

The Growing Crisis of Church Scandals: What's Behind It?

Over the years, we've seen many failures and fallings in the evangelical church. And it begs the question: what is going on?

In my article, "Why Do Leaders Fall?" I wrote: "They fall for the same reason that all Christians fall. Each of us is drawn away by our own evil desires and enticed. When these desires are acted upon, they lead to sin (cf. James 1:14-15). Sin has a life cycle—it either grows or withers depending on whether we feed or starve it. John Owen, the prolific Puritan author wrote, 'Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you'."

A quick word to those whose faith is faltering because of fallen leaders: Never look to man, they will let you down—look to God, He never will.

Guilty Until Proven Innocent

Because of the internet's ability to spread massive amounts of information, it's not surprising that so much is coming out. With this tidal wave of information being shared on countless social media outlets, it's easier than ever before to expose sin.

On the one hand, exposure is sorely needed and long overdue, but on the other hand, it becomes very destructive when it is used as a weapon by arrogant and judgmental people. To truly change lives, truth must be seasoned with grace and watered with hope.

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Instead of pointing people to hope and restoration, we often

rush to premature judgment: “Guilty Until Proven Innocent.” Many outlets that profit from click-bait are eager to drag someone through the mud again, and again, and again.

Priority: We Must Listen

I’m assuming that the reader understands that I’m not lumping everything into the same category. A leader who abuses children is handled much differently than a leader who stepped down due to anger and a controlling attitude.

When there are victims involved, we must listen carefully and prioritize their issue. That’s obvious, but what might not be so obvious is that we often become cold, callous, and overly critical in our zeal for justice.

We must provide a safe, non-threatening environment for victims to come forward, but also avoid the spirit of accusation behind some of these so-called “ministries” who love pulling others down. They can be right in their reasoning yet wrong in their heart. That’s what I’m addressing in this article.

The Spirit of Accusation Kills Humility

I’ve personally seen false accusations hurt good, godly people—a grandma is accused of something because the daughter-in-law doesn’t want her seeing the kids, or a manipulating spouse turns on her partner with false accusations, or a church member falsely accuses leadership because they’ve been hurt.

Again, I’m not minimizing abuse—it must be dealt with swiftly—but we must be careful that arrogance and the spirit of accusation don’t kill discernment.

One particular ministry comes to mind as I’m writing this: Years ago, a pastor had to step down because of his aggressive leadership style, but some Christian outlets still bash him

without looking into the possibility that he's been humbled and broken by God.

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Where's the compassion? Where's erring on the side of grace? Unless we have evidence proving otherwise, why aren't we rejoicing that God has done a great work in his heart? Has the spirit of accusation and the lack of humility and brokenness crept into your own heart? I've been guilty of this myself. When we recognize this, we must repent.

We Must Do Better

One thing is certain: Leaders need to be more forthright and admit their sin. People would respect them a lot more and it would set a good example. Leaders not only lead by example with integrity but also with repentance.

We must provide a safe haven for those with issues, and instill an open-door policy where members can go to any of the elders if they have concerns with leadership.

The Pain of Pride

Each side tends to be biased: We guard friends but assault enemies. Conservatives are quick to point out fallen charismatics but say nothing about fallen conservatives, and charismatics can be guilty of the same. The enemy of our soul doesn't care what denomination we belong to; he is set on destroying us if left unchecked.

We should never be excited about accusing our brothers and sisters. Exposure must flow from a broken, humble heart that is focused on restoration and repentance rather than chastisement and banishment.

Both Will be Held Accountable

Let me be clear: To adequately assess situations, the critic contending for the truth must be filled with the Spirit to display the fruit of the Spirit. Sadly, that's not the case with many of these so-called discernment ministries that are fueled by pride and motivated by revenue. It's very hard to speak with clarity and precision when we only have snapshots of a story.

Some of these outlets even do a lot of dirty work behind the scenes, baiting people for evidence that might not even be valid—looking for exposure rather than truth. Take heed: Not only will fallen leaders be held accountable but so will heresy hunters who are operating from a wrong spirit.

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