christians in Sudan.

His crying wasn't faked. His message moved the audience to repentance,
brokenness and compassion. We need the Holy Spirit to add those missing ingredients to our pitiful porridge.

We need tears of humility. We need a passion for purity. We need a return to biblical integrity.

Please join me in praying that the Lord will turn up the heat, stir the pot and remove the poison.