

I. Unthinkable to Unsurprised

- A. The Phone Call - In September of last year I received a phone call from my long time friend, Wes Martin, asking me to take up the role of intercessor and spiritual armor-bearer for him. He informed me that some serious allegations had come forth from multiple women who had been spiritually manipulated and sexually exploited by IHOP-KC Sr. Leader, Mike Bickle.
 - 1. Watching the exposure of a hero in my faith and the corresponding fallout of a ministry and community that I was part of and loved has been gut-wrenching. In addition to the pain of watching a hero exposed, it has been almost equally painful to watch the current leadership struggle with honesty, integrity, and transparency through the fallout.
- B. The truth is that the exposure and fallout that Mike Bickle and IHOP-KC is currently experiencing is part of a growing list over the past few years of primary leaders and ministries within the body of Christ whose gross sin and scandal has been exposed.
 - 1. **Mega Ministry Front** - Mark Driscoll of Mars Hill Church; Bill Hybels of Willow Creek Church; Carl Lentz of Hillsong NYC; Brian Houston, Hillsong Founder; Ravi Zacharias International Ministries; Jeremy Foster, Hope City Church; Kirbyjon Caldwell, Windsor Village United Methodist
 - 2. **Common Church Front** - Recent reports on the SBC (Southern Baptist Churches) found roughly 380 clergy, lay leaders and volunteers had faced allegations of sexual misconduct, leaving behind over 700 victims in its wake since 1998. The extent of misconduct is furthered by proven work within the Southern Baptist Convention to move sex offenders to other communities and resist attempts to address the culture of abuse. In May of 2023, Attorney General Kwame Raoul said at a news conference that investigators found that 451 Catholic clergy abused 1,997 children in Illinois between 1950 and 2019.
- C. Unfortunately, there has been so much exposure of very deep seated issues of sin and ungodliness in main church leaders in the last couple years that many in the church have lost trust in the sincerity of leadership altogether. I believe that we have moved from a stance of it being unthinkable that a leader in the church could be so corrupt to a stance of being unsurprised.

II. Shock, Grief, and Disillusionment

- A. The fall of a leader is incredibly hard for anyone who held that leader in high regard. It is difficult to walk through that experience without it disrupting or testing their own faith immensely. Church leaders, by definition, help shape and encourage our own faith and when their faithlessness is exposed, it causes what was formed in us to be questioned.
- B. The natural progression of our reasoning concerning a fallen leader is to question what parts of their words and actions were genuine and pure, and which were false and sinister. Unfortunately, there is no actual end to this process, and we are generally only left with pain and confusion.
- C. Fallen leaders leave various levels of trauma in their wake based on proximity and influence that take months and years to process. For some, the pain and confusion is so vast and untenable that they end up walking away from their faith completely.
 - 1. With the multitude and severity of fallen leaders we are currently seeing, I believe it is imperative for us to take a close examination of why and how this is happening. Also, I believe we should respond in a proactive way here at Restoration to protect both our leaders and those they lead.

III. Lessons and Implications

- A. In light of all the current exposure of corruption, abuse, control, and manipulation of church leaders in our day, I believe we must take a prudent look at common denominators that led to this sort of unchecked sin and leadership abuse and destruction.
- 1. Idealism - There is a long standing historical conviction within the church that leaders are in general more Godly or sanctified than lay people, especially if they have a powerful or very impactful ministry. Because of this, there is a general assumption and trust that they are living Godly lives. It is this issue of unjustified trust that causes us to be less concerned with accountability in general, and when issues of sin arise. Biblically, I believe it's actually the opposite; leaders are held to a stricter or higher standard. (Titus 1:1-13; Jam. 3:1)

2. Unbalanced Power/Man of God Culture - In every story of fallen leaders exposed for an abuse of some kind, they have had an unbalanced level of papal authority. They are the highest authority and power in the church and no one questions their hierarchical spiritual position. (Plurality is the Rule of Church Leadership)

“Papal supremacy is the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church that the pope, by reason of his office as Vicar of Christ and as Pastor of the entire Christian Church, has full, supreme, and universal power over the whole church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered”

“Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely” - Lord Action to Bishop Creighton regarding church leaders in 1887

1. In most cases where leaders are exposed, the individuals who knew them best recognized the signs or even the acts of the sin issues long before they were exposed for what they were. The common feedback from these individuals is that they were not able to see it objectively because of the idealism of the leaders assumed internal holiness.
3. Lack of Accountability - In every case where we see fallen leaders there is a massive lack of accountability in that leader's life. The accountability in general only started happening after a problem was reported, if it happened at all.
 - Touch Not the Lord's Anointed - Sometimes accountability never happens because there is a false idea of “the culture of honor.” The church has been convinced that it is ungodly or wicked to call out errors or weaknesses in a leader. Even the most sincere criticism done in love is viewed as attack or slander. (1 Sam. 24:6; Ps. 105:15)
 - Misapplication of Matt. 18 - In many cases, an unhealthy environment is allowed to continue because the process of reconciliation laid out in Matthew 18:15-17 becomes weaponized to ensure control and silence.
4. Lack of Transparency - Another key ingredient in an unhealthy or toxic church leadership culture is a lack of transparency. In every single story of fallen leaders, their sinful actions were ongoing for “years” before being called out publicly in the church, and unfortunately in most cases, they were exposed by outside sources. (Stumbling VS Persisting in Sin 1 Tim. 5:19-20)

5. Primary Visionary - The testimonies of individuals involved in navigating the calling out of leaders who were walking in sin were that they were crippled in doing what seemed right because the leader alone held the primary vision or strength of the church ministry direction and platform. In general, there was a pass given to the character disqualification because of the tremendous ministry fruit that they were seeing as a result of the leader's work. (Ministry gifts do not validate Leadership, Leadership is not validated by gifting Rom. 12:6; 1 Tim. 3:1-13)