

The Position of Bob Jones University Regarding the Membership of Dr. Chuck Phelps on Its Cooperating Board of Trustees

Bible-believing Christians frequently face the question of how to respond biblically to criticism when it comes at them or when it is directed toward a Christian brother. At Bob Jones University, we believe that Scripture teaches we are to receive criticism in a spirit of humility. We try to listen and determine if there is something we need to change—and if there is—we change it. If we humbly listen to our critics, analyze the situation and don't find cause for change, we then, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, determine whether or not to answer the criticism.

In one chapel message this semester, the speaker drew our attention to Col. 3:12-14 which directs us to clothe ourselves with Christ, especially His love. This emphasis provides a fitting context for approaching the topic at hand. Our privileged identity—holy and beloved—necessitates a distinctive wardrobe—compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. The Holy Spirit takes for granted that there will be complaints between people who are not yet glorified. So how we handle disputes—with forbearance and forgiveness—has everything to do with bearing the identity of Jesus Christ. We must speak the truth and speak the truth in love.

In the last few weeks, an environment has been created on the internet in which BJU is being criticized by some people unhappy with the University for having Dr. Chuck Phelps on our Cooperating Board of Trustees. Because of the increasing attention the criticism is receiving, we believe an answer is now prudent.

In 1997 a tragic incident took place in Concord, N.H. involving members of a church then pastored by Dr. Phelps. A 15-year-old girl in the congregation was raped by an older man who also attended the church. It was only this past summer—2011—that this man was charged and convicted for his crime.

We are grieved by the sin committed against this lady who was a young teenager at the time. And we are grieved that she will live with the horrible effects of this sin against her throughout her lifetime. Sin is real and so is its damage that only God's grace can heal and restore.

Bloggers have posted a wealth of information about this incident and how Dr. Phelps handled it. Dr. Phelps has been accused of not reporting the crime to officials, sending the girl out of state to hide the situation, harboring a criminal and protecting a sexual predator. We believe that the biblical way to approach this information is to get all the facts before judging Dr. Phelps or his actions, including going directly to him for answers to questions.

While the University maintained regular contact with Dr. Phelps since the matter came to light, we have recently spent time on Dr. Phelps' website—drchuckphelps.com—and reading what the bloggers are saying. To verify facts and get our questions answered we called him and he answered our

questions. After speaking with him and weighing the criticisms against the facts, we have concluded that some of what is posted on the internet about this incident is true, but the majority is a little bit of truth mixed with a lot of opinion and speculation.

Did Dr. Phelps do everything perfectly? No—nor would anyone make perfect judgments in similar circumstances. He has openly admitted this on his website. Bloggers have been quick to judge and condemn Dr. Phelps. But a biblical approach would be an attitude of forbearance toward a Christian brother—not recklessly making accusations of crime or cover up against a man of good reputation before gathering the facts. The biblical principle is to go to the person directly and get facts before reaching a judgment. Dr. Phelps has offered to talk to several of his critics and even shared his phone number, but not one has called to talk with him directly.

The internet posts criticizing Dr. Phelps are a great reminder of the consequences of the negative use of social media—how it can be used to tear down a person's reputation with little verification of fact. They are also a reminder that there are positive, biblical ways to participate in social media discussions, including not quickly rushing to judgment, considering the intent and motives of those posting, considering the tone of what is said and whether it is Christ like in nature, being willing to exert the time and energy to seek the truth humbly, and being willing to challenge others with deep questions and facts.

The BJU Board of Trustees and the Cooperating Board are comprised of godly men and women who exhibit wisdom and humility in their positions. If Dr. Phelps or any other Board member covered up a crime such as this, he or she would not be retained on the Board.

In conclusion, we cannot overlook the human side in all of this.

A teenage girl was raped—this is a tragedy.

A rapist is in jail—this is justice.

A faithful pastor is being pummeled in social media and his family maligned—this is unjust.

Our God is being grieved.