

Jerry Falwell Responds to Politico's 'Hit Piece' in Exclusive Interview: 'We Have Nothing to Hide'

Liberty University President Jerry Falwell says he's not too concerned about the negative article Politico recently released about him. In response to the scathing piece, Falwell says he is pursuing legal action against the employees who shared university emails with the press.

In an exclusive interview with *Charisma*, Falwell says the writer of the piece, Brandon Ambrosino, cherry-picked disgruntled employees to get a negative spin on the university.

"The reporter was ... a Liberty graduate who wrote an article a few years ago for *The Atlantic* about how he was treated as a gay student at Liberty," Falwell says. "And at some point, he turned, but I don't think it was his fault. I think it was some former board members and employees who are disgruntled and who just decided to abuse or violate their fiduciary responsibilities and their confidentiality agreements and share Liberty emails with the press."

Politico gathered information from over two dozen high-level university employees and associates of Falwell for the article. These men and women, Ambrosino writes, believe Falwell isn't "the right man to lead Liberty University or serve as a figurehead in the Christian conservative movement."

The article references several media reports about business deals that allegedly benefited some friends of Falwell. Politico also cited new accusations by anonymous critics that Liberty is really just a "real estate hedge fund" and that

Falwell's dictatorial style of leadership instills a culture of fear at the school.

Overall, Falwell says, Liberty does not have a culture of fear. He argues that if Ambrosino had interviewed a random sample of Liberty employees and students, he wouldn't have reached that conclusion.

"We have 9,500 employees, and I'm sure it's easy to find 10 or 12 who are upset because they didn't get a promotion or something," he says. "I'm sure that's what he found. But if anything, I've been too merciful. [As a CEO], I've let people stay much longer than I should have when they were incompetent, because I felt bad for their families. ... I had an employee tell me yesterday, 'I've worked with other evangelical organizations, and I can tell you there's a difference here.' There's no spirit of fear here. In fact, everybody [says] just the opposite."

Many of Politico's accusations hang on a slew of emails Ambrosino obtained. Some of these emails reveal what appears to be Falwell using university funds for personal gain and favors for friends. More specifically, he reported that university money was going toward construction and real-estate projects that benefited Falwell and his friends.

But Falwell says he doesn't have anything to hide.

"There's nothing in any of those emails," he says. "We've answered every question. This has been going on for a year and a half. We've answered every question with everything squeaky clean. And we explain that in detailed, written answers. But [Politico] didn't print anything that didn't fit their narrative."

Falwell explains that Liberty has undergone extensive audits every year since at least the 1980s. In all those audits, he says, professionals have never found anything unsavory in the school's dealings.

"Any transaction with any contributor or board member or anybody who has positions of authority is disclosed in full on our 990s for the public to see," he says. "We have nothing to hide. That's why I felt I had no choice but to call the FBI, because these people are just bitter and angry. Liberty did struggle for years financially, and these people came in with a plan to try to push me out—we have emails to prove it—and to take over, thinking that we would need their financial help.

"Turns out we pulled ourselves up by our own bootstraps, never needed help from anybody after my father died, and they just couldn't handle that. They were always looking for ways to enrich themselves personally. And I always shut them down.

"So we have no choice. But if the FBI decides they don't want to prosecute—but I think they might—we have a civil action plan. We have a fiduciary responsibility to the school to do what's in the best interest of the school and expose these folks."

Falwell admits that this course of action may not look like turning the other cheek to some people. But he believes Jesus taught that His followers must do what's in the best interest of the government or corporation they are part of.

"When you deal with people personally, you have an obligation to love your neighbor as yourself," he says. "So this is not personal. This is corporate. ... And I believe in Jesus' teachings to do what's in the best interest of the corporation, just like Donald Trump has a job to do. It's in the best interest of the nation. So that's my take on it all. And I'm glad to go to war. I just actually enjoy it probably a little too much."

Falwell says he's not the only one facing intense scrutiny right now. In fact, he says others who support Donald Trump have also wrestled with media backlash.

"Everybody who supports [Trump] has been tagged recently," he says. "I've been finding out from different people—I won't name names—but there have been hit pieces on almost every one of them. I think they can't get to him because he's so tough, so now they're going after anybody who supported him. And good luck to them, because I'm going to have fun with it."