



HOW SHOULD A CHRISTIAN DEAL WITH SCANDAL IN GOD'S CHURCH?

How should a Christian approach the subject of scandal in God's church? The scandals in Christianity just keep coming: child molestation, misuse of church funds, sexual immorality among church leaders, etc. It's sickening to watch the name of Christ being dragged through the mud...and it becomes personally sickening to have unbelievers throw these sins (abominations may be a better word) in our face when we try to represent Christ before them.

One saint writes, "I looked for the church in the world only to find the world in the church." In other words, the world's conduct and the church's conduct have now become the same. Unfortunately, the church is rapidly losing its influence as the salt, because it has embraced sin or tolerated sin instead of rebuking sin.

I once asked a deacon, "Why did you retain your pastor after learning of his adultery?" The reply was given, "It is because everyone liked him!" Would anyone like to guess why that church had problems?

Let me suggest six lessons many churches and leaders have forgotten. First, the Bible must be our authority in all manner of life, including dealing with scandal. Should our allegiance be determined by how we feel about someone or how we feel about God? The Bible is a plain book that expresses God's opinion very plainly about these scandals. God bless those who have the courage to say, "This is what God says to do and we must do it!"

Second, any Christian can fall. That includes Christian celebrities, too. David, at one time a man after God's own heart, committed adultery with Bathsheba. Peter fell when he denied knowing God the Son. Samson was such a mighty man in physical strength but a mere weakling in moral strength. Therefore, don't be surprised if your hero falls, too, but don't allow your disappointment to pretend nothing happened.

Third, accountability is important. The old saying is true: "Absolute power corrupts absolutely." I have always instructed my churches: "Don't ever allow a

pastor to take control of your finances. You should demand that all of your finances be handled above the table.” One pastor stole funds from a church cemetery fund. When asked for his reasoning, he replied, “You don’t pay me enough!” How sad! But who gave him access to the funds in the first place? Life would be so much easier if we required accountability among our leaders.

Fourth, sin must be judged, not overlooked. The Apostle Paul writes, “Those that sin, rebuke before all that all may fear” (1 Timothy 5:20). Contrast those words with the reaction of the Corinthian church: “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that even pagans do not tolerate: A man is sleeping with his father’s wife. **AND YOU ARE PROUD!** Shouldn’t you rather have gone into mourning and have put out of your fellowship the man who has been doing this?”

One televangelist was caught in a sexual tryst. Someone defended him by saying, “What will happen to his ministry if we deal with the problem?” No one asked, “What will happen to God’s honor if the sin is ignored?” One of the major networks even used the words “slap on the wrist” to describe the response of Christianity to this sin.

Fifth, forgiveness should not be confused with restoration. Many think that if someone cries crocodile tears that we should give that person a clean slate and move on. Not necessarily so, for the Bible (recall the first lesson) says, “You reap what you sow.” David’s sin was serious, his confession was contrite but his household reaped a four-fold harvest of unspeakable horror. Did God forgive David? Yes. Did God restore David to how things were previously? Not by a long shot. Remember: Sin leaves scars, often deep scars. Some no longer meet God’s qualifications such as “blameless” and “having a good reputation among the unsaved.”

Sixth, always place your trust in God and not man! Will God ever fail? No. But man will fail though hopefully not in a major, disqualifying way. The Psalmist urges, “It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man” (Psalm 118:8). There is room for only one person on our pedestal: our Lord and Savior. Keep your eyes on Him, follow Him, obey Him, and you will help the church deal scripturally (and therefore correctly) with any scandals that come your way.