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Needed: Holiness The Lesson from Ravi Zacharias

By Thomas Eglinton

It is sadly becoming a common story – Christian celebrity falls. The latest in the never-ending line is Ravi Zacharias, the globally popular Christian apologist who died last May. Ravi was the author of many books, the founder of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries and well known as someone who could logically and clearly defend the faith. After his death allegations of sexual misconduct came to light and were recently confirmed by the publication of a third-party investigation into Ravi's behaviour.

This event caused me to think back to a talk I heard at a 9Marks Pastors Weekend at Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington DC a couple of years ago. I can't remember who gave the talk – it was either Jonathan Leeman or one of the other elders at Capitol Hill. I can't remember the main topic of the talk either. But the speaker started the talk with a pre-amble that stuck so clearly in my mind.

“The thing your congregations needs most from you is...”

How would you finish that sentence? What do we need most from our pastors? Pastors, what does your congregation need most from you?

Judging by the topics of our conferences and podcasts you could be mistaken to think the answer is ‘leadership’ or ‘management skills’ or ‘relatability’.

“The thing your congregation needs most from you is **holiness.**”

The reality is that this is the most needed thing regardless of your walk in life. If our pastors are not pursuing holiness, they are not doing their job. If our husbands are not pursuing holiness, they are just putting on a façade. If our wives are not diligently seeking holiness, their work is incomplete.

My church needs my holiness. My wife needs my holiness. My kids need my holiness. My colleagues need my holiness. My friends and neighbours need my holiness.

Whatever other duties and goals we have, all come secondary to

holiness. Regardless of how many people love our work, the only thing that matters is what God thinks of our work – and that means we must pursue holiness over accolades.

“You shall be holy, for I am holy” (1 Pet 1:16) is the call on our life.

The call isn't “Be effective, for I am effective.” It isn't “Be a leader, for I am a leader.” God doesn't say “Be a great speaker, for I am a great speaker.” The call on your life and mine is holiness.

To put it another way, “strive for ... holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb 12:14).

The fall of leaders like Ravi should reinvigorate us to place holiness in the proper place in our own life and in the life of the church.

LET'S RE-EMPHASISE HOLINESS.

So, as I look on at Ravi's fall, I am reminded to ‘be killing sin, or sin will kill you’ as John Owen said.

In the *Voyage of the Dawn Treader* we meet the bratty child Eustace. Eustace indulged his sinful selfishness constantly. In one of my favourite scenes in the Narnia series, Eustace ends up being turned into a dragon. Lewis was communicating something in this scene about the nature of sin. If we don't kill the dragon inside of us, we will end up becoming the dragon. If we aren't killing the anger dragon, we will become an angry person. If I don't kill the lust dragon, I, like Ravi, will become a lustful man given over to sexual sin.

The Puritans understood how important this topic is in the Christian life. They emphasised sin, repentance, temptation and holiness. On my bookshelf I can see *The Sinfulness of Sin* by Ralph Venning; *The Mortification of Sin* by John Owen; *The Doctrine of Repentance* by Thomas Watson; and *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices* by Thomas Brooks – just as a start.

So, as we reel after hearing the news about Ravi, let's act like a

Puritan and “take heed lest we fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). “Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry” (1 Cor. 10:14). Let’s pick up a book about sin or holiness and ask the Lord to show us individually where we need to repent.

Pastors, preach about sin and holiness and the purity of God. These topics should be a regular part of our congregation’s spiritual diet.

REMEMBER CHRIST

While we are on the topic of the Puritans, sin and holiness can not be preached or lived without Christ being front and centre. Right next to all their books on sin there is *The Heart of Christ* by Thomas Goodwin; *The Glory of Christ* by John Owen; and *So Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ* by John Bunyan.

The Puritans preached sin and holiness, certainly. But they also preached Christ, the merciful and wonderful saviour. Slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love (Ps 145:8). It turns out that sin and holiness are the perfect companions to the glory of

Christ.

As sin and holiness are held up as God’s pure and high standard, the mercy and grace of Christ shines brighter than ever. Without understanding sin and holiness, the beauty of Jesus is not so glorious.

To bring this all back to Ravi, the report of this man’s behaviour should shock us all because of the horror of his sin. But it just possible that in his final hours Ravi was given a spirit of genuine repentance. And the glory of Christ is such that if this fallen sinful man who was capable of evil deception and lustful self-indulgence truly repented, Jesus would have said “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43).

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