



Courtesy RZIM

Lessons From Scandal

By

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The International Board of Directors for Ravi Zacharias International Ministries (RZIM) released its response to an investigation into sexual allegations against the RZIM founder a few hours ago. You can read [the investigator's report here](#) and the [RZIM Board of Directors response here](#). We'll refer to those reports in this special article.

You may remember the picture above from an [article we published last May](#). Ravi Zacharias was critically ill and I wanted to write something about him before he passed away. Here's one line from the article that I want to highlight today –

“Someone asked me if I was a fan of Ravi Zacharias. My answer is the same now as it was then: ‘I’m a fan of Jesus Christ ...’”

Not A Fan

I am not a fan of human celebrities and haven't been since I became a journalist more than 50 years ago. I met many celebrities and interviewed them for radio, television and newspapers. I found 'celebrities' to be quite human, not at all what their publicity agents wanted us to believe about them.

I am a fan of no man because of what I know to be true about human nature. The only Man who deserves our praise, adoration and undying love is Jesus Christ, the Son of Man and Son of God. Jesus is Perfect. The rest of us are not.

That's one lesson we can learn from Ravi Zacharias. He was not perfect. In fact, according to investigative findings, he was far from it. Some of the details of the sexual allegations are explicit, so I will not repeat them in this article. You can read the full report with all the sordid details, if you want, at the link provided at the beginning and end of this article.

I will share this brief quote from the investigators' conclusion that sums up their findings:

“Our investigation was limited to Mr. Zacharias’s sexual misconduct, and even as to that issue it was not exhaustive. We acknowledge that we have not spoken to all individuals who may have relevant information to provide. We strived to balance the need for completeness with the need for expediency, and we are confident that we uncovered sufficient evidence to conclude that Mr. Zacharias engaged in

sexual misconduct.” REPORT OF INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION INTO SEXUAL MISCONDUCT OF RAVI ZACHARIAS, LYNSEY M. BARRON, ESQ. WILLIAM P. EISELSTEIN, ESQ.

The RZIM Board of Directors wrote this as part of their response:

“To be victimized by unwanted sexual contact, advances, and behavior is horrendous. It is diametrically opposed to everything we believe about the value and dignity of every single person. We believe not only the women who made their allegations public but also additional women who had not previously made public allegations against Ravi but whose identities and stories were uncovered during the investigation. Tragically, witnesses described encounters including sexting, unwanted touching, spiritual abuse, and rape. We are

devastated by what the investigation has shown and are filled with sorrow for the women who were hurt by this terrible abuse.” OPEN LETTER FROM THE INTERNATIONAL BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF RZIM ON THE INVESTIGATION OF RAVI ZACHARIAS

It may appear that the RZIM Board has learned an important lesson from this terrible situation, but have they?

Truth and Lies

I have several of Ravi's books in my library and have recommended them to people for years. I have also encouraged people to watch Ravi's sermons online and visit his ministry website. Will I stop doing that? Yes. It doesn't mean that all of what he wrote or preached is untrue, but now there's a cloud over his words because of the duplicity of his life.

Ravi did not live what he preached and that's a real problem. It doesn't mean that truth is no longer truth when the truth-teller is caught telling lies. Even liars can tell the truth from time to time. However, it does throw a lot of garbage at the Truth and that may be one of the worst things Ravi did. The way he lived his personal life became a garbage dump on the Truth of Christ that made up his public life. His preaching of the Gospel has come under reproach because of how he lived.

“Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.” 1 TIMOTHY 3:7

Another lesson we can learn from Ravi is the importance of practicing what we preach. I call it *Living Christian in the Present World*. Ravi was an older man and looked up to by millions of people as an *elder* in the church. When you look at what Paul wrote about elders and older men in the church, you see how far Ravi missed the goal God set for his personal life (read Titus and 1 Timothy to see how elders and older Christian men are to behave).

From what we have learned from the investigative report into Ravi's personal life, we know now that he should have been disqualified from ministry a long time ago. As Paul told Titus, someone needed to *silence* Ravi and *rebuke him sharply*. Ravi should not have been allowed to head up a ministry, preach, teach or write books while he was living like an unbeliever. Some people have even postulated that Ravi was not really saved – that he was an unbeliever, maybe even a false teacher. God will be the Judge of that, but the fact that so many Christians were fooled by Ravi for so many years is tragic.

Failure To Rebuke

So, who was in a position to silence Ravi and rebuke him sharply? In a local church the answer is clear, the elders do that (Titus 1:5-16; 2:1-2). The elders of Ravi's local church should have silenced Ravi and rebuked him sharply. If they did and Ravi didn't listen to them, Paul's guidance is clear about that as well –

“Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.” Titus 3:10-11

Rebuke, and if necessary, reject. That's God's directive to everyone in a position of church leadership. That's another lesson from Ravi's scandal.

I don't know what elders at his church knew about Ravi's personal life, but they should have quickly addressed the problems if they knew about any of them. The local church should be the sending congregation for an evangelist who has membership in their church. The elders should be in close contact with the member-evangelist and know if they are healthy (sound) in doctrine and lifestyle. The denomination that ordained Ravi was also in a position to address allegations of sexual misconduct against the evangelist. Did they do enough? Some reports say they didn't (see reports at the end of this article).

The importance of accountability is another lesson we can learn in the Ravi scandal. Based on the findings published in the investigators' findings, Ravi lived a personal life that had little accountability.

I can't speak to Ravi's relationship with his local church or denomination, but I can raise another concern. What about the leadership at the ministry Ravi founded, RZIM? That's how most people knew about him, through RZIM.

Leadership Problems at RZIM

Ravi started RZIM in 1984. I knew about Ravi and RZIM and followed the ministry's growth. I knew several of the people who worked at RZIM and admired their dedication to the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. To his credit, one of my friends at RZIM wrote a scathing letter saying that "Ravi Zacharias was not the greatest apologist of his generation – but rather one of its greatest frauds." My friend, who resigned from RZIM, laid much of the blame at the feet of the leaders of RZIM, which is the proper place for such blame.

Senior ministry leaders, including the board of directors, act in a similar position to elders in a local church. They don't get a pass because they are not a local church. If Christians want to start a ministry that becomes large enough to have senior leaders and a board of directors, they need to understand that God holds them to the same high standards He holds the local church.

So, where were the senior leaders and board of directors of RZIM with all the allegations against Ravi Zacharias? The allegations made against Ravi after his death were not the first. Ravi has faced many allegations concerning his academic background as well as his personal, sexual life. What did the senior leaders and board of directors really know and when did they know it? What we find with the senior leadership and board at RZIM is a history of defending Ravi against the allegations. It was only after Ravi's death and being faced with mounting evidence of his sexual sins that RZIM lowered its defense and became

open to a serious investigation into the charges against Zacharias. Too little too late. Another lesson.

When Ravi was challenged on his actions, the investigators' report says he responded defensively and angrily. Both of those responses immediately disqualified him for ministry, so how did he continue at the helm of RZIM? Why did it take years for us to learn about the 'real' Ravi Zacharias?

I knew there was a problem when I read that Ravi co-owned two spas in Atlanta. He reportedly purchased the first one more than a decade ago. That's a big red flag that should have caught the attention of church, denomination and ministry leaders. Evangelists and pastors must be above reproach and owning certain types of businesses can put them in difficult, even compromising positions. Bi-vocational ministers depend on their business employment

to make a living, but they should also be careful about the type of business in which they are employed.

Owning a spa, as we have seen in Ravi's case, opened up many opportunities for him to live out sinful behavior with little to no consequence. Ravi had serious problems with sexual perversion and someone in his family or ministry should have recognized it and confronted Ravi. Paul's phrase in Titus 1:9, "holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict," applies in Ravi's case. The word "contradict" means "expose, rebuke, convict, reprove, show to be guilty."

The fact that an investigation conducted after Ravi's death exposed Ravi's sinfulness over a period of many years and showed him to be guilty is too late for Ravi's victims. The rebuke should have come while Ravi was still alive. Ravi needed to be confronted with his sin and rebuked publicly. He needed to publicly repent of his sin, step down from ministry, apologize sincerely to his victims, make restitution, and face disciplinary action from RZIM. He may have needed to face criminal charges as well. Were senior ministry leaders and board of director members at RZIM derelict in their obligation to God as elders of the ministry? As my friend who worked for RZIM wrote, " we have been badly misled by our secretive board and senior leaders." It would appear that something inside the ministry of RZIM went terribly wrong.

The RZIM Board did admit that they were wrong about sexual allegations made by one woman. The Board even called it “our failures in 2017” –

“The investigation’s conclusions have caused us to think very differently about the allegations Mrs. Lori Anne Thompson made against Ravi in 2017. We were wrong. Our trust in Ravi’s denial of moral wrongdoing and in his deceptive explanations of emails and other records that became public was severely misplaced, and our failures in 2017, including our failure to commission an independent investigation at that time, allowed tremendous pain to continue to be caused in the Thompsons’ lives.

We believe Lori Anne Thompson has told the truth about the nature of her relationship with Ravi Zacharias. It is with profound grief that we recognize that because we did not believe the Thompsons and both privately and

publicly perpetuated a false narrative, they were slandered for years and their suffering was greatly prolonged and intensified. This leaves us heartbroken and ashamed. “

Is that statement enough to cancel out the damage the board of directors caused Mrs. Thompson, her husband, family and friends? It is not.

RZIM's Future

"We are shocked and grieved by Ravi's actions. As Ravi Zacharias was the founder of our ministry and the leader of our staff, community, and team, we also feel a deep need for corporate repentance." RZIM BOARD OF DIRECTORS

I supported RZIM for many years, both financially and as a volunteer. I also facilitated getting RZIM speakers on college campuses. I invited Ravi to speak at a local university as part of a campus ministry, but he was not able to fit us into his schedule. Just as well given what he was doing in his personal life at the time of my invitation. Will I do that again in the future? The short answer is **no**. The longer answer is that the ministry has a long way to travel to win back the trust they lost. They may never be able to do that because of how they overlooked Ravi's sinful actions for so long. I'm disheartened by what we've

all learned about RZIM's handling of the Ravi affair. Many of us have lost confidence in the leadership at RZIM, which means we can no longer support RZIM. Another lesson learned.

Will the leadership at RZIM do the hard work of rebuilding trust? They took a small step with the investigation, though it seems to have been in response to intense internal pressure from its staff and external pressure from donors and negative news coverage. What else will they do? I encourage RZIM to do everything within its control to do the right thing and follow God's leading in repenting publicly and declaring changes in leadership positions and actions.

“We confess that there has been pride and arrogance in our hearts, and we are committed to the ongoing process of repentance. Both for what Ravi did and for all of the ways that we have fallen short, we are so sorry. As an organization, we understand that we have no right to forgiveness and that even if forgiveness is possible, it may take time. We also recognize that earning trust is a process and is dependent on the steps that we take moving forward.” RZIM BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The comments in their *Open Letter* may be a start toward rebuilding trust, but we’ll see how they finish. The board does outline some actions it is taking for victim restitution and organizational reform. Again, let’s see how they follow through.

One change that has been put forth is changing the name of the ministry. There will forever be a stain on Ravi's name, so removing his name from the ministry is a small way to begin rebuilding trust. However, a name change is not enough to accomplish that. Should members of the board of directors resign? That may also be a way to help rebuild trust. How about the resignation of senior leaders, including Zacharias family members who are on the ministry payroll? That may also be a way to rebuild trust. What about dismantling the entire ministry and donating its remaining funds to a ministry that works to help victims of sexual abuse? That may be another way to demonstrate how seriously Christians take the sins of its leaders.

The way senior leaders and board members at RZIM have handled the sexual scandal involving its founder makes me wonder if they have read the Bible recently. If they have, did they take what they read literally? There is no way around this. Leaders of Christian ministries have no excuse when they know or suspect doctrinal, sexual or financial sin by preachers and teachers and do nothing about it, or even worse, lie to cover over the sin and the sinner.

I recommend RZIM leaders and board members read 1 and 2 Corinthians and talk about how the Apostle Paul handled sexual sin known by church members. After reading God's Word, I recommend leaders consider that what they should have done with Ravi is what Paul commanded the Corinthians to do. The sin was publicly known through news reports and to many RZIM employees. Paul told church leaders to rebuke the sinner publicly. That's what the board should have done. Paul

also told church leaders to publicly receive the repentant sinner back into fellowship at a later time. If the sin is public, the rebuke should be public. The repentance and apology should be public. Because Ravi is no longer alive, that can't happen. Follow what the Bible teaches without fail and without delay. Another lesson.

It's too late to confront Ravi Zacharias with the evidence, but it's not too late for the leaders and board members to do something substantial. Spending ministry money to hire consultant firms to guide the board is something, but I'm not sure it is 'substantial.' Stepping down from leadership may be a better thing to do in light of what we've learned. Another lesson learned.

Millions of Christians and unbelievers are watching and waiting to see what happens next. The way senior leaders, members of the board of directors and members of Ravi's family respond longterm to the findings of the investigation will determine its future.

On A Personal Note

On a personal note, I believe there is much more to be uncovered in the life and ministry of Ravi Zacharias. There is much more to be uncovered in the way RZIM senior leaders and board members handled the ministry for the past 15 years or longer. I say that as someone who spent decades as an investigative reporter and manager. The investigators admitted there are many things in RZIM that they did not investigate.

“The scope of our engagement did not extend to RZIM finances, possible retaliation against employees, or other aspects of the organization’s culture. This report comments on some of these issues as necessary to discuss sexual misconduct, but this was not an investigation into such topics.” REPORT OF INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION INTO SEXUAL MISCONDUCT OF RAVI ZACHARIAS

I don't believe RZIM will rebuild trust with people unless and until everything comes out. I say this as a Christian apologist and former atheist who admired Ravi and RZIM for many years. I say this as someone who believed in the ministry of RZIM. I feel betrayed. Just like my friend who used to work for RZIM. Betrayed. Betrayed by Ravi and by the leadership of RZIM. However, betraying us is nothing compared to betraying the Lord Jesus Christ and His Gospel. That should concern us the most.

At the same time I feel betrayed, I am also encouraged. We know the end from the beginning. We will get through everything the world, flesh and the devil throw at us. The Church will be victorious through it all. We will 'overcome' because our Lord overcame for us.

I will pray for RZIM – its leaders and staff – and for Ravi’s family. I know this is a very difficult time for many good people who work for RZIM. I feel deeply for them. May God be honored and glorified in all we think, say and do.

Resources

[I've included secular news links to demonstrate how this scandal impacts those the Church is called to minister.]

[Report of Independent Investigation into Sexual Misconduct of Ravi Zacharias](#)

[Open Letter from the International Board of Directors of RZIM on the Investigation of Ravi Zacharias](#)

[Statement from the Board of the Zacharias Trust](#)

[A Template for Evaluating the Miller & Martin Report and RZIM's Response](#)

[Late Apologist Ravi Zacharias Did Engage in 'Sexual Misconduct', RZIM Board Confirms](#)

Ravi Zacharias Hid Hundreds of Pictures of Women, Abuse During Massages, and a Rape Allegation

Victim of Ravi Zacharias breaks silence and nondisclosure agreement with victim impact statement

Victim of Ravi Zacharias Publishes Emotional Statement

Documents Show Ravi's Personal Massage Therapist was Employed by RZIM & Directed Dubious Ministry

RZIM Leader & Speakers Denounce Handling of Scandals; Two Call for New Board

Co-owner of Spas With Ravi Zacharias Speaks of "Happy Endings" and Requests to Delete Information

Inside RZIM, Staff Push Leaders to Take Responsibility for Scandal

Leading Christian Scholars & Apologists Call on RZIM Board to Own its Complicity in Ravi Zacharias Scandal

RZIM Branch in UK Calls on U.S. Board to “Reform Radically”

Ravi Zacharias Spa ‘Massage’ Scandal Could Force Apologetics Org to Oust Family Members

Christian and Missionary Alliance Opens Second Investigation of Ravi Zacharias (New claims raise concerns that previous allegations were not thoroughly investigated by his denomination.)

Denomination That Ordained Ravi Zacharias Has “Raised Concerns” Following New Allegations

The Way Back for Ravi Zacharias International Ministries

Evangelist Ravi Zacharias engaged in sexual misconduct, report says (The Washington Post)

Law firm details sexual misconduct by global ministry leader Ravi Zacharias (NBC News)

Evangelist Ravi Zacharias accused of rape, spiritual abuse by own church (The New York Post)

Ravi Zacharias, Influential Evangelist, Is Accused of Sexual Abuse in Scathing Report (The New York Times)

Evangelist Ravi Zacharias engaged in rape, financial misconduct and spiritual abuse, report says (The Seattle Times)

High-profile, late evangelist Ravi Zacharias led a dark, double life where he ‘sexually abused’ massage therapists, was accused of rape and had 200 photos of women on his phone, according to in-depth report by law-firm hired by ‘ashamed’ church (The Daily Mail)

Evangelist Ravi Zacharias taught his followers to ask tough questions — just not about his sexual conduct (The Washington Post)

Ravi Zacharias, Christianity’s Top Apologist, Sexually Abused Spa Workers (Newsweek Magazine)

New sexual misconduct claims surface about Ravi Zacharias: Famed apologist’s ministry and denomination pledge to investigate (World Magazine)

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