

Telling the Haggard Truth

By Andy Comiskey

In addressing the Haggard crisis, let me begin with a confession. I have two problems.

My first problem: I have been captivated by the power of Jesus' mercy and truth. This sets me squarely in a fight with my culture concerning boundaries for sexual expression. Because of Jesus and His clear upholding of heterosexual marriage as the sole context for sex, in thought and deeds, I live in an ongoing tension with the world around me.

In that tension, I have a responsibility to do everything in my power--in my church and in the greater community to proclaim that reality. I know now that such truth upholds the dignity of all people, and sets a boundary that helps restrain the evils of sensual addiction, betrayal, and abortion.

My second problem: I have a heck of a time staying within that boundary myself. As a Christian of many years, I don't teeter on the edge of out and out adultery. I am too clever for that. But a hungry glance here or there, an alluring image on TV, the advances of admirers on the street or in church—these are sparks that can ignite my heart. Without anyone knowing. Without any loss of face, or position.

God is not mocked. His nearness sears my conscience. "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account." (Heb. 4:13)

I love this all-knowing God. And I love my wife more than ever. After 25 years of marriage, I still find her to be the best thing going, sexually and emotionally. And I am still as capable as ever of violating the boundaries that have become my truth and cause.

Maybe that's why on a recent ministry trip without Annette I insisted on a roommate at every stop, was in daily contact with two accountability partners at home, and had another two praying for me continually while I was gone. Not for anointing. But for purity. That the message I preach would be the message I live. Not because of a historic healing or deliverance that set me free from sexual temptation years ago but because I choose to aspire for purity today in the light of God and man.

My community is not mocked by my silence; they ask the hard questions. They extend mercy. And they know my frailties and my commitment to standing firm until the end.

“Confess your sins and faults to each other and pray for each other that you might be healed.” (James 5:16)

My healing is a contingency plan; it hinges upon my most recent confession. As long as I am known in the struggle then there is grace to live in the truth. Through confession to a brother, I acknowledge the truth that God knows my struggle and is not mocked by my silence. Anything less insults His grace and makes my efforts liable to destruction.

Maybe Haggard wearied of the struggle. Maybe he got too busy to tell the truth to another. Or too proud. I don't know; I've not been invited into his inner life. One thing I know: we always have a choice—a choice to tell the truth of what is going on underneath the surface. No matter how threatening that truth might be to our marriages, our ministries, or our own self-importance, we always have that choice. And when we exercise it, there is always grace. God always honors the broken and contrite heart that dares to utter its haggard truth.

Confession to God through His community: that's how I resolve my two problems—my commitment to the boundary of heterosexual monogamy, and my struggle to actually live within those lines. Confession frees me to live before God and man in that tension. Confession liberates grace to live within the lines, one awkward plea for mercy at a time.

Some don't like this version of freedom. “Progressive” evangelicals who are already doubting whether there is freedom for homosexuals will jump on Haggard's failure as another reason why poor gays must be given freedom to act out. Think again. Haggard's failure should not be used to justify destructive and inherently addictive sin. Haggard's failure should cause every one of us to break the silence of our inner struggle, precisely so that we can live soberly and rightly within the boundaries of truth.

Haggard's failure to break his silence will raise another concern. Should Christians even try to legislate the truth of heterosexual monogamy, e.g. stumping for gay marriage and abortion bans, etc.? The answer should be clear by now. Only if we are living that truth.

Already we can see how Haggard's failure was the grand finale of a series of moral scandals that rocked the religious right in the last election. These failures quickened the changing of the guard in Congress. Immoral moralists sank the Republicans this time around. So be it.

People of social influence like Haggard who make their plank “traditional values” better make sure their lives are founded on those values. And being reiterated again and again through the discipline of confession. Better to admit weakness to your friends and find power to overcome it rather than be exposed by merciless opponents.

As for me, I am more committed than ever to telling the truth of God's boundaries. They have power to restrain sin, yours and mine. I will not hesitate to wage future political battles based on that truth.

If I am living it. While considering the recent election and my priorities, I realized that my center of gravity is not whichever political party reigns in DC. My center is Christ and His body, the Church. I need Him in His community because of my weakness. I've no power in my weakness apart from Him there. And thus I've no offering to others without being centered in the grace of community.

The integrity of my service demands it. So my first offering will always be to the Church, the beautiful, broken body of Christ. To her Christ is returning; the bride made ready for Him through His cleansing of her. I shall do my part, beginning with my own confession: my need for grace to walk clean today.

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