**CHURCH-SUPPORTED INSTITUTIONS**

Churches today do many things that are simply “accepted” without question. After all, who wants to be the “bad guy,” and question what some church does? This is especially true when we are conditioned by our pluralistic society to believe that every possible viewpoint is equally valid. However, those who believe the Scriptures to be the infallible word of God do not accept such notions. They believe that there is an ultimate standard of right and wrong (Jn.12:48); and they measure everything by that standard (Ac.17:11; 1Th.5:21).

With that background set forth, I am going to question a practice of many churches which I believe to be unbiblical: The creation and/or support of humanly-devised business institutions. Usually, this takes the form of benevolent, evangelistic, and educational institutions, such as orphan homes, hospitals, missionary societies, and/or colleges. When questioned about such practices, the common reply is, “We are doing a good work; why would you oppose a good work?” That is a fair question! Let us examine the problem of church-supported institutions.

Sometimes, it is better to show what the problem is NOT before we show what the problem IS; so let us begin there. 1.) The problem is not the “right” of such institutions to exist. 2.) The problem is not “providing care” for the needy, or “preaching the gospel” or “educating” people. 3.) The problem is not the “methods” used to care for the needy, or preach, etc. 4.) The problem is not “paying for services” from an institution. Churches commonly pay for utilities, insurance, supplies, etc. No one questions such things! *So what IS the problem?*

The problem is that there is no Biblical “authorization” for churches to **create** or **subsidize** ANY humanly-devised institution. To be specific, churches have no authorization to create an orphan’s home, hospital, missionary society, or college. And once such institutions are created (no matter by whom), a church has no authorization to subsidize them. If I am wrong, it should be easy to prove: simply cite the book, chapter, and verse to authorize such*. I am not asking for a verse which says that the needy should be cared for; we already know that!* I am asking for a verse authorizing churches to actually create a human business organization of any kind; or to subsidize its operation.

To further clarify what I mean by “subsidizing,” I submit that there is a vast difference between a church paying a light bill for a needy person, and making a donation to the electric company. There is a vast difference between a church buying groceries for a needy person, and making a donation to the grocery store. *Likewise, there is a vast difference between a church paying for the services of a benevolent institution, and making a donation to one.* In one scenario, the church actually pays for the care of a needy person (cf. Ac.4:34-35); in the other, the church is merely subsidizing the operation of a business. I think most people can see this, unless they have a “pet project” to defend.

The Scriptures teach that there is only ONE organization to which a local church may donate money, and that is another local church! Further, it may ONLY grant such subsidies when the receiving church is in financial need. Some verses which support this idea are Acts 11:27-30; Romans 15:25-27; 1Cor.16:1-3; and 2Cor.8:13-15. *In fact, in the latter passage, Paul said such support is to be* ***temporary,*** *i.e., only until the need is met.* He contrasted the “abundance” of one church with the “lack” of another; and said the goal was to bring about an “equality” – which is defined as “no lack” (i.e., no need). Also, note carefully the difference between a genuine need, and unwarranted greed! Some so-called “needs” are merely expressions of “greed” for cash – and that is unacceptable!

In the final analysis, this is a fairly simple matter. Brethren have needlessly complicated it by talking about “hating orphans” or “lack of concern for the poor.” Brethren please! Give us some credit for being Christians, and having a concern for the needs of others. It would befit your case much better to just cite the Scripture authorizing your practice (Col.3:17). In the absence of such a Scripture, we must conclude that the practice of churches supporting humanly-devised business institutions is unauthorized. If not, why not?

--Lanny Smith