

# We Need to Love the Church

You probably groaned, as I did, after hearing that Todd Bentley, leader of the Lakeland Revival, had divorced his wife, Shonnah, and married his former ministry intern, Jessa Hasbrook. The news surfaced after nine months of silence and speculation, during which time the board of Bentley's Fresh Fire Ministries in Canada publicly scolded him for adultery.

Rick Joyner, the popular author who is overseeing Bentley's restoration, released a statement in March saying that (1) Bentley married his new wife and moved to Joyner's base in Fort Mill, S.C.; (2) Todd and Jessa agree that their relationship was "wrong and premature"; (3) Bentley will remain out of public ministry while he seeks healing; and (4) Joyner will oversee the healing process with input from pastors Jack Deere and Bill Johnson.

It was also announced that Bentley will relaunch his ministry, called Fresh Fire USA, in Fort Mill, and that Joyner is collecting donations from supporters to build it. (Leaders of the Canadian ministry Bentley started have 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." But there were glaring omissions in the statements released during March and April that indicate a weakness in our freestyle approach to restoring fallen leaders.

First of all, it is outrageous that Shonnah Bentley, Todd's first wife, is rarely mentioned in the current discussion. Her name wasn't in Joyner's statement—while Todd was mentioned 18 times. Why are wives often ignored when male church leaders mess up? How will Shonnah manage to care for the three

children she and Todd share? Their healing must be addressed too.

Second, we have a bad habit of elevating gifting above character. The prevailing attitude says, "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!" That is a perversion of biblical integrity.

What is most deplorable about this latest installment in the Bentley scandal is the lack of true remorse. In his own statement, Bentley apologized for his actions and said he "takes full responsibility" for his part in 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?

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 coddle 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" (1 Cor. 5:2, NASB). Sometimes genuine healing requires a ruthless, exacting love.

Many today would call Paul's position harsh and legalistic. But that is because we have lost a 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.

I've never claimed to be perfect, and I know the Lord extends His mercy to us all. But when it comes to biblical standards of leadership we need solid confrontation, not squishy compromise. We must restore not only the brother who sinned but also the church that has lost its bearings in the process.

If we truly care about Todd Bentley we will not clamor for his quick return to the platform. We must demand that those involved in Bentley's restoration not only affirm him but also love the church by avoiding a repeat of this scandal.

---

**J. Lee Grady** *is the editor of Charisma. You can read his previous online columns, as well as comments from readers, at*  
.