

Churches and Schools

by Bryan Gibson

An important principle is taught in 1 Timothy 5:16: do not burden the local church with responsibilities that belong to the individual and the family. Clearly, many churches have not learned this principle, or have chosen to ignore it. Churches have burdened themselves with responsibilities that the Lord never assigned to the church, responsibilities that instead belong to the individual Christian, or in some cases, to other organizations. And because they have burdened themselves with these other works, they have neglected the work that God has assigned to them. The bottom line is this: many churches have resorted to giving people what they want instead of what they really need.

In this article we want to focus on one particular problem area. We want to show that churches should not be burdened with establishing or supporting schools. Let's look at some reasons why churches should not be burdened with this responsibility.

First and foremost, there is no authority for churches establishing schools of secular education, or for sending money to support them. Look throughout the New Testament and you won't find any churches involved in the secular education of children. In fact, the only mention of a school is found in Acts 19:9—"the school of Tyrannus." By reading the surrounding verses, you can see that Paul simply took advantage of this meeting place to preach the gospel.

Children did receive some secular education during the first century, during the time the New Testament was written. *Holman's Bible Dictionary* has this note about the education of Jewish children: "The elementary school system among the Jews developed in connection with the synagogue. Even before the days of Jesus, schools for the young were located in practically every important Jewish community. The teacher was generally the synagogue 'attendant.' An assistant was provided if there were more than twenty-five students. The primary aim of education at the synagogue school was religious. The Old Testament was the subject matter for this instruction. Reading, writing, and arithmetic were also taught. Memorization, drill and review were used as approaches to teaching."

Now, if God had wanted churches to become involved in this process, don't you think there would be at least some mention of it in the New Testament? But we cannot find where a church was ever commanded to do so. We cannot find an example of a church involved in this. And there is nothing that even implies that churches should become involved in the secular education of children. Again, there is no authority from God for churches to either establish these schools, or to send money to support them.

Let's look at a **second reason**. Local churches were intended by God to be spiritual training centers, not educational centers. These churches were clearly instructed by God to limit their subject matter to one thing: the word of God. In 1 Corinthians 4:17 Paul said that that he

taught the same thing in every church. 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 shows what he taught and what he did not teach. He did not teach them the wisdom of this world, just the wisdom of God. Acts 18:11 tells of Paul's stay in the city of Corinth. He stayed there a year and a half, teaching the word of God among them. As long as Paul stayed there, wouldn't this have been a good opportunity to establish a school, to get the church there involved in the education of their children? But of course, there is nothing said about that. Read carefully Ephesians 4:11-16. This passage gives a clear picture of the goals God has in mind for each local church, and the provisions He has made to help us accomplish these goals. The goals are all spiritual, and they are accomplished by doing one thing: "speaking the truth in love" (v. 15). All of this is harmony with the description given of the church in 1 Timothy 3:15: "the pillar and ground of the truth."

Let's switch gears for just a minute. Some churches concede that they should not be involved in the *secular* education of children, so what they do instead is send money to "Bible schools" or to the Bible department of other schools. There are several problems with this, too.

Again, **first and foremost**, there is no authority for this. We cannot find any examples of churches sending money to another institution to do the work God assigned to them.

Secondly, Ephesians 4:11-16 tells how God gave "gifts" to the church to make sure it was fully equipped to train people in the word of God. Are we not showing a lack of faith in God's provisions when we give that work over to someone else? Are we not showing a lack of faith in the sufficiency of the church to get that accomplished?

Thirdly, if we send money to some "Bible school" or to some Bible department, the elders of the church would no longer have oversight of the teaching being done (1 Peter 5:2). We could potentially be giving financial support to those teaching error.

Let's get back to the point we made in the beginning. Churches should not be burdened with the responsibility of establishing or supporting schools. So who should? Each individual family. It is up to each family to decide how to best educate their children. It is my responsibility to make sure my children are educated, not the church's.

The work of each local church is determined, not by what is popular, not by what will get us the biggest numbers, not by what people are calling for, not by what we think is good and right, but by what the Lord says.