
AN OPEN LETTER FROM MINISTRY LEADERS

November 4, 2022

John Lewis

Chairman, Bob Jones University Board of Trustees

To Dr. Lewis and the BJU board,

Bob Jones University has been a significant institution in American Christian fundamentalism for nearly a century. For almost a decade now, Dr. Steve Pettit has served BJU as its president. This letter is intended to represent a collective voice of support for the leadership of Dr. Pettit. Those signing include ministry leaders who serve as pastors, educators, chaplains, camp directors, publishers, mission leaders, and missionaries. We are unabashedly orthodox in our doctrine and conservative in our ministry practices. Like you, we are separatists who are unwilling to tolerate or cooperate with unorthodoxy. Those signing include members of the following organizations:

- The Foundations Baptist Fellowship International (FBFI)
- The IFCA International (IFCA)
- The General Association of Regular Baptist Churches (GARBC)
- The Associated Gospel Churches (AGC)
- The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC)
- The Reformed Baptist Network (RBNNet)
- The Bible Faculty Summit
- The Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC)
- The Fellowship of Missions (FOM)
- The American Association of Christian Schools (AACCS)
- And many other organizations, as well as independents.

Many of us are alumni of BJU. Others have ministered in classes, chapels, or conferences at BJU. Several have sent our children and church members to BJU. Our churches and ministry constituents include BJU alumni. We have been blessed by the ministry of the school and its representatives. We are friends of BJU and have been its ardent supporters.

First, we want to thank you for the responsibilities you have undertaken. Spiritual leadership is a privilege, but it can also be exhausting, especially when critical decisions must be made. You have positions of tremendous

influence and stewardship, and we are praying for the Lord to grant you great wisdom for His glory.

Although we represent a great breadth of ministry associations, we share a deep appreciation for Dr. Steve Pettit and the leadership he has provided for BJU. We do not claim lockstep agreement on every issue. Fundamentalism has never required or achieved unanimity on everything; from the beginning it was a multi-denominational coalition. But we believe the University has been well served by Dr. Pettit's principled and balanced leadership, and we are pleased to go on record in our appreciation and support for Dr. Pettit. We are particularly grateful for the following progress which BJU has made under Dr. Pettit's leadership:

- Expository preaching in chapels and at Bible Conference is exceptionally strong.
- Dr. Pettit's intentional focus on discipleship in addition to compliance to behavioral standards is helping students to grow in Christlikeness.
- The vibrant singing of intentionally theological and gospel-saturated songs is good for the student body and glorifying to God.
- The dress code in use now still requires modesty and neatness but makes an appropriate adjustment to a business culture that is less formal than it once was. While we agree that it is important to consistently apply the standards which are in place, this is a challenge for every institution in every era.
- Principled cooperation with churches based on like faith and practice—including select conservative churches in the SBC and PCA—has been good for the school and has given the parents and pastors of students the opportunity to shepherd them through important decisions.
- Compassionate activism and leadership within the Greenville community has provided BJU with a positive Christian testimony and useful working relationships.

There are certainly portions of the BJU constituency who regret the changes listed above. You have undoubtedly heard from some of them. On the other hand, part of the constituency desires more aggressive changes. Poles on both the right and the left have other educational options. But the great majority of the BJU constituency, in our judgment, rests in the middle of these two extremes: they are grateful that the University has made wise and principled changes on non-essentials while continuing to be unbending regarding the true fundamentals of the faith. This vast core of the constituency has been vocal in its support of Dr. Pettit; it cannot have escaped your notice how many people signed the recent Change.org petition, and how positive they are about BJU under Dr. Pettit's leadership.

Further, we encourage you to maintain a sense of proportion regarding the changes Dr. Pettit has made at BJU. We are battling an ever-encroaching secularism in our society. Nevertheless, BJU continues to do "battle royal" for

the Scriptures under Dr. Pettit, even increasing its commitment to teach students a biblical worldview.

- Has BJU abandoned its commitment to six-day creationism or its opposition to evolution?
- Has BJU softened in its opposition to immorality, homosexuality, or transgenderism?
- Has BJU altered its biblical stance on male headship in the home and church?
- Has BJU eroded its emphasis on the substitutionary, penal atonement of Christ?
- Has BJU shifted its stance on the inerrancy of Scripture, the existence of a literal hell, and the exclusivity of the Christian gospel?

The clear answer to each of these questions is a resounding *no*. Does it not seem out of balance, then, to imperil what God is doing at BJU over less vital issues on which conservative Christians have always allowed each other to differ? The ability to differentiate between essential doctrines and tertiary issues was once an identifying mark of fundamentalists.

The genius of BJU has never been dress codes, demerits, or musical styles. The genius of BJU and of fundamentalism has always been the absolute authority and sufficiency of Scripture. We “earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints” (Jude 3)—not for versions, skirts, or songs. We believe that BJU is as unapologetically orthodox today as it was in 1927. In fact, we would argue that the University is actually *more* conscientious in applying the totality of Scripture today than in the past, when it was sometimes schismatic and racially insensitive.

This letter is not an ultimatum. It is a demonstration of support, and we hope it will be received as such. However, we do fear that a change in leadership intended to effect a change in philosophy and direction will be devastating and perhaps even fatal for the University we so admire. We believe that you chose well when you chose Dr. Pettit, and we are therefore urging you to extend Dr. Pettit’s contract and to give him your enthusiastic support. He has stewarded BJU’s legacy well. We pray that he will do so for many years to come.

To the degree that the obstacle to unified collaboration is a breach of Christian fellowship, we pray earnestly for full reconciliation. Please model for the student body and a watching world the humility and grace of our Savior, Who commanded us to love, showed us how to forgive, and blessed those who make peace.

Be assured of our prayers during this critical time and of our genuine Christian love. Grace to you!

Signers

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