

Throwing the Spirit of Murder Out of the Church

Note: Jamie Buckingham was a prolific writer with a quick wit and a passion for sharing biblical truth. In honor of the 25th anniversary of his death, we offer you this timely 1989 Charisma column.

One early morning in January, the lights in the Florida State Penitentiary flickered and dimmed as the executioner pulled a switch in the death chamber. More than 4,000 volts of electricity surged through the body of Ted Bundy, who was strapped in the three-legged oak electric chair known as Old Sparky. Bundy, who may have murdered more than 50 people, jerked against the restraining straps—then slumped to one side. Whiffs of smoke came from under his hood, his wrists and his leg where the electrodes were attached. Justice was done.

Yet the scene outside the death chamber was evidence that while one murderer was dead, the spirit of murder lives on. It was alive and active in the more than 200 people who had gathered in the early morning darkness to celebrate Bundy's execution.

As the funeral hearse pulled away from the prison, people hooted, jeered and held up obscene signs reading, "Burn, Bundy, Burn" and "Roast in Peace."

The fact that Ted Bundy may have deserved to die did not justify the wild glee his execution stirred up. What scares me even more is that I sometimes see that same spirit in the faces of church people.

That same month, I published an article in *Ministries Today* titled "The Manipulative Strategy of a Child Molester." It was written by a former pastor who had spent more than 10 years in prison for fondling little girls. It was an articulate but

frightening warning to church leaders, telling them how to spot the kind of person he used to be.

I say used to be, for he's no longer a child molester. He's one of the few men I know who was genuinely rehabilitated in prison. A college and seminary graduate with a loving wife and children, he had pastored one of the larger churches in his state before his sin was discovered. Arrested, shamed and convicted, he was sentenced to 40 years in prison. During that time, he went through extensive treatment. He came to grips not only with his sin and crimes, but with himself. He genuinely repented. He sought and received deliverance. After the parole board had turned him down several times, some of us went to bat for him. He was finally released. The day he walked out of prison, his wife, who had stuck with him through the entire horrible ordeal, served him with divorce papers. She was too afraid, too wounded, to risk it again. If he was to start over, he would do it alone.

A Pentecostal family took him in, gave him a job and introduced him to the life in the Spirit. It's tough going. Although he'll never pastor another church, he's making it—as a man and as a victorious Christian.

The article, which I asked him to submit, was his first, hesitant step in trying to help others. "If leaders can be warned how to spot people like I was," he told me through tears, "maybe innocent children can be spared the agony of molestation."

For obvious reasons, we did not use his name with the story.

Reaction was radical. Some wrote to commend us. In others, strange spirits reacted. One pastor wrote the angriest letter I've ever gotten in response to an article.

"The author needs to be shot—executed," he wrote. "He is not worthy to live and menace other little girls. ... You printed a deviant's operations with not a word of where he is. He does

not deserve to live, and society is quickly tiring of his ilk. If judges don't carry through with executions, the public will take it into their own hands. Count on it!"

I wrote back, telling him the reason we did not identify the author was to protect him from men like this pastor.

It doesn't take a psychologist to realize that anyone who reacts with such violence is possessed with not only with the same spirit that caused the author to molest children, but a spirit of murder.

I've seen that same spirit sweep across the faces in an audience when I'm preaching and attack some social evil. At a recent conference, I preached against abortion. The reaction frightened me as I sensed a lynch mob spirit just beneath the surface of Christian veneer. The people not only hated abortion, they hated the abortionists.

Sitting in the back of a crusade meeting several years ago, I listened as a preacher whipped the crowd into a fury as he attacked everything from the Catholic Church to pornography. As each new verbal attack was launched against one of these groups, the crowd would rise to its feet, and the people would shout their support. I could hear the hate in their loud "Amen!"

These people were being transformed. They could feel the power of the spirit of murder—and they liked it.

The truth is we've made sin and sinner synonymous and, incredibly, exempted ourselves from both categories.

It's bad enough to live in a world where people jeer at hearses, blast their horns at traffic lights and fire guns into automobiles on the freeway. But when this same syndrome infects the church, it's time to grow fearful.

I wanted to hate Ted Bundy. But I couldn't. One reason is I

have a friend, a Spirit-filled brother, who is one of those next in line to be roasted in Old Sparky. I love him dearly, and I'm grieved. Next month, I'll tell you about him—and why I'm now struggling with capital punishment.

Love, I've discovered, leaves no room for vengeance. {eoa}