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Churches, Colleges and the Lord’s Work

Reading: **Philippians 4:14-23**

* It is important to do the Lord’s work and do it the way He teaches us to do it.
* It is not a matter if it works or not (or when we think it works) but whether our practices are from heaven or men. (Jesus’ question is as pertinent as ever.)
* We walk by faith – faith comes from hearing God’s word.
* The work of preaching the good news of the kingdom of Jesus Christ began with John the Baptist and was then done by Jesus himself. He then taught his disciples, and in particular the 12 apostles to teach this message of forgiveness, salvation and hope. This they did as we read in the book of Acts and the rest of the NT. These men taught others to teach faithful men (*anthropos*, male and female) so that they also would be able to teach others. (**2 Tim. 2:2**)
* This apparently worked pretty well – see what Paul wrote in **Col. 1:23**.
* Jesus had earlier predicted that the gospel would be *preached in all the world* before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD. (**Matt. 24:14**)

**Churches in the NT supported preachers** (**Phil. 4:14-18; 2 Cor. 11:8**)

* The churches (each one) sent support directly to the preacher.
* The evangelists were men. (male)

**What happens when a college asks churches to support their “mission” projects?**

* “With this in mind, we are boldly and prayerfully reaching out to key churches asking them to consider sponsoring Lipscomb Missions from their church budget. Much like a church might sponsor a missionary or another non-profit, we want to be supported by your church specifically to help us fund our mission program.”

(Letter from Lipscomb, August 25, 2017)

* It is clear that these mission trips are not just to help people physically (medical, build bridges) but to evangelize - to teach the gospel to the lost.
* Can a college do as they please in these regards?
* The physical work, I would have no objection, but what about the work of evangelism?
* One thing I am certain of – no churches in the first century ever sent money to a school so that the school could send out young men and women to teach the gospel.
* In fact, I don’t believe churches should send money to colleges at all.

**It is a good work?**

* The Old School Song, Robert Turner, Plain Talk, August 1971
* Letter to churches signed by Batsell Barrett Baxter: “The most important thing that we do at David Lipscomb College is teach the Bible as the inspired word of God. If this is to continue, the congregations of the church must be willing to support this Bible teaching….”
* “For over half a century this great Nashville church (Charlotte Ave.) has contributed each year to our program of teaching the Bible. They have done this under the scriptural authority of Titus 3:1 which admonishes Christians ‘to be ready unto every good work.’”
* Has the Lord told us what good works He wants local churches to perform?
* The word of God provides us with the knowledge of all good works the Lord wants His people to do in the local churches. The aforementioned pattern is to be noted.
* But Baxter’s father wrote in 1931 - “Some people have the idea that the churches take money directly from the treasury and give this money to the colleges under consideration. They have the idea that money given in the general contribution is so used. This is an error. Individuals have been asked from time to time to help finance these colleges. The burden is too heavy for those who run the schools. In a few instances these individuals in some congregations have given collectively for one of the schools. They have done this as individuals, and the purpose of the gift was known at the time of giving.” (Barrett Baxter (father of Batsell Barrett Baxter) Gospel Advocate, Nov. 12, 1931) (taken from Gospel Guardian, April 23, 1964, Ferrell Jenkins at the website noted)[[1]](#footnote-1)
* Does the example in **Acts 19:9** authorize a local church to build and/or support schools?
* This argument was made in some Lambert bible class material.
* This was a local church meeting in a school building. They could have paid Tyrannus rent but that’s a far cry from supporting a school to do the work of teaching the bible.

**Very brief history of colleges/universities**

* Harvard - named after a minister – oldest institution of higher learning in the US. (1636)
* “After God had carried us safe to New England and we had builded our houses, provided necessaries for our livelihood, reared convenient places for God's worship, and settled the civil government: One of the next things we longed for and looked after was to advance learning and perpetuate it to posterity; dreading to leave an illiterate ministry to the churches, when our present ministers shall lie in the dust.” (founders statement

**Schools that have been and/or still are affiliated with churches of Christ**

* There have been many so called Christian Colleges over the years – maybe one building.
* Pepperdine University - founded in 1937 by George Pepperdine – a Christian
* Batsell Barrett Baxter was the first president – later president at Lipscomb and Abilene
* “That sense of stewardship matured into a call of destiny when he observed the alarming rate at which Christian young men and women lost interest in their faith after going on to higher education. He determined that he would dedicate his fortune to creating and endowing a college that would provide the best education possible, managed by administrators and taught by professors who would support students in their Christian belief.” (school website)
* But today… “…the University has received inspiration and spiritual challenge from such leading lights in Christian thought as N. T. Wright, Martin Marty (professor at University of Chicago Divinity School, Lutheran Pastor who sometimes attends a Presbyterian church near where he lives), Dallas Willard, and Os Guinness.” (ibid)
* Abilene Christian University - founded in 1906
* Harding University – founded in 1924 (merger of two junior colleges)
* “The college was named in memory of James A. Harding, co-founder and first president of Nashville Bible School (now David Lipscomb University) in Nashville, Tenn. A preacher, teacher and Christian educator, James A. Harding inspired his co-workers and associates with an enthusiasm for Christian education that remains a significant tradition at Harding University.” (school website)
* Freed-Hardeman – history goes back to 1869
* Lipscomb University – 1891 Nashville Bible School founded by David Lipscomb and James Harding.
* “We aspire to stand in the front ranks of the great educational institutions of the world.” (Harding at the opening of the school) (school website)
* “Associated with the Churches of Christ, the Nashville Bible School grew and found a permanent home on the David and Margaret Lipscomb’s 110-acre farm along Granny White Pike in 1903. In 1918, the school was renamed David Lipscomb College in memory of its founder and reflecting the growth of the institution. The institution became known as Lipscomb University in 1988.” (ibid)
* Florida College – does not use money from churches. (founded in 1946)
* “It is also recognized among these churches as an important training center for ministers. Because non-institutional churches of Christ, as a matter of doctrine, oppose congregational support for colleges, Florida College has some unique characteristics as religious colleges go – the college accepts no direct contributions from any congregation or other organized religious body, and its board members serve as individuals rather than as official representatives of any such entity.” (Wikipedia)
* “All members of the [board of directors](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Board_of_directors) and all [faculty](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Faculty_(university)) members are required to be active members in a church of Christ.” (ibid)
* The history is not all that relevant for this lesson but it is interesting to note the way things were in the beginning and the way things are now. What is the college most known for now? What was the purpose of the founders? Has the college become more liberal in their teaching? Some argue that they all become more liberal over time. (so do churches)

**Is the college doing the work that local churches are supposed to do?**

* The college intends to “shape and nurture them (new students) for maximum impact in the Kingdom.” (letter from Lipscomb, August 25, 2017)
* “The college (Mars Hill College in Florence, AL) was a church-school…. …he undertook to establish a church-school to teach the doctrine of the sect everywhere spoken against.” (*Larimore and His Boys*, F.D. Srygley, p. 97-98)
* "I am endowing this institution to help young men and women to prepare for a life of usefulness in this competitive world and help them build a foundation of Christian character and faith which will survive the storms of life." (George Pepperdine)
* Some are opposed to bible colleges/colleges operated by Christians (colleges that teach the bible – and propose to train preachers) on the grounds that this is the work of local churches. They are opposed regardless of the way the college is supported – by churches or individuals. (Daniel Sommer)

**Can a group of Christians start and run a college?**

* Any business for that matter?
* What about having some bible classes? Can an individual teach wherever he is given the opportunity? What if the Christian who owns a business decides to have a bible study every morning before work starts and asks the local preacher to teach the study?
* How much influence do the schools have on churches?
* Some referred to the problem as the “centralization of teaching.”
* Who oversees the teaching? Who makes the decisions about teaching?
* What if someone at the school begins teaching something that’s false?
* What does the leadership at the local church where this person assembles doing?
* Danger I’ve seen/heard - pride in our own institutions and the perceived influence they have on young people.

**Should we be concerned where our children go to college?**

* Do we prepare them for the battles they may have to face no matter where they attend?
* Is a college a means of a father obeying **Ephesians 6:4**? (one man argued)
* But note that **Ephesians 6:4** tells the father to teach the children – not to leave it up to the teachers at the school (or the local church for that matter).
* Where is an individual matter – we have to weigh the pros and cons.

**Local churches can do the work God wants us to do!**

* May we enthusiastically engage in His work!
* When churches don’t do the Lord’s work, folks try to come up with other ways of doing it.
* We need no missionary societies/colleges to do the work of evangelism.

1. http://www.wordsfitlyspoken.org/gospel\_guardian/v15/v15n50p9b.html [↑](#footnote-ref-1)