

"A CRYING SHAME: CHARLATANS in the HOUSE"
-by J. Lee Grady (-Charisma Magazine).

Churches and ministries are employing bizarre gimmicks to raise money. What has happened to our discernment?

You've probably heard it on Christian television before. An evangelist opens his Bible, reads a Scripture and then suggests that you send an odd amount of money to keep your favorite program on the air for another month.

He begs. He pleads. He cries. And then he tells you that if you hurry and give right now, "while God is stirring the waters," the Holy Spirit will reward you in an extra-special way.

I've heard different amounts suggested—such as \$64.11, or \$72.14, or \$53.24, to correlate with some obscure Old Testament Scripture reference. The implication is that if you write a check for this magical amount, God will release some kind of special blessing on you, such as the salvation of loved ones or the quick sale of a house.

To the untrained ear this may sound like a formula for blessing. Actually it is more akin to superstition or worse, witchcraft. It's not even remotely biblical, but those of us in the charismatic movement are so used to tolerating such shenanigans that we think this is standard procedure for fundraising.

Some ministers who raise money for Christian television stations have succumbed to the infamous "debt reduction" tactic. It goes like this: "God says that if you will give a \$1,000 sacrificial offering right now (God always seems to be in crisis mode in these situations), you will supernaturally get out of debt! The miracle anointing is here! You can release it by writing that check! And we take credit cards, too!"

Talk about voodoo economics. This kind of manipulation is actually against the law in Canada. The U.S. government allows American evangelists to get away with it, but that doesn't mean it's right. It is a spiritualized form of arm-twisting.

And believe it or not, it is getting more blatant and bizarre.

A widely traveled minister recently gave a message about what he called "the Boaz anointing" at a prominent church in Florida. He then invited anyone who wanted this "new" blessing to come to the altar, where gullible souls were encouraged to deposit a check for \$1,500 in the basket. Apparently the Boaz anointing can be yours if you can afford this hefty price.

At another church in my city of Orlando, a self-proclaimed prophet said that he would have a personal word of blessing to pronounce over any person who could give \$1,000 in the offering. That's right. he was selling personal prophecies. Those who actually gave the amount (yes, some people actually fell for this charlatan) stood up to receive "words."

I want to rip my shirt in half and throw dust on my head.

Why should we be surprised that the church in America is making such a weak impact on society when we are allowing greedy

impostors to pollute our pulpits? They are no different than the sons of Eli, who took the people's offerings "by force" so that they could spend it on their own selfish wants (see 1 Sam.2:12-16). They have fallen into the error of the sorcerer Simon, who offered to buy the power of the Holy Spirit so that he could impress people (see Acts 8:18-20).

And what happens to the people who buy into this craziness? I've heard some suggest that "God will bless anyone who gives," even if they give to a crook. That's hogwash. Seed must be sown in good ground if it's going to produce. Those who use manipulation, strong-arm tactics or Scripture-twisting to get money, or who sell the anointing of God so they can buy clothes and houses are not going to release any form of blessing.

In fact, they just might release curses—of poverty, bankruptcy, fraud and confusion. Such dark forces actually follow ministries that have given themselves over to this spirit of financial manipulation. The Bible actually says that charlatans—those who follow the "error of Balaam"—will face a harsh judgment in the "black darkness" of hell (Jude 11,13).

What can you do about this? You don't have to stop giving. God loves a cheerful giver, but He does not want us to give under compulsion. Nor does He want us to reward the modern sons of Eli.

Speak out. Confront those who misuse the Bible to dig for money. Change the channel. Get up and walk out. Give to ministries that focus on meeting real needs and maintain ethical accounting standards. This financial foolishness will end when all of us take a stand.

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