

## HOW CHRISTIAN ARE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS?

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Why do so many Christian schools leave their original positions and purposes and become less than distinctively Christian and more and more secular? Examples surround us, and they fill the pages of history. Too many Christian institutions whose founders demanded strict adherence to Christian principles and to promoting the faith have departed completely or become so imprecise in their goals that they no longer have a Christian reason for existence.

Are there safeguards to prevent such tragedies? And tragedy it is!! No Christian school, college, seminary or organization is founded without considerable sacrifice on the part of its founders, first faculty, and students. The founders usually leave the security of existing ministries to launch the new work. The first faculty also leave certain professional comforts--regular paychecks, tenure, rank, prestige--to join hands in the new venture. Students who choose to come in those first years know there will be poorer facilities, fewer majors, and at the end of the course, an unaccredited degree. Those who support the new school are not the big givers, the millionaires, the foundations and trust funds. Early support usually comes not from the financially well off but from the genuinely sacrificial givers.

But as the years pass that good beginning is forgotten and the direction often changes. Succeeding leadership violates the purity of the ideals of their predecessors and the trust of their constituency. They lose the vision, the dedication, the purging that the problems of the early days brought.

Have we forgotten that schools as well as churches can be lukewarm? Has the lesson of Laodecia been lost on us today? Have we become callous to what

lukewarmness means: "Wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:17)? And "accredited, scholarly, endowed, and large" do not necessarily cure lukewarmness.

What preventive measures can a school take to keep its original stand and purpose? No one has all the answers for every case, but here are some crucial considerations.

#### THE BOARD MUST BE COMMITTED BELIEVERS, TOTALLY INVOLVED

The final authority, responsibility and accountability for any school rests in the hands of its governing board. But does it in practice?

Too many Christian school boards are either poorly informed or simply uninvolved so that they do not sense what is happening in the institution. They listen to reports, give their automatic approval, do not ask questions, do not investigate, and are hesitant to disagree with administrative policies as long as there is no crisis facing them. Perhaps they're intimidated. Or bored. To both.

The result, however, is that change in goals, lowering of Christian standards, hiring of uncommitted, even unbelieving, personnel, and outright compromises with worldly standards can be effected. And often the board turns its collective head and lets the situation rock along.

Board members, like the first helpers chosen by the early church, should be men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom (Acts 6:3). They should also meet the qualifications for elders in the church (1 Tim. 3:2-7). Prospective board members in particular should be scrutinized as to how they are presiding over their own families and what ideals, goals and procedures they employ in raising their own children. All of this will be an indication of the standards they will want to see applied in the school. And remember, leadership in the business world does not necessarily qualify

an individual for leadership in the spiritual world. Nor does the possession of wealth, whether earned or inherited, necessarily indicate an ability to give spiritual and wise leadership on a Christian board.

The single, most important function of the board of any institution is that of choosing its executive leader and seeing that he leads the way Christ would lead. For this, board members must be well informed, spiritually discerning, educationally wise, and crystal clear about why their institution exists. It's also important that the school should not try to do too much; no organization can or should do everything in the Lord's work. So its board must have and keep deep convictions as to the particular contribution of their institution (modern marketers call this 'positioning'), and the board must seek a president who not only shares that conviction but who will implement and guard it.

Too, the board must have confidence in their chosen leader, for he is the one who will either keep the school on course, allow it to change course, or chart a new course. He is also the principal channel of information to the board; therefore, the board must be able to rely on his integrity to convey fully and openly all the information they must have to act.

In addition, board members should care for their president, showing sensitivity to his needs, encouraging him, strengthening his weaknesses, and being available individually for counsel.

#### AS THE PRESIDENT GOES, SO GOES THE SCHOOL

The administration, led by the president, is the key to keeping an institution on target. His spiritual maturity, the depth of his biblical convictions, and the degree of his discernment are measurers of a good president. He will need to solicit help from others in matters of education, finance, and management. But he needs to be able to take the advice he receives and sift it through a discerning, biblical, and spiritual grid. Depending on how well he

does this, the institution will flourish or flounder. This job is not only one of integrating facts and advice that comes to him from many sources but critiquing all imput on the basis of his own in depth knowledge of God and His Word.

Since most presidents can change personnel without board approval, and since he is the official channel of information from the school to the board, he is in a position to change the school's direction and goals almost single-handedly. Therefore, it is exceedingly important that he be trustworthy, mature, discerning, and have the total confidence of his board, his colleagues, and the believers the organization serves.

Every president also affects his student body. If he knows the Word, his example sets a standard for the students. They will want to know the Word too. If he is a man of prayer, they will become believers in the power of prayer. If he is concerned about the Lord's work, they will be too. Though most presidents cannot have much direct and personal contact with the entire student body, students will always sense what kind of person he is and be affected by his example.

In a very real sense the president is the pastor of that flock of young people, watching over their lives, and nurturing them in the faith. And as their pastor, the president must give an account to the Lord for the graduates (Heb. 13:17). What tragedy if he leaves the spiritual training of students only to the Bible professors and takes no leadership in this area himself!

Therefore, the president ought also to be able to expound the Word. He needs to speak in the school chapel on a regular basis. He should be able to preach in any of the churches that fellowship with his school, not as a fundraiser, but as a minister.

#### THE FACULTY IS THE FRONT LINE OF THE SCHOOL'S TEACHING

The principal business of any school is conducted in the classroom. That's

why faculty members must be totally qualified and committed, especially in several important areas.

First, in their personal character, teachers must be intelligent, maturing, committed Christians. Their dedication must be to do God's will wherever He may lead. They must be intelligent in their comprehension of the Bible and the leading of the Holy Spirit. Their own spiritual lives should reflect the maturity of their Christian walk.

Faculty who teach in the liberal arts areas have an added responsibility: not only must they keep up with their specialities, but they must also keep nourishing their spiritual lives. Competence in a secular field does not automatically bring with it competence in biblical truth. All faculty must exhibit the fruit of the Spirit and be, in every sense of the words, Christian ladies and gentlemen.

Second, the faculty must be in wholehearted agreement with the doctrinal position and purposes of the institution. No room exists for mental reservations, subtle criticism in or out of the classroom, or general complaining about the school. Christian integrity demands that any doctrinal deviation that may arise in the course of faculty service bring an immediate resignation. The institution is never obliged to compromise for faculty members; rather faculty members should gracefully bow out when their viewpoint changes.

Third, the faculty should be examples of Christian leaders, meeting the biblical standards for godly men and women (1 Tim. 3; Tit. 1 and 2). It is expected that they will want to be active in local churches, teaching the Bible as opportunities arise, and seeking ways to witness and lead people to Christ. Since these are desirable activities for students in Christian schools, they are musts for their teachers.

Faculty should also lead in promoting Christian standards of living. Today we seem to be more concerned about lifestyles and standards of living rather than living of standards. Students test their teachers' consistency of

life just as children test their parents.' Teachers can ill afford failure, compromise or inconsistencies in these areas, for such will inevitably affect the character of students and later of their children.

Fourth, faculty who teach outside the biblical areas must work hard to integrate their discipline with biblical revelation. Far too often this lack of integration becomes a major deficiency in Christian schools. Prayer at the beginning of a class does not make the content of what is taught in that class Christian. Philosophy, geology, biology, psychology are especially sensitive areas where careful integration is required. To teach a secular subject, however brilliantly, without critiquing it in the light of biblical revelation is unworthy of any Christian faculty member. Even those who teach Bible and theology can fail in this when they consciously or unconsciously embrace the presuppositions of contemporary critical methods and theological ideologies.

All true truth comes from God, but a lot that is passed off as truth comes from darkened, though brilliant, minds that are alienated from the knowledge of God. Therefore, all that claims to be truth must be measured against God's inerrant truth as revealed in the Bible.

#### CAMPUS LIFE TELLS WHAT THE CAMPUS BELIEVES

Maintaining the Christian quality of campus life is an absolute necessity in keeping a Christian school Christian. Many factors enter into this. Certainly the chapel program stands at or near the top. This is the one time the entire school family meets together to listen to God's voice and to submit to the authority of His Word. It is certainly less than best when the student chapel committee furnishes the principal leadership in this area. The president himself should supervise the chapel program since it contributes so much to the spiritual tone of the campus. Since the president seldom meets many students in the classroom,

his chapel contact, presiding and speaking, is all-important.

Students want the president to be more than an absentee fund-raiser or office-bound administrator. So does God! They need and want him to be their father-pastor-elder. A well-balanced diet of exposition, missions, contemporary concerns, and student participation should be planned and executed by the administration. A vigorous, biblical chapel program will do a lot to lighten the load of the counselling office, too!

Every encouragement needs to be given to student participation and growth in regular personal Bible study, prayer, and witness. No Christian ever grows beyond these basics, and the Christian school can play a strategic part in forming these habits of holiness in its students. Too, guidance and encouragement need to be given that will assure regular attendance and involvement in a local church.

It is also important to break down the dichotomy between sacred and secular. Standards are the same whether heard in chapel or practiced in sports, socials, the dorms or the dining room. Wholesome campus life will be built on the principle that "whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).

Christian schools, like Christian homes, need some "house rules." Admittedly, many such rules are not biblical absolutes (some are!), but they should all be based on biblical principles and examples. Such rules are needed simply because not many students are mature at that stage of life. Rules in themselves do not constitute legalism, nor need they hinder the normal development of students. Just the opposite. No Christian, however old in years or in the Lord, ever outgrows his need for guidance from other Christians (Heb. 13:7, 17). Of course rules can stifle, but lack of them can sidetrack the immature. Proper use of them will encourage maturity.

There are few greater privileges than training the next generation of Christians. It is not only a privilege; it is a mandate. "And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2). There is hardly a more strategic place where this is done than in a Christian school.

To go through the motions of Christian education that is only mildly Christian is an insult to God. To offer Him less than the best disgraces His name. If we may assume that His attitude toward such ritual and compromise is the same today as it was in Malachi's day, then we know how He feels about such institutions. He would rather see them shut their doors and go out of business (Mal. 1:10).

That's a serious threat.

But Christian education is a serious business.



SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT YOUR CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Is the board knowledgeable about the school's doctrine, directions and goals?

Are board members known as spiritually mature leaders?

Is the board careful and wise in directing the use of God's money?

How deep are the President's Christian convictions?

Does the President use Scripture to support his positions?

Does the President encourage advice from others?

Does the President know how to sift good from bad advice?

Are the faculty committed to God's will for their own lives?

Are the faculty spiritually mature Christians?

Do the faculty comprehend the deep things of the Bible?

Do the teachers wholeheartedly agree with the doctrinal position of the school?

Are the teachers good examples of Christian leadership?

Are secular subjects taught in the light of biblical revelation?

How do you rate the chapel program?

Are the school's Christian standards enforced consistently?

Are those standards reflected in sports and extra-curricular activities?