

“Do You Believe in Church Camps & VBS?”

by Kyle Pope

This question was posed on our online question board. Let’s consider what the Bible teaches in order to answer it. To start, let’s consider some thing regarding this wording.

“Church Camps.” The question asks about “church camps.” The Bible teaches that while on earth Jesus declared His intention to build His church (Matt. 16:18). On the Day of Pentecost when the gospel was first preached and souls obeyed its call, those who turned to Christ in faith and obedience were first added by God to the body of saved souls identified as His church (Acts 2:47 KJV, NKJV; cf. Acts 5:11). This assembly of disciples was purchased with the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28), and governed by Him as its Head (Eph. 5:23). The New Testament was given as the standard of conduct for activities of this church (1 Tim. 3:15), in both its universal and local sense (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

So let’s ask the question this way, does the New Testament teach (by its direct instructions, by recorded examples of the actions of faithful churches, or by clear inferences) that churches are to build, maintain, staff, and support camps to teach the Bible, provide entertainment for young people, and places of retreat, lodging, association, and edification? No. There is no example in Scripture of churches doing this.

I have known of congregations whose elderships assumed this unscriptural work and promoted it as a part of the work of their local congregation. In spite of the good intentions that may have motivated this, we must recognize that there is no more authority in Scripture to support such activities than there would be to start a business to fix cars, show movies, sell groceries, or any other wholesome activity in which individual Christians may participate.

With that said, let’s ask it this way, would it be wrong for Christians to send their kids to a camp operated and led by faithful Christians (that is not operated as a work of a local church)? Absolutely not. Individual Christians have the liberty to participate in any activity that is wholesome, lawful, and godly. Although there is no authority for churches to assume oversight of such activities, if individual Christians band together to organize camps, schools, or other types of associations to provide opportunities for young people to study the Bible, spend time with other Christians, and escape for a time from the world around us, there is nothing wrong with that. We shouldn’t call these “Church Camps” — perhaps “Bible Camps” would be more fitting. Now, that doesn’t mean that we should send our kids to just any camp that has some religious aim. Some might teach religious error or be extensions of religious organizations operated by denominations, but when faithful Christians offer their time to teach and encourage young people it can be a great thing. My children went to a camp of this sort. My wife was a counselor for years. My kids were greatly enriched by their time with other children and the godly adults who loved them and loved the Lord.

“VBS.” The question also asked about “VBS.” This is the usual abbreviation for Vacation Bible School. Many churches use this name for special studies that are conducted during summer months, often aimed at children who are out of school. To answer this part of the question we must first acknowledge that this name often means something different to different people who hear it and use it.

In the religious world this may refer to a formal organization run and operated under the oversight of a church, yet with its own principal, administrators, teachers, and staff. Much like the denominational “Sunday Schools” that form separate institutions that are operated under the umbrella of the denomination, some “Vacation

continued on page 332903