

Looking for guidelines for Christian blogs? Start with the New Testament

May 9, 2008

Posted: 5/09/08

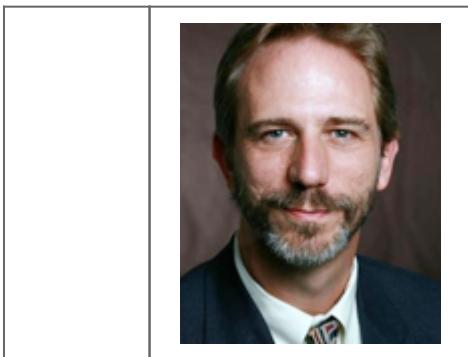
Looking for guidelines for Christian blogs? Start with the New Testament

By Ken Camp

Managing Editor

The New Testament book of James compares the tongue to raging fire and a wild beast that cannot be tamed. And the author of that book never was “flamed” on a blog or in a chat room.

Words have power, whether spoken or written in cyberspace. And Christians don’t get a free pass to ignore the Golden Rule when they log on to their computers, according to ethicist Bill Tillman.



Bill
Tillman

David Gushee

“Basic civility and communication etiquette should always be in place for a Christian, no matter the medium,” said Tillman, the T.B. Maston professor of Christian ethics at Hardin-Simmons University’s [Logsdon Seminary](#).

“The same guidelines such as those from James regarding discipline with our tongue should be translated over to any form of getting words to others or for others. Unfortunately, too many in the Christian circles who blog have operated with the guidelines you can find anywhere else in society. Usually, when cultural guidelines are used on format, style and word choice, things move to a lower level of style.”

While self-expression has its place, some bloggers cross the line by focusing more on themselves than on the ideas they are trying to express, Tillman observed.

“I recognize a dynamic at work in some of them that the blogger is so intent on establishing herself or himself as a person of significance and all his or her ideas are so important that the communication comes off as nearly yelling,” he said. “There is quite a bit of emotional exhibitionism going across the Ethernet.”

Not everyone who claims to be speaking prophetically—or blogging prophetically—truly bears the mantle of prophet, Tillman noted.



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“Being prophetic is not clearing off a space and having a fit, whatever the subject matter or the medium in which it is communicated,” he said.

Like any tool, blogging can be used for good or bad purposes, said David Gushee, distinguished professor of Christian ethics at [Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology](#).

“Blogging at its best represents the democratization of the media. It reflects an entrepreneurial culture in which skill and interest can override official status, title or position. An effective blogger can have more influence than the evening news or a thousand official press releases,” Gushee said.

“Blogging at its worst represents public speech unbound by public standards. It can damage both the blogger and especially the blogged-about. It can also waste enormous amounts of time and can become habitual or even addictive. It is the latest but not the last form of an addictive new technology.”

Tillman echoed that theme of time-wasting, but he also noted blogs' potential as ministry tools.

“There are actually ministry facets that can be addressed through blogging,” he said. But he urged caution—particularly for ministers who

blog during office hours.

"Pastors and other ministers often have a great deal of time that is essentially handed to them by a church for the minister's discretionary use," he said.

"So much is left to the individual's conscience to handle the time and how it's used. With that said, I have to say that from some of the blogging I have read, probably some infringement is done on churches' good will regarding their staff's time."

Blogs as a communications medium are neither good nor bad—but they have the capacity for both good and bad, Tillman added.

"There is a certain neutrality about the technology and the medium. But, just like fire, it's how it's used that qualifies its ethicality," he said.

Some characteristics of blogs set them apart as distinctive, such as their potential reach and their capacity to allow anonymous expression in a public place. But those traits really just demonstrate the human capacity for good or evil, Gushee observed.

"Like all things human, blogging illustrates the exalted and debased nature of the human person and human community," he said. "Moral responsibility involves curbing the damaging dimensions of blogging while elevating those dimensions that contribute to human wellbeing and the common good."

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