

A THEOLOGY OF CHRISTIAN SCHOOL MINISTRY IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

In the process of establishing a model for how a Christian School ministry should relate to its sponsoring church, we must first examine the nature of Christian ministry and consider the validity of a Christian school as a ministry of a local church. As we will see, the body of Christ is commanded to engage in ministry. The bottom line is that a Christian school is either a valid outgrowth of that obligation, or it has no place as a ministry of a church.

To address these issues we will examine the concept of ministry according to the New Testament. Next, we will examine education as a specific ministry function of the church. This study will include an examination of the Old Testament and New Testament teaching on education. Finally, we will draw conclusions about the validity of a Christian school ministry as a part of a local church and observe the implications of the biblical teaching on how that ministry might relate to the church family and organize itself for accountability.

Ministry as a Function of the Church

First century followers of Christ were without a doubt called upon to minister to others. Jesus set the example when he began his ministry at about thirty years of age (Lk 3:23). But the New Testament writers raise the standard high as they describe and prescribe the practice of the early church and its constituency. The apostles devoted themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word (Acts 6:4). Believers were told that they were to exercise the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18). Church leaders were challenged to fulfill their ministry (Col 4:17; 2 Tim 4:5). Thus, we see that the concept of ministry is scattered throughout the New Testament.

Ministry Defined

The New Testament word most often translated 'ministry' is the Greek word *diakonia*. According to Lawrence O. Richards, this word occurs a total of seventy-one times in the New Testament in its basic form *diakonia*, in a related form *diakonos*, and in the verb form *diakoneo*. It may be translated 'service' or 'ministry' (1985:443). It is the word used by Jesus when he called his disciples to serve one another, referring to his life as an example, saying that "he did not come to be served (*diakoneo*), but to serve (*diakoneo*), and give his life as a ransom for many" (Mt 20:28).

New Testament theologian E. Earle Ellis defines *ministry* as “an ordinary act of aid or service to another or as service rendered to God and to others in God’s name” (1989:1). He notes that in first-century Judaism, ministry was carried out by the local priest, the prophets, who at this point in history were scarcely seen, and local leaders such as those titled wise teacher, elder, scribe or rabbi. But in the New Testament church, ministry differed in that it was patterned after the ministry of Jesus especially in terms of his mission, death and resurrection. Just as Jesus was referred to as apostle, prophet, bishop, shepherd and teacher, so his followers accepted those corresponding terms (1989:1-3).

Similarly, Millard Erickson views ministry as an extension of Christ’s ministry. According to Erickson, the body of Christ is to carry out the work of Christ in accordance with the admonition of Christ found in the Great Commission (Mt 28:19-20) and according to the observation made by Jesus in John 14:12: “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do....” The works of Christ are to be done by his body, the church (Erickson 1985:1038-39). In this sense, Christ’s work becomes the model for the believer.

Practically, then, ministry is carrying on the work of Christ. Christ’s purposes become our purposes, and his model of service rendered to the world becomes our model for accomplishing God’s work. This was the challenge before the early church, and the New Testament writings give us insight into how the church thought and acted in order to accomplish that goal.

Ministry in the New Testament Church

Ministry in the New Testament can be examined from various perspectives. First, the individual believer is challenged to exercise his or her spiritual gift in the body and for the church. It is an individual responsibility, but the individual believer is to exercise his ministry as a part of the total ministry of the body of Christ. He can minister as an individual, but he must minister as a part of a larger body of believers in order to be effective and in order to make the body effective as well. Second, ministry in the church is closely linked with the ministry of the biblically-defined officers of the church. Pastors are overseers and servants of the church and as such have a responsibility to facilitate ministry in the body of Christ. Third, the New Testament indicates that the early church organized itself to carry out ministry functions throughout the body that individual believers could not easily accomplish alone. Finally, the ministry functions of the church are spelled out in the scriptures, and the church is challenged to keep its focus on those functions or purposes in order to effectively carry out its mission.

The Believer’s Ministry

Basic to the Christian concept of ministry is the idea that ministry is to be carried out by individual followers of Christ. Every believer is called to be a minister in the sense that he or she is to follow the model of Christ in serving others and leading them to

reconciliation with God. The act of equipping for this service is provided by the Holy Spirit in his distribution of spiritual gifts. Therefore, ministry in its most basic sense is the exercise of those gifts. Believers are given gifts according to the grace of the Holy Spirit and they are called to exercise them in ministry to others (Rom 12:6). As Ellis notes, “the gifts of the Spirit are the function of the Spirit that Paul identifies with Christian ministry. They enable believers to fulfill the *mission* of Christ” (1989:34).

However, the Spirit’s distribution of gifts to individual believers for personal ministry action should not result in an independent attitude toward ministry. On the contrary, the exercise of the spiritual gifts by individual believers is always described as taking place in the context of the church body. Central to the scriptural teaching on the gifts is the idea that the gifts are to be exercised in the context of the church family. The Apostle Paul explains that not all believers are granted the same spiritual gift, making ministry alongside other members within the body a necessity (1 Cor 12:28-30). In other words, the diversity of the gifts and the Spirit’s varied distribution of them require that the body work in concert to carry out Christ’s mission.

Likewise, the individual exercise of one’s gifts and the Spirit’s varied distribution of the gifts should not cause division in the body. Though it seems that some in the Corinthian church sought to regard some gifts as greater than others and, thus, those believers possessing them were greater as well, the diversity of the gifts should in fact result in unity (1 Cor 12:24-25) and greater maturity in the body (Eph 4:12-16). The generous exercise of the gifts on behalf of the body should create a bond with others in the body. Calvin speaks of this connection:

There is nothing more that should incline us favorably to men, than when the Lord manifests himself in them by the gifts of the Spirit. This is the highest commendation of all among the pious, this is the most sacred bond of connection by which they are most especially bound to each other (as quoted in Milner 1970: 183).

Calvin rightly noted that the gifts are far from being the occasion for division or distinction, but rather the tool for knitting us more tightly together (1970:183).

Finally, the individual work of a believer can never be separated from the overall work of the body of Christ. The biblical image of the body of Christ is used to describe the reality of the church, and the believer is part of the body of Christ, the church. Just as Christ, in bodily form, carried out his ministry on earth, so the church as the body of Christ is to carry out the work of Christ in the world. This places the church as the source of all ministry activity. Explaining this, Erickson notes:

The image of the church as the body of Christ emphasizes that the church is the locus of Christ’s activity now, just as was his physical body during his earthly ministry. The image is used of both the church universal and of individual local congregations (1985:1036).

Erickson further notes, “As the body of Christ, the church is the extension of his ministry...The work of Christ, then, if it is done at all, will be done by his body, the church” (1985:1038-1039). Therefore the church, illustrated as the body of Christ, is charged to carry out the work of Christ in the world today.

The Offices of the Ministry

While every member of the body is gifted for ministry, the New Testament names two specific offices designated for service and leadership in the church. Calvin identifies these two offices as elders and deacons though he divides the office of elder into two kinds—pastors and teachers (Milner 1970:145). Likewise, Baptist scholars such as Millard Erickson and E. Earle Ellis identify elders and deacons as the two biblical offices, noting that the terms *elder*, *bishop*, and *pastor* are used interchangeably in the New Testament and denote the same office (Erickson 1985:1075 and Ellis 1989:95-96). Baptist scholar Leo Garrett further notes that these offices, including the interpretation of a single elder/bishop/pastor office, were listed as a part of the Second London Confession of the General Baptists (1677). Though I will not defend this interpretation here, I will accept these as the biblically appropriate offices for the church today.

Most important for our purpose is the role of the office of elder/bishop/pastor. Since it is the most common term used in Southern Baptist churches, we will simply refer to the position as pastor. The functions of the pastor can first be deduced from the meaning of the titles mentioned above, commonly translated *pastor*, *elder*, and *bishop*. The pastor (*poimen*) is the shepherd, exercising care for the flock. This Greek word occurs only once in the New Testament when speaking about a church officer (Eph 4:11), but other uses of the word make clear its meaning related to shepherding the flock. The elder (*presbuteros*) is described in 1 Timothy 5:17 as a ruler of the church. The bishop (*episkopos*) is also described in 1 Timothy 3:1 and Acts 20:28 as one in authority, as its alternate translation, *overseer*, more clearly indicates (Grudem 2000:913-914).

For our purposes, it is most important to note that the pastor is a ruler and designated leader in the congregation. He is to exercise great care for the flock and he is never to lord over them in an ungodly manner. He is a servant of the church, but he is also to be a respected leader with the task of teaching and building up the church that it may accomplish its mission (Eph 5:11-12). But most importantly, as an overseer, it is the pastor’s duty to make sure that the church properly carries out its mission in the world.

Organized Ministry Efforts in the Church

The biblical record of the early church contains practically no record of a church establishing organized ministries, as we understand them today, to carry out its tasks. In other words, we never hear of a youth ministry, prison ministry, men’s ministry, or the like, nor are believers commanded to establish them. Perhaps such a division of labor is

a more modern phenomenon. Instead the New Testament, when speaking of ministry, speaks almost exclusively about the spiritual gifts of individual believers or the offices of pastor and deacon.

However, we do have the seeds of precedence for organizing ministry found in the Bible and early church history. Biblically, the Apostle Paul gives us glimpses of how the early church began to organize itself for ministry. Earle Ellis notes, "There is evidence that, along with an unstructured or 'free' charismatic ministry, an appointed ministry was present in the Pauline churches" (1989:92). Ellis goes on to point out that "the collection and distribution of gifts at Philippi and at Corinth provide two examples of an ordered ministry..." (1989:93). These offerings and their administration might be considered something like a benevolence ministry. Nevertheless, they indicate that church members were uniting their efforts to support a particular ministry function in the church. A second example of an ordered ministry effort by the church includes the appointment of paid ministers and missionaries (Ellis 1989:95-100). So, the concept of an organized ministry effort based at the local church level is not a concept foreign to the New Testament.

Ministry Functions of the Church

We have seen that ministry in the New Testament church is carried out in three ways: 1) believers gifted by the Holy Spirit and 2) specially called church officers set apart to lead the church and 3) the church body organized and working together to accomplish a specific task. But what specific kinds of ministry are believers and churches called to implement? That is, what are the purposes of the church?

First of all, the names of the spiritual gifts believers receive certainly indicate the type of work they are to do. Lists of the gifts are found in several New Testament passages (1 Cor 12:8-10,28; Eph 4:11; Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 7:7 and 1 Pet 4:11). Depending on how one labels the gifts and accounts for duplication, one might find around twenty-two individual gifts, such as Wayne Grudem finds (Grudem 2000:1020). Those gifts will not be listed here, but among them is the gift of teaching (1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11), and as a whole they identify the various kinds of ministry in which the church should engage.

Nevertheless, many theologians freely narrow down the church's functions to a few general categories. Grudem understands the "purposes of the church in terms of ministry to God, ministry to believers, and ministry to the world" (2000:867). The ministry to God is worship; the ministry to believers is nurture; and the ministry to the world is evangelism and acts of mercy. Erickson similarly lists the purposes as evangelism, edification, worship and social concern (2000:1051-59). The passage commonly referred to as the Great Commission (Mt 28:19-20) is often referenced as a key passage for determining the purposes of the church. Also, sometimes mentioned is the Great Commandment that Jesus spoke (Mk 12:30-31) as an affirmation to the ancient command found in Deuteronomy 6:4-5.

Of particular interest to our study is the fact that teaching is easily considered a major purpose of the church because of its presence in the list of spiritual gifts and its preeminence in The Great Commission. The gift of teaching (*didasko*) involves teaching facts for knowledge as well as teaching skills and behaviors for specific action (Richards 1985:589). The gospel records numerous times when Jesus taught and was referred to as, “teacher” (e.g., Jn 13:13). The apostles and the early church continually engaged in teaching (Acts 2:42a) and New Testament believers were called upon to teach (Col 3:16) as well as to scrutinize the teaching of others (2 John 10).

Furthermore, Christ’s Great Commission clearly includes the educational challenge to make disciples by “teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you...” (Mt 28:20). Likewise, the early church was challenged to “present every man perfect in Christ” (Col 1:28) and to exercise all spiritual gifts “so that the body of Christ will be built up” (Eph 4:12). Timothy is challenged to take what he has learned and “entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Tim 2:2).

Therefore, the church was equipped and able to mobilize itself for ministry by the Holy Spirit’s provision of spiritual gifts, the established leadership of church officers and the cooperative actions of the church body. Through these means the church was focused on accomplishing Christ’s purposes. They were dedicated to carrying out his ministry and mission. Part of that mission was the education of believers. Teaching was one of the spiritual gifts and was a continuing function of the New Testament church. As such, a closer examination of this function and how it relates to the contemporary Christian education efforts is in order.

Education as a Function of the Church

As noted above, the church is responsible for educating its members so that they will become mature believers. Specifically, the desire is to help them become obedient to God through a proper understanding of himself and his world. As we will note more completely in a moment, the church has consistently accepted the challenge to teach its members these things, and it has especially focused on the Christian education of children. Thus, in the contemporary church, nobody questions the validity of a Sunday School, catechisms and other training tools for children and adults alike. But what about the rest of a child’s education? Sunday Schools focus one day a week specifically on lessons from the Bible, but our children today experience far more education in their weekday schools. Does the church have any place providing that kind of educational experience?

Much has been written and discussed about the validity of establishing private Christian schools as an alternative to the public school. Indeed, the nature of public education in America has radically changed in the past several decades causing parents to seek alternatives for their children’s education. Should Christian parents send their children to public, secular schools? Should the church in America launch an effort to provide a private school for every child in a Christian family? These are a sample of important

questions that have been and will continue to be addressed by concerned Christian leaders.

However, it is not my purpose here to answer these particular questions. Our concern is simply whether a church has any place establishing a Christian school ministry as a part of its overall ministry. That issue would seem to be easily answered, but it might be argued that Christian schools are better off established independent of a local church. Or it might be suggested that the church should stick to instruction about Christian issues and the Bible while letting the public schools handle reading, writing and arithmetic. The main question we will address is whether the church has any place establishing this kind of ministry and, if so, what implications are there for the governance and operation of that school in the overall structure of the church.

In order to answer that question, we will first define Christian education as it is defined by contemporary private Christian school educators. In other words, we first need to ascertain what exactly we are trying to establish as a ministry of a local church. Next, we will examine the related scriptural teaching, Old Testament and New Testament, to discern who has the responsibility for a child's education. And finally, we will examine the church's and family's role in a child's education.

Christian Education Defined

The ministry we are examining is commonly referred to as a Christian school. It is also referred to as a Christian day school. We will simply refer to it by the former name—Christian school. But the content of that ministry in contemporary American society is a school that teaches all forms of academic content including religious and, specifically, Christian subject matter with the ultimate purpose of creating a devoted disciple of Christ. On the surface, the Christian school is a school that teaches the same subject matter as a public school, but from a Christian perspective and with additional, uniquely Christian subject matter.

Yet, the focus of Christian educators is not only on the content of the education, but on the results. One definition of Christian school education, for example, states, "The purpose of Christian education is the directing of the process of human development toward God's objective for man: godliness of character and action" (Horton 1992:4). Another definition reads that Christian education is "the process by which children and youth develop knowledge, skills, ability and character especially through formal instruction, training and study" (Schultz 1998:15). The emphasis in both cases is the resulting character and behavior of the student.

Another frequently stated goal of Christian school proponents concerns the thinking process of the student. The goal is that when every young person is educated and enters adulthood, he or she will have developed a God-centered worldview. Schultz explains, "Another term for world view is a philosophy of life. We define world view as *the underlying belief system held by an individual that determines his/her attitudes and*

actions in life" (1998:35). The argument is that the public schools most often produce a student with a man-centered worldview, but the Christian school is capable of producing a student that has a God-centered perspective on the world.

Again, the argument of how the education process works in the life of a child and whether the present public school system offers any help for the Christian parent, is not our concern. But if these are the purposes of a Christian school ministry, does the church have any business establishing it? The answer to that question lies in determining what the scripture says about the effort.

Old Testament Mandates for Education

The necessity of education is a clear part of the Old Testament message. Schultz makes the case that education became necessary as soon as sin entered into the world. In the beginning, man knew God in a very personal way. He walked with him in the garden. He cared for the garden, ruled the animals, named them and enjoyed intimate fellowship with God. But once man sinned, he lost the ability to know God and to know good. Man's understanding of God and the world he created would forever be wanting. This is where the need for education began (1998:15-17).

But no matter when education became a clear need, it is evident that the Old Testament emphasizes the need for education. As Garrett notes:

Teaching the law of God to the Israelite people at large and to children in particular was clearly enjoined in the Old Testament. Jethro admonished his son-in-law Moses to teach the people concerning the laws and decrees of Yahweh (Exod. 18:20), and this he did (Deut. 4:5). The Ten Commandments were given for the instruction of the people (Exod. 24:12). Aaron (Lev. 10:11) and the Levites (Neh. 8:9) were given a didactic function with respect to the law, and the same was true of Jehoshaphat's officials (2 Chr. 17:9) and Ezra (Ezra 7:10) (1990:538-39).

Other Old Testament passages speak directly of the education of children. Proverbs 22:6 tells parents to "train up a child in the way he should go." Psalm 78 likewise says that the faithful "will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord."

However, the most popular Old Testament passage invoked by Christian educators as indicating a clear requirement for parents to train their children is Deuteronomy 6:7. Parents are told to impress God's commandments on their children and "talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." This passage emphasizes the parent's responsibility in the training process, the fact that education is a lifelong, every-moment process and the notion that the foundation of truth is the Word of God (Schultz 1998:26).

While the Old Testament contains several passages about teaching children, it is interesting to note that Jewish education was entirely religious education. That is, as Barclay states it, “there was no text-book except the Scriptures; all primary education was preparation for reading the Law; and all higher education was the reading and study of it” (1959:13). As Riesen notes, “nowhere is there a suggestion in either Old Testament or New that academic training—reading, writing and arithmetic—is important, even recommended” (2002:35). Riesen adds that the Old Testament takes no position on education in the areas of science, philosophy, mathematics and the like. Morris Joseph states, “Of secular education there is scarcely a trace. All the ordinances dealing with education deal with it in its larger aspects as a preparation for the moral and religious life, a means of developing character” (1912:194).

So, the Old Testament does not explicitly or implicitly require the establishment of a Christian school as we have defined it, but it does demand that parents educate their children in the commands of God.

New Testament Teaching on Education

In the New Testament, spiritual training is once again mandated. Jesus and the apostles clearly had a teaching ministry and, as noted above, the gift of teaching was to be used by believers to build up the body. The goal was that every believer will be mature and stable followers of Christ (Eph 5:13-14).

Though the Old Testament speaks frequently about the education of children, the New Testament speaks less directly about the issue. Ephesians 6:4 states, “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” This is the only New Testament passage that speaks specifically about the instruction of children, and in its context it has more to do with discipline and training in good behavior than education in the way we have defined it. Furthermore, there are no teachings about education in the general sense, except perhaps a warning that believers are not to be taken “captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than Christ” (Col 2:8).

Yet even though there is only a small amount of New Testament teaching on the matter, it certainly can be shown that the New Testament church embraced the Old Testament mission of training children in religious matters. In the early church community one may identify plenty of childhood educational activity related to religious matters. At the beginning of the Christian era in Palestine, there were religious schools for orphans and some Jewish families, but as Joseph notes, “The ‘three R’s’ and, it would seem, foreign languages, geography, history, mathematics, astronomy and gymnastics were also learnt by children; but all, or most of them, at home” (1912:195). The home was not the only place for this kind of learning. We also see that the early Christians living in Rome rejected the Roman schools and established their own educational operations. Cubberly writes:

In fact the early Christians felt but little need for the type of intellectual education provided by the Roman schools, and the character of the educated society around them, as they saw it, did not make them wish for the so-called pagan learning (1920:82).

These early Christians focused their instruction on Levitical law, “which concerned agricultural regulations and civil laws having to do with marriage and divorce. They studied other biblical laws related to health and purity. Instruction included basic arithmetic, reading and music built around the Psalms” (Kienel 1995:4). In short, Christians tagged on to the Greco-Roman idea of education by creating new schools, but with a new tradition of connecting schooling with morality (Kienel 1995:6).

Given this presence of school activity in the early church, it is apparent that the first-century believers found no contradiction between formal childhood education and the apostles’ teachings. Furthermore, they exhibited no opposition to Christian school education as we would define it today. Though these schools were different in their teaching and learning styles, and though they most often did their work in the homes of believers, “they had the same objective—to provide a training and education program that would not offend Christ and their Christian family traditions” (Kienel 1995: 6).

The Role of the Family and the Church in Education

From the biblical information given above, two important observations can be made. First, parents have the ultimate responsibility for their child’s religious education. Old Testament passages, New Testament teaching and the example of the early church provide ample evidence that, among other things, a child’s education is the complete responsibility of the parents and that the responsibilities that parents have cannot be abdicated or completely delegated to another provider.

Parents can, however, seek help in the education process. Though Old Testament passages like Deuteronomy 6:7 are used to defend the notion of home-schooling, a parent can satisfy this command while allowing others to instruct the children about religious and even secular matters. The command does not exclude the participation of others in the education of their children, but it does place the burden of education of God’s commands squarely on the shoulders of parents. This means that a Christian school ministry may exist to assist parents in their God-given responsibility of educating their children about the commands of God.

Our second observation, then, is that the church family has a part to play in religious training and helping parents carry out their divinely-appointed responsibilities. Cooperation between the believing community and its families can be observed throughout Jewish and Christian history. The Jewish community provided this help through, for example, synagogue schools established as far back as the Babylonian exile (c. 586 B.C.) and developing into a formal system established in 75 B.C. These schools were brought about by a perceived inefficiency in early home instruction and the

development of more sophisticated teaching methods by Greek and Roman educators (Kienel 1995:27-29). As noted above, these kinds of schools were continued by the early Christians.

The nature of the parents' responsibility to educate their children has not changed over the centuries, but the methods of education and the nature of society has changed greatly. So, just as Jewish parents saw the value in centralizing educational efforts into a synagogue school, Christian parents throughout the centuries have done the same. As society has become more complicated and as information in every academic discipline has become more plentiful, the need has become greater. From the time that Justinian declared pagan education illegal (529 A.D.), to the time of the Reformation when Luther saw Christian schools as an essential ally in restoring the true teachings of the scripture (Kienel 1995:35-36, 166-167), to the present day when American parents seek a Christian worldview education for their children, the church has participated as an education provider. Indeed, this is an appropriate place for the church to get involved and aid parents with their biblical responsibilities.

Christian School Education in the Local Church

With these biblical and historical facts in place, several conclusions can be made. First, we will consider the legitimacy of establishing a Christian school ministry in a church. Then, we will draw some conclusions about the implications our study has on how a contemporary Christian school ministry should relate to the overall church family and how it should set up its governance structure as a part of the church. As we examine these conclusions, we will now begin to focus in on the implications for Southern Baptist churches. In doing so, we will at times pay particular attention to the views of Baptist theologians and Southern Baptist church leaders. The challenge is to be as specific as possible in providing points of discussion and implementation for Southern Baptist churches. The underlying assumption is that these churches operate, make decisions, and organize in similar ways.

The Legitimacy of a Christian School Ministry

The case for establishing the legitimacy of a local church Christian school ministry should rest primarily on the evidence that such a ministry fits within the biblical mandates given to the church. Therefore, we have established first of all that the church is required to minister to its members. That ministry is carried out through individual believers gifted by God for service. It is also carried out by the church body working together to accomplish its God-given purposes. We have further established that the spiritual education of believers, children included, is one of the primary functions of the church. This mandate is evidenced by the fact that one of the spiritual gifts is teaching. The presence of that gift in the list of spiritual gifts affirms the idea that individual believers have this important responsibility to the body. The mandate is further evidenced by the fact that the church is called to teach disciples to observe God's commands and to guard itself from false teaching. This evidence alone leads us to believe that the church has the

responsibility for educating its members and that a Christian school ministry, as we know it today, is a valid outgrowth of that responsibility.

But the case for legitimizing a Christian school ministry is further bolstered by an historical examination of the Jewish and Christian communities. The Jewish community emphasized the family's role and responsibility in educating children. To accomplish that purpose parents gave instruction in the home and later, schools were established to improve upon that work. This instruction continued in Christian homes and in Christian schools that first resembled the synagogue schools and later were more institutionalized by the Romans and the Roman-Catholic church. As stated before, the presence of these schools indicates that early followers of Christ saw the concept of a Christian school as compatible with the teaching of the New Testament.

Jumping ahead to the present era, we find that support for Christian schools still exists. Southern Baptist scholars and leaders are supportive of the Christian school ministry idea. Millard Erickson, a contemporary Baptist theologian, briefly mentions the validity of a Christian school ministry in his outline of the purposes of the church:

[T]he task of Biblical scholarship is incumbent on the church. This task is carried out by specialists who possess gifts in such matters. But the church must study not merely God's special revelation, but also his general revelation and the relationship between the two. Christian liberal-arts colleges are one means by which the church can fulfil its responsibility to instruct. Christian day-schools and academies represent the same endeavor on a less advanced level (1985:1056).

Likewise, the *Baptist Faith and Message*, the Southern Baptist's doctrinal statement, specifically mentions Christian schools along with colleges and seminaries as it broadly promotes Christian education in its twelfth article entitled, "Education":

The cause of education in the kingdom of Christ is co-ordinate with the causes of mission and general benevolence and should receive along with these the liberal support of the churches. An adequate system of Christian schools is necessary to a complete spiritual program for Christ's people...(SBC 2000).

In the context above, 'Christian school' refers to day schools, colleges, and seminaries, but later in the article, a specific reference to a day school is mentioned lending support for the Christian school concept. Finally, though Southern Baptists have primarily supported colleges and seminaries, more emphasis is being encouraged today on the Christian day school. In a recent address, Dr. Jack Graham, past president of the Southern Baptist Convention, called on churches to plant new Christian schools:

I think it's time that Southern Baptist churches and associations and groups of churches look more seriously at establishing kingdom schools,

Christian schools. I think it's time we look at not only...equipping young leaders at seminaries and colleges, but we look more seriously at starting at the earliest years, developing disciples and empowering kingdom growth through education (as quoted in Starnes 2002).

Southern Baptist's scholars and leaders recognize the importance of Christian school ministries and lend their support to the contemporary effort.

Considerations for the Church-School Relationship

Not only does our biblical study provide evidence for the legitimacy of a Christian school ministry in a local church, it also provides some direction for the relationship between the church and the school ministry. These and other implications of our research will be expounded on in chapter five, but the current study indicates several conclusions that need to be addressed at this point.

Maintaining the Right Purpose

Though we have made the case above for Christian school ministry in the local church, Christian schools run the risk of forgetting their biblical purpose. The modern church often organizes itself into various ministries in order to accomplish its purposes. Churches may have a youth ministry, a men's ministry, a counseling ministry, an outreach ministry and so on. These ministries, when working properly, help the church accomplish its overall purpose while focusing on specific needs within the congregation. The Christian school ministry can be another such ministry within the church organization. It helps parents fulfill their duty to their children while simultaneously helping the church accomplish its mandate to make disciples and to teach those disciples to observe God's commands (Mt 28:19-20). The lesson for the Christian school ministry is that it is a legitimate ministry as long as it serves a legitimate purpose.

Christian schools have many more complicated features than many other more typical church ministries. Consider a youth ministry, for example, that is led by a pastor or volunteer committee, plans two to three hours of weekly training for its students, plans occasional special events like retreats and mission trips, manages a typically far too small budget and is carried out by many dedicated volunteers. A Christian school, on the other hand, is led by a professional staff member, plans about thirty-five hours of instructional time per week, employs full-time teachers and office staff, plans additional events such as sports and fundraisers, manages a sizeable budget sometimes exceeding the rest of the church's budget, and incorporates the use of volunteers for various tasks.

There are many consequences to these differences, as we will see, but one important difference is that the Christian school ministry can easily lose sight of its purpose to assist the church and parents in fulfilling their God-given responsibilities. Church leaders and school leaders must continually evaluate the Christian school program in light of

these goals. Other goals will compete for the school's allegiance such as the desire to look like, outperform or outprogram the public school down the street, or the desire to create an academically superior or an economically successful child. But the school ministry must keep its focus on its foundational purpose to serve the church and the participating parents.

The Ministry Role of School Leaders

Next, our study tells us more about the people directly involved in the leadership of a Christian school ministry. The people designated to do the work of ministry in the Christian school are commonly referred to as faculty and staff. The faculty is directly involved in teaching students while the staff serves to support the faculty and the overall organization. Both of these groups of leaders are not just employees of the church and/or school; biblically, they are the ministers. Every believer is gifted for ministry and is challenged to exercise that gift in the church (Eph 4:7, 12; 2 Tim 1:6). The school's faculty and staff should not be an exception. They must be believers exercising their giftedness in the body of Christ. The challenge for school leaders is not to see their work as merely a job. Likewise, the challenge to the church's pastors and other leaders is to rightly see that school faculty and staff are full-time ministers, though perhaps not called or ordained to a pastoral ministry. They must be cared for and prayed for as any other layperson ministering in the church.

Consider the implications of seeing faculty and staff from more of a ministry perspective. Teachers should be working in the power of the Spirit and the result of their classroom interaction should be more than academic success, but spiritual success as well. The teacher's work should be bathed in prayer and teachers should have a ministry perspective on all that they do. Likewise, school staff members should see themselves in the same way resulting in a school office operation that is a model of business ethics, Christian professionalism and good financial stewardship. Faculty and staff should pray and be prayed for regularly so that the power of the Spirit will be active in their work, that is, their ministry. They should recognize the diversity of giftedness around them, drawing on the strengths of some and helping in the weakness of others, rather than being competitive and independent-minded. And, finally, genuine love and unity in the body should be fruits of their labor as I Corinthians 12 and 13 prescribe. These are some of the characteristics of a ministry that recognizes the power of using spiritual gifts to accomplish significant results.

Ownership of the Christian School Ministry

Another important implication of the biblical study is that the Christian school ministry is either a ministry of the church or it is not. Either it has its place in the discipling ministry of the church or it belongs somewhere else. Churches with Christian school ministries or churches considering the idea, should carefully settle this foundational issue. We will discuss this issue more in later chapters, but from the perspective of the purpose of the church, the members of the church must see the school as aiding them with their

corporate and personal responsibilities, namely, discipling believers and teaching children to obey God. Many struggles between the church overall, and her ministry leaders, are rooted in differing expectations.

There is considerable debate about whether the Christian school is such a different ministry that it requires its own legal corporate status or its own board for ruling and keeping the church somewhat buffered or untangled in school business. However, the above discussion leads me to a position that if a church chooses to sponsor a school ministry, that ministry should be an integral part of the church ministry. Establishing ministries that are only partly accountable to the church or partly supported as one of the church's ministries leads to confusion about the role of the ministry in the life of the church. The Apostle Paul's illustration of the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12 emphasizes the importance of believers exercising their gifts in the body. Ministering believers need each other. The ministry either fits within the purpose of the church or it does not. If it does, it needs to be embraced as such.

This is not to say that a school cannot be established independent of a church. Independent schools can be established and even supported by area churches, but if a church claims a ministry as its own, the ministry needs to be fully integrated into the accountability and support structure of the church. Pastors, as overseers, need to be able to serve their function and a congregation needs to offer all of its ministry resources to help the ministry accomplish its purpose.

The full implications of this approach are far reaching and will be saved for future discussion. But for the moment, consider the way one might approach church resources like facilities and finances. If the body needs them for ministry, let them be used. Churches should support the school ministry, financially and otherwise, as it does other ministries. The high financial costs of a school will need to be considered, but a total lack of financial support is not justified. Consider how the church would view the school if the body had more of a stake in the school's success. The result would be less bickering over who messed up "my" class's room or who made copies on "the church's" copier. The key is to decide if this large ministry organization is really a part of the church or not. If it is and if that position is embraced as a part of church stewardship and communicated to the entire church, the result will be fewer conflicts.

Christian Education for Everyone

Finally, we must consider the implications of providing an alternative to the public school. We have shown that some in the early Christian church pulled out of the secular education system and opted for a Christian-centered education (Kienel 1995:3-4). Today's parents are faced with the same option. If this is a valid ministry, the church needs to consider how it will be able to provide for an education for every church member's child. Perhaps not every parent would choose to partner with the church for their child's education. Some will home school and others will choose to use the public school. That is the parent's option and responsibility as was noted above. But what if

they choose the church and cannot afford it? We have said that this kind of ministry is valid, so how can everyone receive it?

Economic realities make it difficult to provide this kind of education for every child. But if a Christian school ministry is a necessary option given today's social and political climate in the public schools and if it is a valid ministry that serves the purpose of the church and family, the church needs to make it available for all of their children. That is a big implication. The costs are definitely high, but churches should consider creative ways to handle it. We will examine some of these options later, but this implication cannot be overlooked.

Considerations for the Governance of the School

A Christian school ministry is a complicated ministry. It involves many employees, specialized training, numerous hours of instruction, security issues, meal preparation, athletics and so forth. Because of this, many churches use a board or committee to provide oversight and input into the school's operation. Lines of accountability are also drawn, in a variety of ways, from the school administration to the church staff. This structure, however it exists, can strongly influence the effectiveness of the ministry. We will address school governance issues more in later chapters, but two implications for school governance should be noted related to our biblical study.

Pastoral Support of the Christian School

While some churches' Christian school ministries share common governance organizations (boards, committees, headmasters, etc.), churches differ greatly on lines of authority and responsibility within those organizations. At this point, however, we can make the observation that church ministries should be under a pastor's authority. Our study above of the office of pastor indicates that pastors were meant to be overseers (*episkopos*) of the church. Calvin saw pastors and ministers as divinely appointed to govern the church (Milner 1970:134). Though the ministry of the church should be able to take place efficiently and effectively as believers exercise their gifts, pastors, in most church structures and definitely in the Southern Baptist setting, have a high standing in church governance and need to oversee the ministry that takes place in their congregation.

The point is that pastors need to embrace every ministry of the church. Starting a Christian school without the pastor's complete blessing would be a tremendous mistake. Likewise, the pastor should educate himself in the issues and operation of a school so that he can have a servant-like, supportive attitude toward the school that the church family can emulate as well. The pastor need not have his hands in the daily operation of the ministry, but he should be able to support the good work that takes place and, as overseer, identify areas of concern that make the ministry falter in fulfilling its purpose in the church. Pastoral involvement is critical. As Paul Young notes, "The need for a Christian school must be birthed in the heart of a pastor by the Spirit of God," and, "The

church's marriage to the Christian school must be exemplified, cultivated and guarded by the pastor" (1997-98:7).

Parent Involvement in the Christian School

Finally, parents have an important place in school leadership as well. We have noted that the Christian school ministry exists as an extension and in support of the parent's obligation to provide religious training for their children. Parents need to be involved in the school as much as possible. Some need to serve on school boards and/or committees to provide guidance and be made aware of the instructional process. They need to be communicated with about school curriculum, classwork, homework, chapels, etc. In other words, the school and the parents need to be careful not to foster the idea that parents can use the school to contract out the responsibility of religious education. Ministry leaders and school programming needs to reinforce the idea that the school is partnering with the parents to accomplish their God-given parenting goals.

Chapter Summary

The Bible offers considerable insight into the role of the church and its members in regard to education. Old and New Testament believers considered the education of their children a high priority, and they looked to parents to be the primary teachers. But parents did not always seek to educate their children on their own. They welcomed the support of the believing community in fulfilling their obligation, and that community continues to support parents with the education of their children to this day.

Christian education is a critical task of the church and family. Pastors must recognize that there is more to education than just Bible education. Every educational discipline was created by God and is only fully understood in the context of biblical truth. Therefore, pastors need not fear starting a Christian school ministry. In fact, they should hope that they have the opportunity to expand their church's educational role with the presence of a Christian school that helps parents more adequately fulfill their God-given responsibility of educating their children. Regardless of how a pastor seeks to fulfill his duty of Christian education, he can be assured that the task is a biblically mandated one and that the resources of the Holy Spirit and the word of God are available for the task.