

What Ravi Zacharias Might Tell Us Today

We were all devastated last May when Christian apologist Ravi Zacharias died of spinal cancer at age 74. Our souls were crushed again last week when we learned that the famous author and preacher had been involved in years of predatory behavior with women.

I didn't want to believe the reports. This man was an intellectual giant who could argue with the most die-hard atheists and agnostics. But a thorough investigation by Ravi Zacharias International Ministries proved that Zacharias sexually abused massage therapists for more than a decade—and that one woman even accused him of rape.

The fallout has been devastating. Women in Atlanta—as well as in Thailand, India and Malaysia—said Zacharias abused them or engaged in inappropriate behavior during massage therapy sessions. Some were even paid with ministry funds. And leaders of the ministry now admit they didn't do enough to hold Zacharias accountable for his double life.

The author's books have been pulled from shelves. His publisher, HarperCollins, has announced that the 16 Zacharias titles they published, including *Who Made God?* and *The Logic of God*, will be taken out of print. The Atlanta-based ministry is downsizing, and its British subsidiary has split from the American organization. It's possible that RZIM, the largest apologetics organization in the world, may not survive.

Moral failures of this magnitude—especially when they involve high-profile ministers—are never easy for the Christian community. From the embarrassing televangelist scandals of the 1980s to the more recent downfalls of Bill Hybels, Jerry Falwell Jr. and Hillsong pastor Carl Lentz, Christians feel

betrayed by these failures—and their victims often don't get the healing they need. (Sadly, in some cases we blame the victims.)

The world sees hypocrisy, and they ask: *Why can't your leaders just live like Christians?* It's an honest question. Meanwhile, Satan scores points when he successfully tempts preachers to compromise biblical standards. This is the worst kind of defeat for our team.

There's no easy way to process the awfulness of a religious scandal. We can pray for the victims. We can pray for the families of the fallen ministers. We can pray for restoration for the men or women who failed. But is there any way to avoid these tragedies?

I've gone through a gamut of emotions after hearing about Zacharias. I'm sad because so many women were exploited by a man of God they trusted. I'm shocked that the leaders of RZIM didn't act fast enough when some of them saw warning signs. I'm disappointed in Zacharias himself. He led so many people to faith in Christ, only to have his ministry irreparably tainted because of the secrets he tried to hide.

I can't help but imagine what Zacharias would tell us now, in hindsight, if he were here to explain it all.

I can't be certain, but I believe he would warn us that if we build our lives and ministries on hidden sin, the foundations will crack. Since Zacharias was a gifted Bible scholar, he might refer to 1 Corinthians 3:12-13 (NASB): "Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw, each one's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each one's work."

Those are sobering words. It is God who ultimately reveals what's at the bottom of our service for Him. He knows our motives. He knows our hidden agendas. He knows if we built our

ministries on integrity, humility and purity or lies, pride and corruption. Things might look good on the outside for a while; we might be able to fool people about who we really are. But we can't fake it with God. He knows the difference between gold and straw.

Zacharias was the author of 30 books, and they sold millions. His sharp intellect opened doors to world leaders. Former Vice President Mike Pence and football legend Tim Tebow spoke at his funeral. He was the picture of success. Yet apparently he traded it all in, like Esau, for a bowl of stew. How sad that he didn't go to a trusted friend, confess his sexual addictions, step away from ministry and find healing for his soul before his death.

We Americans love success, and we tend to worship celebrities. Yet I've noticed that success often destroys people. Unless we have the character to sustain our blessings, they can become a curse.

All of Zacharias' books contain important truths about the Christian faith. But perhaps this man's most important message came through his tragic downfall. I plan to use this somber moment to inspect my own foundations. I pray you will do the same. {eoa}

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