

The Double Standard

By Jamie Buckingham

■ It's tough, being a citizen of two worlds. When in Rome, some argue, you just do as the Romans do. But I'm not sure that's what Jesus had in mind when he told us to "render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's...and unto God that which is God's." I mean, what do you do when you live in Rome and Judea at the same time?

When I was in Charlotte investigating the latest crisis at PTL (the story is in this issue of the magazine), I looked at a taped video testimony of a young woman who had been offered a bribe by a Charlotte newspaper if she would say something dirty about Jim Bakker.

The woman and her family had been cold, hungry and without work. Her husband had a broken wrist. Homeless, they had been given refuge by PTL in their trailer park. They had lived on the campgrounds—along with a number of other destitute families—for six weeks at PTL expense.

Then PTL executives discovered that some of the people in the campground were selling drugs. PTL has always been under critical surveillance by the media. A drug scandal would have been juicy news for the local newspaper. They had no choice but to ask all the freeloaders to move on. However, they did help each one find a place to live and assisted in jobs for those who wanted to work.

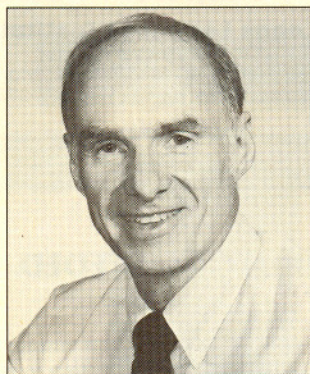
Depressed, the woman wrote her feelings in her diary. She also complained to one of her neighbors that PTL had evicted them. (That was before she realized PTL was going to find them someplace else to live.) The neighbor, angry at PTL for breaking up the drug ring, called the newspaper.

Shortly afterward a reporter from the *Charlotte Observer*—who had been collecting information on PTL—knocked on the woman's door. In his hand he held photocopies of the woman's diary. It had been copied without her knowledge and returned to her trailer. When asked how he got the diary, he said, "It appeared on my desk." He wanted to know if the woman would testify to having been treated unfairly by PTL.

She refused. PTL had been kind to them, she said. They had taken them in and given them free housing when they had no place to go. "There was only so much they could do," the woman told the reporter. "It was time for us to vacate so someone else could move in."

The reporter left but returned the next day. He said, "We'll help you with rent and utilities if you will give us your story."

Again she refused. This time she contacted PTL. She felt they needed to know the newspaper was offering bribes to people if they would testify against the ministry. She offered to give her testimony on videotape if it would help PTL in its current struggle with the media. Of course, the newspaper denies it bribed anybody. And the reporter says he never met the woman.



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I sat in a private office and looked at the tape. When it was over, executive director Richard Dortch asked me, "Is this ethical?"

I answered him with a question. "By which standard? Theirs or ours?"

I have since inquired of a number of newspaper editors. All of them were adamant in stating this is not acceptable journalistic procedure. That indicates that, even among the news media, standards are relative. Some hit low. Others try to play fair.

Kingdom standards are different. They are absolute. The "thou shalt nots" have not changed. It's just that things get confused when you try to live in both worlds.

Down in Florida, for instance, there are two young Pentecostal men locked up in a prison for 10 years. They dared ask the question: Is it right to destroy property to save human life? Confused over how to obey God while living in Caesar's world, they made a big mistake—they bombed three abortion clinics in Pensacola on Christmas Day a year ago. Caesar stepped in, of course. The prison sentences they received were stiffer than those given most murderers.

Unfair? But who says the world is supposed to play fair? You see, Caesar operates on a different standard.

The disciples recognized this. The same men who said, "We must obey God rather than man," were willing to be beaten and thrown into prison for that obedience. Nothing's changed.

A sign on a wall brought kingdom absolutes into sharp focus. It read: "Resolved: that the Christians of this world agree they will not kill each other."

But what does that do to patriotism? Does that mean Christians should not drop bombs on other Christians—even if Caesar tells you to?

Does that mean I have some kind of obligation to a Christian wetback who sneaks across the border to keep from being killed in Central America? Caesar's law says send him back. But what does God say?

A dear friend is a flight attendant with a major airline. Her labor union is calling for a strike against the "unfair" labor practices of management. But by which standard is fairness judged? We sat and talked the other morning for two hours. She was struggling with her loyalties to her fellow Christian stewardesses—and with the command of God to forgive enemies. Can you strike and forgive at the same time? Are you willing to lay down your life for a scab?

I have told my children, "You've entered maturity when you realize nothing in this world is fair." Not labor. Not management. Not the boss. Not the employees. Unless you obey God rather than man, you'll always operate by a different standard—the standard of self first.

Jesus said we're to take up the cross daily.

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