

Voices: Three problems undermining church's kingdom influence

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I was grieved recently to hear yet another report of a church leader being asked to step down because of moral impropriety. According to the reporter: "This is the ninth church leader within the [Dallas-Fort Worth] Metroplex to step down since May." Sadly, there has been another more recently.

Is it any wonder why people question whether God and this life of faith in Jesus makes a difference? If the church, let alone her leaders, are no different than people far from God, why would lost people want to follow Jesus?

Scandal after scandal erodes the kind of kingdom influence the church is to have. How did we come this far? Let me offer three observations and suggestions.

1. Diminishing integrity

First, there seems to be diminishing levels of integrity. From leadership on down, the importance of living above reproach has fallen out of favor.

It is not unusual for church people—and leaders—to live like good people who have no relationship with God. While church leaders are called to a higher standard, there can be less resolve to maintain that standard when the corporate levels of integrity decrease.

The solution, at least in part, calls for all of God's people to evaluate their

lives, not based on what their neighbor is doing, but upon God's word. There needs to be purposeful growth, accountability and investment in the kind of relationships where we hear the truth about the things each of us needs to work on.

2. Entertainment focused

Second, some churches and ministries are based upon people. From charismatic leaders to the most professional "wows" we can bring for the audience to experience, some churches have become celebrity and entertainment focused.

The church never was meant to be about who the leader is nor how good her performers are. God designed the church to seek him, for he is the head of the church.

We can make great strides toward this by keeping our focus continually upon him. Let me say it this way: Jesus is the only celebrity in the house, and anything we do that takes our eyes off him hinders the desired work of the Spirit among us.

3. Worldly practices

Third, letting worldly practices replace obedience and faith.

Many business principles can help churches, but we start to drift when we begin to rely upon them more than God. It is a subtle shift that often begins with good intentions, but quickly moves into making decisions based more on what we can do rather than on what we believe God has called us to do and can be done only if he helps us.

Worldly practices are subversive because they make so much sense and actually can work ... at least outwardly. But God is concerned primarily

with the small things, like one's heart. When our hearts are right, then God begins to reveal his God-sized plans that inevitably will require outright faith and obedience.

Prayer

I'm not sure any church will come to the place of being in step with the Father's leading apart from prayer.

I am praying for a great movement of God's Spirit. Would you join me?

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