

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Lessons from a Modern-Day Moral Shipwreck

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: TMC238

It's exciting to be a part of what God is doing at the Master's College. These are wonderful days for us, wonderful days for the life of the church that I have the privilege of pastoring, wonderful days for the ministry of Grace To You and there is a real turning, I think, back to the Word of God across this country and around the world, and we're privileged to be a small part of that. But at the same time when there is such good news, such encouraging news, it seems as though we're always on the brink of some massive kind of tragedy within the evangelical church. And if you have been reading the newspapers lately, or if you've been watching any of the cable news programs or even the regular news programs, you have heard about the terrible story of Ted Haggard, the pastor of New Life Church in Colorado Springs. It has been discovered that the pastor of this very large church, multiple thousands of people who attend that church, I have been by that church a number of times, know of the reputation of the church, know a little bit about him as well.

It has come to light that over the last three years he has been involved with a homosexual prostitute to an extensive degree. At the same time, involved in drugs. And not only is the pastor of that church, or was he up until a few days ago, but also the president of an organization called The National Association of Evangelicals. It's a relatively old organization that started out to sort of give evangelicals a collected profile in issues that were related to the place of Christianity and the church in America. It has descended rather rapidly and lost its theological centrality and its biblical focus. And nonetheless there have been a lot of people associated with the NAE and some of the media has said that he was president of an organization that involved 30 million evangelicals. Well I don't know that there are 30 million true Christians in America to start with, and I doubt that there are anywhere near that many who even know anything about the NAE, but the media has blown this up to make it THE most widespread scandal of anybody associated with evangelicals. And we all go back to the Jimmy Swagart scandal, back to the Jim Bakker scandal and there have been others of this level which the media has taken and run with. And we understand that and that is to be expected when you are a high profile pastor and leader in the Christian world.

And I think for us this is a profound heartache. I have been contacted by a number of people, talked to some of the people in Colorado Springs who are involved in the leadership there and other evangelical leaders around the country, and sort of comparing notes and responses and perspectives on this. What do we do? How are we to understand this very high profile evangelical, not only in his own church but in the national organization? Not only there but one who has been involved with the

United States Government and with the White House staff lobbying against homosexuality? He has taken a strong stand against that. In fact, he was preaching a sermon on television against homosexuality when the male prostitute he had been seeing regularly saw him. And he said he had to do what was the honorable and noble thing and expose this man for his great hypocrisy.

And, of course, all who serve the Lord Jesus Christ are tainted by that, all who are faithfully carrying out ministry to the honor of the Lord, and that would be 95 percent of all pastors across this nation who are faithful to the Lord and they live a life that backs up what they preach. But we all get tainted by this and this gives the critics of Christianity reason to throw us in with all the other scandals, such as the one in the Roman Catholic Church with all the pedophile and homosexual priests that are there. We just get tainted with that broad brush. And for such an event to happen, I think calls us to take a look at it and to get a bit of a perspective on this situation.

And so, I thought that this morning I would just lay out some things for us to consider with regard to what we might learn from this terrible, terrible blight. Before I get into that, however, I want to add a footnote to this. While I am convinced that this brings dishonor and reproach to the name of Jesus Christ in the short-term, I am also convinced that in the long-term Christ is purging His own church. And while I'm always grieved to find out that some trusted pastor is a full-blown hypocrite, at the same time I am grateful that his hypocrisy has been discovered, because that church needs not to be a victim of that any longer than necessary, nor does anybody else. And certainly the Lord, as we read in Revelation chapter 1 moves through His church with eyes of flaming fire, penetrating to the dark recesses of the church to discover where sin is and stamping it out with feet of bronze. And judgment does belong at the house of God as the Lord purifies His church. And so we look at this with a mixed response...short-term, it is tragic, short-term it brings reproach on Christ, short term it makes us all fall into question as to our integrity. Long term, the Lord has exposed a terrible cancer in a very high profile ministry and has rescued the future of the people who have been under that kind of leadership. And so from that standpoint it is a good thing for the Lord to purge His church.

I said through the years many times that time and truth go hand in hand. Given enough time, what you are will show up. And that is precisely what Scripture tells us. In fact, I'm going to show you some Scriptures as we think about this a little bit. In 1 Timothy chapter 5, right at the end of the chapter, we read this, "The sins of some men," verse 24, "are quite evident going before them to judgment." This is not talking about divine judgment, this isn't talking about the judgment of God. This is talking about the church. This is talking about how important it is to deal with leaders in the church. If you go back to verse 17 it's about elders who rule well, who are worthy of double honor because they work hard at preaching and teaching. This is talking about elders whose lives are above reproach and so they cannot receive an accusation. The church cannot against any elder unless it's been confirmed by two or three witnesses. And if it's bound to be a true accusation, there is sin, they are to be rebuked in the presence of all, so it's talking about how the church deals with sin among its leaders.

Down in verse 22 it adds, because of the seriousness of spiritual leadership, because your life is exposed, because you are going to be publicly rebuked if you are found to be in sin, we have to be very careful who we ordain...verse 22..."Do not lay hands on anyone too hastily and thereby share responsibility for the sins of others." When a church puts its hands too hastily on someone and puts them in leadership without an appropriate examination and without time to prove that man's true character, it becomes guilty of complicity in the sin. And it's in that kind of discussion that verse 24 says, "The sins of some men are quite evident," which also is to say the sins of other men are not that evident. Some of the sins of some men go before them to judgment. It is known and the church renders its verdict on what is apparent. However, for others their sins follow after. In other words, they come late to exposure...they come late to exposure.

But when they come, what are we to do? When men have gotten away with a kind of hypocrisy for a relatively long period of time and their sins are exposed, what are we to do? First of all, once the sin is confirmed, it is to be rebuked publicly in the presence of everyone so that the rest will also be fearful of sinning. This leads to a removal from ministry, a permanent removal. According to 1 Timothy chapter 3 it says, "An overseer, or pastor, must be above reproach...above reproach." No blight on his life. No manifest known sin, no habitual sin that impugns his character. And the first qualification after that broad sweeping statement about above reproach is a one-woman man. He must be faithful to the one woman God has given him. And then he goes on to list some other things. Same qualification is also given in Paul's first chapter to Titus where essentially he says the very same thing, that if you're going to be involved in ministry, you must be above reproach. Listen to what he says, "If any man is above reproach, a one-woman man, etc., for the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, understanding that he has taken a stewardship from God and it must be a stewardship consistent with the character of God and with the holiness of God.

Paul in writing to the Corinthians of chapter 9 of 1 Corinthians, at the end of that chapter in verse 27, understands the issue clearly. Listen to what he says. "I discipline my body," he literally uses the word that means to punch. "I discipline my body and make it my slave." I have to get control of my flesh. "So that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified," *adokimos* means tested and found unqualified. I have to discipline my body. I have to get control of my passions or in preaching to others I myself will be disqualified. If your body's out of control in any area, and particularly in the sexual area, that's why the one-woman man is the first thing in the list, you are disqualified. This is not a principle, by the way, that is limited to the New Testament. If you go back even in to the Old Testament, you hear the words of the psalmist, "He who walks in a blameless way is the one who will minister to me. He who practices deceit shall not dwell within My house. He who speaks falsehood shall not maintain his position before Me." No one will minister to God and in the place of God who is not blameless. And when a sexual approach comes into the life of a servant of the Lord, it is a permanent disqualification. It is a reproach that never goes away. Listen to Proverbs chapter 6, very

specific words, verse 32, "The one who commits adultery with a woman is lacking sense. He who would destroy himself does it." And that would be equally true with committing adultery with a man in a homosexual relationship. "Wounds and disgrace he will find...here's the key...and his reproach will not be blotted out. It will never be removed." It is a permanent reproach...a permanent reproach. When this happens in the life of one who is a pastor or a minister, his role of pastor is permanently forfeited. He is not above reproach. He has brought upon himself a reproach that never goes away.

Now with that as a general background, just some things that I want you to understand because I want you to understand you only get one opportunity at a life of integrity, just one...just one. I remember the words of Oscar Wilde, the great writer, who lived in a day when homosexuals were all in the closet and they hid that horrific perversion. But he was discovered, the great writer, Oscar Wilde, was discovered and he said, "I never dreamed that what I did in private I would one day have to shout from the housetop." That's what the Bible says about, "Be sure your sins will find you out," which is a biblical way to say time and truth go hand in hand. Some men's sins are manifest before the judgment and before that the church renders a judgment on their suitability for ministry, and other men's sins follow after. But time and truth generally cause those sins to show up.

Now what do we learn when this happens? What do we learn from the tragedy of Ted Haggard? Let me give you some things we learn, and this would be true of many others who have fallen, high profile sort of media charismatic and I mean that in the fact that they have charismatic theology, his is a charismatic church. What do we learn? Number one, that false spiritual standards cannot restrain the flesh. False spiritual standards cannot restrain the flesh. There are some things that are foundational. You have to get the gospel right to be a Christian, right? A false gospel, a perverted gospel cannot save, nor can a perverted view of a false view of sanctification purify. You can't be saved by a substandard gospel and you can't be sanctified by a substandard paradigm for sanctification. And in that world of charismania where there are associations with people that you see in the media like Benny Hinn and others of those popular charismatic media personalities, there is a paradigm for sanctification that is an utterly unbiblical one. And it is the idea that spirituality is the product of emotion, spirituality is the product of emotion. Spiritual development is the result of miracles and wonders and signs and experiences and things like supposedly speaking in tongues and having God put impulses in your mind and having the Holy Spirit speak to you. Charismatic theology is built on signs and wonders and emotions and feelings and whipping people into some kind of a frenzy in what is wrongly called worship. That kind of thing feeds emotion by bypassing the mind and then the emotions are connected only to the flesh. And they really become fleshly emotions rather than sanctified emotions that respond to the truth in the mind. Nothing wrong with emotions, God gave us emotions. Nothing wrong with singing with all your heart as you did this morning from the understanding of what it was you were seeing before your eyes. You were singing about profoundly glorious truth and it lifts up your soul. And in response, your emotions pump adrenalin into your lungs and out comes the words of praise.

But if you feed the flesh continually, if your emotions are never connected to any true understanding of sound theology, then people are living surviving on disconnected emotions fled by fleshly impulses, ecstatic experience, mindless mumbling in gibberish. This is not a paradigm for true sanctification. And so the inside superstructure of this kind of Christianity is faulty because you're trying to live godly without a proper understanding of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit and spiritual truth with relation to sanctification as its given in Scripture. You're just trying to make it from one high to the next high to the next high. It's essentially what Galatians 3:3 says, you don't begin in the Spirit, that would be referring to regeneration being born of the Spirit, you don't begin in the Spirit and then become perfected by the flesh. But you just watch the people, you see them in this kind of environment detached in mental neutral. They have been told, they have been trained that if they want to speak in tongues, they have to put their brain in neutral and let the Holy Spirit take over. If they want miracles from God, they have to fall over backwards in what is called being slain in the Spirit, it's all a part of that kind of genre in the absence of a real sound understanding of doctrine which would begin with a true understanding of God and His glory that can cultivate a genuine love for God, a love for holiness and the love for obeying God.

Second thing you learn from this and this is a related thing, the first thing you learn is that a wrong paradigm for sanctification cannot restrain the flesh. The second thing you learn is true doctrine is critical...true doctrine is critical to everything.

When I look at this kind of Christianity that is high profile, massively emotional exercises by people desperately trying to chase some emotional experience that will help them overcome the struggles of their own flesh, when I watch that, my heart aches, it just aches because they never get what they really, really need. Because they wrongly divide the Word of God, there's no foundation for rightly doing the work of God. And I'm convinced that there are no signs and wonders occurring in these people's lives. There are no signs and wonders occurring in this movement. And I'll tell you why, because when God did signs and wonders in the apostolic era, it was to authenticate His Son and to authenticate the Apostles who were the preachers of the truth. And if God was going to give anybody signs and wonders today to authenticate their ministry, it wouldn't be people with aberrant theology. That would be ridiculous. If God would authenticate anyone, He would authenticate those who are the true teachers who understand the Word of God the way its always been understood by those historically who have been faithful to a right interpretation of Scripture. God is not in the business of authenticating false teachers who are getting rich by turning people into victims. By the way, you can authenticate any teacher any time you want, just measure everything they say against the standard.

So the first thing we learn has to do with doctrine. And the second thing, or the third thing I want to mention to you, it's also related to what I said at the beginning, is the church must hold spiritual

leaders to a biblical standard. And it must hold them accountable to that standard and it must hold them accountable to that standard. It cannot avoid confrontation on a regular basis. People say to me all the time, "Who holds you accountable?" Well first of all, if I can't win the battle in my heart, I can't win it anywhere else and I'll become a hypocrite. The first one that holds me accountable is the Spirit of God through the work of the Word of God. If I never preached a sermon in my entire life, if I never preached one single sermon, I wouldn't change anything about my life because the privilege of spending every single week of my ministry life for almost 40 years studying the Word of God deeply to prepare messages has been such a sanctifying mercy in my life that if I never said a word to anybody about what I learned, it would be enough that God gave me the privilege to live in the accountability in the Word of God which reveals to me the glory of God which causes me to love God which then becomes a motivation to honor God.

But I am glad that not only is the Spirit of God holding me accountable, but I'm surrounded by people who hold me accountable. My wife expects me to live everything I preach all the time. The woman is not realistic. But that's a tremendous kind of accountability and I cherish it. My children and my grandchildren expect the same out of me and that's a great accountability and everybody I work with surrounding me expects that same thing out of me. And I've been around a long time in the same place, 37 years in the same church, they know me, they know my wife, they know my kids, they know my grandchildren, they know my house, they know everything there is to know about me, and that's the way it ought to be. There's no way to escape...absolutely no way to escape.

I got on an elevator in Canada. I was way up in the northern part of Quebec, I got on an elevator. I was going down the elevator and I said to whoever I was with, "Somebody's going to pick us up outside," that's all I said. And there's a lady in the elevator, she turned around and says, "I know that voice. You're John MacArthur." This is good. That's...that's a good...it's not that I'm trying to escape to do anything, but the more intense that accountability, the more important it is for you to honor the value of integrity. Churches need to hold their leaders to accountability and it has to start in the little things...in the little things.

I'm going to give you another point that will tie into that. Sin on a habitual level is not isolated to one category. That's a fourth thing that we learn from this. Sin on a habitual level is not isolated to one category. People don't sin in a prolonged way in one category. There may be a dominating gross perversion, like going to a male prostitute for three years regularly and taking drugs, but that is just the one aspect of sin that manifests itself. There has to be sin all over the place everywhere else as yet undiscovered. Who knows what kind of magazines somebody does look at, what kind of garbage on the internet, what kind of movies, who knows what other corruptions exist in that kind of heart. You can't isolate sin. And so I say, what we learn from this is you watch somebody's life in spiritual leadership, you have every right to scrutinize that life and to question the issues of that life. And when something doesn't appear to be right, even though it may not be the monumental kind of sin which we associate with a total disgrace, it's the kind of thing for which you need to pray and maybe even

confront.

There's another thing we learn from this and that is the fragile nature of spiritual credibility...the fragile nature of spiritual credibility. You can live your whole life serving the Lord and one great calamitous scandal, it's all undone and you're finished for good. Chuck Swindoll and I used to talk about this and thank the Lord for his faithfulness, of course, among many others. And he said, "I always look at it like a balloon, one pin and the whole thing explodes." That's the fragile nature of spiritual leadership.

You say, "Well I don't think I'm going to be a spiritual leader." Yes you are. I'll give you something to think about, men. When you get married, you marry a Christian girl. The greatest gift you can give her is your spiritual integrity because your relationship to her is going to be built upon two things, she has to trust you and only when she trusts you will she respect you, and only when she trusts you and respects you will she really love you and only when she loves you will she truly honor you. And it all starts with trust. And if you appear to be something that you're not and she finds out, once trust is shattered even at that level, very, very difficult to get it back ever. Be trustworthy in the smallest things, the littlest things, the tiniest details because if you ever plant in the mind of a partner, and the same thing is true with you ladies, if you ever plant in the mind of your partner that you may not be trustworthy, then suspicion dominates the relationship, suspicion destroys respect and kills love and eliminates honor.

So, we have every reason in spiritual leadership to live open lives. That's why the Bible says that elders in the church ought to be characterized by hospitality. Their life is an open book, their home is an open book, their world is an open book. Look at me, look at my wife, look at my house, look at my children, look at my grandchildren, look at my private life, personal life, take a deep and profound and careful examination of my life as you want because I have to stand not only before God, but I have to stand before you as one examined and found worthy.

Another thing we learn from this is the ugliness of hypocrisy. I don't know that there's anything uglier than hypocrisy. When you study the gospels, in particular, you have this dominating group of people called Pharisees and they are...they're the ugliest people I think in the New Testament. They're worse than the pagan Gentiles who want to kill the preachers of the gospel, who chase Paul. It's...it's the hypocritical Pharisees who were so religiously self-exalting and hated the Lord Jesus Christ, God Himself in their midst. There's nothing as ugly as spiritual hypocrisy. And the world has a right to be outraged at this. The church should be outraged. In fact I was kind of surprised that when...and you never know cause you get media reports of all kinds, but when this fall happened to the pastor over there in Colorado, the first few comments were, "Well, we love him and we want to restore him and we know he's human..." Wait a minute, wait a minute, there's a time for all of that, but the first and initial response should be the same response at least that the world had. And what was the world's response? What did they say? "What a hypocrite. What a phony that the homosexual prostitute says,

'I had to do the noble thing...very select nobility...I had to do the noble thing and expose him for being a hypocrite.'" And there was outrage over this hypocrisy and the church runs in and says, "We want to restore him, we want to love..." There needs to be outrage over the horrific ugliness of spiritual hypocrisy. And it isn't that you hate the hypocrite, it's that you hate the one who pretends to give honor to Jesus Christ and when truly discovered, brings massive reproach upon His name. Hypocrisy is the ugliest of things in the religious world. And we see it again in a situation like this.

Another lesson to think about. Time for a couple more. Is that the power of the gospel often goes beyond the human instrument. Somebody is going to say, "Well didn't somebody hear the gospel through him?" Sure. "Was anybody saved that heard him preach?" Sure, of course, absolutely. The gospel is more powerful than the vehicle because it is the gospel itself that saves. It's not the preacher. That's one of the big illusions of our day that people get converted because of how clever I am. People get converted because of how slick my presentation is. People get converted because I've figured a way to make the gospel irresistible. The most popular Christian book of our time says that if you have the right method you can lead anybody to Christ. It's all about style. It's all about technique. It's all about being culturally acute and sensitive to how people think. And you can get into anybody's mind and make them respond positively to the gospel. The bottom line is it's really not about our technique at all. The power is in the truth. The power is in the seed, not the sower, if you want to borrow the language of Matthew 13. The power is in the truth, the power is not in the preacher. Salvation is never the result of the human instrument, it's always the result of the power of the truth and the work of the Holy Spirit. And so, of course, if and when the gospel is preached, no matter who preaches it, as Paul says in Philippians 1, "I rejoice that Christ is preached."

Another lesson to think about is the power of self-deception...the power of self-deception. You ask yourself, "How can a man week after week after week after week preach in his church, lead his church staff, counsel people, how can he get up on a national platform and preach against homosexuality and live with himself while he's engaged in that very iniquity and others as well? How can you do that? That's the power of the deception of sin. Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things." It's amazing how you can live in total duplicity, how you can live in absolute contradiction to what you say. You become hardened by what you preach and indifferent to it, even in your own life. Self-deception is a powerful component of our fallen flesh. Take a look at yourself. If you're skilled at deceiving yourself about your true condition, if you're skilled at deceiving others, you know it. And if you're good at it now, you're going to be better at it the more you do it. And you may be on the road to hell because that's not an indicator of a real regenerate heart.

It goes without saying that a final lesson is the horrible disaster of having your sin revealed. That is a horrific experience. Why? You lose your church. You lose the trust of your family, your friends. Worse than that, you bring reproach on God that will never go away. Oh can you be restored spiritually? Sure. But there will be a black mark on the rest of your life and that's the way it will be. This is a time,

young people, in your lives to make sure you set the course so that you don't ever end up in this kind of tragedy. Do we care for this man? Of course. Do we pray for him? Yes, for his spiritual life and his family and restoration. Do we pray for the people in his church who desperately need true godly spiritual leadership? Do we pray for the church at large not to become complacent about this because it happens so often? Yes. And I pray that you as young people will be, as I said, to live your life on a course at this point in your life that is going to insure against that in the future so that you can finish your life strong, never having brought reproach on the name of Jesus Christ.

Father, we thank You for the issues of life that we can look at, scrutinize, learn from. This is not pleasant. This is not a happy occasion. It is a grief. The reproaches that fall on You fall on us. When Your name is dishonored we feel the pain. When Jesus went into the temple when He first came to Jerusalem, He made a whip and cleansed it and He quoted from the Psalms that the reproaches that fall on You fall on Me, zeal for Your house has eaten Me up. We're passionate about Your church. We're passionate about Your honor and Your glory and we want to bring no reproach ever upon Your name. And, O God, how I pray that all in the family here at the Master's College and Seminary and in our churches that are represented here and our pastors that all will walk in integrity in blamelessness, being above reproach and living and serving to Your glory and honor. May we all set the course now to finish strong. And, Lord, we can't do it without Your help. We discipline ourselves. We make the necessary choices to walk in a path of holiness. But we depend totally on the work of Your Word and Your Spirit for our ongoing, increasing holiness. We commit ourselves to that, submitting to Your will and Your power in Christ's name. Amen.

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