

The Panel on Todd Bentley: The Line Being Drawn in the Sand

I have recently heard from several of my friends that they believe 2020 will be a year when God starts reforming His church. I believe this to be true. Part of this reformation will be the revelation of the hearts of leaders as well as highlighting some of the modern distortions of the gospel.

Soon I will deal with six areas for church reformation but for now I will just focus on the first area of reformation I believe God is orchestrating in His church.

Biblical Standards for Christian Leadership

This first point is something I am participating in right now as I have agreed to serve on a panel that rendered an opinion this past week that stated—among other things—that evangelist Todd Bentley should lose his ordination and step down from all ministry because of an avalanche of allegations against him related to immoral behavior. (Dr. Michael Brown released the official statement by our panel on major Christian news outlets such as *Charisma* magazine, The Christian Post and beyond.)

Of course—echoing the voice of the panel—all of us desire Todd's full restoration, first to God and eventually to some form of ministry.

We all have to take heed to the admonition of Paul related to restoring a fallen believer: Galatians 6:1 says, "Brothers, if a man is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, watching yourselves, lest you also be tempted."

On the other hand, I have actually been thankful that this has angered many people in the church and for some of the public attacks against me and the rest of the panel members because their attack just reveals their lack of biblical standards, their own distorted view of the grace of God, and is subsequently serving as a red flag to the rest of the body as to who else (besides Todd) belongs to his camp. (Truly, a person is not only known by his friends but equally by his opponents and for this I praise God!)

In light of all this, a line is finally being drawn in the sand! Some may ask, is there a higher standard for Christian leadership in Scripture? Yes, there is! James 3:1 says that we who teach in the body of Christ will be held to the strictest judgement by God—so yes, there are higher standards for leaders, preachers and teachers of the word of God.

Secondarily, in the context of the teaching of the fivefold ministry in Chapter 4 (4:11) of Ephesians, Paul the apostle admonishes us to walk in a manner worthy of the calling in which we have been called (see 4:1,2). This has nothing to do with being saved by works but with how God expects us to walk in our assignment after we have (already) been saved by grace. Thus, one of the primary reasons I agreed to participate in the panel opinion regarding Todd is because I believed this had to do with highlighting the need to return to the old biblical standards as a criteria for Christian leadership—especially in the charismatic church—so this issue is much larger than Todd Bentley. (Especially because I didn't want to give too much focus or attention on Todd because he does not warrant it.)

Some may wonder if the panel has biblical grounds to investigate and call out a leader in public? Scripture teaches us in 1 Timothy 5:19-20 not to entertain a charge against a spiritual leader except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. Well, in the case of Todd, there were literally dozens of accusations from the year 2004 to 2019—many of which

were firsthand accounts vetted by a professional investigator before they ever got to our panel.

Some may ask why we called him out in public? Paul also instructed Timothy to rebuke said leaders in public so that other leaders may stand in fear (see 1 Tim. 5:19-20). Hence, Paul said one of the primary ways to maintain a proper biblical standard for holiness in church leadership is to call them out in front of other people so that others may fear!

Furthermore, the epistles of Paul illustrate how he called leaders out in public for false teaching and other violations, as we see in 2 Timothy 1:15; 2:17; as well as the fact that John the apostle also called out a leader (Diotrephes) for the divisive control he exerted on a church (3 John 9-11). That being said, I believe there are too many unaccountable leaders right now in many expressions of the church—especially the charismatic movement.

One solution to this problem, especially for the many thousands of nondenominational, independent charismatic leaders and movements, is that I am hoping that leaders I work with in the church, leaders like Dr. Brown and like those who serve with me on the council of the United States Coalition of Apostolic Leaders, would eventually serve as a type of Jerusalem council (see Acts 15) to discuss current church trends, culture, doctrine, theology and to hold leaders in certain circles of the church accountable. (For those who are not affiliated or accountable to any governing body in the church, the best we can do is to correct them in public.)

Jesus said He would build His church (Matt. 16) but He also utilizes leaders to build His church; hence, all leaders need to understand and apply proper protocols, criteria and standards of ethics in order to qualify as a leader (take note how Jesus used leaders of each of the seven churches in Revelation Chapters 2,3 to deliver His message of correction, encouragement, and or rebuke).

I blame the pervasive influence of hyper-grace teaching for the practice of justifying immorality in the pew and pulpits of the church. One of the erroneous teachings that I believe have opened the door to people serving in ministry while living in sin is hyper-grace. By "hyper-grace," I am referring to the tendency of focusing on one aspect of the nature and gifts of God to the exclusion of other aspects of His character, nature and gifts. Consequently, when people focus solely on grace, they miss the other parts of Scripture that deal with repentance, holiness and walking uprightly, and thereby think they can now live any way they want (and God will still use them—as long as they ask God to forgive them).

This intentional lifestyle of sinning because of a focus on hyper-grace was dealt with 2000 years ago in the book of Jude, which says in verse 4 that ungodly people have perverted the grace of God and turned it into a license for sensuality which denies our only Lord and master. The apostle Paul also said the same thing in Romans 6:1 when he asked, "Shall we sin so that grace may abound?" His answer was a resounding "no" when he said, "How can we who died to sin continue to live in it?" (See Rom. 6:2).

In order to focus on hyper-grace, these teachers have decided that the moral law of God is no longer in effect in the New Covenant. The practice of doing away with the Ten Commandments as a standard of holiness and behavior in the church is a revival of an old heresy called "antinomianism" (which means "against law") which, unfortunately, is popular in many circles of the contemporary church.

Conversely, Paul says that the grace of God does not lead to sin but to holiness! In Titus 2:11-12, Paul teaches us that the grace of God has appeared so that we will renounce ungodliness and worldly passions and to live upright and godly lives in this present age—it was never given as an excuse to live in sin!

The 10 Commandments (Ex. 20; which were repeated numerous times in the New Testament, see Ephesians 6:2,3 as one of many examples) were never removed as a standard of holiness for the church—since it is rooted in the holiness and nature of God.

In closing, I believe the charismatic church is in a critical moment, in a crossroads so to speak, with a hypothetical line in the sand drawn across churches and leaders, as will be seen in their social media platforms and pulpits.

In the revivals of the early 18th to the 20th century, pubs were emptied or even closed down. Now they are populated by Christians who actually view getting drunk as a sign of freedom and those who oppose this practice as antiquated legalists.

The next year will expose those who are attempting to walk in the whole counsel of God (see Acts 20:27) or merely use one aspect of His character and nature—His grace—as a license to sin and as a way to justify living between two opinions, trying to love God and love the world at the same time. Hopefully many will take heed to the warning from James (see James 4:4) who said that friendship with the world is to be an enemy of God.

May God reform His church and conform all of us in His body to the image of His Son Jesus.