

The Tragic Scandal of Greasy Grace

This week's announcement about evangelist Todd Bentley's hasty remarriage and restoration is sending a confusing message to the church.

I groaned when I learned early this week that Canadian preacher Todd Bentley, leader of the controversial Lakeland Revival, had decided to divorce his wife, Shonnah, and marry his former ministry intern, Jessa Hasbrook. The news surfaced after almost nine months of silence and speculation, during which time the board of Bentley's Fresh Fire Ministries in British Columbia publicly scolded him for committing adultery.

In a statement released March 10 by Rick Joyner, the popular author and minister who is overseeing Bentley's restoration process, we were told that (1) Bentley married his new wife several weeks ago and moved to Joyner's base in Fort Mill, S.C.; (2) Todd and Jessa agree that their relationship was "wrong and premature" and that it "should not have happened the way it did"; (3) Bentley will remain out of public ministry while he seeks healing; and (4) Joyner will oversee the healing process with input from Dallas pastor Jack Deere and California pastor Bill Johnson. **(Read Rick Joyner's response to this column.)**

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It was also announced that Bentley plans to relaunch his ministry, called Fresh Fire USA, in Fort Mill, and that Joyner is now collecting donations from supporters to help rebuild it. (The Canadian ministry Bentley started has now been renamed Transform International, and it has severed ties with the evangelist.)

In a few places in his statement Joyner expressed tough love, especially when he said: "We know that trust has to be earned and that Todd will have to earn the trust of the body of Christ for future ministry, which will not be easy, nor should it be." He also made it clear that true repentance and restoration "can only come if we refuse to compromise the clear biblical standards for morality and integrity."

But there were some glaring omissions in the statements released this week that indicate a fundamental weakness in our freestyle approach to "restoring" fallen leaders.

First of all, it is outrageous that Shonnah Bentley, Todd's first wife, does not seem to be an issue in the current discussion. Her name is never mentioned in Joyner's statement—while Todd is mentioned 18 times. We are never told how Shonnah is handling the divorce. How will she manage to care for the three children she and Todd share? She and the kids seem invisible in this process. Yet if anyone needs healing and restoration, is it not the other half of this broken family?

Second, we charismatics still seem to have a habit of elevating gifting above character. It's almost as if the end justifies the means. (So what if a preacher ruins one marriage and makes a hasty decision to marry a younger woman—the important thing is that we get him back in the pulpit to heal the sick!) That is a perversion of biblical integrity. God can anoint any man or woman with the Holy Spirit's power; what He is looking for are vessels of honor that can carry that anointing with dignity, humility and purity.

What is most deplorable about this latest installment in the Bentley scandal is the lack of true remorse. In his own statement, Bentley apologizes for his actions and says he "takes full responsibility for my part for the ending of the marriage." But how can he be taking "full responsibility" if he willingly chose to have a girlfriend on the side—and then

married her immediately after his divorce was final? Why did he hide for several months when he should have been listening to counsel and seeking reconciliation with his first wife?

Many Christians today have rejected biblical discipline and adopted a sweet, spineless love that cannot correct. Our grace is greasy. No matter what an offending brother does, we stroke him and pet him and nurse his wounds while we ignore the people he wounded. No matter how heinous his sin, we offer comforting platitudes because, after all, who are we to judge?

When the apostle Paul learned that a member of the Corinthian church was in an immoral relationship with his father's wife, he did not rush to comfort the man. He told the Corinthians: "You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst" (I Cor. 5:2). Sometimes we must draw a ruthless sword in order to bring genuine healing. The "wounds of a friend" are faithful to bring conviction and true repentance (see Prov. 27:6).

Paul actually delivered the unrepentant Corinthian man to Satan "for the destruction of his flesh" (5:5) so that he could be saved. That does not sound very nice. Many today would call Paul's tactic harsh and legalistic. But that is because we have lost any true sense of the fear of the Lord—and we don't realize that our laxness about God's standards is a perversion of His mercy. When the sin is severe, the public rebuke must be severe.

In all the discussion of Bentley and the demise of the Lakeland Revival, I am waiting to hear the sound of sackcloth ripping into shreds. We should be weeping. We should be rending our hearts—as God commanded Israel when they fell into sin (see Joel 2: 13-14). To give guidance to a confused church, our leaders should have publicly decried the Lakeland disaster while at the same time helping both Todd and Shonnah to heal.

We have not mourned this travesty. We have not been shocked and appalled that such sin has been named among us. We act as if flippant divorce and remarriage are minor infractions—when in actuality they are such serious moral failures that they can bring disqualification.

If we truly love Todd Bentley, we will not clamor for his quick return to the pulpit. While we certainly want him to be fully restored to fellowship with God, we cannot rush the process of restoring a man to ministry. Leaders must live up to a higher standard. We must demand that those involved in Bentley's restoration not only love him but also love the church by protecting us from the kind of scandal we endured last year.

J. Lee Grady is editor of *Charisma*. To read Rick Joyner's and Todd Bentley's public statement [click here](#).

Read Rick Joyner's Response to Lee Grady's Column, "The Tragic Scandal of Greasy Grace."