

Jamie Buckingham on True Freedom From the Press

The morning after a recent ministry scandal broke, I woke to the inner words, "Beware of the tumblebugs." It's been a long time since I thought of tumblebugs. Lying in bed, I remembered kneeling as a child in our barnyard watching those little beetles at work.

A tumblebug finds a pile of manure. With its front claws it pulls out a small amount, mixes it liberally with beetle spit, works it into a ball, then rolls it across the barnyard, pushing it with its nose.

As I look out over the kingdom, I realize God has given His church a huge dose of laxative. The secular media—the tumblebugs of society—smelling the results of God's purgative, have rushed out from under their rocks. They're not looking for the hand of God, much less the face of God. They're not even interested in the type of purgative administered by the Holy Spirit to cleanse and purify His church. All they are nosing for is expelled waste. Once found—and God's people never have been good at digging latrines—they roll it into a neat little TV spot and serve it up on the 6 o'clock news.

No one is a stronger proponent of freedom of the press than I. But it is truth that makes us free, not twisted, slanted, one-sided, incomplete facts. Such stories put us in more bondage than any journalistic censorship imposed by government regulations. A free press in the hands of irresponsible journalists is as dangerous as a vindictive man who shouts "Fire!" in a public theater. The journalists whose primary intent is to catch people in wrongdoing (or who edit film to create the impression of wrongdoing) are instruments of the devil.

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Why does the press continually ask questions of prominent pastors that try to set them up to look like buffoons? Remember what the news reporting media did to former Secretary of Interior James Watt? Once the newspapers discovered he believed in the return of Christ, they warped his words to sound like Watt felt it was OK to destroy our natural resources since the world would be burned up when Jesus returned anyway—the exact opposite of what the secretary believed.

Following my brief foray into the world of the secular media during the PTL scandal, I quickly realized that no good can come from Christians being interviewed on programs such as “Larry King Live,” “Nightline” or “60 Minutes.” Yet, following the most recent scandal, I saw publicity-hunting preachers by the score drooling to have their pious faces making nonsensical statements on the tube.

“Please, please, don’t go on TV; your words will be twisted,” I said to my friends. “Let God do His work without your opinions or interference.” But it’s hard to say no when ABC is on the phone telling you the world is waiting for your wisdom.

When will we realize the world does not understand our terminology, our values, our commitment to walk to the sound of a different drummer? Yet we go on TV and toss out terms even we don’t fully understand—terms such as repentance, forgiveness and discipline.

Please, my sisters and brothers, shut up and stay home. Talk theology among yourselves. If you go on TV, talk about God’s love. Only the truth makes us free. Until the press begins reporting on what God is doing, rather than what man is doing (or man’s angry or confused reactions to what God is doing), it is never qualified to claim to be free.

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Why didn't the free press headline the evangelist's outstanding overseas crusades—the largest in history—as well as his sin? And would you expect to read in the papers any account of spiritual changes the evangelists might have undergone since their fall?

Like tumblebugs, the media are only interested in something that stinks.

A survey of the Anti-Defamation League found that 51% of American Jews thought Israel was responding “too harshly” to the Palestinian rioters. Where did the ADL, Israel's greatest American friend, get its information? From the slanted news served up by the TV tumblebugs.

Jesus did not tell Peter, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-jona, for Dan Rather has revealed this unto you.” He said His church was to be built on knowledge from God. Since media revelation is earthly, I'll have to look elsewhere to find what God is saying.

It's time for Christians to turn off their TV sets and open their Bibles. Where else can you find a true word on Israel or politics, or how to treat a fallen preacher?

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Jamie Buckingham wrote 153 columns for Charisma over 13 years, first known as “Dry Bones” but later as its most-recognized “Last Word.” His singular voice was animated by a heart for Jesus baptized in the power of the Holy Spirit in 1967 at a Full Gospel Businessmen's convention. Buckingham provided a steadying force during the scandals of the 1980s, penning the seminal article on the PTL scandal, “God Is Shaking His

Church" in May 1986.