

Answering Brother Smith's Challenge

Mike Willis

The publication of *We Have A Right* has created quite a stir among those who make the Daniel Sommer argument that the church is the only collectivity which can teach the Bible. Brother J.T. Smith published the following as his front page article for the *Gospel Truths* December 2005 magazine which is published by Gospel Truths, Inc. He wrote,

A Challenge to Mike Willis

In their new book "*We Have A Right*" (published by The Guardian of Truth Foundation) we are told that there is no difference in *The Guardian of Truth Foundation, Inc.* and *Gospel Truths, Inc.* Yes, it is true that we were forced to incorporate in order to receive a 2nd Class Non-profit mailing permit. This corporation consists of me, my wife and one of our daughters.

Because I said in an Editorial that "I am the sole proprietor and owner of *Gospel Truths*, and this is a part of my work as an evangelist" brother Mike Willis questioned the validity of this statement. He implies there is "no difference."

Brother Willis says that brethren contribute articles to *Gospel Truths* which is no different that (sic) making a monetary contribution. There are no "staff writers" for *Gospel Truths*. Those who send in articles are sending material they want published as a part of their work in evangelism.

Here is a challenge for brother Willis.

As owner and editor of *Gospel Truths*, without consulting any other person I can cease and desist the publishing of *Gospel Truths*. If there is no difference in *Gospel Truths* and *Truth Magazine* I challenge brother Willis to say "I can cease and desist the publishing of *Truth Magazine* without consulting a single person." I know, he knows and everyone else knows he cannot. They are not the same.

I want to examine what brother Smith admits in this short statement. He admits that Gospel Truths, Inc. is a corporation. He tells us who his board of directors are: J.T. Smith, Geneva Brown Smith, and his married daughter. So, Gospel Truths, Inc. is not a local church; it is not J.T. Smith; it is not J.T. Smith's family because it also involves the family of his married daughter; it is a collectivity overseen by a board of directors, just like the Guardian of Truth Foundation. All of this talk about Guardian of Truth Foundation being a human organization which is preaching the gospel in contrast to Gospel Truths, Inc. should forever end. Brother Smith has created a human organization designed to teach that human organizations which teach the Bible are wrong! Seems a bit inconsistent to me.

However, he defends his creation of this organization on the grounds that the government made him do it! If brother Smith believes that it is a sin for any other collectivity to preach the gospel, he should not organize a collectivity to preach the gospel. Period! End of discussion! The government does not force him to organize such a collectivity; certainly, he should not allow the government to force him to sin. If it tried, then he should "obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). The argument appears to be that it is alright to sin if the government makes you sin.

The truth of the matter is that brother Smith formed his corporation for the same reasons we at the Guardian of Truth Foundation did—to get tax deductions for any contributions to the organization, to avoid paying taxes on any profits it makes, and to qualify for less expensive postage for his magazine. These financial considerations motivated him to commit, what he believes, is sin! Let me assure you that, if I believed that it was a sin to form another collectivity for the purpose of teaching the Bible, I would not form one regardless of what the government

set forth as conditions for special tax benefits and lower postage rates.

Brother Smith thinks his board is different from the one operated by Guardian of Truth Foundation because, “As owner and editor of *Gospel Truths*, without consulting any other person, I can cease and desist publishing *Gospel Truths*.” Let’s examine what he has said.

1. He is not the solitary owner of *Gospel Truths*. Gospel Truths, Inc. is the owner, according to the papers he has filed with the state of Oklahoma. If he thinks he can mix and mingle personal funds with those of Gospel Truths, Inc., a non-profit religious organization, he is violating civil law and stands condemned for violating civil law as per Romans 13:1-7. He knows that he cannot, so he assuredly recognizes the distinction between a sole proprietor and a corporation. He is not a sole proprietor. He is running a corporation.

2. He affirms that he can “cease and desist publishing of *Gospel Truths* without consulting a single individual.” What difference does that make? Would Guardian of Truth Foundation be acceptable if I had the authority to “cease and desist publishing *Truth Magazine* without consulting a single individual”? If so, what Bible verse teaches that? But, granted that brother Smith can cease and desist publishing *Gospel Truths* at his whim, what does it show? It shows that his Board of Directors is made up of “yes” women. Whatever its president wants to do, its other board members acquiesce to his wishes. There is no give and take that occurs when other board members challenge and test the leadership of the organization. Frankly, the Guardian of Truth Foundation could just as easily have staffed its Board of Directors with relatives and “yes” men (or women). Had that been the case, our president could “cease and desist” publishing *Truth Magazine* without consulting a single individual, just as brother Smith can do. However, the Guardian of Truth Foundation made a conscious decision not to fill our board with “yes” men because we do not see the wisdom in that kind of organization and we see nothing in the Scriptures which requires us to put “yes” men on our board. If he thinks his board is stronger because it has “yes” people as board members and because brother Smith wants to practice nepotism in his selection of members for his board of directors, that is his prerogative. I am not charging him with sin for doing so. However, there is no biblical difference in a board with “yes” men and a board of those who are not “yes” men, so far as whether or not a human organization exists and whether or not that human organization is scriptural. If he could sustain the proposition that there is a biblical difference in the one or the other, he surely would have said so in his “challenge” to us. Give us the Scripture, brother Smith!

3. He states that he has no staff writers. That’s interesting inasmuch as he was a staff writer for another paper, that is, he wrote a regular column entitled “Using Great Plainness of Speech” in *Searching the Scriptures* for years. Was brother Smith guilty of sin when he served as a “staff writer” for *Searching the Scriptures*? And what Bible verse says that it is right for a corporation such as Gospel Truths, Inc. to publish a paper so long as it does not have staff writers and wrong if a corporation such as Guardian of Truth Foundation publishes a paper because it has staff writers. Is having a staff of writers what makes *Truth Magazine* wrong but *Gospel Truths*, which is published by Gospel Truths, Inc., right? If so, what verse in the Bible teaches that? Frankly, I haven’t read that verse in my Bible. Have you? Give us that Scripture too, brother Smith!

Arguments such as those brother Smith made are the kind which men are forced to concoct when they create their own collectivities to teach that collectivities which teach the Bible are wrong. Either they are admitting that their collectivity does not teach the Bible or they are woefully inconsistent. The kind of hair splitting which brother Smith makes in this short article demonstrates his problem in trying to defend one collectivity while condemning those operated by others. This is the same problem Daniel Sommer, W. Carl Ketcherside, and Leroy Garrett had when they taught that the church is the only collectivity which can teach the Bible, all the while operating their respective collective teaching arrangements in *Octographic Review*, *Mission Messenger*, and *Restoration Review*. The Daniel Sommer position that the church is the only collectivity which can teach the Bible or offer worship leads logically and inevitably to the position that Bible colleges are wrong and all gospel papers operated by more than one individual are wrong. Make no mistake about it; those who want to draw a line of fellowship against

those of us associated with *Truth Magazine* will also draw a line of fellowship against those associated with Florida College, *Biblical Insights, Inc.*, *Think*, R.J. Stevens singing schools, those who participate in summer camps in which the Bible is taught and have singing and prayer. Make no mistake about it: There is no rational reason to apply this test of fellowship to the Guardian of Truth Foundation but not to other collective works operated by brethren. Teaching one's opinions as divine revelation inevitably leads to factionalism and unnecessary division.

But there is another alternative brother Smith and those associated with him can choose to follow. The other alternative is that these brethren can practice what they teach with partiality. Paul wrote, "I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality" (1 Tim. 5:21). These brethren can make a conscious decision to ignore those other collectivities which are doing the same thing that the Guardian of Truth Foundation is doing and are organized and supported the same way that the Guardian of Truth is. Should they so choose, this will be obvious to brethren as well. Thinking brethren will ask, "Why are only those associated with the Guardian of Truth Foundation and *Truth Magazine* singled out for condemnation?" They will think that those who selectively apply their teaching must have a vendetta against someone for whatever reason. What else can explain their using partiality in the application of what they believe?

Brother Smith tries to defend the contributions he receives from the writers to his paper as being different from monetary contributions. Nevertheless he writes, "Those who send in articles are sending material they want published as part of their work in evangelism." Therefore, these articles are "evangelistic," as in "missionary." Each issue contains a number of writers working together under a common head—a collectivity—to produce their product. This is the very reason that I described *Gospel Truths*, which is published by Gospel Truths, Inc., as a missionary collectivity! "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words shalt thou be condemned" (Matt. 12:37).

Brother Smith attempts to justify his practice of running what I could describe as a "privately supported missionary society" with the argument that he could send in an article to a Baptist publication to expose the errors of the Baptist church without that action being comparable to a contribution of money to said magazine. He tells us that this is the same thing that he and his stable of regular contributors are doing. Sounds pretty good on the surface.

However, our brother seems a bit confused in this situation. These two things are not at all equal. Certainly one could make a "contribution" of a negative article, condemning any false doctrine, to a journal that was the purveyor of that error or sinful practice. For example, any one among us would be delighted to have the opportunity to contribute an article exposing the evils of homosexual behavior to a magazine that is circulated among those who believe in and practice the homosexual lifestyle. Likewise, we would be happy to respond in kind to the errors of those who are the advocates of any false doctrine, so long as our hands are not tied as to what we might be able to say. This would apply, of course, to the situation with the Baptist journal that our brother discusses.

On the other hand, most brethren would see a clear-cut difference between that and what Brother Smith is actually practicing. Those who participate with him are not writing in to expose the sin of what Brother Smith is doing. Rather, they are making a contribution to his paper that is beneficial and supportive, rather than condemnatory and confrontational. One might imagine, as a more appropriate comparison, that one of our brethren decided to make a monthly contribution as a regular writer in the same homosexual magazine that we mentioned above. Each month he composed a positive and encouraging piece of literature, let us say, on travel options: modes of transport, destinations, hotels, restaurants, etc. If brother Smith picks up this magazine at the doctor's office, and reads one or two of his articles and discovers that this brother in Christ is "making a literary contribution" to said journal—will he be willing to swallow his own contention that this fellow is not actually making any sort of

“contribution” to the ongoing success and welfare of the journal to which his literary donation is being sent monthly? I think we all know the answer to this question! He understands the difference between an article that is critical of sin and error, and the practice of making a donation of literature that is supportive of the wrong that is being taught or practiced. The former is detrimental to the magazine, attempting to tear it down and destroy it. The latter is a literary subsidy of sorts, reinforcing the positions taken by the journal. That is precisely what his stable of writers do every single month. But, let’s go a little further. Let’s suppose that a brother in another state volunteered to typeset the same homosexual magazine without charge, another group of people volunteered to address and mail the same homosexual magazine without charge. Would these people be making donations to that homosexual magazine? Our brother is transparently “grasping at straws” in his effort to justify that which is as clearly a parallel to the organization and operation of the Guardian of Truth Foundation as anything ever could be. Brother Smith, your desperation is showing!