

Sin in the Camp

A prominent pastor in Los Angeles caused a stir two years ago when he divorced his wife and—seven days later—married another woman. Lots of people fled his church, and his distraught ex-wife and their three children moved to Hawaii. But in just a few months, members of his new congregation were dancing in the aisles in their new facility, and the talented young preacher was back on the conference circuit, no questions asked.

Today Clarence McClendon enjoys the spotlight on Christian television, and he shares pulpits with top leaders in our movement. Meanwhile we are expected to forgive and forget—lest we be branded as judgmental. After all, if the offerings are flowing, and the preaching still gets the people to shout, then surely the anointing of God is on this man no matter what he did. Right?

It sounds so merciful, but restoring a person into ministry after a moral failure is not that simple. We're supposed to give people time to heal. But the truth is that when it comes to marital breakdown or sexual sin, we charismatics are way too eager to grant immediate pardons.

* Prayer leader and former pastor Larry Lea told Charisma last month that

he had nonstop speaking engagements during the time he was divorcing his first wife, Melva, and marrying his new one, Leah. Obviously the churches that invited Lea to preach didn't have questions about whether the issues in his life had been dealt with properly.

* The founder of one of the nation's most prominent marriage ministries, Ray Mossholder, announced in January that he is divorcing his wife and marrying a younger woman (see page 22). He doesn't plan to stay in the pulpit, but he told us that two churches offered him jobs when he announced his resignation.

* Last year South African charismatic pioneer Ray McCauley shocked the churches in his nation when he divorced his wife and married another woman in a matter of months. His church has lost some members, but American pastors have been quick to absolve him. One of his defenders told me: "Yeah, Ray's marriage didn't work out. But really, he is more anointed than ever!"

Apparently what is important to us today is hype, not holiness. I guess what we want are ministers who can move a crowd to swoon and to write big checks. What we need are broken men and women who can move us to repentance.

An epidemic is sweeping the church, yet few leaders seem alarmed about it. We're more concerned about a preacher's donor base than we are about his soul. We think we should quickly "restore" the guy who ran out on his wife because, after all, if he leaves the ministry for a year to find healing he might not be able to finish paying for his Lear jet.

Lord, help us.

That ripping noise you hear is the sound of sackcloth being shredded in my office. There is sin in the camp, and if we don't deal with it God's way it is going to become a plague.

Let's stop kidding ourselves. To support a man in sin by keeping him in the pulpit immediately after a moral failure is not "restoration." Lame attempts to whitewash sin with spin doctors, faxed press releases and upbeat TV appearances is only going to make this epidemic spread faster.