

Say Goodbye to the Untouchable Preachers

God is shaking His church and removing corruption. But we share the blame for giving charlatans a platform.

Al Capone once controlled all of Chicago. The notorious 1920s gangster bribed the city's mayor, bought the police and presided as king over an empire of casinos, speakeasies and smuggling operations. He dodged bullets for years and lived above the law—and earned the nickname “untouchable” because no one could bring him to justice.

Before Capone finally went to prison in 1932, he justified his crimes by saying: “All I do is satisfy a public demand.” He didn't take responsibility for the pain he caused because he knew mayors, policemen, community leaders and bootleggers supported him the whole way.

“There is no way we can know how many unbelievers rejected the gospel because they saw the church supporting quacks who swaggered, bragged, lied, flattered, bribed, stole and tearfully begged their way into our lives—while we applauded them and sent them money.”

I hate to compare any minister of God to a gangster. But the sad truth is that today there are a handful (well, maybe more) of unscrupulous preachers who share some of Capone's most disgusting traits. They are notoriously greedy. They are masters of deception and manipulation. They have bought their way into the charismatic religious subculture and used their uncanny hypnotic ability to control major Christian TV networks.

And, like Capone, their days are numbered. Justice will soon catch up with them.

These false prophets probably all started out with a genuine

call from God, but success destroyed them. They were lured away from true faith by fame and money, and when their ministries mushroomed they resorted to compromise to keep their machines rolling. Now, in the midst of the Great Recession, God is closing in on them.

But before we rejoice that these imposters are being removed from their pulpits and yanked off the airwaves, let's hit the pause button and reflect. How did these false preachers ever achieve such fame? It couldn't have happened without help from us.

We were the gullible ones. When they said, "The Lord promises you untold wealth if you will simply give a thousand dollars right now," we went to the phones and put the donations on our credit cards. God forgive us.

We were the undiscerning ones. When they said, "I need your sacrificial gift today so I can repair my private jet," we didn't ask why a servant of God wasn't humble enough to fly coach class to a Third World nation. God forgive us.

We were the foolish ones. When it was revealed that they were living in immorality, mistreating their wives or populating cities with illegitimate children, we listened to their spin doctors instead of demanding that ministry leaders act like Christians. God forgive us.

We were the naïve ones. When they begged for \$2 million more in donations because of a budget shortfall, we didn't feel comfortable asking why they needed that \$10,000-a-night hotel suite. In fact, if we did question it, another Christian was quick to say, "Don't criticize! The Bible says, 'Touch not the Lord's anointed!'" God forgive us.

We have treated these charlatans like Al Capone—as if they were untouchable—and as a result their corruption has spread throughout charismatic churches like a plague. Our movement is eaten up with materialism, pride, deception and sexual sin

because we were afraid to call these Bozos what they really are—insecure, selfish, egotistical and emotionally dysfunctional.

If we had applied biblical discernment a long time ago we could have avoided this mess. There is no way we can know how many unbelievers rejected the gospel because they saw the church supporting quacks who swaggered, bragged, lied, flattered, bribed, stole and tearfully begged their way into our lives—while we applauded them and sent them money.

When well-meaning Christians quote 1 Chronicles 16:22 (“Do not touch My anointed ones, and do My prophets no harm,” NASB) to cover up corruption or charlatanism, they do horrible injustice to Scripture. This passage does not require us to stay quiet when a leader is abusing power or deceiving people.

On the contrary, we are called to confront sin in a spirit of love and honesty—and we certainly aren’t showing love to the church if we allow the charismatic Al Capones of our generation to corrupt it.

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