

Church Schools

(The following article was written long ago to answer a troubling matter among brethren. It is sad that it is still an issue fifty years later - prb) The church owns no schools, hospitals, drug stores, camps or filling stations. Many brethren are in these businesses, and brethren are within their rights when they get into such businesses. They have a right as individuals to set up schools, hospitals, drug stores, camps and filling stations. They have no right in the light of the scriptures to set up such things and then call upon the church to support them, or to call them "Church of Christ schools, hospitals, drug stores, camps and filling stations."

Certainly a brother running a school, a hospital, a drug store, a camp, or a filling station has a right to teach the Bible as he has opportunity. In fact, it would be very wrong for him or any of us not to teach the word of God at every possible opportunity. I do not believe that any Christian will be in any business without teaching the Bible when he can. I believe that brethren who work in the stores, the offices, the schools, the farms, the shops, etc., will teach when they can, the Bible.

If we would make a distinction between what the individual may do as a simple member of the church and what the church may do as a body, it would solve many of the problems that are troubling Zion (Please read that again). When brethren get to talk about "The Educational Foundation that was set up by the Church of Christ" they are wrong. The church is not setting up anything and is not starting anything but Congregations of Disciples of Christ. The God of heaven set up everything he wanted to set up. He set up the church more than nineteen centuries ago. He set up the home six thousand years ago. Christians are members of these two divine institutions.

The Church is God's educational institution. Of course, it is right and proper that our children be educated in languages, history, science, medicine, etc. But that is not the work of the church. The work of the church is to preach the gospel of Christ and care for the worthy poor who are members of the church and do not have relatives who can or will do it. I would rather that my grandchildren would sit at the feet of a Christian to learn their mathematics, English, etc., but that is not the work of the church. If we keep on, the average member is not going to know what the church is to do. When good brethren talk about the church owning colleges, camps etc., they are wrong. Such is the language of Ashdod and should not be engaged in by intelligent Christians.

When I began to preach forty years ago, congregations were being divided and brethren alienated because the distinction was not clearly made between what the individual Christian can do and what the church can do. In my part of the country that breach is practically healed and the old sores are cured. Brethren, I beg of you not to open up this breach and pick at these old sores. Start your schools, your hospital, your drug store, your camp, and your filling station, but do not beg the church as the body of Christ to support it. Let the church, be the church. I would even suggest that you don't talk too much about your camp, and your filling station from the pulpit and in the bulletins and religious papers. Remember these are individual enterprises of yours and do not interest the church.

I am an old preacher. The sun will sink behind the western hills for me before long. I love the church. I love every brother. Let us be careful. Keep the church and the world separate. May God help us in our righteous endeavors to serve Him. *(By Fred E Dennis of Marietta, Ohio. Published in Truth Magazine VIII: 9, p. 14 June 1964)*

"By Aphrodite!"

In the Roman Empire, pagans would often call on the name of a god or goddess as they placed bets in a game of chance. A favorite deity of the gambler was Aphrodite, the Greek word for Venus, the goddess of love. During the roll of the dice, they would say "epaphroditus!" literally, "by Aphrodite!" In the book of Philippians we read of a Greek convert to the Christian faith by the name of Epaphroditus. He was a close companion of Paul who served him well in his missionary enterprise. Of his friend, Paul wrote: *"Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier"* (Phil. 2:25).

Epaphroditus was a spiritual brother in Christ, a faithful worker who preached the Gospel, a brave soldier in the faith, and the courier of the inspired letter to the church at Philippi. He modeled brotherhood, a work ethic, spiritual endurance, and service. Certainly, Epaphroditus had a well-deserved reputation that showed he did not live by a pagan deity but by faith in Jesus Christ.

Even more important than our names are the Christian qualities seen in our lives: dependability, care, encouragement, and wisdom. What words would you like others to use to describe you? If we take care of our character, our reputation will take care of itself.

Hospitality

In the New Testament, hospitality is a hallmark of Christian living. It is listed as a characteristic of elders (1Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8) and is commanded for every follower of Jesus as an expression of love (Rom. 12:13; 1Peter 4:9). But its meaning goes deeper than being a gracious host or opening our homes to guests. The Greek word translated “hospitality” means “love of strangers.” When Paul speaks of being “given to hospitality” (Rom. 12:13), he is calling us to pursue relationships with people who are in need. It is not an easy task.

Author Henri Nouwen likens it to reaching out to those we meet on our way through life—people who may be estranged from their culture, country, friends, family, or even from God. Nouwen writes: “Hospitality, therefore, means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place.”

Whether we inhabit a house, a college dorm, a prison cell, or a military barracks, we can welcome others as a way of showing our love for them and for Christ. Hospitality is making room for people in need. Hospitality can fill the emptiness of a lonely heart.

Generosity

We call this the “Season of Giving,” but God expects generosity from His people at all times. In Deuteronomy 15, Moses emphasized the widespread nature of poverty and how the more affluent must deal with it. They were warned of four dangers:

--A hard heart, ignoring the needs of the poor (v.7).

--A closed hand, withholding what the poor lacked (v.7).

--An evil thought, hesitating or refusing to loan money to the poor because the year of canceling debts was nearing (v.9).

--A grudging spirit, a reluctance to satisfy the needs of the poor among them (v.10). Not only were they warned about selfishness, but more important, they were encouraged to be spontaneously generous (vv.8,10-11).

Among God’s people, there must always be a spirit of generosity toward the poor. Let’s open our hearts and our hands. Generosity stems from the heart that has experienced God’s grace. Sometimes you have to take a leap of faith first. The trust comes later.