

Why Do So Many Televangelists Land Themselves in Jail?

Newspapers, online magazines and bloggers across the country are buzzing this week about televangelist Juanita Bynum landing in jail.

The controversial prophetic preacher, recording artist and author was arrested and carted to Lew Sterrett Justice Center—and spent the night there—after failing to show up at a Dallas civil proceeding that named her as a defendant.

The case involves a judgment that ordered her to shell out \$140,000 to ALW Entertainment. Apparently, she did not follow through on a commitment to perform in a play ALW was producing. Charisma News contacted Bynum's office Wednesday but did not receive a response.

Of course, Bynum is hardly the only television evangelist to sit behind bars. Last July, Maryland pastor Robert J. Freeman, a televangelist who lived in a \$ million home with five fireplaces and two four-car garages, was sentenced to 27 months in prison related to a bankruptcy case. Also known as "Dr. Shine," the charismatic pastor was convicted for hiding church assets so he could get out of paying a mountain of debt faith couldn't move.

"Freeman lived a life of fraud and deception, using millions of dollars from church members, and fraudulently obtained credit to pay for luxury cars and a mansion while falsely representing in court that he was indigent," Maryland U.S. attorney Rod J. Rosenstein said in a statement.

Who could forget televangelist Creflo Dollar landing in jail for allegedly choking his daughter? Charges were later dropped, but his mug shot appearing in media headlines caused quite a stir. Televangelist Eddie Long didn't land in jail,

but the civil suits against him have piled up. Some hoped doomsday prophet and televangelist Harold Camping would be arrested for his false prophecies about the end of the world that led so many astray.

This is by no means an exhaustive list of televangelists who have had brushes with the law. But it was somewhat exhausting to recall all of these scandals. Believe me, I don't like reporting on them any more than you like reading them. But if we turn a blind eye to these issues—or let the secular media take the lead—we are neglecting our responsibility as Christian media. (I'm sure that statement will drive plenty of debate, but are we really supposed to ignore anything negative that happens in the body of Christ, even when it's all over the secular media? There's a difference between responsible reporting and heresy hunting.)

So I said all that to ask this: Why do so many televangelists land themselves in jail? Many famous Christian preachers have been in jail—I've been in jail—but that's supposed to be part of your pre-Christian testimony rather than the event that brings reproach on your ministry.

I'm not here to throw stones or drag anyone's name through the mud. But we need to deal with this problem in the church. So I'll ask the question once again: Why do so many televangelists land themselves in jail? Are they being falsely accused? Perhaps sometimes. Did they fall into temptation? Certainly that's happened. Did they slide into deception that greed introduces? I think that's the answer more times than not.

When you look at the list of televangelists that have landed in jail, you'll notice a running theme: greenbacks, big bucks, mighty dollars, finances, Benjamins, dead presidents, dinero, moolah, dough, riches, lucre—money. Then again, it's not really the greenbacks, big bucks, mighty dollars, finances, Benjamins, dead presidents, dinero, moolah, dough, riches,

lucre—the money. It's the greed.

“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Tim. 6:10). That's why the writer of Hebrews warns us, “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’” (Heb. 13:5). I'll stop there. Amen.

What are your thoughts? Why do you think so many televangelists are landing in jail? For all those who make headlines, there are many Christian leaders without television followings who are also landing in jail. What say you?

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