

The Fire of Holiness vs. the Spirit of Perversion

Moral failure in our ranks has become an epidemic—and the only solution is a heaven-sent spiritual housecleaning.

I'm sure you felt as heartsick as I did when you heard about the nightmarish charges leveled against Atlanta preacher Eddie Long of New Birth Full Gospel Baptist Church. While I passed through two airports last Thursday, CNN was airing the sordid details of the lawsuits filed by two young men who are accusing Long of coercing them into sex. Two more men have since come forward with similar lawsuits.

Whether the charges are true or not (please pray for Long and his church during this ordeal), it was awkward to hear newscasters suggesting that a married Pentecostal bishop had abused his power and carried on secret gay affairs. What's really sad is that in our sexually desensitized culture people don't even blush when they hear such talk about a minister.

"We must preach the full gospel, not a neutered version that avoids any mention of sin, judgment or holiness. The redemption of Jesus does not give us a license to sin, and those who teach such heresy will be held especially liable."

In a sermon last Sunday, Long dismissed the allegations and vowed to fight his accusers. Most members of his 25,000-member church rallied behind him, even after incriminating photos began circulating. Long has not explained the suggestive photos of himself or how the young men obtained them, but he declared he is "not the man" he is portrayed to be in the lawsuits.

At this point it is Bishop Long's word against the four men, and we will soon endure the embarrassment of a civil trial that could be very ugly—and even more shameful if evidence

supports the accusations. As with the Catholic child abuse cover-up, and numerous recent scandals among Christian leaders, the name of Jesus will be dragged through the mud and Christians will be broad-brushed as hypocrites who preach one thing and do another.

I started noticing a disturbing trend way before the allegations against Bishop Long surfaced. A sinister spirit of perversion has invaded the ranks of charismatic churches. Here are just a few examples that have been reported to me by people familiar with the situations:

- The leader of one supposedly Christian ministry encouraged the wives of two men to have adulterous affairs, and then asked the women to provide detailed descriptions of their activities
- A group of traveling ministers routinely met for weekend getaways that included wife-swapping
- The male leader of a “prophetic” church on the West Coast seduced several men in his core leadership team. (The church shut down after the sin was exposed.)
- A pastor learned that members of his staff were having sexual affairs in the sanctuary of his church, and he did nothing to stop the debauchery.
- A church in the Southeast hosted a marriage seminar in which Christian couples were encouraged to install poles in their bedrooms so wives could engage in pole dancing prior to sex. (Question: Didn’t pole dancing originate in strip clubs? Did someone visit a strip club to get this idea?)

Forgive me for being so graphic. It gives me no pleasure to describe sins that should never be named among believers, especially those who claim to be “Spirit-filled.” Any leader who engages in or tolerates such behavior has no business laying his filthy hands on people in a church and pretending to have the Holy Spirit.

The spirit of perversion resembles the cult of Baal worship, which caused ancient Israel to backslide constantly. In the New Testament, it is associated with Jezebel, the priestess of Baal, and it manifests when false teachers invade the church and lead people into idolatry and immorality (see Rev. 2:20). It attacks church leaders because the enemy's goal is to contaminate the people through defiled pulpits.

God raised up an Elijah to confront Baal and Jezebel. To pull down the stronghold of perversion in today's compromised church, we must have an army of fearless men and women who live in the fire of holiness and who preach the Word without compromise. Not perfect people, but those who have allowed the Refiner to consume their selfish pride and materialistic greed—the breeding grounds of perversion. Not self-righteous people, but humble, broken men and women like Elijah, who was prepared on the backside of the desert before he confronted Baal's prophets on Mount Carmel.

We need holiness, and true holiness is not legalism. We preach the mercy of the cross and God's amazing love for sinners. We offer forgiveness and healing to those who have been immoral. The blood of Jesus and the renewing power of the Spirit can free any repentant person from the bondage of sexual sin. But we must also warn believers that those who turn from Christ, and return to perversion, have trampled His blood and "insulted the spirit of grace" (see Hebrews 10:29).

We must preach the full gospel, not a neutered version that avoids any mention of sin, judgment or holiness. The redemption of Jesus does not give us a license to sin, and those who teach such heresy will be held especially liable.

My prayer is a desperate one: *Lord, baptize us in the fire of Your holiness!* I hope you are desperate for the same flame. Ask Him to rekindle the Refiner's fire in you.

J. Lee Grady is contributing editor of Charisma. His most

recent book is The Holy Spirit Is Not for Sale. Follow him on Twitter at leegrady.