

Why Do Preachers Ask For Money

Why do those preachers always ask for money? Many people both in the church and outside the church ask this question concerning TV preachers. People get offended at hearing a minister ask for money every time they watch. I was discussing this with a couple people the other day; each of them had a different point of view. One thought it was disgusting and offensive; the other thought there was nothing wrong with it. The person that was not offended asked the other person a very good question “If it upsets you so much why do you watch?”

It has been 15 years since the PTL scandal hit but still many people are skeptical. A lot of negative things happened during the 80’s with Jim Bakker, Jimmy Swaggert, Oral Roberts, Robert Tilton at the end of the decade. But yet the TV evangelist has not really been affected much by what many thought would crumble the television ministries.

Television ministries continue to average less time asking for money than commercial networks spend time airing advertisements. This is one thing that has to be considered when looking at this issue. Commercial Networks pay for their airtime with sponsors. Ministries must pay for their airtime with contributions from viewers. This is one thing that is overlooked by those that complain about Television Ministries fundraising efforts. Many people assume that the minister is putting the money in their pockets, but the fact is that the cost of having a television show is very expensive.

Stephen Winzenburg a Communication's Professor at Grand View College in Des Moines has researched this very issue for the last 20 years. His findings are very interesting. He monitored almost 150 broadcasts of 22 different television ministries in the fall of 2000. He used content analysis to gather his data by timing segments of the program and categorizing the main theme of each segment into one of four groups: Fund Raising (which involves specific requests for money), Promotion (which would market free ministry-related items such as salvation booklets or telephone help lines), Political (which would involve commentary on current political events such as the presidential election or the peace process in the Middle East) and Spiritual (which could include music, prayer, preaching or celebrity testimony).

Here is some of the data that he gathered from this study:

F=Fund Raising P=Promotion POL=Political M=Ministry

Kenneth Copeland (F 8%; P 3%; POL 0%; M 89%)

Day of Discovery — (F 0%; P 5%; POL 0%; M 95%)

Creflo Dollar — (F 7%; P 8%; POL 0%; M 85%)

Jerry Falwell — (F 22%; P 27%; POL 7%; M 44%)

Billy Graham — (F 3%; P 13%; POL 0%; M 84%)

Marilyn Hickey — (F 13%; P 6%; POL 1%; M 80%)

Benny Hinn — (F 8%; P 7%; POL 1%; M 84%)
James Kennedy — (F 6%; P 3%; POL 13%; M 78%)
Joyce Meyer —(F 11%; P 4%; POL 0%; M 85%)
Praise the Lord —(F 1%; P 2%; POL 1%; M 96%)
Frederick Price — (F 10%; P 4%; POL 0%; M 86%)
Richard Roberts — (F 27%; P 5%; POL 0%; M 68%)
James Robison — (F 23%; P 10%; POL 9%; M 58%)
Charles Stanley —(F 2%; P 1%; POL 0%; M 97%)
Jimmy Swaggart — (F 10%; P 1%; POL 0%; M 89%)
Jack Van Impe — (F 13%; P 1%; POL 10%; M 76%)

I left Robert Tilton off this list because at the time I wrote this article he no longer had a TV program. That has changed since this article was written. He spends more than half of his time pleading for money. I really do not consider his so called ministry, legitimate.

As you can see by the data some did better than others. The three that spent the most time pleading for money (Richard Roberts, James Robison, and Jerry Falwell) were still asking for money less than secular networks do with their commercials. Jerry Falwell's program is a non-stop infomercial combined with a religious broadcast and James Robison uses too much air time offering trinkets for donations. The trinkets for donations approach is what Praise the Lord (TBN) uses as well. Some sell tape series and books to help raise money.

Stephen Winzenburg brought up a subject in his article that I will address next. He asked all of the above ministries for an accounting of all the money raised in their ministry. My question is " Do we have the right to know how much money they take in, and how they use that money"? Winzenburg stated that most of the ministries did not provide this information, insinuating that they had something to hide. So do we have the right to know how much they bring in? Let me ask you a question. Do you have the right to know how much money McDonalds makes and how they spent their money? Should it be any different for a ministry, especially when they are audited every year by outside auditing firms? What is the difference other than the product they provide? Not that the Gospel is for sale, but it is the principle! I like Coca Cola, but I do not feel that just because I purchase coke products that I have the right to know all their business. I especially do not have the right to know if I am not a customer (or support the ministry)! So this is where I disagree with Mr. Winzenburg. He believes we have a right to know, and I do not.

Conclusions:

I think that the fact that TV ministries are doing much better with the amount of time they are fundraising than their secular counterparts is a good thing. I know that it is very expensive to be on television, but I am glad that many of them are. I enjoy watching and learning from some of these men and women. I do not have a problem with these ministries

asking their viewers to support their TV ministries. I do have a problem with some of the techniques though, especially the trinkets for donations method. This sounds like the snake oil salesman technique, and is probably the root of much of the disdain that some have for TV Evangelist's. My feeling is, if you love them and are feed by them, support them. And if they disgust you and make you mad, TURN THE CHANNEL!!! That is what they made the remote for.

Jim Kingsnorth