

The
Martin - Thomas
Debate

*The Privately Funded Entity
to Preach the Gospel
Issue*

January 20-27, 2005

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This written debate between Don Martin of Denver, Colorado and Mike Thomas of Owensboro, Kentucky was accomplished on the Bible Matters list with approval of the list owners.

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Date: **January 20, 2005**

Subj: **“Second Annual Truth Magazine Lectures”**

Don Martin to the list:

I just read the January 6, 2005 issue of Truth Magazine and noticed that they have started advertising and promoting their "Second Annual Truth Magazine Lectures" (pg. 27).

They have some good subjects scheduled and, in some cases, preachers assigned. For instance, "Is the Bible Relevant to the Modern World?" and "'Oh How I Love Thy Law.'" R. J. Stevens is being brought in to lead in songs of worship.

Truth Magazine and the Guardian of Truth Foundation obviously migrated last year to their "new" church/human institution status. With this second lectureship, they are gaining more speed in their human institution playing church campaign. Since the gospel in modern application and God's laws are being considered in this second lectureship, I wonder if the speakers are going to address the fact that in the First Century climate, Christians worked collectively through the local church (treasury, oversight, etc.) in preaching the gospel and in edification (cp. I Tim. 3: 15). There were no human boards, consisting of a president and treasury, board of directors, etc. in which Christians collectively functioned in executing the work of preaching. They were content on each local church having oversight that consisted of elders and a treasury into which each contributed on every Lord's Day (Acts 14: 23, I Cor. 16: 1, 2).

It seems that some brethren are just not satisfied in the simple arrangement put in place by God. I suppose such an arrangement just does not offer the circumstance for the ambitious and progressive, they must have their privately supported missionary societies that offer positions and clique associations and benefits.

Those who warned years ago that we were not addressing and presenting the whole counsel relative to how the Lord's work is to collectively be done either were not persistent enough, too few in number, or their warning just was not heeded. Some then and now simply teach that the local church is the only entity to preach the gospel with the Lord's money. I submitted then and now that the local church is the only entity through which Christians are to collectively preach the gospel (I Tim. 3: 15). Human institutions preaching the gospel, albeit privately supported, are not only an aberrant arrangement, but they also promote all manner of politics and clique formation.

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I have had a number of brethren through the years who defended privately supported institutions doing the work of the local church to evince their love for these entities in both practice and speech. "Such privately supported institutions can do a better job preaching the gospel with the oversight of their president, board of directors, and treasury than the local church can do," I have been told. Alas, it is evident that some love their privately supported human institutions more than they love the church.

When Florida College has been questioned as to their annual lectureship, their reply has been: "We are a privately funded school and we offer these lectureships not as worship, but as extended education." Truth Magazine and the Guardian of Truth Foundation do not even attempt to hide behind the school claim, they constitute a human institution doing the work that God assigned to the local church.

Cordially,
Don Martin

Date: **January 20, 2005**

Subj: **"Re: Second Annual Truth Magazine Lectures"**

To the list:

I offer this response as a rebuttal to the idea that it is a sin for individual Christians to organize and conduct a lectureship to teach the gospel. While I appreciate brother Martin's regular contributions, I must respectfully disagree with his assertion that the brethren at FC and Truth Magazine have sinned in having lectureships. I trust that this is not a violation of the rules for Bible Matters.

There are at least two significant objections to such arrangements:

- (1) That the first Christians worked collectively through the local church treasury and oversight.
- (2) That the local church is the only entity through which Christians can preach the gospel.

When I first read that, I thought of Aquila and Priscilla in their work as a couple, especially at Ephesus (Acts 18:24-26). Were they working through the treasury and oversight of the church at Ephesus in instructing Apollos? No, "they" took him aside and taught him God's will, without the aid or intervention of the the church that met in their house (1 Cor. 16:19).

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The same is true today. When my wife and I teach our neighbors, friends or family, we are doing this as individuals -- separate and apart from the local church. The only time we would be violating the church's treasury or oversight is when we used local churches to fund and oversee our efforts (ie, weekend retreats, seminars, vacations, etc.). But as long as we meet our responsibilities as individuals, and not burden the church with them (1 Tim. 5:16), we are teaching the gospel the way God intends (1 Pet. 3:15).

If this is true for individual couples, why would it not also be true for individual brethren? Why is it okay for couples to teach their neighbors and children (apart from the efforts of the local church), and not okay for brethren in other parts of the country to come together to do so? They are still working as individuals in both cases and are not violating God's limitations on the local church. The only time arrangements as the FC and Truth Lectureships would be sinful is when they used churches to fund and oversee their efforts. THEN they would be going beyond what God has given the local church to do. But by paying for and overseeing their own efforts, they are no different than Aquila and Priscilla in teaching the gospel.

If the local church is the only medium we can work through as brethren, where is the authority for Bible Matters and every other online effort to teach the gospel? Are we not working together as brethren to uphold and promote the gospel? Of course we are. And yet, I don't know of any church that is funding and overseeing our efforts -- which is the way it should be! The only time this medium would violate God's will for the church is when we used local churches to fund and oversee our efforts. But as long as we are keeping things in the individual realm, we are doing what we're supposed to be doing as brethren, whether it be 2,3 or 300 of us working together.

brotherly,

Mike Thomas
Owensboro, KY

Date: **January 20, 2005**

Subj: **"Response To My Second Annual Lectureship Post"**

Don Martin to the list:

I am sure most of you have read my article titled, "Second Annual Truth Magazine Lectures" that appeared yesterday on this list. I am also confident that you have read a reply post by Mike Thomas. If you have not read Mike's good reply, please do so. Mike is a good man and I commend his conviction.

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I have contacted the list owner as to setting up an exchange on list between Mike Thomas and me on the matter of a privately funded institution made up of brethren that is designed to preach the gospel. I have also contacted Mike regarding our on list exchange.

I look forward to the exchange and encourage all of you to respectfully consider what Mike and I will say, giving both views your attention and study. The privately supported society matter is crying for attention and discussion. The problem is that most of the guys who believe in it will not polemically defend it. I appreciate Mike Thomas for speaking out and look forward to the exchange, pursuant to list rules.

Cordially,
Don Martin

Date: **January 21, 2005**

Subj: **“Don Martin’s First Rebuttal Post to Mike Thomas (the privately funded entity to preach the gospel issue)”**

Don Martin to Mike Thomas and the list:

I thank the list owners for granting permission for Mike Thomas and me to have an exchange on whether or not it is scriptural for brethren to pool their resources in forming such an organization as the Guardian of Truth Foundation and through this entity, having a president, board of directors, and treasury, preach the gospel. Mike responded to my original post titled, "The Second Annual Truth Magazine Lectures" and took issue with my objections to brethren thus working through a human organization to do the work God has assigned to his organization, the local church (cp. I Tim. 3:15). According to list rules relative to challenge, we each shall have up to ten replying posts, one each per day. I shall expend my reply post number one by examining some of Mike's comments and objections.

Anterior to this, I want to sincerely thank Mike Thomas for having the courage of his convictions to express in writing his opposition to my post and his belief that brethren may form such an institution and collectively work for the dissimilation of the gospel. The primary promoters of the Guardian of Truth Foundation entity concept have refused to address the issue. This is strange because when they go after one or ones whom they believe are errorists, they chide them for their lack of willingness to defend their teaching and practices. When alleged errorists charge that the Guardian of Truth Foundation or Truth Magazine group are watch dogs, divisive, and in general, trouble-makers, the G. O. T. F. group expose their cowardice. Yet, the G.O.T. F. men are now doing precisely the same thing!

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Thus, it is refreshing to find in Mike Thomas a man of courage and willingness to speak out on this issue. I sure wish I could say the same about such men as Mike Willis and Ron Halbrook. I shall attempt to be succinct in my posts (this one will probably be the longest).

Mike Thomas wrote in his rebuttal post:

"I offer this response as a rebuttal to the idea that it is a sin for individual Christians to organize and conduct a lectureship to teach the gospel. While I appreciate brother Martin's regular contributions, I must respectfully disagree with his assertion that the brethren at Florida College and Truth Magazine have sinned in having lectureships. I trust that this is not a violation of the rules for Bible Matters."

Don answers:

The thrust of my post pertained to brethren forming such an organization as the Guardian of Truth Foundation through which they collectively preach the gospel. Here is what I wrote:

"Truth Magazine and the Guardian of Truth Foundation obviously migrated last year to their 'new' church/human institution status. With this second lectureship, they are gaining more speed in their human institution playing church campaign."

Here is what I said in regards to Florida College:

"When Florida College has been questioned as to their annual lectureship, their reply has been: 'We are a privately funded school and we offer these lectureships not as worship, but as extended education.' Truth Magazine and the Guardian of Truth Foundation do not even attempt to hide behind the school claim, they constitute a human institution doing the work that God assigned to the local church."

Mike continued:

There are at least two significant objections to such arrangements:

(1) That the first Christians worked collectively through the local church treasury and oversight.

(2) That the local church is the only entity through which Christians can preach the gospel.

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When I first read that, I thought of Aquila and Priscilla in their work as a couple, especially at Ephesus (Acts 18:24-26). Were they working through the treasury and oversight of the church at Ephesus in instructing Apollos? No, "they" took him aside and taught him God's will, without the aid or intervention of the the church that met in their house (1 Cor. 16:19).

The same is true today. When my wife and I teach our neighbors, friends or family, we are doing this as individuals -- separate and apart from the local church. The only time we would be violating the church's treasury or oversight is when we used local churches to fund and oversee our efforts (ie, weekend retreats, seminars, vacations, etc.). But as long as we meet our responsibilities as individuals, and not burden the church with them (1 Tim. 5:16), we are teaching the gospel the way God intends (1 Pet. 3:15).

Don responds:

Let us understand what the issue is not: I am not opposed to a single Christian teaching the gospel to others (Acts 8: 5ff.). I am not addressing two Christians working in concert to teach others (cp. Acts 18: 24-28). This is not the issue and must not be confused as being the issue. I agree with Mike that the scriptures recognize and exemplify concurrent action involving individuals that is really individual in nature (case Aquila and Priscilla).

Here is the issue: Brethren pooling their resources in forming a human institution (president, board of directors, etc.), having its own treasury in which they collectively work, an entity that has the express purpose of preaching the gospel to the lost and edifying the saved.

Mike, we agree regarding such a scenario as Aquila and Priscilla. However, I see not a scintilla of authority for an Aquila and Priscilla today forming an institution such as the Guardian of Truth Foundation and collectively preaching the gospel. Again, this is the issue. Some say that Christians thus functioning in a human organization such as the G. O. T. F. are doing the same thing as Aquila and Priscilla. When brethren thus organize and function, they are performing a collective work (the treasury of the institution would simply serve to prove this, see I Timothy 5: 16).

Mike asked:

"If this is true for individual couples, why would it not also be true for individual brethren? Why is it okay for couples to teach their neighbors and children (apart from the efforts of the local church), and not okay for brethren in other parts of the country to come together to do so?"

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Don answers:

Mike, you are comparing apples and oranges.

Mike augmented his above statement with the following:

"They are still working as individuals in both cases and are not violating God's limitations on the local church. The only time arrangements as the FC and Truth Lectureships would be sinful is when they used churches to fund and oversee their efforts. THEN they would be going beyond what God has given the local church to do. But by paying for and overseeing their own efforts, they are no different than Aquila and Priscilla in teaching the gospel."

Don comments:

Mike, you are an intelligent man and you surely can see the difference in what Aquila and Priscilla did and in what brethren who formed and are working through the Guardian of Truth Foundation and Truth Magazine are doing. Again, we are talking about apples and oranges.

Mike probed:

"If the local church is the only medium we can work through as brethren, where is the authority for Bible Matters and every other online effort to teach the gospel? Are we not working together as brethren to uphold and promote the gospel? Of course we are. And yet, I don't know of any church that is funding and overseeing our efforts -- which is the way it should be!

The only time this medium would violate God's will for the church is when we used local churches to fund and oversee our efforts. But as long as we are keeping things in the individual realm, we are doing what we're supposed to be doing as brethren, whether it be 2,3 or 300 of us working together.

Don concludes his first rebuttal:

Mike, Bible Matters and the Guardian of Truth Foundation are vastly different in the most significant and primary ways. Bible Matters does not have a general treasury, president, board of directors and in the mode of entity posture declare its function as preaching the gospel. As I understand Bible Matters, it is simply an Internet list that provides brethren the opportunity to share the fruits of their labor on an individual plane, similar to the circumstance of Aquila and Priscilla. If Bible Matters organized itself after the similitude of the Guardian of Truth Foundation, I would avoid it.

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I am not as old as some of our extant preachers who fought the institutional issue of the forties and fifties (I was active beginning in the early sixties). However, some did not go far enough in their teaching and such simplistic teaching is producing its consequences today. It is not just the matter of the treasury of local churches being involved in the matter of human institutions preaching the gospel, such entities thus functioning have no authority. The scriptures provide for a circumstance in which Christians execute true collective action (elders to oversee, treasury, etc.), and that organization is the local church (I Tim. 3: 15, cp. 5: 16). There is no authority for brethren creating another organization with its own structure through which to collectively preach the gospel.

Questions for Mike Thomas:

1. Do you really see no essential difference between what Aquila and Priscilla did in Acts 18 in teaching Apollos and in the Guardian of Truth Foundation?
2. Do you still maintain that in all important and elementary ways, the Guardian of Truth Foundation and Bible Matters are parallel and brethren functioning in the G. O. T. F. and brethren who post on Bible Matters are doing precisely the same thing and in the same circumstance?
3. Would it be scripturally allowable for brethren to form a missionary society, having its president, board of directors and treasury through which to preach the gospel, support preachers, and send out preachers, with the proviso that this "Reach the Lost Foundation" (R. T. L. F.) did not solicit or accept monies from churches (just individuals)?

Thank you, Mike and the readers, for considering this post. I invite all to now consider Mike's reply post.

Cordially,
Don Martin

Date: **January 21, 2005**

Subj: **"Response to Lectures (1.1)"**

To Don Martin and the list:

I too want to thank the moderators of Bible Matters (BM) for this opportunity to discuss this matter. It is apparent that this is a matter that is becoming a problem for some brethren. And,

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like brother Martin, I share the same respect and appreciation for him as he has expressed for me. We have never met in person, but we have come to know one another through the years via email and over BM. He has always been kind to me and I am quite confident he is capable of defending this position as well as anyone who holds it.

I will also say up front that I do not know the history of the efforts made to discuss this matter publicly with the men of the Guardian of Truth Foundation (GOTF), nor do I need to know to make my own response. I'd like to distance myself from the accusation that they are cowards and unwilling to defend their position, as postulated in Don's post. I don't know all the men associated with the GOTF, but those I do know are men of good character and courage. I'd like to, therefore, just focus on the issue at hand and not speculate about the motives of those who may or may not discuss this matter publicly.

My position remains the same as I stated yesterday: individual Christians can and should teach the gospel (1 Pet. 3:15), without violating the limitations God has placed on the church (limited treasury and oversight of elders). I still maintain that Aquila and Priscilla are an example of this principle. It matters not how many saints are involved in the teaching, nor how they are organized – as long as they do not involve the church in their individual efforts. The Lord has confined the church in its work in evangelism by giving us only one example of supporting gospel preachers: directly and not through a sponsoring church or missionary society (Phil. 4:15-16). Where has He made such restrictions among individual saints? Where has He limited or confined our effort as individual Christians? As long as we remain in the truth of the gospel (2 John 9-10), where has God limited our effort in preaching it?

It is a mistake to think that the church must be the only organization supporting the gospel to maintain its integrity as the pillar and ground of the truth. First of all, is the church the pillar of the truth because of its support of preachers? Or is it the pillar of truth for what it represents before God: the embodiment of His will (Eph. 3:10-11)? I would suggest to you that even if every gospel preacher were removed from the face of the earth, the church would still be the pillar and ground of the truth because it is the body of Christ—the intended purpose of creation (Eph. 1:9-10). And yet, we are told that the church must support gospel preachers to maintain its role as the pillar of the truth. And if evangelists are supported through any other organization, the church is not given its proper place in God's plan. If that were true, no individual Christian could do any teaching without the use of a local church. If God's pattern for evangelism is that the church be the only organization for Christians to work through, then that is the pattern and any violation of it would be a sin. Thus, individual efforts apart from the church would be a method other than the use of the organization of the church, and contrary to God's will. But we know He permits methods of evangelism other than the collective effort of the church because He tells us to teach our neighbors and children. Does the church cease to be the pillar of truth when we as parents teach our children or when we teach our neighbors? Why then would it

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cease to be the pillar when organizations like the GOTF or FC teach it?

Secondly, the home is an organization—designed by God! He instituted it in the garden and has maintained its nature and structure since then. And yet, none of us has an issue with a family doing its part to teach the gospel. No one thinks the home is usurping the church's role in preaching the gospel, even if that family should support a preacher directly. What if my family and I were able to afford to host our own lectureship, would we be guilty of working outside of the organization of the church? If so, what scripture would we be violating? Where has God limited the efforts of individuals in preaching the gospel, as long as they teach the truth?

Don asked three questions:

“Do you really see no essential difference between what Aquila and Priscilla did in Acts 18 in teaching Apollos and in the Guardian of Truth Foundation?”

No, I do not. Both cases are examples of individual Christians doing their part to preach the gospel. The number of brethren involved in a spiritual task does not nullify the fact that they are still acting as individuals, separate and apart from the church (Matt. 18:16).

“Do you still maintain that in all important and elementary ways, the Guardian of Truth Foundation and Bible Matters are parallel and brethren functioning in the G. O. T. F. and brethren who post on Bible Matters are doing precisely the same thing and in the same circumstance?”

Yes, I do see these efforts as parallel in terms of individual action versus the action of the church. If it is okay for 2 Christians to teach the truth, apart from a local church, it is okay for 200 brethren to do so. How they are organized does not matter as long as they do not violate God's limitations of the church. BM is an organization of brethren under the authority and supervision of its moderators, and we all agreed to abide by its rules in becoming members. If we can work together as brethren, in a collective manner, apart from the church, in teaching the truth on BM, we can also work together as brethren, in collective manner, apart from the church, in teaching the truth at a lectureship.

“Would it be scripturally allowable for brethren to form a missionary society, having its president, board of directors and treasury through which to preach the gospel, support preachers, and send out preachers, with the proviso that this "Reach the Lost Foundation" (R. T. L. F.) did not solicit or accept monies from churches (just individuals)?”

Yes, if it were possible for a missionary society (MS) to function without interfering with the work of local churches. But as of yet, there is no such thing, and, to my knowledge, there never

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has been. It is like asking if a government could have leaders without taxing the people. I suppose it is possible for leaders to pay their own way, but it never has nor ever will happen. To suggest that a MS could exist without interfering with the role of local churches is possible, but it will never happen. Preachers supported through a MS are sent to work with other churches, for the most part, and have always relied on the support of local churches to maintain the MS. To compare this to the efforts of the GOTF and FC lectureships is not plausible. Neither is designed to infiltrate the work of local churches and neither is dependant on local churches for its existence. These are business operated by Christians who have made a profit, and are able and willing to host the preaching of the gospel. Should they ever seek the role of assigning preachers to churches or require the sponsorship of churches to continue their efforts, then I would be first in line to oppose them. For in doing so, they would be violating the role of the church and no longer acting as individuals.

To Don, I ask:

- (1) Have Christians violated God's pattern for the church as the pillar and ground of the truth in forming a business or institution to sell a magazine or book that teaches the gospel?
- (2) When brethren "pool" their resources together to form institutions like the GOTF and FC, are they acting as individuals or are they performing brotherhood projects?
- (3) Is it a sin to rejoice in the spread of the gospel, even when it is not taught by the church?

Brotherly,
Mike Thomas

Date: **January 22, 2005**

Subj: **"Don Martin's Second Rebuttal Post to Mike Thomas (The Privately Funded Entity to Preach the Gospel Issue)"**

Don Martin's second rebuttal post to Mike Thomas and the list (the privately funded entity to preach the gospel issue):

I am not been disappointed regarding the good job Mike is doing in defending the privately supported (not supported out of church treasuries) society that has been formed by brethren that has full organization structure (president, board of directors, treasury, etc.), through which these brethren collectively preach the gospel. Mike and I disagree regarding this issue and we both trust that this exchange will provide all a study opportunity to see both sides of this growing

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issue. At the end of Mike's rebuttal, he asked me three good questions, which I shall address toward the end of this reply. I appreciate Mike being upfront and answering the questions that I posed to him. I shall make comments on Mike's statements and arguments, consider Mike's answers to my questions, and then pose additional questions to Mike.

First, this whole issue of privately supported societies formed by brethren to preach the gospel is a simple issue. I say it is simple because the scriptures set forth only one such organization through and in which brethren collectively function, the local church. The local church is the ".pillar and ground of the truth" (I Tim. 3: 15). The local churches are seen sending out men to preach and supporting those who heralded the truth (Phili. 4: 15, 16). Christians banded themselves together in this entity (local church) to contribute in the treasury and to be overseen by God appointed elders (I Cor. 16: 1, 2, Acts 14: 23, Heb. 13: 7, 17). Also, the scriptures clearly distinguish between individual and collective action (I Tim. 5: 16). Hence, we have authority for the local church providing the organizational structure through which Christians collectively work.

However, there is no authority for Christians thus banding themselves into a human organization having a board of directors (not God appointed elders), a president, and its own treasury to do the work God has assigned to his organization, the local church. Thus, the privately supported missionary society issue is first one of authority and there is no Bible authority for Christians forming any organization such as being discussed to do the work of the local church. Brethren during the forties and fifties who taught that the problem with human organizations was simply the use of church treasuries did not go far enough. There simply is not authority for such human institutions doing the work of God's collectivity, the local church.

Mike wrote:

"I'd like to distance myself from the accusation that they are cowards and unwilling to defend their position, as postulated in Don's post. I don't know all the men associated with the GOTF, but those I do know are men of good character and courage. I'd like to, therefore, just focus on the issue at hand and not speculate about the motives of those who may or may not discuss this matter publicly."

Don comments:

I can certainly appreciate Mike's position and statement. However, there are a number of us who know first hand the utter refusal of Mike Willis, for an example, to defend his human institution. All of this is well documented. Mike and others are pushing their human institution, knowing full well that such is dividing brethren. The Guardian of Truth Foundation first lectureship (gospel meeting) evidenced more clearly the intent to make this institution an entity

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designed to do the work of the local church.

Mike wrote:

"My position remains the same as I stated yesterday: individual Christians can and should teach the gospel (1 Pet. 2:15), without violating the limitations God has placed on the church (limited treasury and oversight of elders)."

Don replies:

I average about twenty exchanges or debates each year and always the attendant and paramount challenge is to establish and keep in focus the real issue. Mike and I have agreed relative to individual and even concurrent individual action. I have no problem with the circumstance and example of Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18: 24-28). In order for the supporters of such organizations as the Guardian of Truth Foundation to successfully and dialectically use Aquila and Priscilla, they must find not individual or even concurrent individual action, as is the case with this couple, but an organization such as the Guardian of Truth Foundation. Instead of the simple circumstance of a couple teaching another the gospel, they need to come up with, let's say, the Reach The Lost Foundation, a society having a president, board of directors, treasury, etc. and have Aquila and Priscilla collectively working through this entity. This is the real issue! I appreciate and applaud Mike not wanting the church treasury used to support human missionary societies (he has book, chapter, and verse for this objection), but Mike does not go far enough and simply insist on God's simple arrangement of the local church being the organization with its overseeing elders in which Christians pool their resources and collectively preach the gospel.

Mike wrote:

"Where has He limited or confined our effort as individual Christians? As long as we remain in the truth of the gospel (2 John 9-10), where has God limited our effort in preaching it?"

Don responds:

Again, my friend Mike misses the real issue. This discussion is not about individual action, but rather Christians forming an institution other than the local church through which to collectively preach the gospel.

One element of this privately supported missionary society issue that has for some time really alarmed me, in addition to the fact that such is without Bible authority, is the reasoning that Mike and the promoters of such institutions are using. They are telling us that a Christian can

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be a part of let's say, The Reach The Lost Foundation, again, having all the vestiges and requirements of a fully formed entity, even tax exempted, and still perform truly individual action. How, I ask you, can one of these men successfully meet in polemic discussion one who is promoting institutionalism (they argue that the Christian is still performing individual action through such an institution)? Both, I say kindly, climates of argumentation and defense are seriously flawed.

Mike stated in his rebuttal:

"And yet, we are told that the church must support gospel preachers to maintain its role as the pillar of the truth. And if evangelists are supported through any other organization, the church is not given its proper place in God's plan. If that were true, no individual Christian could do any teaching without the use of a local church. If God's pattern for evangelism is that the church be the only organization for Christians to work through, then that is the pattern and any violation of it would be a sin. Thus, individual efforts apart from the church would be a method other than the use of the organization of the church, and contrary to God's will."

Don comments:

Again, Mike does as all defenders of such societies as the Guardian of Truth Foundation, he mixes apples and oranges, draws extreme conclusions, and then assigns these fallacious deductions to those opposed to none-church supported institutionalism. Please ponder Mike's above statement:

"If that were true, no individual Christian could do any teaching without the use of a local church."

Aquila and Priscilla did, regarding this we are agreed. Some are growing so dependent on the institutional mentality that they believe simple teaching such as we have noticed about individual action and collective action and, moreover, the local church providing the only circumstance of collective action (structure, treasury, oversight, etc.) just cannot be. The First Century Christians functioned very well without such societies as the Guardian of Truth Foundation. In fact, through collective action involving the local churches and individual action, the gospel phenomenally spread such as never subsequently duplicated. When will we learn to simply rely on God's plan and cease creating and injecting our way ideas?

Mike offered a standard argument:

"Secondly, the home is an organization-designed by God! He instituted it in the garden and has maintained its nature and structure since then. And yet, none of us has an issue with a family

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doing its part to teach the gospel. No one thinks the home is usurping the church's role in preaching the gospel, even if that family should support a preacher directly. What if my family and I were able to afford to host our own lectureship, would we be guilty of working outside of the organization of the church? If so, what scripture would we be violating? Where has God limited the efforts of individuals in preaching the gospel, as long as they teach the truth?

Don answers:

A father, mother, and children who are Christians and attempting to reach the lost is not tantamount to the Guardian of Truth Foundation or our "Reach The Lost Foundation." On the other hand, if the family decided they wanted to organize into an entity, having its own president, board of directors, treasury, etc. in order to serve for Christians to collectively preach the gospel, then such would be tantamount to the matter that I am opposing.

Mike, can you see the difference and what the real issue is?

I have asked the above question of various ones and they reply, "There is no difference." A simple retort would be, "Let them try and claim a contribution to a father or even father, mother, and children concurrently preaching the gospel and see what IRS tells them." They could claim a contribution to the "Reach the Lost Foundation" or the Guardian of Truth Foundation because IRS recognizes the Guardian of Truth Foundation as an entity and not just disjointed or concurrent individual action. Simple enough, isn't it?

I asked Mike three questions and Mike stepped up to the plate and answered them. I shall insert them below, Mike's answers, and then briefly comments,

Questions one:

"Do you really see no essential difference between what Aquila and Priscilla did in Acts 18 in teaching Apollos and in the Guardian of Truth Foundation?"

Mike's answer: "No, I do not. Both cases are examples of individual Christians doing their part to preach the gospel. The number of brethren involved in a spiritual task does not nullify the fact that they are still acting as individuals, separate and apart from the church (Matt. 18:16)."

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Don's comment: Since I view Mike as honest, I must accept the fact that he sees no essential difference between what Aquila and Priscilla did in Acts 18 in teaching Apollos and in the Guardian of Truth Foundation. I do not know why he cannot see a difference because there certainly is a serious difference.

Question two:

"Do you still maintain that in all important and elementary ways, the Guardian of Truth Foundation and Bible Matters are parallel and brethren functioning in the G. O. T. F. and brethren who post on Bible Matters are doing precisely the same thing and in the same circumstance?"

Mike's answer:

"Yes, I do see these efforts as parallel in terms of individual action versus the action of the church. If it is okay for 2 Christians to teach the truth, apart from a local church, it is okay for 200 brethren to do so. How they are organized does not matter as long as they do not violate God's limitations of the church. BM is an organization of brethren under the authority and supervision of its moderators, and we all agreed to abide by its rules in becoming members. If we can work together as brethren, in a collective manner, apart from the church, in teaching the truth on BM, we can also work together as brethren, in collective manner, apart from the church, in teaching the truth at a lectureship."

Don's comment:

Again, Mike has been honest and I appreciate this. However, his honesty does not make a wrong answer right.

Question three:

"Would it be scripturally allowable for brethren to form a missionary society, having its president, board of directors and treasury through which to preach the gospel, support preachers, and send out preachers, with the proviso that this "Reach the Lost Foundation" (R. T. L. F.) did not solicit or accept monies from churches (just individuals)?"

Mike's answer:

"Yes, if it were possible for a missionary society (MS) to function without interfering with the work of local churches. But as of yet, there is no such thing, and, to my knowledge, there never has been. It is like asking if a government could have leaders without taxing the people. I

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suppose it is possible for leaders to pay their own way, but it never has nor ever will happen. To suggest that a MS could exist without interfering with the role of local churches is possible, but it will never happen. Preachers supported through a MS are sent to work with other churches, for the most part, and have always relied on the support of local churches to maintain the MS. To compare this to the efforts of the GOTF and FC lectureships is not plausible. Neither is designed to infiltrate the work of local churches and neither is dependant on local churches for its existence. These are business operated by Christians who have made a profit, and are able and willing to host the preaching of the gospel. Should they ever seek the role of assigning preachers to churches or require the sponsorship of churches to continue their efforts, then I would be first in line to oppose them. For in doing so, they would be violating the role of the church and no longer acting as individuals."

Don's comment:

I agree with Mike regarding privately funded missionary societies interfering with local churches. However, unlike Mike, I believe God has provided his one and only missionary society, if you will, when he supplied the local church circumstance through which Christians collectively work in preaching the gospel and edifying the saved. Again, Mike confuses and combines different particularity in his answer.

I shall now answer Mike's three questions posed to me.

Question one:

"Have Christians violated God's pattern for the church as the pillar and ground of the truth in forming a business or institution to sell a magazine or book that teaches the gospel?"

My answer:

This is a splendid question and helps to further illustrate and qualify this issue of privately supported institutionalism. The simple answer is, not necessarily. Christians engaging in a profit business (printing and selling religious books) does not necessarily constitute the Guardian of Truth Foundation that has the stated purpose of not just a business venture, but an institutional effort to preach the gospel.

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Question two:

"When brethren 'pool' their resources together to form institutions like the GOTF and FC, are they acting as individuals or are they performing brotherhood projects?"

My answer:

I personally do not see the Guardian of Truth Foundation and Florida College as necessarily parallel (I do have problems, though, with Florida College acting as a seminary for churches of Christ). I believe Christians can and may be gainfully employed in an education pursuit that involves academic studies of the Bible as literature. I also believe that there can be a circumstance in which said educational institution offers special courses or activities that involve Bible study of a public nature. However, the Guardian of Truth Foundation has stated that they intend to preach the gospel to the lost. Those who thus function within the confines of this institution are not performing individual action or concurrent individual action, but rather institutional action.

Question three:

"Is it a sin to rejoice in the spread of the gospel, even when it is not taught by the church?"

My answer:

We rejoice when men like Philip preach the gospel and when modern day Aquila and Priscillas preach the gospel. We are caused to rejoice when men and women obey the gospel as a result of the church preaching the gospel. However, I personally do not and cannot rejoice when brethren pool their resources to form a human institution, with its human oversight, and treasury and through that arrangement, collectively preach the gospel. Such is an aberrant arrangement, one without the authority of God's word.

My three questions for Mike to answer in his next rebuttal:

Question one: Does having book, chapter, and verse for all we teach and practice really matter? If so, why does it not matter that we simply follow the example and teaching of the New Testament relative to how God executes his work that involves collective and corporate action? In this vein, do you believe in "brotherhood works" or "brotherhood activation"?

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Question two: Can the gospel be successfully and adequately preached today by God's institution, the local church, with its oversight and treasury or must we have human institutions such as the Guardian of Truth Foundation?

Question three: If an institution such as the Guardian of Truth Foundation may offer lectureships (gospel meetings) for the purpose of worship, edifying the saved, and reaching the lost with the gospel, is there any limit to what they may do in their worship services? Since it is a fact that they have preaching and public prayer, may they offer the Lord's Supper on the Lord's Day, and if not, why not? Furthermore, are Christians thus functioning in such an institution fulfilling their duty to give into the treasury by contributing to the institution on the Lord's Day?

I close by again thanking Mike for his fine spirit of cordiality. I ask you to prayerfully consider Mike's rebuttal.

Cordially,
Don Martin

Date: **January 22, 2005**

Subj: **"Response to Lectures (2)"**

Fellow listers:

I appreciate the interest many of you have shown in studying this controversy. It's good to know there are a host of brethren who sincerely care about walking in the faith. I also appreciate Don Martin for the kindness and patience he has shown me thus far in our exchange. It has been a pleasant yet challenging task to discuss this issue with him.

Don and I have agreed to omit an exchange tomorrow (Sunday) and will resume our posts to Bible Matters on Monday.

I believe it is safe to say that Don believes there are three types of action we are capable of taking as Christians in preaching the gospel: church, individually or as a human institution. He is in agreement with the first two, but is convinced the third is unscriptural. He said of the GOTF, "Those who thus function within the confines of this institution are not performing individual action or concurrent individual action, but rather institutional action..." Hence three possible realms: the church, individual or concurrent individual action, and institutional action. It is my understanding, however, that there are only two types of action we can take in spiritual

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matter: as the church or as individuals.

Any effort outside of the church is an individual effort, no matter how many saints are involved or how they are arranged (collectively or in an institution). My scriptural proof of this is seen in the instructions given to saints regarding the care of widows (1 Tim. 5:16). The church is not to meet the responsibility of the individuals, of which we all agree. However, the Lord has not stated specifically how the individual is to meet those needs, in terms of organization. The individuals can care for their widow individually or through an organization, but in both cases they are still acting separate and apart from the church. The church has its realm of responsibilities and the individual has his. As long as the individual does not violate the realm of the church in meeting his own responsibilities, he may do his work in any lawful method deemed wise and expedient.

An everyday example of these two realms can be seen in our national government. There are two sectors when it comes to occupations in the United States: private and public. You either work for the government or you do not. If you do not, you are in the private sector, and it matters not how you are arranged – you’re still in the private realm. A man who mows lawns for a living may not work in the same way Sam Walton did in starting his own company, but both men made their living in the private sector. Their arrangement does not change the fact that neither worked for the government.

In like manner, when Christians form an organization to meet their responsibilities to teach the gospel (1 Pet. 3:15) or care for the needy (1 Tim. 5:8), they are still acting in the realm outside of the church. There is no third realm or sector distinguished by God. He did not say caring for the needy was the responsibility of both the individual and the institutions. He said it was the job of Christians, so that the church might not be burdened. Two choices: the individual or the church. Any apart from the church is in the individual realm. Any effort apart from the individual, in preaching the gospel or in caring for the needy, is in the church.

If it is true, as Don says, that God’s will does not permit Christians to form “an institution other than the local church through which to collectively preach the gospel”, he is saying God has limited our efforts in the personal realm when it comes to meeting our responsibilities. And, again, I ask for scripture showing this limitation. We all agree that God has limited the church’s efforts in preaching the gospel (i.e., no missionary societies, sponsoring church, etc.). But where has He limited what we can do in the individual realm (as long as it is moral and in keeping with the gospel)? If you say, “the local church is the only organization designed by God for Christians to pool their resources together to preach the gospel”, you are placing a limit on what can be done individually. I’d like to see where the scriptures teach this.

When the Lord told individual Christians to care for their needy or to be ready to teach others,

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He never limited how they are to be organized to do this. A family may decide to care for their widow at home or they may decide it more prudent to place her in an institution, but in either case they are caring for their widow, separate and apart from the church. Likewise, a Christian may decide to teach the gospel from door to door or he may work with other Christians in publishing a magazine, but in either case he is working in the individual realm, separate and apart from the church. To say Christians cannot preach the gospel through an organization is the same as saying Christians cannot care for their loved ones through an institution. BUT WHERE HAS GOD PLACED THESE LIMITATIONS ON US? Where has He said we cannot use institutions to meet our responsibilities in the individual realm? Where has He said we cannot have organizations to do our duty as individual Christians?

I have always understood Bible authority to be defined by things that are either general or specific. In short, if God has specified, we cannot generalize (1 Sam. 15:18-23). And if God generalizes, we cannot specify (Rom. 14:2-5). God has specified the kind of work the church can do and in what manner (eldership, limited benevolence, direct support of preachers, etc.). He has not, however, specified how we meet these responsibilities individually, in terms of arrangement and organization. Instead, He has given us the general commands to care for our family, help fellow saints and to be ready to preach to the lost. Some of you will meet all of these duties by yourself, without the aid of other Christians and organizations. Others, however, will deem it more expedient to work alongside others, even if it is through an institution (nursing home, private college, religious magazine, etc.). I believe you are at liberty to do so, but brother Martin does not. He says there is a limit to what the individuals can do in meeting these responsibilities. With all due respect to my good brother, I believe he is binding where God has not bound, and specifying where God has generalized.

He says “The First Century Christians functioned very well without such societies as the Guardian of Truth Foundation” in preaching the gospel. I’m sure they did. And I’m sure they did very well without nursing homes and religious magazines as well. However, that does not change the fact that individuals can choose to use these mediums if they so desire in meeting their responsibilities. To say we cannot have the GOTF today because there is no example of it in the NT, among individual saints, you also must say we cannot have nursing homes and religious publications among individual saints either. The only problem with this is you are attempting to specify how Christians are to be arranged in the individual realm, of which there is no specificity given by God. If there is a specific arrangement, I’d like to see it.

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Don asked three questions:

“Does having book, chapter, and verse for all we teach and practice really matter? If so, why does it not matter that we simply follow the example and teaching of the New Testament relative to how God executes his work that involves collective and corporate action? In this vein, do you believe in "brotherhood works" or "brotherhood activation"?”

Yes, we must have scriptural authority for all we do, both within the church and without (1 Cor. 4:6; Col. 3:17). The only time we can have “brotherhood” projects is when God permits the church to carry out such a work. An example is the involvement of various churches in caring for the needy saints in Judea and in helping Paul with his expenses as a preacher (Rom. 16:22-28). The brotherhood did not have authority to use the church’s treasury to offer such benevolence and compensation to non-saints. Other brethren throughout the world may have chosen to get involved with such projects among non-saints, but the church did not have the authority to do so. All the ways the first Christians helped others as individuals is not stated, nor is there a restriction given to all the kinds of methods God allows. The only restrictions given were those placed on the church in not opening the treasury to non-saints. Therefore, we are limited in the church realm as to the kind of projects we are involved in throughout the brotherhood. The individual saints, however, were not restricted in their working together, separate and apart from the church.

“Can the gospel be successfully and adequately preached today by God's institution, the local church, with its oversight and treasury or must we have human institutions such as the Guardian of Truth Foundation?”

The church is sufficient to carry out its work, especially without all the innovations and pageantry used by churches to lure people to services. The gospel is powerful enough to convert man to God (Rom. 1:16), without the aid of human wisdom and persuasive speech (1 Cor. 2:4-5). The same is true in the individual realm as well. We need to lead men to God through the gospel, and not through persuasive, human knowledge. To say the GOTF was formed because of a lack of faith in the church is not correct. When we as individuals seek to do our part in leading others Christ, we are not doing so because of a lack of faith in the local church. We do so because it is our duty to do our part as well. In like manner, the GOTF and organizations like it are simply doing their part as individuals to teach God’s word. Individual effort in the gospel does not necessitate a loss of faith in the church’s ability. Both the church and the individual are required to have faith in God as they evangelize, and neither was given their responsibility because of a lack of confidence in the other.

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“If an institution such as the Guardian of Truth Foundation may offer lectureships (gospel meetings) for the purpose of worship, edifying the saved, and reaching the lost with the gospel, is there any limit to what they may do in their worship services? Since it is a fact that they have preaching and public prayer, may they offer the Lord's Supper on the Lord's Day, and if not, why not? Furthermore, are Christians thus functioning in such an institution fulfilling their duty to give into the treasury by contributing to the institution on the Lord's Day?”

I don't know of any attempt ever made by brethren at an individual lectureship to offer the Lord's supper on Sunday, or to meet at a time when saints in the area were gathered for worship. I have known of families to take it when they could not travel to be with their brethren, but I'm not sure what to think about such cases. I guess it would be parallel to brethren who gather to take the Lord supper on the Sunday service of a lectureship. I suppose there could be a scenario where saints can gather for the Lord's supper at such a time, but I know of no reason to do so if there are churches in the area gathering for worship at the same time. I think is one of those apples and orange comparisons. The GOTF is an individual organization to teach the gospel. They have never attempted or wanted to be considered a church organization. The same is true of Florida College. The church is told to take the Lord's supper on the first day of the week. But the GOTF and FC are not attempting to be a church, so I don't see how this question relates to them.

To Don, I ask:

1. Is it a sin for a group of Christians to own a benevolent organization that will care for needy saints?
2. Is it a sin for a group of Christians to own an organization that publishes material that will be used to teach the lost and / or edify the saints?
3. Where has God limited the organization of Christians in carrying out their duty as individuals?

Brotherly,
Mike Thomas

Date: **January 24, 2005**

Subj: **“Don Martin's Third Rebuttal Post to Mike Thomas (The Privately Funded Entity to Preach the Gospel Issue)”**

Don Martin to Mike Thomas and the list (my third rebuttal pertaining to the privately funded entity to preach the gospel issue):

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I again thank Mike for his good, prompt, and courteous rebuttal post. Mike and I are not "mad" at each other, we simply hold antithetical views pertaining authority in the matter of what organization is to do the work of preaching the gospel, edifying the saved, and relieving the needs of needy saints.

I have stated that this issue is not simply an academic, philosophic exchange about insignificant *modus operandi*. Allow me to illustrate this way: We are taught to sing in our praise of God (Eph. 5: 19). No where are we expressly told in the exact wording, "Thou shalt not use a piano, etc." However, we have the specific "sing" and we understand that the specific "sing" excludes "playing" on an instrument such as a piano, as these are different acts. Moreover, we respect the silence of the scriptures as we realize to introduce a piano into the worship of God in this dispensation would be to appeal to the silence of the scriptures and that such is wrong when we are expressly told what and how we are to perform a matter (cp. Heb. 7: 11-15). After a similar fashion, we are told that the church ".is the pillar and ground of the truth" (I Tim. 3: 15). The local church is an organization or entity in that it has structure. The local church consists of elders, deacons, and members, the elders oversee and there is the provision of a treasury to provide the monetary means of executing the work of preaching the gospel, edifying the saved, and ministering to impoverished saints, when the need is present (Phili. 1: 1; Acts 14: 23; I Cor. 16: 2).

Each local church is autonomous and works perfectly to provide Christians the collectivity through which they can corporately do the work assigned to the local church. Since, this is the only arrangement seen in the scriptures that involves the collectivity milieu and in view of the express teaching relative to the local church, I must conclude that human organizations that Christians have formed through which to collectively preach the gospel, etc. are wrong. If not, why not?

Organizations such as the Guardian of Truth Foundation are human in origin, thinking, and make-up. They offer, on a secondary level, the means for "brotherhood manipulation" and "control." They gender politics, boundary wars, and the formation of cliques. They are not overseen by qualified elders (I Tim. 3; Tit. 1), but by men, often politically ambitious men. Hence, we can see the wisdom of God in so appointing the local church through which Christians pool their resources, are overseen, and do the work God has assigned to his entity.

I do not mean to run down Mike, but he and I both must speak what we believe to be the truth. In order to attempt to justify such organizations as the Guardian of Truth Foundation, the promoters must present a number of fallacious arguments. There is of necessity a perversion relative to individual and collective work. Some how they have arrived at the stance that Christians can function in an entity such as discussed and still perform individual work. Also, in every debate that I have had on this issue, I have at some point witnessed the activate the

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brotherhood argument. The old, "Christians are not corporately functioning in an entity, they are individually performing a brotherhood work. In fact, save for the church treasury being used issue, institutionalism is institutionalism and is basically characterized by the same flaws and objections.

Mike wrote in his second rebuttal:

"I believe it is safe to say that Don believes there are three types of action we are capable of taking as Christians in preaching the gospel: church, individually or as a human institution."

Don comments:

I have labored to point out the following action that I deem relevant to this exchange:

1. Action that is purely individual (Acts 8: 5).
2. Action that is concurrently individual (Acts 18: 24-28).
3. Action that is collective or corporate in nature (cp. I Tim. 5: 16).

I have conceded all three and I have expressed my opposition to Christians pooling their resources in a human institution, be it missionary society, edification entity, or benevolent order set up for the relief of needy saints, on the basis that such institutionalism is an aberration of the simple arrangement God has taught (working collectively through the local church). Both the local church and the Guardian of Truth Foundation constitute collective action. The question is which is authorized.

Mike countered by saying:

"It is my understanding, however, that there are only two types of action we can take in spiritual matter: as the church or as individuals."

Don replies:

If I did not know what Mike was saying, I would agree with the immediately above statement.

Here is what Mike believes and teaches:

"Any effort outside of the church is an individual effort, no matter how many saints are involved

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or how they are arranged (collectively or in an institution)."

Don reflects:

I want all to seriously think about Mike's statement. By the way, what Mike is saying is standard and often heard by the promoters of such human orders as the Guardian of Truth Foundation. Even at a glance, such a view is manifestly flawed. When Christians work through an organization (president, board of directors, and treasury), they are no longer simply performing an individual work. Paul shows the difference in individual and collective action in I Timothy 5: 16. Such is not limited, as Mike contends, to "spiritual matters." I recently had a debate with a high ranking Mason of the most elect group within the Masonic order who professed to be a Christian. I pointed out that to so function within the Masonic framework was to act within the Masonic order. "I am working as an individual Christian," said he, "it does not matter that I am a Mason, working through Masonry, and involved in the Masonic treasury along with thousands of other Masons." I say again, besides being wrong, the privately supported institution mentality results in all sorts of flawed reasoning.

Mike reasoned:

"However, the Lord has not stated specifically how the individual is to meet those needs, in terms of organization. The individuals can care for their widow individually or through an organization, but in both cases they are still acting separate and apart from the church."

Don comments:

Again, we see the mixing of apples and oranges. This issue is not if a Christian may meet the needs of an aged parent in medical need through a qualified nursing home. While the nursing home can constitute an entity, there is no parallel. However, the parallel would be in place if Tom, Dick, and Sally formed a home for the aged (president, board of directors, treasury, etc.) and all functioned therein to take care of needy saints in general.

Notwithstanding, Mike augments his statement:

"To say Christians cannot preach the gospel through an organization is the same as saying Christians cannot care for their loved ones through an institution. BUT WHERE HAS GOD PLACED THESE LIMITATIONS ON US?"

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Don observes:

I repeat, my aim is not to belittle Mike, but the reasoning is severely flawed.

Mike states:

"If you say, 'the local church is the only organization designed by God for Christians to pool their resources together to preach the gospel'", you are placing a limit on what can be done individually. I'd like to see where the scriptures teach this."

Don responds:

I must state that God has placed a limit on how Christians can organized an entity through which to preach the gospel, edify the saved, and offer relief for needy saints by offering Christians the provision of the local church. There is just as much scripture for the local church being the only organization found in the scriptures as there is for singing praise to God (I Tim. 3: 15; Eph. 5: 19).

Mike then considered and answered my three questions. I shall insert each question, Mike's answer, and my brief comment. Afterward, I shall answer Mike's questions and then ask three more.

Question one:

"Does having book, chapter, and verse for all we teach and practice really matter? If so, why does it not matter that we simply follow the example and teaching of the New Testament relative to how God executes his work that involves collective and corporate action? In this vein, do you believe in "brotherhood works" or "brotherhood activation"?"

Mike's answer:

"Yes, we must have scriptural authority for all we do, both within the church and without (1 Cor. 4:6; Col. 3:17). The only time we can have 'brotherhood' projects is when God permits the church to carry out such a work. An example is the involvement of various churches in caring for the needy saints in Judea and in helping Paul with his expenses as a preacher (Rom. 16:22-28). The brotherhood did not have authority to use the church's treasury to offer such benevolence and compensation to non-saints. Other brethren throughout the world may have chosen to get involved with such projects among non-saints, but the church did not have the authority to do so. All the ways the first Christians helped others as individuals is not stated, nor is there a restriction given to all the kinds of methods God allows. The only restrictions given

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were those placed on the church in not opening the treasury to non-saints. Therefore, we are limited in the church realm as to the kind of projects we are involved in throughout the brotherhood. The individual saints, however, were not restricted in their working together, separate and apart from the church."

Don's observation:

Mike, it seems to me that you have migrated or are about to accept in full the "activate the brotherhood to perform individual works" concept.

Question two:

"Can the gospel be successfully and adequately preached today by God's institution, the local church, with its oversight and treasury or must we have human institutions such as the Guardian of Truth Foundation?"

Mike's answer:

"The church is sufficient to carry out its work, especially without all the innovations and pageantry used by churches to lure people to services. The gospel is powerful enough to convert man to God (Rom. 1:16), without the aid of human wisdom and persuasive speech (1 Cor. 2:4-5). The same is true in the individual realm as well. We need to lead men to God through the gospel, and not through persuasive, human knowledge. To say the GOTF was formed because of a lack of faith in the church is not correct. When we as individuals seek to do our part in leading others Christ, we are not doing so because of a lack of faith in the local church. We do so because it is our duty to do our part as well. In like manner, the GOTF and organizations like it are simply doing their part as individuals to teach God's word.

Individual effort in the gospel does not necessitate a loss of faith in the church's ability. Both the church and the individual are required to have faith in God as they evangelize, and neither was given their responsibility because of a lack of confidence in the other."

Don's comment:

Mike, my friend, when Christians formed the Guardian of Truth Foundation and worked through it in doing the work God has assigned to the local church, they are not performing individual work but collective work. This is a basic incorrect premise behind institutionalism in the church, both involving church treasuries and without the treasuries.

Question three:

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"If an institution such as the Guardian of Truth Foundation may offer lectureships (gospel meetings) for the purpose of worship, edifying the saved, and reaching the lost with the gospel, is there any limit to what they may do in their worship services? Since it is a fact that they have preaching and public prayer, may they offer the Lord's Supper on the Lord's Day, and if not, why not? Furthermore, are Christians thus functioning in such an institution fulfilling their duty to give into the treasury by contributing to the institution on the Lord's Day?"

Mike's answer:

"I don't know of any attempt ever made by brethren at an individual lectureship to offer the Lord's Supper on Sunday, or to meet at a time when saints in the area were gathered for worship. I have known of families to take it when they could not travel to be with their brethren, but I'm not sure what to think about such cases. I guess it would be parallel to brethren who gather to take the Lord supper on the Sunday service of a lectureship. I suppose there could be a scenario where saints can gather for the Lord's supper at such a time, but I know of no reason to do so if there are churches in the area gathering for worship at the same time. I think is one of those apples and orange comparisons. The GOTF is an individual organization to teach the gospel. They have never attempted or wanted to be considered a church organization. The same is true of Florida College. The church is told to take the Lord's supper on the first day of the week. But the GOTF and FC are not attempting to be a church, so I don't see how this question relates to them."

Don's comment:

While Mike offers some hesitation, Mike agrees that in at least certain conditions, it would be scripturally allowable for Christians working through an institution such as the Guardian of Truth Foundation to observe the Lord's Supper. Mike, I can only understand you by your words and answer to my above question (see my below question two).

I should think if one takes the position that human societies are allowed to offer the climate for Christians to collectively do the work God has assigned to the local church that it would also be allowable for Christians functioning in these human institutions to observe the Lord's Supper in the environs of the institution.

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I shall now answer Mike's questions for me:

Mike's question number one:

"Is it a sin for a group of Christians to own a benevolent organization that will care for needy saints?"

Don's answer:

In www.bibletruths.net you will find an article titled, "The Society System." About nine paragraphs down in the material, there is an internal link to material to the Philippine Relief Fund. This is a society or institution that is set up and run by "brethren" for the relief of needy saints in the Philippines. I do believe that such is wrong and is an example of the institutionalism that we are discussing. God means for Christians to collectively work through and in local churches in this matter and not form a human institution for their collective work (checks to the Philippine Relief Fund are tax deductible, I understand). To visit the page hosting the article, click on the following URL: <http://www.bibletruths.net/Archives/BTARO99.htm>

Mike's question two:

"Is it a sin for a group of Christians to own an organization that publishes material that will be used to teach the lost and / or edify the saints?"

Don's answer:

I have affirmed that brethren have the right to together engage in a business for profit, be it religious book publication or some other venture.

Mike's question three:

"Where has God limited the organization of Christians in carrying out their duty as individuals?"

Don's answer:

Since God has taught and exemplified the local church as forming the ability for collective action for Christians to preach the gospel, edify the saved, and minister to needy saints, overseen by elders and using its treasury, I must conclude that all devices of men are unauthorized. However, this discussion is not about individual action. I know of no limitation placed on individual action, other than instances that you, Mike, have mentioned (must be moral, civilly legal, etc.). Mike, you continue to confuse, intermingle, and use interchangeably

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individual and collective action.

My questions for Mike:

Question one:

How can you continue to insist that Christians working within an institution that has a president, board of directors, and treasury to do the work of preaching the gospel to the lost, edifying the saved, and/or ministering to needy saints constitutes only individual and not collective work?

Question two: For the sake of clarity, if there is no local church within driving distance and the Reach The Lost Foundation has assembled on the Lord's Day for preaching (call it lectures if you like) and singing songs of praise to God, is it allowable for them (Christians functioning in this institution) to partake of the Lord's Supper (it appears you have answered, "yes," but I want to make doubly sure)?

Question three:

When a specific such as singing is set forth, does it not exclude all other acts, in this case, playing on a piano, etc.? If so, since only the local church is set forth as the collective means for Christians collectively functioning, would not all other institutions be excluded from doing the work God has assigned to his collectivity, the local church?

Mike, thank you in advance for your next post, answering my questions, and honestly considering this issue of privately funded institutionalism.

Cordially,
Don Martin

Date: **January 24, 2005**

Subj: **"Response to Lectures (3)"**

Fellow Listers:

In our zeal to defend our position on this issue, let us remember that every effort we make is to be for the glory of God (1 Cor. 1:31). Let us not measure the truth of this issue by the position held among those we love and respect (vs. 12-13). Instead, let us seek God's will on this matter and bind where He has bound, and loose where He has loosed.

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I say that because I believe this is a matter of personal judgment, and that my good brother Martin and others are binding where God has not bound. We cannot specify the type of arrangement Christians may have in preaching the gospel, when they are doing so in the personal (individual) realm, because God has not given such a pattern. Brother Martin believes brethren cannot form, use or own organizations to carry out their duty as individual Christians, separate and apart from the church. He says such endeavors express a lack of faith in God's organization of the church as the pillar and ground of the truth.

However, the Lord has instructed Christians to teach the lost (Col. 4:6), care for needy saints (Gal. 6:10) and to edify other Christians (Rom. 14:19), in our own efforts APART from the church, EVEN THOUGH these same responsibilities are given to the church. Does the church cease to be the pillar and ground of the truth when Christians meet these responsibilities in the personal realm? Are Christians told to evangelize, care for the needy or edify other saints ONLY WHEN they believe the church is failing in its duties? God forbid. Neither was given their work because of a lack of confidence in the other. God has given these duties to both the church as a whole and to individual saints as a whole because He wants His people constantly involved in His work (Titus 2:14). While He has limited what the church can do in performing its work (local eldership, limited benevolence, direct support of preachers, etc.), He has not made such distinctions among Christians apart from the church. As long as we are not violating His will (Rom. 3:8; 1 Jn. 1:7), we can use our judgment in deciding what is necessary to carry out His work. The apostle Paul thought it was more expedient if Timothy was circumcised in preaching the gospel (Ac. 16:3). This was a judgment he and Timothy made apart from the church, in their own efforts as evangelists, and in no way could they bind it on other brethren. They were using whatever lawful method they deemed necessary in carrying out their tasks as Christians.

In like manner, Christians today may use their judgment to meet their responsibilities to the gospel. Some will work by themselves (at home, door-to-door, over the phone, etc.), while others will work with others through organizations (religious publications, nursing homes, colleges, etc.). I believe this is permitted because God has not limited the organization we can have in the personal realm as He has the church (Eph. 4:11). How then can we put a limit on the effort Christians make in meeting their responsibilities to God? How can we say, "THIS is the limit of organization you can have in working as individuals apart from the church"? It is equivalent to saying Paul and Timothy had no right to do what they did with circumcision since such was not permitted within the church. "The church is the pillar of the truth, and since God has not taught the church to practice physical circumcision, you cannot practice such among yourselves! Have you lost faith in the gospel?" But Paul and Timothy did not practice circumcision because of a lack of faith in the gospel or the church. They did so to open doors for the gospel. They were at liberty to make such judgments among themselves because God had not bound on the individual what He had the church regarding circumcision. Likewise, Christians will work together in organizations like FC and the GOTF because they deem it more

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expedient to accomplish their duties as Christians. They do not enter such arrangements because of a lack of faith in the church, the gospel or God. They do so because they believe it will open more doors for the gospel, which is their God-given liberty since God has not limited our organization in the personal realm.

How then can brother Martin and others say it is a sin for brethren to teach the gospel, help the needy or edify the saints through organizations? We all agree God has not permitted such in His pattern for the church, but what limits has He placed on the organization Christians can have outside of the church? Where has He said, "This is the most you can have in a group while teaching others"? Or, "You can work with other Christians, but if you become an organization, you have lost faith in the church"? I know my brother Don thinks he has answered these questions, but in all sincerity I don't believe he has proven his case from the scriptures. If anything, he has contradicted himself in his own arguments.

After showing the scriptural organization of the church, Don wrote: "Since, this is the only arrangement seen in the scriptures that involves the collectivity milieu and in view of the express teaching relative to the local church, I must conclude that human organizations that Christians have formed through which to collectively preach the gospel, etc. are wrong. If not, why not?"

And yet, when asked if Christians can own an organization that publishes material used to teach the lost or edify the saints, he said: "I have affirmed that brethren have the right to together engage in a business for profit, be it religious book publication or some other venture."

These statements of Don's contradict themselves in the same way John Kerry said he voted for the support of the troops before he voted against it. If the only organization Christians can work through in preaching the gospel is the local church, then no Christian has a right to "to engage in a business for profit, be it religious book publication or some other venture"! If the GOTF has no right to exist when Christians use it to host a lectureship, then brethren have no right to own, operate or use other organizations that print, publish and distribute material used in teaching the gospel. If it's wrong for the GOTF and FC to give it away in a lectureship, then it is certainly most evil for brethren to make a profit through a business that sells the very same material. Thus, to be consistent Don would have to say it is a sin for brethren to own and publish a religious magazine --- apart from the church. And that it is a sin for brethren to work together in publishing tracts, workbooks and resources for preaching the gospel --- apart from the church. And that brethren cannot use, own or operate an organization like a nursing home in caring for their needy saints --- apart from the church. ANY type of organization that brethren "engage in for profit, be it religious book publication or some other venture" would be a violation of the church as the pillar and ground of the truth. If the local church is the only organization God condones among Christians, even in their efforts apart from the church, then NO organization COULD EVER be used, owned or operated by brethren in teaching the

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gospel. It's all or nothing, if Don's reasoning is correct. There cannot be a happy medium in this IF individual saints are bound by the same regulations God has placed on the local church.

Don quoted me when I said there are only two types of action we can take in a spiritual matter: as the church or as individuals. He then replied: "If I did not know what Mike was saying, I would agree with the immediately above statement." In what way would you agree with me in that statement? Would you agree that we as Christians are either engaged in a work as a church or as individual saints? In what other way can you agree with me? When brethren "engage in a business for profit, be it religious book publication or some other venture," are they acting as the church or as they acting as individuals? Are they functioning together in a collective manner as the church or are they functioning together in a collective manner as individual saints, separate and apart from the church? Which realm are they functioning in: the church or the individual?

If it were possible for me to post a diagram of these two realms, I would have a picture of two circles within each other. The larger circle on the outside would represent the area in which we work as individual saints. The smaller circle, within the larger, would represent the area we may work as saints within the local church. BOTH circles would have the responsibility of preaching the gospel, caring for the needy saints and edifying other saints. However, the smaller circle would be confined by God with a specific organization and limitation to its work. The larger circle would not have such restrictions because there would be no verse showing a specific design and organization from God. This would be the realm of individual action, be it a saint going from door-to-door in preaching the gospel, or be it a saint using a nursing home to care for his family who are needy saints. The individual realm is just that: the realm in which individual saints do their part, separate and apart from the church. Or, as Don correctly noted, this is:

- “1. Action that is purely individual (Acts 8: 5).
2. Action that is concurrently individual (Acts 18: 24-28).
3. Action that is collective or corporate in nature (cp. I Tim. 5: 16).”

This is the realm that permits Christians to act on their own or with other saints in “a business for profit, be it religious book publication or some other venture.” I would NOT have the authority from God to say you are limited in how you are to be arranged or in what way you accomplish your work because He has not defined this realm as He has the church's realm. He allowed Paul and Timothy to use their judgment regarding circumcision in teaching the gospel, even though He made no such rules for the church. He gives Christians the liberty to use their judgment and wisdom in the personal realm as long as it is consistent with His will AND does

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not infringe on the church's realm. To bind on the individual realm what God has limited to the church is to bind where God has not bound.

Don asked me: "How can you continue to insist that Christians working within an institution that has a president, board of directors, and treasury to do the work of preaching the gospel to the lost, edifying the saved, and/or ministering to needy saints constitutes only individual and not collective work?"

In the same way Christians can work through an institution that has an owner, manager and salesperson that is doing the work of publishing religious material that will preach the gospel to the lost and / or saints. These institutions are permissible in the individual realm because God has not defined the kind of organization we are to have in fulfilling the responsibilities He has given us as Christians. The only organization He has given in His work is that which He says regarding the church.

"For the sake of clarity, if there is no local church within driving distance and the Reach The Lost Foundation has assembled on the Lord's Day for preaching (call it lectures if you like) and singing songs of praise to God, is it allowable for them (Christians functioning in this institution) to partake of the Lord's Supper (it appears you have answered, "yes," but I want to make doubly sure)?"

No, because this would not constitute the church. Just because there is singing, preaching and praying does not make it the church (Ac. 12:12), which is why we can do so with our families and friends at times away from church. The Lord taught the church to take the Lord's supper on the first day of the week. He has never given such instructions to saints when worshipping Him apart from the church.

"When a specific such as singing is set forth, does it not exclude all other acts, in this case, playing on a piano, etc.? If so, since only the local church is set forth as the collective means for Christians collectively functioning, would not all other institutions be excluded from doing the work God has assigned to his collectivity, the local church?"

To the first part of the question, yes, once God gives a command it excludes all other types of work in that category. To the second part, I say, no. The Lord has confined the organization of our efforts when we act collectively in the church. He has not given such confinement when we act collectively in the personal realm, which is why we can engage in a business for a profit, be it religious book publication or some other venture.

Don said "both the local church and the Guardian of Truth Foundation constitute collective action." If that be the case, I ask these questions of you:

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1. In what way are brethren acting collectively in operating the GOTF?
2. How does this differ from a business that is operated by brethren in publishing religious material?
3. What are some other ventures that would be permissible for brethren to engage in, especially when such businesses will aid Christians in carrying out their work for the Lord?

Thank you, Don, for the good exchange. It has been helpful.

Brotherly, Mike Thomas

Date: **January 25, 2005**

Subj: **“Don Martin to Mike Thomas (my fourth rebuttal pertaining to the privately funded entity to preach the gospel issue)”**

Don Martin to Mike Thomas and the list (my fourth rebuttal pertaining to the privately funded entity to preach the gospel issue): (Some how this post did not make it to Bible Matters. I apologize to Mike and the list for any confusion this may have caused. I have my rebuttal number five ready for in the morning.)

I commend all for your interest in reading this exchange between Mike Thomas and me. I also commend to you Mike's good statement:

"In our zeal to defend our position on this issue, let us remember that every effort we make is to be for the glory of God (1 Cor. 1:31). Let us not measure the truth of this issue by the position held among those we love and respect (vs. 12-13). Instead, let us seek God's will on this matter and bind where He has bound, and loose where He has loosed."

The reason for this exchange is that both Mike and I believe the other to be wrong relative to privately supported entities through and in which Christians collectively work to do the work God has specifically assigned to his collectivity, the local church. Mike believes such institutionalism is permissible. Mike wrote in his last rebuttal:

"I say that because I believe this is a matter of personal judgment, and that my good brother Martin and others are binding where God has not bound."

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I have simply contended that since God has set forth an organization in which Christians are told to collectively function, an entity having structure, oversight, and a treasury to fund the work (the local church), Christians are not at liberty to establish their human institutions such as the Guardian of Truth Foundation as an additional institution. I have expressed the conviction that when God articulates a specific, all other, in this case institutions, are excluded. I illustrated this regarding music. God has said "sing"; therefore, "playing on a piano," etc. is excluded. This issue is so simple that I think it is eluding Mike and some others.

Mike has accepted and built on the following premise:

"Any effort outside of the church is an individual effort, no matter how many saints are involved or how they are arranged (collectively or in an institution)."

Don comments:

As I have remarked, Mike is obviously an intelligent man. However, I am at a loss as to how he has arrived at the immediately above premise. In my original post, the one that precipitated Mike's challenge and thus this exchange, I mentioned past experience that I have had with such institutional brethren. "We believe that we can with our institutions functioning under their president, board of directors, etc., do a better job of the preaching the gospel than the local church is typically doing under the oversight of their elders," I have been told. Brethren, this is a serious issue, one that not only involves a perversion of basic Bible authority and acting on the silence of the scriptures when we are expressly told how to collectively preach the gospel, but one that also sets the stage for and fosters all manner of political gymnastics. I know because when I was yet a young preacher, I was urged to join one of the privately supported missionary societies. When I refused, I was told, "If you are not for us, you are against us, and you will find it hard to hold meetings or even do a local work once you are our enemy!" This was many years ago and I have been fighting these institutions and institutionally minded brethren ever since. I think that some of Mike's problem is that he has not yet seen the politics and power struggles that result from these orders among us. Such is admittedly on a secondary level of objection, as these institutions are lacking authority in the first place. God does not want to collectively see the work that he has assigned to the local church done by any other institution than the local church. If it were not so serious, it would be humorous to watch these brethren play church.

Mike affirmed in his last rebuttal the following:

"We cannot specify the type of arrangement Christians may have in preaching the gospel, when they are doing so in the personal (individual) realm, because God has not given such a pattern."

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Don responds:

It could be that we are approaching the time for this exchange to begin coming to an end. I say this because it has been my experience that when we are expending our time in repetition, it is time to wrap up the discussion.

Mike continues to insist that Christians can form an entity, one having a fully developed structure such as a president, board of directors, and treasury, and function in this entity to preach the gospel, and, yet, such work is individual and not collective. Mike is not even acknowledging the reality of his position, how then, I ask, can we actually address the problem?

Based on apples and oranges and a flawed premise, Mike makes a number of dialectically incorrect deductions:

"However, the Lord has instructed Christians to teach the lost (Col. 4:6), care for needy saints (Gal. 6:10) and to edify other Christians (Rom.14:19), in our own efforts APART from the church, EVEN THOUGH these same responsibilities are given to the church. Does the church cease to be the pillar and ground of the truth when Christians meet these responsibilities in the personal realm?"

Again, I repeat, truly individual work (Philip in Acts 8) or concurrent individual work (Aquila and Priscilla, Acts 18) is not the issue or focus of this exchange. Mike has used Aquila and Priscilla to justify such orders as the Guardian of Truth Foundation. Notwithstanding, I have repeatedly pointed out that there is not a scintilla of evidence of Aquila and Priscilla being a member of a privately supported institution and working therein. Mike has failed to produce even a facsimile of evidence for such privately supported institutions doing the work God has enjoined on his collectivity, the local church. My desire as been to simply replicate New Testament Christianity and teach Christians to work collectively within the local church. Mike's call has been to in addition, let Christians form their human institutions to do the work God has given to the local church. Concerned reader, it is just this simple. Besides, if one is really busy collectively working in the local church, I do not believe they will have all the extra time needed to also be involved in brethren's institutions.

Mike persists in mixing apples and oranges. In his recent rebuttal, Mike mixed apples and oranges and then declared that he had caught me in a contradiction. In fact, Mike seemed to really think he had me because he had a lot to say about it.

Consider Mike's statement and reasoning:

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"After showing the scriptural organization of the church, Don wrote: 'Since, this is the only arrangement seen in the scriptures that involves the collectivity milieu and in view of the express teaching relative to the local church, I must conclude that human organizations that Christians have formed through which to collectively preach the gospel, etc. are wrong. If not, why not?'

"And yet, when asked if Christians can own an organization that publishes material used to teach the lost or edify the saints, he said: 'I have affirmed that brethren have the right to together engage in a business for profit, be it religious book publication or some other venture.'

"These statements of Don's contradict themselves.."

Don comments:

I commend Mike for pressing the issue, he is just doing his job. However, Mike has again used flawed logic. I have always contended that Christians engaged in a business for profit (selling a service) is not tantamount to the institutionalism that I am exposing. I say this knowing that on occasion such claims of business for profit is only abeyant and that the real motive is wanting to work through a human institution. However, this involves motive and not logistics as such, a different issue than the one being discussed. There is a manifest difference between three brethren forming a book publication business that publishing religious books for profit and three brethren forming the "Reach The Lost Foundation" through which they and other Christians can preach the gospel and/or edify the saved, and/or minister to needy saints. In the latter instance, they (the institution) brings in preachers to hold meetings (lectures, if you prefer) in order to "preach the gospel to the lost" and publishes books to give away under the heading of preaching the gospel. These two situations are materially different.

Mike proceeded to build on his flawed premise:

"If it's wrong for the GOTF and FC to give it away in a lectureship, then it is certainly most evil for brethren to make a profit through a business that sells the very same material. Thus, to be consistent Don would have to say it is a sin for brethren to own and publish a religious magazine --- apart from the church."

Mike's reasoning is difficult for me to follow. Again, there is a difference between brethren forming a society in which to collectively preach the gospel and in some brethren forming a business for profit. To own and operate a religious book store is not tantamount to having a foundation that has a stated purpose of preaching the gospel and doing the work God has given to the church. I just do not know why Mike cannot see this.

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As to a religious magazine, I do believe such an undertaking by brethren can be wrong. When brethren form and the effect is Truth Magazine, for instance, having editors, staff writers, etc., I do believe we have such an entity as we are considering as being a privately funded missionary society.

I view my contribution to Bible Matters as individual and at the most, concurrent individual. Mike and I are both contributing to this list; however, Mike and I do not constitute a missionary society or entity. Again, why cannot Mike see this?

I shall now present my three questions that I asked of Mike, his answers, and my brief comments:

Question one: "How can you continue to insist that Christians working within an institution that has a president, board of directors, and treasury to do the work of preaching the gospel to the lost, edifying the saved, and/or ministering to needy saints constitutes only individual and not collective work?"

Mike's answer:

"In the same way Christians can work through an institution that has an owner, manager and salesperson that is doing the work of publishing religious material that will preach the gospel to the lost and / or saints. These institutions are permissible in the individual realm because God has not defined the kind of organization we are to have in fulfilling the responsibilities He has given us as Christians. The only organization He has given in His work is that which He says regarding the church.

Don's comment:

I am truly sorry that I have been unable to move Mike from his erroneous thinking and logic. Mike again demonstrates total incognizance regarding individual and collective action.

Question two:

"For the sake of clarity, if there is no local church within driving distance and the Reach The Lost Foundation has assembled on the Lord's Day for preaching (call it lectures if you like) and singing songs of praise to God, is it allowable for them (Christians functioning in this institution) to partake of the Lord's Supper (it appears you have answered, "yes," but I want to make doubly sure)?"

Mike's answer:

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"No, because this would not constitute the church. Just because there is singing, preaching and praying does not make it the church (Ac. 12:12), which is why we can do so with our families and friends at times away from church. The Lord taught the church to take the Lord's supper on the first day of the week. He has never given such instructions to saints when worshipping Him apart from the church."

Don comments:

Mike is absolutely right in this answer. However, in his rebuttal prior to this one, Mike was not as sure. Perhaps progress is being made, after all.

Question three:

"When a specific such as singing is set forth, does it not exclude all other acts, in this case, playing on a piano, etc.? If so, since only the local church is set forth as the collective means for Christians collectively functioning, would not all other institutions be excluded from doing the work God has assigned to his collectivity, the local church?"

Mike's answer:

"To the first part of the question, yes, once God gives a command it excludes all other types of work in that category. To the second part, I say, no. The Lord has confined the organization of our efforts when we act collectively in the church. He has not given such confinement when we act collectively in the personal realm, which is why we can engage in a business for a profit, be it religious book publication or some other venture."

Don comments:

I am also delighted at Mike's answer to question three. Notice what Mike said:

"He has not given such confinement when we act collectively in the personal realm.."

We remain a distance from the truth, but at least Mike is now referring to brethren who band themselves together as we have discussed and perform work as "act collectively." Mike now concedes that such brethren in these human institutions are acting collectively. I am very pleased with this progress, albeit little.

Regarding Mike's last statement in answer three, I again reiterate, brethren together owning a business for profit is not tantamount to the Guardian of Truth having a lectureship to preach the

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gospel to the lost.

Mike said in preparation to asking me three questions (question one also asked):

"Don said 'both the local church and the Guardian of Truth Foundation constitute collective action.' If that be the case, I ask these questions of you:

Question one: "In what way are brethren acting collectively in operating the GOTF?"

Don's answer:

The board of directors all officially function in the capacity of institution members. In the case of Truth Magazine, a product of the Guardian of Truth Foundation, the editors, board, and staff writers officiate as entity members and so perform their entity duties. Mike, please take off your blinders and see this institution in reality and in operation. To try to argue that these are just men who are individually functioning without any association to the Guardian of Truth Foundation is not only fallacious, but ludicrous.

Not only are these men acting as board members of an institution, but a number of these men are diametrically opposed on such doctrinal matters as marriage, divorce, and marriage to another (I am referring to Connie Adams, Donnie Rader and Weldon Warnock). Some say that it matters not who all these men believe and teach since it is not the church. What a warped concept of fellowship!

Question two: "How does this differ from a business that is operated by brethren in publishing religious material?"

Don's answer:

I suppose that since you use the word "business," you have reference to brethren who own a religious book publishing business and sell for profit.

If they were not making money, they would not be in the business. They are not out to "preach the gospel," bring in preachers, and provide lectureships (gospel meetings), this is some of the material difference. See the difference, Mike?

Question three: "What are some other ventures that would be permissible for brethren to engage in, especially when such businesses will aid Christians in carrying out their work for the Lord?"

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Don's answer:

Mike, I have not personally given this matter much thought. I suppose, though, that one could think of a number of instances that would be equal to brethren going into a Bible or religious book publication business for profit.

My questions for Mike to answer:

Question one:

How can you use the argument of a thus-saith-the-Lord to exclude playing on a mechanical instrument, but fail to exclude Christians using other entities (other than the Lord's church) to organize and do the collective work God has assigned to the local church?

Question two:

How can all work outside the local church be "individual" and yet you now speak of "collective action" in the institutional climate?

Question three:

Two rebuttal posts anterior, you were not sure as to an institution that offered praying, singing, and preaching not being able in certain circumstances to also offer the Lord's Supper; however, in your last rebuttal you said such would be wrong; did you change your mind?

Mike, as I mentioned earlier, we could be nearing the end of this exchange. I know that I have said about all I had to say. The simple conclusion is, God has furnished the missionary society, if you will, the edification order, and the benevolent institution in which his people are to function and that entity is the local church, overseen by elders. He has given it structure, oversight, limited its government to being autonomous, and has arranged for a treasury to furnish the monetary means of executing the work. Human institutions mock God's arrangement and are a source of clique politics. I have seen enough of this in my life to make me nauseous. Mike, you may not have seen such, but, believe me, it is present. Again, though, this is a secondary objection.

Cordially,
Don Martin

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Date: **January 25, 2005**

Subj: **“Response to Lectures (4)”**

To my brother Don Martin and fellow listers:

I want to say in the beginning of this post that I truly appreciate Don’s sincerity and the diligent effort he has put forth in defending his position. I hope he believes me when I say I take no pleasure in being at odds with him over this matter, and neither do I relish the thought of saying he is binding where God has not bound. He is correct in his warnings about human institutions and the sinfulness involved when churches use them to do the work of the church. We must constantly endeavor to keep the line drawn between the individual realm and the church realm. We need to constantly guard against the idea that Truth Magazine and Florida College (and such entities) are extensions of the church. They are not, and fortunately they don’t claim to be. These are collective efforts of brethren separate and apart from the church, and need to remain that way. I hope to never see the day when churches are used to fund these organizations or when brethren rely on them to meet the responsibilities of the church. What a sad day that would be.

The same warning also goes for the organizations Don says brethren can have in publishing material for evangelistic purposes. These collective efforts of brethren belong in the individual realm and should never be seen as an extension of the church. The church is the pillar and ground of the truth, even when brethren meet their responsibilities in a collective manner apart from the church. The church cannot do what the individual can do. But neither should the individual be held by the same organization as the church. The two have not been given the same limitations and liberties, which is why we need to constantly examine the line to make sure we’re not applying to one what God has given the other.

I also want to express appreciation for the owners of Bible Matters for providing brethren with this medium to discuss such matters openly and in a timely manner. There was a time when brethren had to wait months to hear the total discussion of written debates, since the magazines were published weeks apart. Now, we can have a healthy discussion within a matter of days. What a blessing. The only draw back is the participants don’t always have the time needed to edit and “clean up” their final draft as they would in a traditional written debate. Hence, I made more than a few grammatical errors that I do not enjoy seeing. I promise you, I much more better than that! So please remember that this was a daily discussion that happened in a matter of hours, without enough time to properly edit our work for clarity of speech. The content, however, has been good and I have no regrets with it.

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That being said, brother Richie Thetford has offered to make this exchange available on his website (thetfordcountry.com) once the debate has ended. I know I am in agreement with the idea, and I trust Don will be as well. Richie has an excellent website with an online library full of useful material. As time goes on, it will be helpful for brethren to have something to study when they are faced with this issue. I appreciate Richie's willingness to help them, as well as for his own concern and love for God's will.

This is my first time to have a "debate" or formal exchange with someone, even if it was written. That doesn't change anything, since experience as a debater does not determine the truth, as seen in Apollos (Ac. 18:24-25). One thing I have learned, though, is that it takes more than just saying your opponent is flawed and has weak reasoning, to prove your argument. You must be able to show from the scriptures where your opponent has missed the mark and why you have reached the right conclusions. Dodging questions and making accusations (to promote unjustified fear) are not enough to defend the truth. You need scripture.

Don wrote in his last post, "Mike has failed to produce even a facsimile of evidence for such privately supported institutions doing the work God has enjoined on his collectivity, the local church."

The reason I have not produced a verse for privately supported institutions doing the work of the church is because there is no verse for such a thing, NOR has that been the position I have been defending. The debate, if you recall, is over whether or not Christians may engage in such enterprise separate and apart from the church. I have said all along that BOTH the church and the individual have been given the work of evangelism, helping the needy and edifying the saints (1 Pet. 3:15; Gal. 6:10; Rom. 14:19). The only difference being that the church has been limited in what it can do and how it can be organized (1 Tim. 5:16; Eph. 4:11). Don is the one saying the individual has been placed under the same organization God has given the church. The burden of proof is on him to produce even a facsimile of evidence from the scriptures showing that God makes this distinction. It is not enough to say there are institutions used today by churches to unscripturally do their work, the refore all institutions and collective effort apart from the church is wrong. If that is the case, there would be no liberty for brethren to engage in a business for profit, be it religious book publication or some other venture, as Don promotes. Do you know of a verse in the Bible that says the church can engage in a business for profit in teaching the gospel? I don't, which is why I don't support the idea of institutionalism within the church. Yet at the same time I do not condemn brethren who decide to enter into such arrangements in their own personal efforts BECAUSE God has not bound on the individual Christian what He has the church! He has limited the organization of the local church. He has not limited the ways in which brethren can be organized outside of the church. If He has, there would be NO permission for brethren to work collectively through an organization that publishes religious material.

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When I called Don to the carpet regarding his inconsistencies in condemning organizations yet condoning businesses of religious publication among brethren, he said:

“Mike has again used flawed logic. I have always contended that Christians engaged in a business for profit (selling a service) is not tantamount to the institutionalism that I am exposing... There is a manifest difference between three brethren forming a book publication business that publishing religious books for profit and three brethren forming the "Reach The Lost Foundation" through which they and other Christians can preach the gospel and/or edify the saved, and/or minister to needy saints. In the latter instance, they (the institution) brings in preachers to hold meetings (lectures, if you prefer) in order to "preach the gospel to the lost" and publishes books to give away under the heading of preaching the gospel. These two situations are materially different.”

(1) I have never heard of the RTLTF and do not know of its organization. I would imagine that this is something found among institutional brethren AND is used by churches to carry out their work. If it is, it is not fair to use such examples in comparison with the private organizations I am defending (GOTF, FC, etc.). The issue is not institutionalism among churches; the issue is the extent of organization among brethren apart from the church. If indeed the RTLTF is an institutional outfit among liberal churches of Christ, then that is an inappropriate example of what I am defending. It would be akin to me comparing Don's approval of religious publications to magazines and literature used among institutional churches, and scaring brethren into rejecting his religious publications all together.

(2) If the RTLTF is an organization run by brethren apart from the church, through which they bring in preachers to hold lectures, and they are teaching the truth (especially against denominationalism), how is that any different than a religious magazine that has men submit articles for teaching purposes? You say it is okay for brethren to own and operate a business that publishes religious material, so where does this material come from? Gospel preachers? If so, why is it okay for brethren to teach through that medium and not okay for them to teach through a lectureship? I don't know of a verse that shows the church having permission to engage in a business that publishes religious material, do you? So why do you permit it among brethren, separate and apart from the church? I would imagine it is because you know God has not bound on the individual the kind of organization He has the church.

Let me clarify AGAIN what I mean when I say individual. It is EVERY effort made by individual saints apart from the church, whether alone, concurrently or collectively. Don said “three brethren forming a book publication” is okay. This is an example of what I mean by individual action. The number of brethren involved and how they are arranged does not change the fact that they are still acting independent and apart from the church. Don says “Mike again demonstrates total incognizance regarding individual and collective action,” but in reality I am

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quite aware of what is collective and what is not. Three brethren forming a book publication is an organization, whether Don is able to swallow it or not. This is a collective effort through which more than one brother is working with another to accomplish a task. But this is okay with me since it is being done in the personal, individual realm, separate and apart from the church. It is when we say the church is the ONLY collective action saints can be involved in that I have a problem. Brethren can work collectively as individuals, separate from the church, in meeting the responsibilities God has given them, whether it be in worship (Ac. 12:12), in evangelism (Phil. 4:3) or in helping the needy (1 Cor. 16:15). Both the church and the individual have been given responsibilities in the gospel. The Lord has limited the organization of the church, but I have yet to learn of the limit of organization we can have in the personal realm. The NT shows examples of Christians working together apart from the church. That is enough for me to believe God allows more than just the organization of the local church for evangelism, edification and benevolence.

It is not enough to say there were no organizations among saints in the NT in evangelizing, so there cannot be among us. We all agree there were no such arrangements in the church, but what is the limit of organization we can have as individuals? Don says “three brethren forming a religious publication” is okay, but where is that taught in the scriptures? Where has God given individuals the authority to form a religious publication? Is there a command, example or verse that necessary implies it is permitted among saints? If not, how do you have authority to permit brethren to enter such adventures, even when doing their work as individuals? It is likely because God was general in His commandments to individual saints regarding evangelism but was specific within the church. This is why we have groups of brethren in the NT meeting their responsibilities apart from the church (see above references). They were permitted to use their judgment in doing their work to the best of their ability, even when they practiced things not found within the church (Ac. 16:3). This is why Don and I agree that three brethren can form a publication for religious purposes, even though such is forbidden within the organization of the church. This is individual action and a matter of personal judgment, and not a matter of brotherhood organization.

I say this with all sincerity that I am terrified of being wrong in what I am teaching on this issue. The thought of convincing innocent souls to follow something contrary to God’s will is almost enough to keep me from saying anything at all (Jas. 3:1). The only consolation I have in this exchange is in knowing God has made a distinction in what the individual can do and in what the church can do. I can find plenty of verses to show that the church is not to fund, operate or work through human institutions like the GOTF and FC. But I cannot find a verse that says brethren cannot operate such facilities separate and apart from the church. Therefore, I find the courage to enter into this discussion issue by knowing I am defending the personal liberties God has given Christians. Such a defense is most certainly found within the scriptures (Rom. 14:14-20).

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One of the things I was hoping to show Don and those who believe like him is how inconsistent they sound in permitting religious publications yet condemning the lectureships of the GOTF and FC. The brethren involved in a religious publication are attempting to teach the gospel to others. The brethren involved in a lectureship are attempting to do the same. The only difference is one is in spoken form and the other is written. It makes no sense to me for Don to say “the church is the only organization God allows collective work among saints,” when condemning lectureships, yet two breaths later say he supports the organization of Christians for religious publishing purposes. Has the church ceased to be the pillar of truth when brethren join their efforts to teach the gospel through a religious magazine or over Bible Matters? (And, yes, Bible Matters is a group effort among saints!) Then why would it cease to be the pillar of truth when brethren join in efforts to teach very same gospel in person at a lectureship? These are all examples of organization and collective efforts among brethren, whether we acknowledge it or not. So why is there an unfair distinction and condemnation of one but not the other?

This is not an effort for me to defend Truth Magazine or Florida College. I think one brother said it best when he wrote me to encourage me in my stand, “I am certainly not a fan of GOTF, but truth is truth and should be upheld.” I have not always agreed with the things published in Truth Magazine, nor have I always held the beliefs of those who teach at Florida College. But the brother is right, “truth is truth and should be upheld”! We may not agree with the efforts put forth in these human organizations, but such is permitted because neither is the church or an extension of the church. These are NOT brotherhood projects, nor were they intended to be. These are individual saints working in a collective manner IN THE SAME WAY brethren do so in publishing religious material. If you can accept one organization among brethren, why not accept another doing the very same thing – teaching the gospel?

Don asked:

(1) “How can you use the argument of a thus-saith-the-Lord to exclude playing on a mechanical instrument, but fail to exclude Christians using other entities (other than the Lord's church) to organize and do the collective work God has assigned to the local church?”

Will you, Don, “please take off your blinders and see this institution in reality and in operation” as you have asked of me? Please hear me out:

I...do...not...believe...Christians...can...use...other...entities...to...organize...and...do...the...collective...work...God...has...assigned...to...the...local...church.

If that's what this debate was all about then I would not have agreed to it...because we would be in agreement! The issue is whether or not you can bind on the individual the kind of organization and limitations God has given the local church. I say there is no such teaching in

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the scriptures, but you are convinced there is. You and the brethren who agree with you must produce evidence that God forbids collective action among brethren in the personal realm. I have shown you from the scriptures that God has given the same work to the individual that He has the church, and has permitted a group effort among saints in meeting these responsibilities. My position permits you to have three brethren form a business for publication of religious material used in evangelism. Your position does not, even though you permit brethren to do so. If you use the argument that “to sing” necessitates a rejection of “to play” in musical worship (which it does), and then compare that to the organization of the church versus the organization of individual Christians, you are defeating your own position. If the only organization God permits among saints, in meeting their responsibilities to the gospel, is that which was given to the church, then you CANNOT in any way support the existence of organizations formed by brethren to publish evangelistic material. This would also prohibit you from submitting articles to Bible Matters and religious magazines, as well as not permit you to use nursing homes owned by brethren. If God has said “the local church is the only organization permitted among saints,” (or “to sing” if you will), then you cannot say it is okay for brethren to have their own businesses that aid a Christian in his duties, apart from the church. Such would be equivalent to “play” in addition to singing, if you will. What I’m trying to get you to see is that such businesses are permitted because God has given a pattern for the church to follow, but has not specified an arrangement in the personal realm. He has not said “to sing,” if you will, regarding individual organization in preaching the gospel, caring for the needy or in edifying fellow saints. He has simply given us the authority to do these things with no specific organization and limitations as He has the church (local elders, direct support of preachers, limited benevolence, etc.).

(2) “How can all work outside the local church be "individual" and yet you now speak of "collective action" in the institutional climate?”

If I haven’t answered that question by now, I can’t answer it. Let me try to answer it this way, when three brethren join together to form a business for publication of religious material, are they doing so as the church or are they doing so as individuals? If you say as individuals, then that’s what I mean by collective action performed by individuals. Any word that expresses their efforts is fine with me: join in, engage in, collective action, etc. How they are arranged does not change the fact that they are acting separate and apart from the church, in meeting the responsibilities and liberties God has given THEM.

(3) “Two rebuttal posts anterior, you were not sure as to an institution that offered praying, singing, and preaching not being able in certain circumstances to also offer the Lord’s Supper; however, in your last rebuttal you said such would be wrong; did you change your mind?”

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Two rebuttal posts anterior I said, “The church is told to take the Lord’s supper on the first day of the week. But the GOTF and FC are not attempting to be a church, so I don’t see how this question relates to them.”

One rebuttal post anterior I said, “Just because there is singing, preaching and praying does not make it the church (Ac. 12:12), which is why we can do so with our families and friends at times away from church. The Lord taught the church to take the Lord’s supper on the first day of the week. He has never given such instructions to saints when worshipping Him apart from the church.”

It seems to me that the Lord taught the church to take the Lord supper on the first day of the week, and that He gave no such instructions to individual saints in their efforts apart from the church. If you’re asking me if brethren can use the assemblies of the lectureship instead of meeting with brethren in the local churches, I would say such is not in keeping with God’s will. If you are asking me if there are ever occasions when brethren can meet outside of the local church to take the Lord’s supper, I’ll say what I said earlier, I honestly don’t know.

One brother wrote to me since with a good illustration about how “he thinks” (he is not for certain) that when brethren go on the Bible land tours with brother Ferrell Jenkins that they take the Lord’s supper together on Sundays (when there is no local church present). I honestly do not know what to think of this, do you? Yet at the same time I am not about to condemn them in their efforts because they are coming together as brethren on the first day of the week to take the Lord’s supper. Does God consider such assemblies to be equivalent to brethren gathered at local churches? Part of me says, yes (Matt. 18:20). But the other part of me wonders if such is necessary since God instructed the church to take the Lord’s supper, and not individual saints. Would I take it with them if we came together for that purpose? Yes, I likely would. I’d probably feel ashamed if I didn’t. The same is true with families that take it together when they are unable to meet with other saints. Does God permit such assemblies at will? I truly don’t know, do you?

In light of illustrations like these, I said it might be possible for brethren to be joined together in a lectureship on a Sunday, with the intent of coming together to take the Lord’s supper, if it were not possible for them to meet with other saints in the area. But I also said I don’t know of any such efforts ever being made at lectureships hosted by brethren, which is why you responded with a question about the ROTF offering it. Does the Lord permit brethren to assemble at will to partake of the Lord’s supper, on the first day of the week, apart from local churches? I don’t know, do you? Are you ready to draw a line of fellowship with those who do, as with those on the Bible Land tours (if indeed this is what happens)? If you permit such occasions among brethren while on vacation, would you also permit such among those gathered at a lectureship for the same reasons?

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Really, Don, how does this relate to our discussion? Is the GOTF and FC attempting to serve the Lord's supper at their lectureships? Are they asking brethren to view them as a church or an extension of the church? If not, then why bring in these extreme, non-existent, hypothetical situations? What does this have to do with the organization God has given individuals in their work in evangelism, edification and benevolence? If you want to have an exchange on whether or not the Lord's supper can be taken among saints outside of the assembly of the church, then let's have a discussion on it. But since we have agreed to discuss "the privately funded entity to preach the gospel issue," why dwell on this non-issue?

I agree with Don when he says this discussion has run its course. I know of nothing else to say that I haven't already said. If Don wants to make a final response expressing his appreciation, that's fine with me. Nevertheless, this will be my last post on this matter, if Don does not request another rebuttal. I sincerely do appreciate him as a fellow Christian and hope no eternal damage has been done in our exchanging of views. Thank you, once again Bible Matters and brethren, for your patient consideration.

Your brother in Christ,
Mike

Date: **January 26, 2005**

Subj: **"Don Martin's fifth rebuttal post to Mike Thomas (the privately funded entity to preach the gospel issue)"**

Don Martin's fifth rebuttal post to Mike Thomas (the privately funded entity to preach the gospel issue):

I again thank Mike Thomas for being willing to defend his belief that brethren have scriptural authority to form privately funded institutions such as preaching societies, edification orders, and relief for needy saints foundations, having full organizational structure, president, board of directors, treasury, etc., through which they can and may do the work God has assigned to his entity, the local church. Is such without Bible authority? Yes, emphatically stated. However, Mike Thomas is one of the few who will defend his belief. Mike Willis and other promoters of the Guardian of Truth Foundation, one such institution, will not defend their practices and teaching. Yet, on many occasions these institution promoters have chided others regarding different doctrine particularity because they would not polemically address the doctrinal differences.

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Mike and I have both express the opinion that the discussion is drawing to an end. I like to see an exchange end in the spiritual of cordiality. Mike and I have considered two more rebuttals, this one from me and then one more (two more from Mike). I, too, appreciate the list owners providing this opportunity and, again, Mike's willingness to discuss and defend his beliefs. Mike has impressed me as a very dedicated and honest man and I am hoping after this exchange, he will back off and take a good look at what we have discussed. If no change on his part is then forthcoming, perhaps when he has more personal experience regarding these institutions, he will grasp what I have said and believe the scriptures to teach on this subject.

I have pointed out that on the main level of examination, such institutions lack Bible authority. God has told us how Christians are to collectively preach, edify, and relieve needy saints, through the local church (cp. I Tim. 3: 15). When a specific is supplied, all other, in this case institutions, are eliminated. We have drawn a parallel between institutionalism and music in praise of God. God said "sing" and "playing on a piano" is excluded (Eph. 5: 19). God has said that Christians through the collectivity of the local church are to in the aggregate do the above mentioned work; hence, such orders as "Reach The Lost Foundation" are excluded (the R. T. L. F. is a made up foundation that roughly parallels the G. O. T. F).

Mike has charged that the opponents of privately funded missionary societies, etc., deny individual action. The simple truth is when an individual functions within an organization, they are functioning as part of the organization and not just as an individual! I have shown this charge to be false (case of Philip, Acts 8). Mike has said that we do not believe that two Christians can do anything together unless it directly goes through the local church and I have shown that to also be false (case of Aquila and Priscilla, Acts 18). Mike, at first, leaned heavily on the example of Aquila and Priscilla, claiming that the example proved his case for institutionalism. However, I have pointed out that to so use the circumstance of Aquila and Priscilla, Mike would have to produce the situation of Aquila and Priscilla working through a human institution that was comprised of brethren who had organized for the express purpose of collectively preaching the gospel to the lost. Mike obviously failed to produce such proof. In the case of Acts 18, we see concurrent individual action. Mike ended up adducing the argument that outside the local church, there is only individual action, regardless. Yet, in his rebuttal number three, Mike talked about the "collective action" inherent in institutionalism. The simple truth is when an individual functions within an organization, they are functioning as part of the organization and not just as an individual!

Mike and others who join him in defending privately funded institutionalism do not see the difference between three brethren owning and operating a religious book publication business for profit and in three brethren setting up the Reach The Lost Foundation. In the business scenario, they are a business for profit. If the profit ceased, they would cease their business. In the case of the Foundation, they are doing what they do to preach the gospel. Mike Willis

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being the exception, all the Guardian of Truth Foundation board members and staff writers of Truth Magazine are not doing what they do with profit or money in mind! There must, then, be other impetus. A business produces a product for profit. The religious entity seeks to reach the lost, often operating in the "red," if you will. The religious order recruits preachers, especially young preachers and offers them positions, such as staff writer for their promoting magazine. The privately funded missionary society preaches the gospel, often calling the activity a "lectureship." In this "lectureship," they have songs of praise, often bringing in a professional song leader, public prayer, and preaching. They urge obedience to the gospel. The Guardian of Truth Foundation is already advertising their "Second Annual Lectures." Yet, Mike and others want us to believe that the Guardian of Truth Foundation/Truth Magazine is simply brethren in business for profit, not so.

On a secondary level of objection, such privately funded societies of brethren collectively doing the work God assigned to his collectivity, the local church, involve all manner of corruption and perversion. As noticed, in the case of the Guardian of Truth Foundation, you see such men as Connie Adams, Donnie Rader and Weldon Warnock all corporately working together to preach the gospel, men who are diametrically opposed on such serious issues and marriage, divorce, and marriage to another. Weldon Warnock advocates a position that according to Adams and Rader, eventuates in fornication and adultery. Yet, these three men join hands in their human institution in fellowship. Lines are drawn, gospel meetings involving churches are "contacted" and cancelled, often involving ties to the various societies. Do not tell me this does not happen, I have seen it first hand! Brethren push their human institutions, not caring that such is causing division. "We do not have to have such societies," say they, "but when asked to abandon them, their adamant answer is, "No way!"

When I asked one main promoter of such institutionalism why he was so determined to have his order, his answer was: "We must have this arrangement in order to form the backing we need." What did he mean? When you arrive at the answer, you will understand why I say that such institutionalism fosters and promotes cliques and partyism (cp. Phil. 1: 14-16). Groups are formed and they rally around their leaders. "What issues are we opposing and championing?" are the understood questions. Together they stand as a group and if you challenge one, you have challenged the foundation. If you incur the wrath of the foundation, "We will see that your meeting work is diminished and that you will have trouble even finding a local church to preach for!" "If you are not with us, we will consider you against us!"

Notwithstanding, Mike expects me to see no difference between three brethren who go into business for profit and in the privately funded foundations and societies! I am here to say in language free of ambiguity that these foundations are the source of many problems among us and must be exposed for what they are, unscriptural institutionalism with all of its politics and corruption, playing church.

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My friend Mike wrote:

"The reason I have not produced a verse for privately supported institutions doing the work of the church is because there is no verse for such a thing, NOR has that been the position I have been defending."

Don comments:

I must admit that I do not fully understand Mike's position and I apologize for this. As a rule, when in a debate, I understand my disputant's position better than he does. I have failed in this case. My simple argument has been that since we only find one provision and circumstance of Christians functioning corporately and collectively in preaching the gospel and that entity is the local church, then God means for this to be the only entity doing this work. The oversight is limited to elders and the treasury used to execute this God assigned work is the church treasury. I see the utter silence of any teaching supportive of privately funded institutionalism as prohibitive, especially in view of the what and how being supplied. Mike sees the silence as a license (there is no expressed prohibition), I suppose. Hence, Mike argues from the silence of the scriptures; while I argue from what is taught and then the silence of anything else.

Mike wrote in his forth rebuttal the following:

"The debate, if you recall, is over whether or not Christians may engage in such enterprise separate and apart from the church. I have said all along that BOTH the church and the individual have been given the work of evangelism, helping the needy and edifying the saints (1 Pet. 3:15; Gal. 6:10; Rom. 14:19). The only difference being that the church has been limited in what it can do and how it can be organized (1 Tim. 5:16; Eph. 4:11). Don is the one saying the individual has been placed under the same organization God has given the church."

Don comments:

I sincerely apologize to Mike for not having the ability to be more communicative. It appears that I have miserably failed. Yes, the individual Christian has the responsibility to teach others, we have seen this in the example of Philip (Acts 8). Christians may also engage in what we call concurrent individual action, as did Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18).

However, when Christians form their own entity (board of directors, treasury, etc.) through which to collectively preach the gospel, this is no longer either individual or concurrent individual action, the entity is functioning. I just do not seem to be able to make this clear so Mike can understand it.

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Mike continued regarding privately funded entities doing the work God has assigned to the local church:

"Yet at the same time I do not condemn brethren who decide to enter into such arrangements in their own personal efforts BECAUSE God has not bound on the individual Christian what He has the church! He has limited the organization of the local church. He has not limited the ways in which brethren can be organized outside of the church. If He has, there would be NO permission for brethren to work collectively through an organization that publishes religious material."

Don comments:

Hence, the authority for Reach The Lost Foundation, according to Mike. Again, Mike sees no material difference between three brethren forming a religious book publication business for profit and three brethren forming the Reach The Lost Foundation in order to preach the gospel to the lost, arranging for preachers, offering public worship, prayers, etc.

Mike stated:

"If the RTLFL (Reach The Lost Foundation, dm) is an organization run by brethren apart from the church, through which they bring in preachers to hold lectures, and they are teaching the truth (especially against denominationalism), how is that any different than a religious magazine that has men submit articles for teaching purposes? You say it is okay for brethren to own and operate a business that publishes religious material, so where does this material come from? Gospel preachers? If so, why is it okay for brethren to teach through that medium and not okay for them to teach through a lectureship? I don't know of a verse that shows the church having permission to engage in a business that publishes religious material, do you? So why do you permit it among brethren, separate and apart from the church? I would imagine it is because you know God has not bound on the individual the kind of organization He has the church."

Don responds:

A religious magazine such as Truth Magazine is, I maintain, part of the institutionalism that I believe is unscriptural, I have explained this. Again, though, Mike mixes apples and oranges. A business for profit is not tantamount to the institutionalism being discussed.

Consider Mike's statement:

"Three brethren forming a book publication is an organization, whether Don is able to swallow it or not. This is a collective effort through which more than one brother is working with another

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to accomplish a task. But this is okay with me since it is being done in the personal, individual realm, separate and apart from the church. It is when we say the church is the ONLY collective action saints can be involved in that I have a problem."

Don responds:

Yes, three brethren so functioning constitute a business, but what is its nature and purpose, Mike, to make profit or to preach the gospel? I have maintained that the only authorized collective action of saints to preach, edify, and relieve needy saints is the local church. Mike, mixing apples and oranges is only confusing the issue.

Mike then states the real issue:

"Brethren can work collectively as individuals, separate from the church, in meeting the responsibilities God has given them, whether it be in worship (Ac. 12:12), in evangelism (Phil. 4:3) or in helping the needy (1 Cor. 16:15).

Don comments:

Herein lies much of the problem, this belief that, "Brethren can work collectively as individuals" to do the work God has enjoined on his collectivity, the church. When three, lets say, brethren form the Reach The Lost Foundation for the purpose preaching the gospel and function within this institution, with its board of directors, treasury, etc., they are no longer functioning as individuals, Mike, but the entity is activated. Mike, I plead with you to consider what you are saying.

Mike reasoned:

"But I cannot find a verse that says brethren cannot operate such facilities separate and apart from the church. Therefore, I find the courage to enter into this discussion issue by knowing I am defending the personal liberties God has given Christians. Such a defense is most certainly found within the scriptures (Rom. 14:14-20)."

Don observes:

Here we are able to look in some depth into Mike's reasoning. In other words, if a matter is not expressly forbidden, it must be viewed as a liberty. I have said from the onset that this privately funded institution issue is parallel to the music in worship matter. "Since the scriptures do not expressly say, 'thou shall not use a piano in worship,' the piano must be viewed as a liberty and

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you have no right to condemn it," the exact same logic applied to music says.

Notice: God has said to sing; God has set forth the local church as the entity through which Christians are to corporately function, the specific singing excludes playing; the specific local church excludes privately funded organizations. To argue for these institutions, one must appeal to the silence of the scriptures, rejecting what is taught.

Mike is persistent because he continues to maintain the following toward the end of his last rebuttal:

"These are NOT brotherhood projects, nor were they intended to be. These are individual saints working in a collective manner IN THE SAME WAY brethren do so in publishing religious material."

Don comments:

Mike stays with his "individual saints working in a collective manner" argument. Again, when saints combine in the climate of an institution, they are no long individually acting. This individual activity in a collectivity is a total misnomer and is severely flawed. Such is organization activity. Mike confuses brethren being organized and having an organization (treasury, etc.). Mike confuses a business for profit and an entity set up to preach the gospel.

Mike continues to maintain the subsequent:

"Bible Matters is a group effort among saints!"

Mike still says that Bible Matters is tantamount to the Guardian of Truth Foundation. How can Mike make this argument? I am at a loss. Bible Matters, as I understand it, is at best an example of concurrent individual action. Each writer submits a post to the list. There are no staff writers, we are not part of a board of directors, and Bible Matters is not chartered and does not function as a privately funded missionary society, etc. Yet, Mike says that they are the same.

Mike then makes a statement that, in seems to me, I should have made:

"Will you, Don, 'please take off your blinders and see this institution in reality and in operation' as you have asked of me? Please hear me out: I do not believe Christians can

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Use other entities to organize and do the collective work God has assigned to the local church.

If that's what this debate was all about then I would not have agreed to it because we would be in agreement! The issue is whether or not you can bind on the individual the kind of organization and limitations God has given the local church. I say there is no such teaching in the scriptures, but you are convinced there is."

Mike, for about the hundredth time, when individual Christians band themselves into an entity, having structure, treasury, etc. to do the work of preaching the gospel, edifying the saved, and/or relief needy saints, they are no longer individual Christians performing individual works, but an entity functioning as an entity.

I do understand why so many cannot accept the truth just stated because to do so would be to forfeit their claim to their privately funded societies.

I shall close this post and urge you to consider Mike's next rebuttal.

Cordially,
Don Martin

Date: **January 26, 2005**

Subj: **"Response to Lectures (5)"**

Brother Don and fellow listers:

This response will be brief.

Allow me to explain why my last rebuttal of Don's post was submitted to Bible Matters before his. He and I have been sending each other our posts before we submit them to BM, to give each other a little time to prepare a rebuttal. He has been going first in this debate and I have been responding. When he sent me his 4th rebuttal on Monday night, in response to my rebuttal (3) that day, he said it would be posted to BM the next morning. The following day, Tuesday, I wrote my rebuttal (Response 4) and submitted it at 3:00 p.m., assuming Don's was already posted by then. Because of some mix up, his did not get posted until today (Wed.). I'm not assigning blame to anyone. I'm just explaining why I was able to respond to Don's rebuttal before you had a chance to read it and why mine was posted to BM before his.

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In my last response, I said it would be my last unless Don requested another rebuttal of me. His fifth rebuttal has now been submitted to BM and I will respond accordingly. However, this will not take very long since I believe Don has essentially said the same things in his last two posts. He has yet to show from the scriptures where God has assigned to the individual realm the organization and limitations He has given the local church. He insists on saying the only collective effort permitted among Christians is through the local church. For that reason, I will ask a series of questions for Don to respond to, and then I will give my final response (6) tomorrow as a conclusion to the debate. That will then be my last effort in this exchange, I promise.

To Don, I ask:

- (1) YES or NO, may a group of Christians, separate and apart from the work of the church, own and operate a publishing company that produces books and magazines, written by Christians, for the express purpose of evangelism and / or the edification of saints? Please explain your answer and list the verses in the Bible that support your conclusion.
- (2) YES or NO, may a group of Christians, separate and apart from the work of the church, own and operate a benevolent facility, as a nursing home, and permit as customers Christians in need? Please explain your answer and list the verses in the Bible that support your conclusion.
- (3) YES or NO, may a group of Christians, separate and apart from the work of the church, own and operate a school that will permit the teaching of the Bible as one of its courses? Please explain your answer and list the verses in the Bible that support your conclusion.
- (4) YES or NO, may a group of Christians, separate and apart from the work of the church, own and operate a discussion list, like Bible Matters, and permit Christians to submit articles for the express purpose of evangelism and/or the edification of saints? Please explain your answer and list the verses in the Bible that support your conclusion.

Brotherly,
Mike Thomas

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Date: **January 27, 2005**

Subj: **“Don Martin's Sixth and final rebuttal post to Mike Thomas (the privately funded entity to preach the gospel issue)”**

Don Martin's Sixth and final rebuttal post to Mike Thomas (the privately funded entity to preach the gospel issue):

In this my final rebuttal, I want to comment more on what I view to be one of the basic flaws in Mike's reasoning that he thinks allows Christians to form privately supported missionary societies, edification boards, and relief for needy saints foundations. After these comments, I want to address Mike's good questions.

Before I proceed, however, I want to again thank those who have provided Bible Matters and for the opportunity to again engage in such a discussion. It is my strong belief that all such issues must be studied instead of brushed aside. I have found in Mike Thomas a very reasonable and capable debater. I wish Mike and I had been on the same side of this issue, but we both are accountable for our teaching. It remains my desire that Mike will yet see the folly of institutionalism among brethren that continues to exist in the privately funded institution mentality. I sincerely thank Mike for his efforts and time. Mike has done as good of job in general as any whom I have debated on this subject. The outstanding thing about Mike is he is level headed and has conducted himself very commendably! I also want to thank all of you who have considered what Mike and I have had to say. I shall now begin to wrap up my part in this exchange.

Mike has told us in this exchange that the church (collectivity) is subject to God's restrictions, in that; the local church must not contribute to human organizations such as missionary societies. He explains that this is the case because the scriptures only authorize the church treasury to be use to do the work God has assigned to the church. Mike has produced scripture and with this, I must agree. However, when I have pressed the biblical fact that the only way the scriptures offer and teach a collective milieu or means for Christians to preach, edify, and relieve needy saints is in God's collectivity, the local church, Mike and others retort with the statement, "We are at liberty to function the way we elect as individuals." They believe the claimed liberty allows them to form institutions through which to collectively work, doing what God has said for his entity, the local church to do. The simple truth is when an individual functions within an organization such as discussed, they are functioning as part of the organization and not just as an individual! Hence, they create the incongruous situation of collective work in an individual work climate.

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Notwithstanding the contradiction of such an idea, Mike has repeatedly contended for such and presented this argumentation as his primary rationale and justification for Christians forming privately funded institutions through and in which to collectively do the work God has assigned to his collectivity, the local church (cp. I Tim. 3: 15). Mike has claimed that he has presented Bible authority for such institutions with the example of Philip (Acts 8) and Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18). However, we noted that these examples only present individual action and then, in the case of Aquila and Priscilla, concurrent individual action. To use Aquila and Priscilla to validate institutionalism, Aquila and Priscilla must be shown to have collectively functioned within an institution such as "Reach The Lost Foundation."

On one hand, Mike says that all action outside the local church is individual. Yet, he also has now conceded "collective action" and has made this concession relative to privately funded societies. To complicate this, Mike maintains that Christians collectively working through a Foundation that has the expressed mission of preaching the gospel are performing individual works. This quandary that is characteristic of Mike's position is the case with all institution promoters. Consider this, please:

Lest we confuse the difference between "individual action" with "corporate action," it's important that we understand the definitions of these words.

All of the following definitions are from the New Illustrated Webster's Dictionary, 1992.

It is true that "institutions" are made up of "individuals" working together, but an organized "institution" hardly falls into the category of "individual action."

Institution, "A corporate body or establishment instituted and organized for an educational, medical, charitable, or similar purpose." (p. 505).

Furthermore, Webster tells us that those who promote such institutions have a mind set. Notice the following definition under "institutional" and then "institutionalism."

Institutional, "Designating a form of advertising intended to promote good will and prestige, as for an institution, rather than to get immediate sales." (p. 505).

Institutionalism, "Belief in and support of the usefulness and authority of institutions. The spirit that exalts established institutions, especially in religion: opposed to individualism." (p. 505.)

An institution ("corporate body") is the very opposite of individualism.

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Notice the definitions given for "individual" and "individualism."

Individual, "Differentiated from others by peculiar or distinctive characteristics: an individual style...Anything that cannot be divided or separated into parts without losing its identity." (p. 495.)

Individualism, "Personal independence in action, character, or interest."
(p. 495.)

When we look up the definition of "organization" and/or "foundation," we learn that these are in absolute contrast with "individual action."

What is a Foundation? "A fund for the permanent maintenance of an institution: an endowment. An endowed institution."

Notwithstanding these clear definitions, Mike has said that all action, even action within an institution is individual. Mike has Christians working within a privately funded missionary society performing individual work in a collective climate. Such is wrong and untenable.

Mike and others expect thinking people to accept their explanation that such institutions as the Guardian of Truth Foundation only involve individual action. Some promoters wanting to operate under the guise of "business for profit," expostulate that they are in a business and then as individuals, they are teaching the gospel.

It was apparent to all that preliminary to the "First Annual Lectures" sponsored by the Guardian of Truth Foundation, Ron Halbrook attempted to prepare the way with his article, "Let The Church Be The Church." I, for one, resented Ron's approach and viewed it as cowardly and deceptive. The real and honest titled should have been something to the effect, "Let The Church Be The Church, But Let Us Play Church With Our Institutions." When carefully examined, Ron's article was a sneaky way of trying to convince brethren to accept the Guardian of Truth Foundation overtly becoming a privately funded missionary society. I want to now insert an excerpt from my article in www.bibletruths.net titled, "Let The Church Be The Church!" - A Review." I do so at this time because I view Ron and Mike's argumentation as tantamount:

".Author Ron Halbrook states a number of truths with which I readily concur (most errorists will mix some truth in their presentation of error and this is what Ron did, 2 Pet. 2: 1ff. The expression "privily shall bring in" in Second Peter 2: 1 is from the Greek pareisaxousin. Para means by the side and eis indicates entrance and direction. Hence, error is often introduced by the side of the truth). Consider some:

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"Christians must be active, faithful members of the local church..The church does some things the individual does, but is not an individual..The church does some things a business does, but is not a business organization. Both churches and businesses need money to operate, but the church depends upon the freewill offerings of its members and not upon selling goods and services, investments, and other business strategies.. ('Let The Church Be The Church!,' Gospel Truths, pg. 1 and 4).

Ron supplies more substantive comments when he wrote:

'Individuals may act alone or in concert to form and conduct legitimate, legal businesses..Churches may simply purchase goods and services from businesses for their own use in fulfilling their work' (Ibid., pg. 5).

Ron indicates more openly the direction in which he really wants to guide the reader when he wrote:

'Businesses conducted by Christians sometimes make Bible study materials available to customers or invite a preacher to teach weekly Bible lessons for interested employees. Several Christians have combined their funds to rent meeting rooms at motels for gospel preaching in places where the true gospel is unknown..' (Ibid., pg. 5. The observant reader will notice that what Ron is suggesting is not tantamount to Christians forming an organization with a president, board of directors, treasury, etc. through which to collectively preach the gospel, which is what Ron is laboring to promote in his material).

Consider the rationale used by Ron Halbrook to promote the Guardian of Truth Foundation functioning as a local church:

'In the course of conducting our business, members of the G.O.T. Foundation often pray together and even pray with other people with whom we have dealings, especially in praying for God's wisdom and blessings upon our endeavors. We discuss God's Word together and with others, especially regarding its proper application to our work. As circumstances permit, we create and utilize opportunities to teach people the truth and God's Word and we do everything possible to encourage them to obey, worship, and serve God faithfully. Such studies have been conducted for the staff writers of Truth Magazine from time to time. The Truth Lectureship makes it possible for other interested individuals to share with us in such studies. By inviting people to read Truth Magazine and to visit our web site., we hope to better acquaint them with the goods and services of our bookstores and to encourage them to obey, worship, and serve God faithfully' (Ibid.).

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When I have asked brethren who were involved in organizations as to the authority for such organizations preaching the gospel, they would typically reply by saying, 'We are selling and providing a service for Christians and churches.' When further probed, they would answer by saying, 'No, we as an organization are not doing the work of the local church, we are simply in business to make money and if we did not make money or charge for our service, we would not offer it!' With the advent of Ron's material, there is no longer the, 'if we did not make money or charge for our service, we would not offer it!' argument. Again, writing about the Guardian of Truth Foundation Ron stated:

'As circumstances permit, we create and utilize opportunities to teach people the truth and God's Word and we do everything possible to encourage them to obey, worship, and serve God faithfully.'

Brethren, such is deception in the first degree! Who is the repeated "we"? The answer, the Guardian of Truth Foundation. Ron and now, you, my friend, Mike, have introduced an aberrant area of work, a Christian performing a truly individual work within an institution. Such is flawed, a cope out, and is error. We would be helpless and seriously crippled if we tried to debate the average institution promoter during the fifties with this kind of understanding of action. Mike, I appeal to you to abandon such faulty reasoning, you are much too intelligent and I believe honest to continue such a masquerade.

I shall now address Mike's questions and close my final rebuttal.

To Don, I ask:

Question one: YES or NO, may a group of Christians, separate and apart from the work of the church, own and operate a publishing company that produces books and magazines, written by Christians, for the express purpose of evangelism and / or the edification of saints?

Please explain your answer and list the verses in the Bible that support your conclusion.

Don's answer: I have affirmed the right of brethren to form a business for profit. I have even affirmed a religious book publication business for profit. However, your scenario does not fit this circumstance. I say this because you state that their reason for owning such a business is ".for the express purpose of evangelism and/or the edification of saints." Hence, I would have to say that based on their intent, they are forming an institution through which to collectively work, doing what God has assigned to his collectivity, the local church (cp. I Tim. 3: 15).

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Question two: YES or NO, may a group of Christians, separate and apart from the work of the church, own and operate a benevolent facility, as a nursing home, and permit as customers Christians in need?

Please explain your answer and list the verses in the Bible that support your conclusion.

Don's answer: In these matters, intent is very important. It does not appear from Mike's example that these Christians are attempting to do the work of the church in the matter of assisting needy saints as such, only admitting them along with others. Therefore, the scenario is not as decisive as the Philippine Relief Fund that is set up to assist needy saints. Again, this case is not as clear, I would have to know more before I could clearly say that I viewed it as the kind of institutionalism that we are discussing. By law, I suppose they would have to admit any who meet their financial requirements, assuming it is not an eleemosynary order (cp. I Cor. 16: 1, 2.).

Question three: YES or NO, may a group of Christians, separate and apart from the work of the church, own and operate a school that will permit the teaching of the Bible as one of its courses?

Please explain your answer and list the verses in the Bible that support your conclusion.

Don's answer: Just based on your scenario and question, I would answer, "yes." I say "yes" with the understanding that the motive for such a school is, again, a business for profit and that the climate is academic. There could, though, be another problem, depending on several matters, the problem of a "Church of Christ seminary" situation (cp. I Tim. 3: 15, 2 Tim. 2: 1, 2).

Question 4: YES or NO, may a group of Christians, separate and apart from the work of the church, own and operate a discussion list, like Bible Matters, and permit Christians to submit articles for the express purpose of evangelism and/or the edification of saints?

Please explain your answer and list the verses in the Bible that support your conclusion.

Don's answer: Based on my understanding of the nature and structure of Bible Matters, I would answer, 'yes.' I would feel much more comfortable if there were simply one owner. Again, I do not know all the details relative to Bible Matters. It is my understanding that the list is simply for individual Christians to submit articles, without any kind of organizational structure. There are no staff writers, board of directors of which I am aware, or treasury such as discussed, etc. Therefore, I view Bible Matters as an example of concurrent individual action. Should I receive information to the contrary, I certainly would remove myself. To contradistinguish, I would not

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be a part of Truth Magazine, the organizational structure being one reason.

In closing, I again state that I have a serious evident problem with privately funded entities comprised of brethren for the purpose of allowing them to collectively work in doing the tasks God assigned to his entity, the local church. However, I view another inherent problem as just as consequential, the problem of attitudes toward Bible authority. Since I only read of one organization to do the work of preaching, edifying, and relieving needy saints, I conclude that human institutions comprised of brethren doing this work are excluded. Why are we not content with just doing Bible things in Bible ways? Such institutions tend to be clearing houses for false doctrine and open fellowship, as seen with the Guardian of Truth Foundation. They are run by a president and board of directors, not God appointed elders. Also, these human institutions are not autonomous; therefore, they tend to exert "brotherhood" controlling influence, as we have noted. Perhaps these reasons and possibly others, are why God only mentions one institution through and in which Christians collectively function to do His work. The argument used to justify these orders that, ".since the scriptures do not say not to have them, they must be viewed as a liberty" is totally contrary to a sound hermeneutic and is an argument based on the silence of the scriptures (cp. Heb. 7: 14). God has stated a specific (local church) and all other institutions of Christians doing this work are excluded. How can any promoter of such institutions successfully argue against mechanical music in worship, prayer to Mary, sprinkling for baptism, ad infinitum? I say this because none of these matters are expressly condemned. However, there are specifics stated and we understand that these just mentioned matters are excluded. Why can we simply use the same approach relative to the neo-institutionalism that is on the rise among us?

Cordially,
Don Martin

Date: **January 27, 2005**

Subj: **"Response to Lectures (6)"**

To my good brother Martin and fellow listers:

I trust you know by now the tremendous respect and appreciation I have for Don Martin, Bible Matters and those of you who have followed this discussion to its conclusion. It has required a great bit of diligence and hunger for truth on your part to stay with it this long. I know I can speak for Don in saying it has been no small task for us either. Don is a sincere Christian with tremendous ability. In fact, I hope to someday be as capable, knowledgeable and as involved as he is in defending God's word. A quick glance at his website will confirm this effort. Thus, I

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hope he never gets discouraged in his quest for God's will (2 Tim. 2:15) and that he will always have the courage to examine publicly what he teaches publicly. He has certainly been forthright and supportive of me (as much as he could) during this discussion, for which I am thankful. Like him, I regret that we could not be on the same side in this issue. If anything, as I told a friend after reading Don's last post, that I truly felt sorry for him in trying to answer the questions. It seemed like a difficult task to accomplish while remaining consistent with his argument. But then again, who among us has not struggled with consistency in studying truth? Consistency is likely the hardest fruit to bear on the tree of good fruit. Nevertheless, Don presented a sincere and genuine effort in this exchange, and I will now respond accordingly.

Don wrote, "On one hand, Mike says that all action outside the local church is individual. Yet, he also has now conceded 'collective action'..." If you, the reader, are entering this debate at this juncture, I encourage you to review what I have said in my previous rebuttals about individual action in comparison to the work of the church. You will see that this is not something I "conceded" as a result of this exchange. My very first rebuttal will show that I understand the scriptures to teach that Christians are either acting in the private (individual) realm or within the church realm, in doing the work of evangelism, benevolence and edification. My brother Martin says he believes that the only time we may (lawfully before God) act collectively as brethren is in the church realm (through the local church). But, as seen in his answering of my recent questions, he realizes there are scenarios in which brethren can (lawfully before God) act collectively in the individual realm in evangelism, benevolence and edification, separate and apart from the church. This does NOT mean he believes brethren can form institutions to do the work of the church. He and I both agree on that. But he does acknowledge there are certain types of collective action brethren are permitted to join in without violating the work and organization God has given the church.

When Don was asked if Christians, separate and apart from the church, may own and operate benevolent facilities, that would permit as customers the care of needy saints, he wrote the following. (Keep in mind that helping needy saints is both the work of the church as well as the individual.)

"In these matters, intent is very important. It does not appear from Mike's example that these Christians are attempting to do the work of the church in the matter of assisting needy saints as such, only admitting them along with others. Therefore, the scenario is not as decisive as the Philippine Relief Fund that is set up to assist needy saints."

Amen. That's what I've been trying to say all along. There are times when brethren can act AS an organization, separate and apart from the church, and NOT "appear...that these Christians are attempting to do the work of the church" (as in the perversion of the Philippine Relief Fund among churches). That's what I mean by collective action in the individual realm, separate and

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apart from the church. It is when an effort is considered “collective” in comparison to one saint. It is considered “individual” in comparison to the work of the church. This is what I believe brother Halbrook intended when Don quoted him in saying, “The Truth Lectureship makes it possible for OTHER INTERESTED INDIVIDUALS (emphasis mine, mt) to share with us in such studies.” “Other interested individuals” -- not other interested churches. They are individuals gathered at a lectureship and are considered an assembly in contrast to those not present, but that does NOT necessitate they are gathered as a church or an extension of the church. They can still be gathered in a collective manner and NOT be considered the church (Ac. 12:12). Why engage in such spiritual activities apart from the church? It is because the Lord has given the individual realm the SAME responsibilities of evangelism, edification and benevolence AS HE HAS the church, with a limitation on the organization and effort of the local church (Rom. 15:24-27; 1 Pet. 5:2). He has not limited the organization and effort of Christians outside of the church, else brethren could not collectively own and operate organizations that assist them in evangelism, edification and benevolence, as Don concedes are permissible organizations.

For that reason, I ask brethren who hold the position Don has defended, why condemn the efforts of brethren at the lectureships of Truth Magazine and Florida College, when they teach and promote the truth? Are these the efforts of brethren within local churches or are these the efforts of brethren apart from the church? Don has conceded that it is possible for brethren to act as a group in forming organizations without appearing to be Christians who are attempting to do the work of the church, so why can you not do the same with these lectureships? If you permit the gospel to be taught in written form by brethren through an organized publication (like a magazine), why not permit them to teach that very same lesson in a speech at a lectureship (respecting God’s rules for public teaching of His word, of course; cf., 1 Tim. 2:8-12)? I’m not saying you have to agree with everything that is done and taught in these human organizations. I don’t. But it doesn’t mean we have to bind where God has not bound in drawing a line of fellowship over their right to act independent of the church in preaching the gospel. If it is permissible for brethren, apart from the church, to form an organization to sell a book that teaches the gospel, why would it not also be permissible for that very same organization, using the very same men, teaching the very same lessons, provide a public setting to GIVE away the very same gospel? How is their effort any different than the effort put forth by Aquila and Priscilla in teaching Apollos? How does their arrangement change the fact that they are still acting independent of the church, in things God requires of saints outside of the local church? As long as everyone is remaining within the parameters of the gospel (2 John 9-11), why would we place on the individual the restrictions God has given only to the local church? Do we not know that God makes a distinction in what the two are permitted to do (1 Tim. 5:16)?

In our effort to lead the noble war against institutionalism within the church, let us not go to the other extreme in condemning institutions all together. Just because they are abused among liberal minded brethren within the church does not necessitate an abuse of such efforts by

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conservative minded brethren apart from the church. There were Christians in the days of Paul who abused the physical act of circumcision within the church (Ac. 15). They were trying to bind on Christians what God never intended. This abuse, however, did not require an all out denunciation of circumcision as a whole. Such could still be practiced by saints, apart from the church, for reasons other than the abusers were promoting, to open doors for the gospel (Ac. 16:3). Brethren, I ask you, if Paul could make such distinctions with something as controversial as circumcision, why can we not make similar distinctions today with something as controversial as institutionalism?

If institutionalism is being brought into churches as a substitute for the organization and work God has given the local church, then we need to be as adamant and diligent in our stand against it as Paul was with circumcision (Ac. 15:2). But if institutions are formed by brethren, separate and apart from the church, to do their work as Christians, for reasons other than those who abuse it within the church, why can we not be as opened minded and mature with it as Paul was with circumcision? Is the risk of division and corruption from institutionalism any less threatening for us than circumcision was for brethren in Paul's day? Of course not. This is why he constantly warned brethren of the dangers of misunderstanding and misusing circumcision (Gal. 5:1-6; 6:11-15). But he did NOT run to the other extreme in rejecting it all together, when it could be practiced without "appearing to be Christians who are attempting to do the work of the church"! That's the kind of wisdom we all need to strive for when dealing with any controversial matter that develops among us as God's people (Jas. 3:13-18).

Well, there it is brethren. Don and I have concluded our exchange. The responsibility is now yours to take what has been taught and examine it under the light of the gospel, to find where God stands on this issue (Ac. 17:11). If I am wrong, I hope I have not led anyone astray with me. If I am right, and that this issue is ultimately a matter of personal judgment, I hope we can learn to bear with each other's differences---"For we are brethren" (Gen. 13:8). May we all remember that ultimately this is all about God, and not the names of those mentioned in this debate. "That, as it is written, 'He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.'"

brotherly,

Mike Thomas
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