

# **Bible Teaching in Schools vs. Institutionalism**

Wm. E. Wallace  
Indianapolis, Indiana

The recent Supreme Court's decision forbidding Bible reading in public schools was made in view of "all the people being required to finance a religious exercise that only some of the people want and that violates the sensibilities of others."

The decision "did not say the Bible or religious history could not be studied in public schools as part of a general education program." A schoolteacher in Indianapolis, who is a member of the congregation for which I work, teaches a Bible course in a public high school. The Bible course counts as an English credit. It is an elective course and involves Bible people, Bible events, Bible things, and Bible lands.

The teaching of this kind of Bible course in public schools does not violate the constitution of the United States nor does it go against the Supreme Court decision. "The state is firmly committed to a position of neutrality" in religion, and so long as Bible courses in public schools respect this principle they are acceptable under our constitution. The teaching of the Bible in public schools does not make public schools Bible schools, nor does it put the public schools in competition with the church.

## **Bible in Private Schools**

This reference to Bible teaching in public schools serves as a springboard to another subject--the teaching of Bible courses in privately owned colleges. It is my contention that members of the church of Christ may operate schools in which the Bible is taught along with the liberal arts and sciences. The purpose of such a school is to provide the same kind of education offered by public schools under supervision of those who seek to hold true to Biblical standards.

The Bible is taught in such a school as an accredited course and this offers the student opportunity to deepen his knowledge of God's book. In order to assist young men who plan to preach the gospel, studies of special value to gospel preachers are given. The teaching of Bible to all students in the college is a means of continuing growth in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. The special courses for young preachers equip them for efficient and aggressive use of God's word.

The environment of such a school allows the student to mature intellectually and spiritually within the fold of principles upheld by his family circle. He worships as he did in his hometown, he associates with people like "home folks", his counselors are like Dad and Mom in faith, and his social and recreational activities are like those approved back home.

This kind of school cannot be operated with state or federal tax funds because in this "all the people would be required to finance a religious environment that only some want and that violates the sensibilities of others."

The purpose of the private school, then, is to provide the same kind of education that state supported schools give, adding courses in Biblical literature under pious environment and in conditions favorable to the individual family background.

The individually or privately supported school must function under the rules of national accrediting associations in order to give the student secular education of equal value to state supported schools.

## **Is There a Sin Involved?**

Is it wrong for Christians to operate a school in which Bible and religious environment are emphasized? Is such a school unworthy of our individual support? Is the existence and support of such a school a violation of scriptural principle? Parents surely are not in error when they commit their children to the educational oversight of godly personnel who teach Bible in conjunction with liberal arts courses. Schools that provide such opportunity for extension of the process of bringing "them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" are certainly worthy of support of all Christians. If there is any violation of scripture in such a school system, it is not found in the *place* of teaching the Bible, for we can teach the Bible any place; it is not found in the effort to provide godly counsel and environment, for this is the very work of every mature Christian. Parents do not surrender their duties toward children in sending them to such schools; they are merely assuring the continued spiritual growth of the maturing youngster who is leaving home in preparation for going out on his own.

## **Human organizations**

Colleges operated by our brethren are opposed by many on the grounds that they are human organizations doing the work of the church, or set up to do the work of the church. In order for these accusations to be proven, it must be first established that the teaching of the Bible is the exclusive right of the church. Neither colleges nor individuals do the work of the church unless the church financially supports, appoints and oversees the work. The work of the church is to preach and teach the Bible. But this is also the work of the individual. The individual is doing a work which the church does when he teaches or preaches, but he does not do *the* work of the church unless he teaches and preaches as a representative or an apostle of a particular congregation. As a representative of the church he would be doing the work of the church in that the church appoints him to work, and provides the support necessary, and oversees the work if it be a local effort. When an individual preaches and teaches on his own, he does not do the work of the church, but he is doing a work which the church also does. To be technical, I point out that the church actually does not preach or teach. The individual does this, and the church appoints, chooses, sends, and supports. The individual teaches and preaches. The church and the individual have parallel responsibilities in evangelism, edification and benevolence. Individuals may act for a church in evangelism, in edification, or in benevolence. They may also act on their own in evangelism, in edification, and in benevolence.

The college appoints, chooses, and supports individuals to teach the Bible in classes. In this it is not doing the work of the church, but it is doing a work that the church also does. In this the college does not do the work of the church unless the church supports the college financially.

When financially supported by the church the college is an agent for the church, doing the work of the church, for the church.

## **Teaching Arrangements**

The congregation is not the only arrangement in which the Bible may be taught and the congregational treasury is not the only means by which a gospel preacher or teacher may be supported.

The New Testament authority for Bible teaching in arrangements other than the local congregation, and under auspices other than the local eldership, is within the charge given to gospel preachers and teachers to be "instant in season, out of season"; in the example of Paul teaching in a school-place provided by Tyrannus; in the example of Paul in the synagogues, and before the Areopagus, in jails, in civil courts; in the urgency of teaching the word in every place and to all people.

## **Purpose of Private Colleges**

Any college set up to conform to the regulations of accrediting associations is first of all a liberal arts and sciences institution giving students an education designed to help them find their place in secular society. This is the primary purpose of any accredited college, regardless of what is stated in charters or deeds. This is the purpose and function of such accredited schools as Florida College (formerly Florida Christian College). Christians who control and operate colleges are especially interested in giving students a godly environment and Bible teaching as they pursue the liberal arts curriculum. Bible courses in the curriculum, godly teachers, and wholesome environment do not change the fundamental purpose of any accredited liberal arts school. I emphasize that this purpose is to prepare the individual for a better place in society, in view of promoting the well-being and happiness of the people. A look at the curriculum of accredited private schools will show that religious courses constitute a low percentage in comparison to the whole.

The names given to some colleges are ill-advised in that wrong use is made of religious terms. Some of the clauses in the charters and deeds are not worded accurately. Staff personnel in colleges often have incorrect conceptions as to the nature of the college; and many preachers would make a church institution out of the college by putting it in the budget of the churches. But these abuses do not change the fact that Bible teaching in public or private schools does not distract from the fundamental purpose of all accredited schools, which is, the preparing of the student for a better place in society.

What makes the private college different in principle from the missionary society of the Christian Church? The missionary society is a church organism set up to take the place of the church, dependent on funds of the church, and works instead of or in place of the church to send out preachers. The college is an educational unit set up separate and apart from the church to provide preparation for careers in the world. The school does not become parallel to the missionary society until it takes money from the churches and thus becomes an agency of the churches. The missionary society has no right to exist with or without church funds for it parallels and rivals the

church, and functions in place of the church. It is a church organism. It sends our preachers in place of the church, or for the church.

## **Organizations vs. Institutionalism**

What of "The Gospel Press"? This is an organism established to advertise through national publications. Originally this corporation did not accept money from churches. It could be condemned in that it proposed to speak for churches of Christ, a function to which no organization has a right. The Gospel Press is not parallel to the college.

Church organizations are wrong because New Testament teaching regarding organization does not allow for any church organization larger or smaller than the local congregation. This is the real principle violated in the institutionalism of our day. The private school existing separate and apart from the church in control, function, and support does not violate the principle and does not classify under the error of institutionalism.

Institutionalism centers on the error of churches establishing organizations to do their work, and the error of granting church funds to various organizations. Individuals have the right under the principle of Christian liberty and service to establish organizations separate and apart from the church so long as the organizations do not encroach on the autonomy and function of the churches.

Missionary societies and other such organizations that accept financial grants and responsibilities from local churches serve in violation of New Testament teaching on church organization and function. Suppose a missionary society like the ACMS of the Christian Church ceases to accept church money and accepts only individual contributions? It is still wrong in that the purpose for its existence is to send out preachers in place of the church. It becomes a sending agency and by its very nature would call for individuals to give to it instead of to the church.

The association of individuals together in educational enterprises and publishing houses, under legal charters or deeds, does not parallel those institutional and organizational arrangements that reflect on the principles of the all-sufficiency of the church. The teaching of Bible and religious courses in colleges and the publishing of religious literature for use of churches does not infringe on the church. A group of preachers working together to preach the gospel without the support and sanction of any congregation does not trespass on church rights. This sets forth the truth that all teaching and preaching of the scripture need not be done by or under the supervision of the church. When preachers or others form themselves into a *structural organization* that supplants the church, *then* they have violated scriptural principle.

Those who oppose the privately owned colleges which employ teachers to teach Bible and related subjects must not only prove that Bible teaching is the exclusive right of the church, but they must prove that the college is parallel to the missionary society in purpose, design and function.

The work of the church is to care for older folks. There are some members of the church who provide homes for senior citizens without support of the church. In this they are not doing the work of the church, but they are doing a work that the church may also do. So it is in the case of

edification and evangelism. Members of the church and others operate business or educational enterprises in which or through which they teach truth and perform religious services. If this is to be condemned, then churches must operate presses to publish their own Bibles, songbooks and literature.

Organizations set up to publish religious literature or to educate children under religious influences do not rival the church unless they are designed to take the church's money, assume the local congregation's responsibilities and speak or act in the name of the churches.

## New Testament Teaching

There are some things that do not come within the explicit teaching of the scripture, but which are allowed by scriptural principle. The erecting of church buildings; business meetings of the congregation where there are no elders; publishing of "gospel papers", and a host of other things are not explicitly taught in scripture but are allowed by scripture principles. Human organizations in which Bible and related matters are taught are not explicitly referred to in the New Testament, but are allowed in the liberty given to individuals to exercise expediency, choice, and discretion in the good work they do.

If brethren will properly distinguish between human organizations separate and a-part from the church, and human institutions that become church institutions, the real issue will be better focused. Business enterprises which produce religious works, and educational enterprises which provide religious education are not parallel to church institutions and missionary societies, which encroach on, or rival the church.

To teach the Bible in an organizational relationship other than the church is not condemned by any New Testament principle unless the organizational relationship infringes and encroaches on the Lord's body, or involves a transfer of funds, responsibility and authority from the church to the organization. Organizational machinery that brings congregations into association or society arrangements involves infraction of God's law of local government and autonomy. The school, in its rightful place does not do this.

The work that God wants the church to do is to be done through local churches. When the church transfers its funds and responsibilities, when church organizations, institutions, or associations are created, the wheels are in motion for a denominational and ecclesiastical body. This is what the "Herald of Truth" arrangement and the institutionalism of our day are doing. This we must continue to fight. But in the battles against the institutionalism and centralization of our day we must be careful not to destroy the usefulness of legitimate arrangements in which we can do well and serve efficiently.

*Truth Magazine* VIII: 3, pp. 13-16  
December 1963