

## Response To Ron Halbrook's "*Brief Observations On Brother Haile's Objections To Florida College*"

Tim Haile

While it is never enjoyable, it is sometimes necessary to express disagreement with others. It is particularly unpleasant to have to disagree with one's friends, and Ron Halbrook has been a friend of mine for many years. I have learned much from his sermons and writings, and I trust that I will continue to learn from him. Due to our history I will refer to brother Halbrook as "Ron" throughout the course of this article. The reader should conclude no disrespect on my part by my referring to him in this personal way. As Ron said in his response to me, we have been friends for many years. Calling Ron "brother Halbrook" seems too impersonal for me.

Ron's reply [[click here for the complete article](#)] was to an email article that I sent out entitled, "Some Reflections On The 2011 Florida College Chorus Tour." [[click here for the complete article](#)]. In that article I was critical of the FC chorus' "*performing*" of "*songs, narrations and scripture readings focusing upon the death and resurrection of Christ.*" Ron took issue with my criticisms, and defended the right of "service organizations" to engage in such activities as a means of advertisement, Bible instruction and as a means of displaying the school's quality of education.

**1. Some Thoughts On The Title Of Ron's Article:** Titles are admittedly difficult, for their purpose is to very briefly yet adequately describe the writer's immediate topic. While I assign to Ron no malicious motive, his wording was unfortunate, for it does perpetuate a malicious rumor that I am opposed to the FC institution *itself*. My article did not state "objections to Florida College." I objected to specific *practices* of the Florida College chorus. I objected to the use of the gospel and of gospel songs in a *performance*.

While I don't expect everyone to read everything that I write, I do expect people to read my material if they are going to presume to answer me. Ron made several statements that suggest that he misunderstands the nature and purpose of my objections. So, as I have stated many times before and in many different venues, forums and formats, I say again: I have no scriptural objection to the right of schools, colleges and bookstores to *exist* and to provide *commercial* functions. I have no scriptural objection to businesses like schools or bookstores, *selling* goods and services. The principle of commerce and free enterprise is everywhere found in Scripture. I am grateful for publishing companies and stores that produce and sell Bibles and other teaching materials. Nor do I have any objection to

such businesses *selling* their material in *audible format*. By repeated admission of their owners, administrators and promoters, these schools and bookstores *are not local churches*. On this point we well agree. Since local churches do not *sell* their teaching or materials, there can be no conflict between these organizations. The problem comes when businesses leave their rightful practice of *commerce* and cross over into the fields of evangelism and worship.

## 2. The Real Point Of My Objection:

Ron wrote in his response,

*“Recently brother Tim Haile wrote an article objecting to Florida College’s announcement that the school chorus will sing some spiritual songs.”*

No, that is not what I objected to. *“The school chorus will sing some spiritual songs”* every time it meets as such on campus for training and experience. I objected to an organization “performing” acts of worship for the purposes of advertisement and revenue. I *did not* object to people gathering to sing spiritual songs. I referenced Ephesians 5:19 and Colosians 3:16 and pointed out that these passages were not limited to local church assemblies. I have no objection to group singings. I have participated in them in the past.

Ron mentioned the right of family members or others to gather for the singing of such songs. I agree that this can scripturally be done, but that is *not* what the Florida College chorus is doing. In the chorus performance, one group of people sings spiritual songs to another group of people that merely witness the event. To be parallel Ron needs a situation in which *some* family members invite *other* family members to *listen* to them sing spiritual songs. He needs a situation in which one group of Christians invites another group of Christians to *listen* while they sing spiritual songs to them. Ron’s examples are not analogous to what the FC chorus is doing. What I objected to in my article was the “performing” of such songs *for others*. According to the FC ad, the listening audience is *invited to listen* while the FC chorus “performs.” I objected to the common use of those *spiritual songs* for promotional and commercial purposes. In order for Ron’s point to be parallel he needs Florida College to send out invitations for others to come and sing *with* the Florida College chorus when they sing spiritual songs. This is not what the FC chorus advertisement said would be done on their tour.

Ron wrote:

*“As part of its curricula in teaching music, F.C. has always included instruction in both secular and spiritual songs.”*

I have received conflicting information on this point, but that is irrelevant, for all know that commercial organizations must continually adapt to the whims of their clientele in order for those organizations to remain fiscally viable. Contrariwise, divine truth is *“firmly fixed in Heaven”* (Psalm 119:89). God’s instructions do not change, including His instructions about singing. The singing of *“psalms, hymns and spiritual songs”* is permanently regulated by Scripture (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). In the singing of these types of songs, God’s name is used and praised, and His holy things are honored. Whether done by a local church, by family members or a by group of individuals, the singing of gospel songs must be done without using God’s name *in vain*, and it must be done without God’s holy things being *profaned*. Using psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, and narrations and Scripture readings focusing upon the death and resurrection of Christ, **is either worship** or its is **taking God’s name in vain** – it is either **preaching God’s word** or it is **making merchandise of God’s word**. Perhaps Ron can tell us which it is in the case of the FC chorus performance.

Other singing rules also apply. The principle of silence precludes the use of mechanical instruments of music with spiritual songs, and the principle of reciprocity precludes the use of solos, duets and choirs. Christians are to *“address one another”* in the singing of such songs. Ron failed to address my application of these verses. If Ephesians 5:19 is limited to local church singing, then what about verses 18 and 20? Ephesians 5:18 forbids the drinking of intoxicating wine. Does this apply only in a local church assembly? Is it okay to get drunk provided that one does it somewhere *other than* the local church assembly? (see Eph. 5:18). Of course not! And are we authorized to *“give thanks to God for everything”* only in a local church assembly? (see Eph. 5:20). No, we may thank God any time and anywhere. The same observations can be made about the verses before and after Colossians 3:16.

Ron wrote:

*“The school chorus is not like a church choir which attempts to offer worship on behalf of the congregation. A school chorus simply learns music as part of the school’s teaching program, and a presentation by the chorus simply illustrates or exhibits the results of this teaching program.”*

Ron’s defense of the FC chorus’ performance of spiritual songs places him in a precarious position with respect to the use of church choirs. According to Ron, the FC chorus is right to sing spiritual songs to others who are only

listening, because the chorus' motive is not to "offer worship on behalf of the congregation." Ron argues that the FC chorus provides "instruction" by singing spiritual songs. Using this argument, would a church choir be scriptural if it claimed to only provide "instruction" for the church and did not intend to offer worship on behalf of the congregation? Such a church choir could do what Ron defends the FC chorus for doing, which is to "provide instruction in spiritual songs" to a listening audience. Ron refuses to apply the reciprocity principle [singing "to one another"] of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 to choral performances, but these verses are not limited to just local church assemblies, Ron's permission for choral performances would necessarily extend to local churches on the bases that one group is merely instructing another group and is not engaged in worship.

Ron says that such performances serve to exhibit the results of the school's teaching program. Couldn't this be adequately accomplished by the secular songs that are sung? From a purely *academic* perspective, what is accomplished by the use of *spiritual* songs that cannot be accomplished by the *secular* songs? The answer is nothing! The singing [performing] of spiritual songs obviously serves some other purpose, and we certainly know that people enjoy gospel performances. If there is any doubt about this, just consider the tremendous popularity and financial success of musical groups [including a cappella groups] that sing spiritual songs.

Ron wrote:

*"If the school chorus would perform as part of the worship of a local church, faithful saints throughout the U.S. including myself would rise up in a mighty protest."*

This reminds me of the above-described dilemma. I am curious to know what Scripture Ron will use to refute a non-worship performance by the FC chorus, choir or other arrangement in a local church assembly? One would assume that he would cite the reciprocity principle of Ephesians 5:19. However, a casual reading of the context reveals that the reciprocity rule extends beyond just the confines of the local church worship assembly.

### **3. The Role of Human Institutions:**

Ron wrote:

*"A school teaching the Bible does not violate God's plan for the work of the local churches, because the school does not function as the agency of churches but purely as the instrument of individuals. The school teaching*

*Bible classes or giving a Bible reading in the chorus presentation is not like a missionary society which attempts to function on behalf of local churches."*

While I have seen no evidence of non-institutional brethren using human organizations as agents of local churches, there is ample evidence that some non-institutional brethren are using such organizations *in place of* local churches. I agree with Ron that "individuals" may use schools as instruments, albeit not of *worship or evangelism!* Ron misses the point entirely. The issue is not whether or not individuals may scripturally pay a school or a bookstore for a product or service: **The issue is whether or not individuals may scripturally pay schools and bookstores to evangelize. Do the Scriptures authorize non-church organizations to provide worship, evangelistic and edificatory services to individuals?** This is the issue.

Ron and others are quick to point out that Florida College and Guardian of Truth Foundation "are not like a missionary society." He and others seem to think that the classic "missionary society" arrangement is the only possible kind of non-church organizational error when it comes to evangelism. Ron will recall that missionary societies were also supported by *individual* saints, and not all missionary societies attempted to control local churches.

Ron and others rightly cite passages like Acts 13:1-3; 2 Cor. 11:8; Phil. 1:5; 2:30; 4:14-18 in order to demonstrate the Bible pattern for church support of evangelists, and *against* the missionary society arrangement. Do these brethren not realize that these passages *also* specify the *local church* as the evangelistic organization? (see also Eph. 4:12; 1 Thess. 1:8; 1 Tim. 3:15). *This* is the real issue.

Do the defenders of business Bible lectureships, chorus evangelism and other such activities believe that there is anything wrong with the missionary society *per se*? That is, would Ron object to the formation of a missionary society that was funded solely by the private donations of individual Christians? This is a valid question. I have suggested that *if* privately supported evangelistic organizations are authorized, then they should be openly and vigorously promoted, funded and operated. I have also suggested that *if* they are right, then given the importance of evangelism such organizations should be implemented on a large and wide scale, and they should be pursued enthusiastically. Is the reader ready for the answer that I am repeatedly and [strangely] consistently given? Most of my detractors tell me that they are "not comfortable" with

such a plan as this. To this I repeatedly [and logically] reply: “But, why not? If Scripture authorizes it, then why not do it?” Of course, the answer is obvious: they know that [non-institutional] brethren are not yet ready for such a program. Such things must be developed and implemented very slowly.

So, while, as Ron says, the school is “not like a missionary society” in that it does not attempt to function on behalf of local churches, the school is like the missionary society in that both are human organizations that are engaged in evangelism and worship that God assigned to the local church and individuals.

#### **4. Products and Services:**

Ron wrote:

*“Schools conducted by brethren are service organizations supplying the needs of individuals seeking an education and of families seeking an education for their children. Individuals and families thus provide funds either to purchase educational services or as donations to sponsor educational services.”*

We are witnessing the resurrection of the terms “service organizations” and “service institutions.” On the one hand, I am glad to see Ron and others admit that the practices being discussed are those of *organizations*. Ron’s use of this term may come as quite a shock to the several FC and GOT supporters who have been trained to classify the action as some hybrid form of “individual” action. Ron is absolutely right to use the term “organization, for *joint* action by organizations is precisely what we are discussing.

On the other hand, for these organizations to be right, they must be *authorized* to provide the “services” that they provide. Ron earlier said that, “*F.C. has always included instruction in both secular and spiritual songs.*” I remind the reader that my original article was a critique of FC’s chorus “*performing songs, narrations and Bible readings focusing on the death and resurrection of Christ.*” Ron never objected to this practice, and actually defends it as legitimate function of schools. According to Paul, *gospel* preaching involves the teaching of the *death [crucifixion], burial, and resurrection* of Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:1; 1 Cor. 15:1, 2). Recent FC chorus performances have “focused” upon these gospel facts [along with the *birth and life* of Christ]. Thus you have, according to Ron’s words, *donations* given to a human *organization* so that it can preach the gospel to another group of people. Yes, the FC organization is certainly providing a “service,” and it is eerily similar to the service that is provided by another

*organization* that is funded by the private *donations* of individual saints: the local church!

Ron said,

*"It is right for the school to offer prospective students, interested families, and potential donors opportunities to see the school in action and to assess the quality of its educational work. That is why a school such as Florida College invites people to attend Bible lectures, classes during the school session, and presentations by the chorus."*

I found this interesting. If polled, how many lectureship attendees (FC or GOT/TM) would give this as their reason for attending? How many chorus attendees would say that they attended such performances for the purpose of assessing the quality of the school's educational work? I have never heard this from anyone before. But Ron has again missed the point of my critique. My objection was to the chorus' singing praise to God and admonishing [non-singing] Christians who merely sit and watch the performance. I objected to people reading or narrating [preaching] the gospel and singing spiritual songs as a business promotion and media sales. I would object just as strongly if the purpose were for displaying "the quality of its educational work." This makes merchandise of the gospel (2 Cor. 2:17; 2 Pet. 2:3). Ron said that such organization operators are not guilty of "crass commercialization" for using such activities to "advertise" their services. While I disagree with Ron's application, I actually like his term: This behavior does amount to *crass commercialization*. Christians should not be using gospel *songs* and *facts* as a means of advertising a human institution or profit making.

Ron wrote,

*"We do not expect people to buy "a pig in a poke" (meat in a bag which was not examined first). Why would we expect people to attend a school, send their children, or donate funds when they have no means to assess the quality of the school's work? People who go to lectureships and chorus programs can make their own assessment of the quality of the school's educational activities and then decide whether they wish to attend the school, or send their children to the school, or donate to the school."*

Herein lies the problem. There is something *fundamentally* wrong when the quality of an organization must be assessed by its *preaching of the gospel* and its *performance of spiritual songs*. God never intended for gospel songs and gospel facts to be used by organizations [or others] for the purpose of exhibiting quality of services and education. Such display of quality education could be done without using acts of worship for performance.

Secular songs could be used instead of songs that are designed for praising God and admonishing one another. Ron's statement, "*when they have no means to assess the quality of the school's work,*" implies that the only way one can assess the quality of the school's work is by attending a special program presented by a traveling choral group for scheduled appearances!

Ron wrote:

*"Men who operate such a school on an honest economic basis are not guilty of crass commercialism (seeking base gain by misrepresenting products and exploiting people). To operate as a service institution the school must charge for services and generate income, which is honorable rather than crass or exploitative."*

This again misses the point of my objection. No one objects to charges being made for services and products. The generation of income is obviously necessary for operating a "service institution." However, the use of acts of worship in public performances is not necessary for generating income. Since the traveling and performing FC chorus does not charge for its performance, what bearing does Ron's statement have on the issue at hand? Maybe it "generates income" by their performances resulting in some donations from individuals for the school's expenses of operation. Will Ron admit that THIS is why his paragraph has bearing on the issue at hand? If so, the FC chorus performances are for generating income for the school.

Ron wrote:

*"Unless the custom has changed in recent years, the audience at F.C. chorus programs is instructed to reserve applause for the chorus until it sings secular songs, not when it sings spiritual songs, so as to avoid the appearance of entertainment in connection with spiritual songs. Listening to recorded classes, lessons, or songs is neither proxy worship nor entertainment but provides opportunities for respectful reflection."*

This begs some questions: Would a chorus be acceptable in the local church's worship service provided that the audience did not applaud and only listened in respectful silence? Would it be acceptable if a disclaimer stated that this singing by the chorus was not being done as proxy worship or for entertainment? May a chorus or choir be used in the local church to provide "opportunities for respectful reflection?" Again, Ron might like to cite Ephesians 5:19 or Colossians 3:16 for their reciprocity principle, but those verses will capture him in his defense of chorus performances of *psalms, hymns and spiritual songs*.

Ron wrote,

*“In short, individuals who sing, pray, and study the Bible together do not compete with the local church, do not denigrate the local church, do not profane the local church, and do not violate the organization or mission of the local church.”*

Who is opposed to individuals singing, praying and studying the Bible **“together?”** I do not oppose such, and this was not the point of my objection! I wrote in opposition, NOT to individuals doing these things **“together,”** but to an *organization “performing songs, narrations and Bible readings focusing on the death and resurrection of Christ”* while other people watched and listened.

### **Conclusion**

Near the end of Ron’s response to me he suggested some reading materials. One title was an article that Ron had written entitled, *“Let The Church Be The Church.”* While the time may come when Ron’s warning will be needed among non-institutional brethren, that time is not now. I see no evidence that non-institutional churches are acting in the place or capacity of bookstores or colleges. I know of no churches that are *selling* goods and services. However, I do know some schools and bookstores that are mimicking local churches in their spiritual and religious exercises. Ron’s article misses the point and ignores the actual issue. Churches are not infringing upon schools and bookstores: Bookstores and schools are infringing upon local churches. In the context of the present controversy, the title of Ron’s article is a misnomer. In order to address the real issue the title should be, *“Let The Bookstore Be The Bookstore,”* or *“Let The College Be The College.”* If local churches begin to rise up and usurp the role of colleges and bookstores, then we can write articles encouraging churches to behave like churches.

Though it has made for a lengthy reply, I have tried to quote Ron fully and carefully. I do appreciate his willingness to study these important issues.

Tim Haile