

Reflections on the SBC Scandal

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The heartbreaking revelations this past week of the terrible abuses and cover-ups within the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) have sent shock-waves throughout the Church at large. Evangelicals have long believed this kind of problem could only affect the Catholic Church, and that such things would never occur in a conservative Protestant denomination where we supposedly do things the right way.

But now the veil has been lifted. And the men responsible for this debacle may have done more damage to the cause of Christ than all the Richard Dawkins of this world combined. And we fear, too, that the SBC may not be the only organization with this disease.

First, a Word for the Survivors of Abuse

For those who have suffered at the hands of these abusers, we grieve over your pain and suffering, and stand with you in your distress and your journey to recovery. Please know that God cares deeply for you and has a plan for your restoration, to create life where the enemy has brought death and destruction to your soul.

What you need to know is that the healing God offers you may not be available in your present church context. Sadly, much of the evangelical world still has little to no idea of how God is involved in inner healing, or how recovery is readily available through engaging directly with God. I am not suggesting that you leave your church or the people you have come to know and love; only that you may need to look elsewhere for the resources you need. Please see the links at the end of this article for help in your healing journey.

Why? What is it with the Moral Failure in Our Leaders?

"How can this happen? What is wrong with these people who do such things? And how can we stop this from happening in the future?"

About 30 years ago, the editors at Christianity Today were asked why they had decided not to print a particular story about another leader who fell. Their answer was, unfortunately, very telling about the condition of the Church. They said there were so many of these cases that they had to set criteria to limit how many of them they would be able to cover.

My friends, this may not be easy to hear, but the problem we are facing is not just about individual people who never belonged in leadership. And it will not be fixed by putting more controls in place, such as better screening and oversight, more accountability, and such. Although to be fair, a little basic ethical integrity would help; so that instead of throwing their injured under the bus they would report and fire their abusers.

But this kind of evil will never be restrained by applying external pressure. Because the true underlying cause of this malady is, in fact, deeply embedded in the very nature of how the Evangelical Church (on the whole) views the gospel and the Christian life!

I know that is a radical thought; perhaps even unbelievable to many. After all, we evangelicals believe with all our heart that we have the truth the world needs to hear. A quick look at the SBC home website makes it abundantly clear that this organization is dedicated to spreading the good news ... as they understand it.

But here is the sobering truth. As Dallas Willard pointed out so eloquently several decades ago, the manner in which many theologians and pastors (including SBC) proclaim "The Great *Commission*" unfortunately includes within its very message, "The Great *Omission*." Because the gospel they preach is all about how you can have your sins forgiven so you can go to heaven when you die. They are fiercely dedicated to producing *converts* instead of *disciples*. However, the gospel of the Kingdom that Jesus taught and Paul proclaimed is – at its very core – an invitation to become a follower of Jesus so that we can learn how to live in an interactive relationship with God in this present life, so that His life in us can transform every aspect of our character.

In other words, *the most essential elements* of the gospel that lead to transformation are actually *missing* from the "gospel" message we hear most often. The good news that was from the beginning a life-transforming gospel, has been stripped of its power to change lives in the present, due to its exclusive focus on life after death. But the true gospel calls us into a life of apprenticeship to Jesus that purifies the flesh and over time transforms our ruined soul to reflect the character of Jesus. And it is precisely *the lack of* character transformation that leads to moral failure.

Which means that the prevailing evangelical view of the Christian life and message may be, quite honestly, *perfectly designed to get the results it is getting*. Given a "gospel" that quite literally lacks meaningful answers to *this* life's most pressing issues (eg. how to purge evil from our flesh) we should *expect* to see moral failures in our people!

This, my friend, grieves the heart of God: that many of those who proclaim the loudest our need to hear the gospel, have failed to understand the good news at all – that we can truly be delivered from evil and learn from Jesus how to live differently in this broken world. Separating the gospel from its roots and its explicit call to life-long development of *the life of God within us* (not behavior modification) is one of the greatest tragedies within the modern Church.

How that all came about is certainly beyond the scope of this article. But the shocking truth is that the Evangelical Church is itself in need of hearing the real gospel for the first time. We have come to the place today where it is the Western Church that needs to be evangelized. Only then can we become a light to the world around us. And for those

who are willing to see, the resources are already all around us in abundance. A great many authors and theologians who have rediscovered for themselves what God wants to do for His people, are actively working to bring this reality to our present time.

God alone has the answers to questions we encounter in a crisis like this. May we have both the will and humility to say we need more light than we currently have, and to do the work of re-learning what it means to be a child of God.

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See also:

www.Copernicus20.net on re-evangelizing the Western Church.

www.dWillard.org for a theological foundation that is sound.

www.HealingInternational.org for a comprehensive view of Christian living.

www.AliveAndWell.org for inner healing.

www.TransformationPrayer.org for inner healing.

www.KingdomFormation.org/books-related-to-christian-formation/ to learn more.