

Educating Christian Children

"But where the Holy Scripture does not rule I certainly advise no one to send his child. Everyone not unceasingly occupied with the Word of God must become corrupt; therefore we must see what people in the higher schools are and grow up to be I greatly fear that schools for higher learning are wide gates to hell if they do not diligently teach the Holy Scriptures and impress them on the young folk."

Martin Luther

Quoted in Ewald M. Plass, comp., *What Luther Says, An Anthology*, 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 1:449.

Biblical revelation speaks not only to all the longings and needs of our life, but also to every aspect of society. God's word forms a plumb line of truth in every sphere of knowledge and activity. The Psalmist David said, "Therefore I esteem right all Thy precepts concerning everything" (Psalm 119:128). In Christ, the creator and sustainer of all things, are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3). As believers, we are commanded to take captive all knowledge to the obedience of Christ (II Corinthians 10:5). Only in God's light (perspective) can we truly know anything (Psalm 36:9). The fear of the Lord is the precondition for wisdom and knowledge (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10).

Jesus Christ is Lord over all: over salvation, over life, over death, over the future, over the nations, over law and society, over reasoning, over knowledge. He commands parents to train their children in His Lordship (Ephesians 6:4). God has given parents the responsibility and final authority to secure, guide, and control the education of their children. For what purpose? To train the next generation to think with a renewed mind about all areas of life and to walk in all God's ways (Romans 12:1-2).

Man was originally created, in God's image for God's glory, to subdue (develop) the earth (Genesis 1:26-28). To subdue, man must first study every aspect of God's creation so that its parts might be properly correlated. This is what Adam did when he named the animals (Genesis 2:19-20). From the beginning, the primary task that belonged to each parent was to instill this dominion mandate perspective in their children and to help them pursue it.

When Adam and Eve rebelled against God's word, He placed them and their descendants under a curse (Genesis 3:17-19). The consequences of this ethical rebellion are spiritual death (Romans 8:5-8; Ephesians 2:1-4) and intellectual malfunction (Romans 1:21-22; I Corinthians 2:14; Ephesians 4:17-18). The curse of sin also introduced an inescapable conflict between those who are enemies of God and those who embrace the promised Redeemer (Genesis 3:15).

This conflict makes the task of pursuing proper knowledge of the world and developing a God-glorifying culture much more difficult. Because of sin, unbelievers will misinterpret and distort the facts of this world. As they do this, they will profess to be wise, but they are really fools instead (Romans 1:22). It is thus imperative that parents educate their children within the perspective and power of God's revelation and grace.

The redemption that Christ has secured for His people does not just guarantee forgiveness of sins and heaven in the future. It also delivers the believer from the futility of sin in the present. Concerning modern day education, intellectual futility and foolish reasoning govern its methods and learning about

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this present world. If you do not think you have been influenced by this distorted education, then answer the following questions:

- Did your schooling reflect the glory of God? Did it give Jesus Christ His proper place as Lord over all?
- Did the content of instruction reflect reverence for God's word as the sole standard of life, conduct, and interpretation?
- Did the curricula or any of your teachers encourage you to respond to the biblical God in adoring worship?

Many people define the process of education as “preparation for life.” The Bible declares that God is life. Modern day education does not confirm this truth. The touchstone of modern day education leaves little or no room for the God of the Bible. In its content and methodology, modern day education declares that God is insignificant. University professor Allan Bloom describes the goal to which primary education, in the past fifty years, has dedicated itself, “There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative.”¹ Therefore, from the viewpoint of Scripture, modern day education is not education at all. It is miseducation. It is a counterfeit. It is a lie.

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Proverbs 1:7). Genuine knowledge of any school subject must begin with reverence and submission to God. We must, in our pursuit of knowledge, adhere to the fundamentals and philosophy that centers in the Lord Jesus Christ. If we do not, we will be taken captive by the philosophy of the fallen world (Colossians 2:8, I Timothy 6:20). It is the word of God that sets apart His people in the truth (John 17:17). Thus, neutrality in education is not only impossible (Matthew 12:30), but immoral (James 4:4). Accordingly, the aim of Christian parents must be to encourage their children to walk as disciples of Christ; to know the truth that is in Jesus Christ and that all knowledge must revolve around Him. Only in this knowledge will they enjoy real freedom (John 8:31-32).

The dominion mandate, the fall of man, and the fundamental nature of genuine knowledge all compel Christian parents to train and educate their children, regardless of the subject matter, in the nurture of the Lord and the light of His revelation (Proverbs 5:1-2; Psalm 119:105, 130).

This parental responsibility has been a part of the confession of faith of God's people from the earliest days and indeed a primary application of the first and great commandment (Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Matthew 22:37-38). It defines what it means to keep covenant with God: “And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart, *and you shall teach them diligently to your sons ...*” (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). This passage instructs parents to teach their children constantly and consistently, in every time and place, covering all the spheres of human thought, activity and living. It must be noted that this responsibility has been assigned directly by God to parents and not to any other institution of society.

Along with this God-given responsibility comes God-given provision in resources, time, and money. Every parent can fulfill this command. If, as a parent, you think you cannot, then the problem is not with God's commands, it is with your priorities. If you think you need not fulfill this command, then God's warning is clear - the one that does not make provision for the biblical training of his

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children has denied the faith (I Timothy 5:8).

Regardless, then, of whatever children learn - from math and science to history, geography, grammar, literature, and the arts - parents have a God-given duty to see to it that their children learn these subjects, as much as is possible, with the perspective and application of the Christian world view as derived from God's revelation. It should also be the policy of every church that calls itself Christian to inculcate this educational responsibility in parents. The teaching, preaching, and pastoral care ministry of every church should be focused on directing and helping parents to walk in God's gracious covenant as faithful disciples of Christ. We will never see genuine cultural reformation until this priority is implemented, maintained, and nurtured universally by the body of Christ.

I appeal to Christian parents everywhere - do your duty! God will use your obedience to fulfill His ancient promise: "The knowledge of the glory of the Lord will fill the earth as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9; Habakkuk 2:14).

For many of the ideas in this paper, the author is indebted Greg L. Bahnsen's article entitled "Biblical Policy on Keeping Covenant with God in the Education of Our Children" Penpoint V:3 (Apr. 1994).

Endnotes:

¹Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), p. 25.