

Education of Children

By David Sheats

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A major decision facing parents today is which method to use in the education of their children. This decision is thrust upon us because of the highly technical nature of our society and the fact that a large proportion of the jobs available require, at minimum, a high school education, while many more require additional education. Most education options require involvement in godless government-controlled systems, where men's philosophies prevail, and morality is at the level of Sodom.

What should parents do, who sincerely desire to raise their children for God? The following discussion of some of the issues at stake is prayerfully offered in the hope that it will provide some light to help parents fulfill their responsibility before God.

The Foundation, Christ and His Church

Before discussing some of the details regarding education, we need to consider carefully some foundational issues, because if we are on the wrong foundation, we cannot help being wrong in the outworking. The first thing we must see clearly is that the family is not the primary goal. While the family is very important, God does not build around the family unit. He has chosen to sum up all things in Christ (Ephesians 1:10). Everything else must take this into account--and not just in theory. Closely associated with this fact is God's purpose in the church.

The church is the body of Christ in reality, not just in theory. Families fit into the church, not the church into families. If this is not seen in the right perspective, in the end we will fail with our children. Our children can be well-trained, well-educated, go on to be wonderful citizens of the world, and still miss God. As Christians, our purpose is to see our children in Christ. If they are in Christ, they are in God's plan for eternity.

The essential factor in seeing this come to pass is the example that we as parents are setting. Are our lives controlled by Christ, and by what God is doing in the body of Christ, or are our lives centered in our families? As parents, if the focus of our lives is the family, we will never be able to point our children to, Christ, because we teach far more by example than any other way. The revelation of Christ and His purpose in the church must dominate and control our entire lives. Christ said, "*I will build My church...*" (Matthew 16:18). He did not say He would build the family.

A properly ordered and functioning family is essential if the family is to be a part of His church, but it cannot be the center. Each of us must personally answer the question of where our focus is, in light of the purpose of God. A further discussion of the church itself is outside our subject here, but it cannot be overemphasized that this forms the foundation for our movement in God.

In the World But Not Of the World

A second foundational area that must be clear in our vision is that God is calling men out of this world unto Himself. God is not building in the world or in its system. The whole Adamic race (old man) was judged at Calvary, and a new creation (new man) was begun in Christ Jesus. There can be no mixing of the two, and anyone who makes himself a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of Christ (James 4:4). When we use the term "world," we are speaking not of land and trees, but of the godless system of society and government which does not acknowledge God, but operates completely separate from God and refuses to come under His authority. In fact, Satan is called the god of this world, or age (2 Corinthians 4:4).

We must see this separation that God has made, or we will try to mix what God is doing in the church (which is pure and holy) with what Satan is doing in this world (which is full of sin). God is calling men out of the world and its system, into Christ.

Jesus prayed not that we would be taken out of this world physically, but rather that God would keep us in the world (John 17:15). His purpose is fulfilled as we walk as He walked. Jesus was never afraid to go anyplace as He did the Father's will, but He was never a part of either the religious system or the governmental system of His day. He never stooped to its level, and when men tried to trap Him, He said, "*Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's*" (Luke 20:25). He could attend weddings, visit the homes of sinners, and go into the temple, but in each place He remained in control of the situation and glorified God. Yet He has called us to walk as He walked, and He has given us the Holy Spirit that we may also be led, and walk in the power of God as salt and light in this godless age. No rulebook will take the place of the Holy Ghost, and men's wisdom will not be sufficient for us to walk in this world and be salt and light.

The New Covenant

A third foundational issue is the provision that God has made in the new covenant. Some have tried to divide the ages of time into many different "dispensations" in order to explain God's dealings. Some of these efforts have probably gone too far, but we can say that clearly there is an old covenant, and there is a new covenant. We are living in the new covenant; thus, we must be careful not to mix the provisions or the dealings of the two. The promises of the new covenant are so much greater than the old that there is hardly any comparison. A full discussion of this is far beyond what is possible here, but consider just a few of the differences between the old and new covenants.

In the new covenant, God has come to abide within man by the Holy Spirit (John 14:23). The old could deal only with outward acts, but in the new, God deals with the whole heart of man (Matthew 5). The promise in the new is that He will write His law upon our hearts and minds (Hebrews 8:10). "*No man will teach his neighbor 'know the Lord' for all shall know Me*" (Hebrews 8:11). Christ did not just set an example for us to follow--He has become our life (Galatians 2:20). The old is called "*a ministry of condemnation and death,*" while the new is what brings life (2 Corinthians 3:6-9).

All of these things and many more have tremendous implications when it comes to working out our salvation. We are on this side of Calvary, and the Holy Ghost has come. Those in the old were looking forward to the Savior; for us, He has come. Have we let this truth affect our thinking and our actions when it comes to raising our children? For example, sometimes we draw heavily from the book of Proverbs when teaching our children or considering how to deal with them. But the Holy Spirit is not mentioned even once in Proverbs. Why? Because the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified (John 7:39). But now He has been given.

Have we let the truth of this fact affect our dealing with our children? God has not changed, but His dealing with men does change. We are not in the time of Moses, nor are we the nation of Israel. We are being built together "*a habitation of God in the Spirit.*" Do we know what that means?

Training Versus Education

There is no question that God has given parents: the responsibility of training children. It is not the responsibility either of the government or of the church. Only parents have the place in the life of a child to train as God intended. But some go farther, to make education the same as training. If we will consider this matter carefully, I believe we can see these are not one and the same. To make them the same can lead us down a wrong road, and put burdens on some parents that they are not able to bear.

Training is a matter of building character and guiding the overall growth and maturity of a child. This includes such items as diligence, faithfulness, submissiveness, honesty, patience, good manners, good work habits, orderliness, kindness, gentleness, thankfulness, generosity, neatness and loyalty. All of these traits and more can be taught whether or not a child ever learns how to read and write, or do any mathematics. Indeed, there are many in other cultures who do not have the need or the opportunity to become educated as we know education; yet they are trained by their parents, learn a skill that enables them to earn a living (such as fishing), and conduct themselves honorably in their own place. Education or lack of education does not make them a better-trained person.

Education, on the other hand, has to do with learning specific skills. It may be in the common areas of reading, writing, and arithmetic, or it may include other skills normally taught in the classroom that are necessary to function in the jobs that are available in a highly technical society. Some children learn these skills more easily than others. Then there are other skills which are best taught by working with mature craftsmen who possess a skill and are willing to teach others on the job.

Our culture has glorified education to the point of being a god or an idol, making it the answer to everything. It does not take much discernment, though, to see that education does not deal with the heart of man and is not the cure-all to man's evils.

Character Versus Life

There is one more foundational area which we need to mention regarding the training of our children. It is a major area and we cannot expand upon it here, but it is the question of what makes a person a Christian. We cannot train our children to be Christians. Only God can make them Christians, and He does that by making them partakers of His life. Jesus said that He came to give us life (John 10:10). New birth by the Spirit is what brings us into the life of God, and only God can accomplish this work as our children respond to His dealing in their lives. Each one must deal personally with God, and our children are no exception.

One of the major things that we do in preparing our children to meet God is to teach them to submit to authority when they encounter it. When they encounter the authority of God in their lives by the Spirit, the example of our lives and the training we have given them will be strong encouragement to submit their lives to God and partake of His life. However, neither we nor God can force that choice. It is a love relationship entered into willingly, and anything that makes salvation other than a love relationship in the Spirit is not salvation.

We can prepare our children for God in much the same manner that the temple of the old covenant was built under the direction of God to prepare for the presence of God coming to abide. We can build character to a certain point, but then the Holy Spirit must enter into the heart and continue building in a

deeper way than parents can. For example, we can teach honesty, but only the Holy Spirit can bring godly honesty into the heart. We can teach our children to be loving and caring to a point, but only the Holy Spirit can bring the real love of God within.

People that have not been trained properly by their parents have a great deal of "unlearning" to do when they come into the life of God. However, if the proper training has taken place, the Holy Spirit can continue the work already begun. Remember, it is the Holy Spirit who is working through the parents in the beginning, so there will be no inconsistency if we are sensitive to God.

Relationship Is the Answer

Having considered some key foundations in working with our children, how do these apply to the decisions which are before us regarding the matter of education? If we have accepted our responsibility as parents in the matter of training our children, and we see clearly what God is looking for in their lives, one area will begin to take on great importance--the relationship we have as parents with our children. It is a close relationship that must be guarded and worked with on a continual basis. We must keep the lines of communication open, and be sensitive to God at all times. There is no formula, no "five easy steps."

Each child is different, and the situation and the needs are continually changing. We must know what our children are thinking, and constantly be ahead of them to guide them in their choices. No matter what form of education we may be using, we must be "on top of the situation," working towards a goal in their lives.

Often, when parents begin to look for another structure for education, it is because there has been failure in this area of relationship. There has been a breakdown in communication, and the parents are not on top of the situation. They have not given the necessary guidance and direction, and have not been sensitive to the needs of the child. They conclude that it is not possible to work with the current structure, and start looking for other options, never considering that they may be the ones at fault.

Parents have sometimes moved their children from public schools to private schools, from private schools to a structured home school, and from structured home school to no structure at all. Many times (not always), it is a continual path of running from responsibility and discipline. Each step seems to help, but in the end, the child is not being trained and the results are only temporary. Training is hard work for both the parent and the child. Nothing worthwhile comes easily. No matter what structure we may be using for education, there is no substitute for a close relationship between parent and child. If it is not present, we need God's wisdom and power to see it restored and maintained.

God's Wisdom For Each Situation

One trap that we can fall into is making one form of education "the answer" for all. It has been said by some that if parents were really spiritual, they would educate (not train) their children all the way through school to the college level. Consider what bondage this would bring to parents. There may be some that can do this, but many do not have that ability or opportunity. The family may have several small children, the father may work away from the home all day just to make ends meet, and the wife may not even have a high school education. What is this family to do? If we are not careful, we can put burdens on people that they cannot bear.

Each situation is different. The culture is different, the educational opportunities are different, and the parents' capabilities are different. The financial circumstances are different, the children are different, and the needs are different at different ages. We cannot put people "in a box" and say they must fit our

ideas. Children have been hurt in early years by well-meaning parents who did not know how to give their child a good foundation in reading, but who were told they must educate their child if they really cared. Resentment can build in a child's heart in later years, which can undo any good that might have been done through parents doing all the educating.

What we are saying is that no matter what form of educational structure we use, we must know God's direction and His wisdom for the moment. There is no one "best way." Parents may be using public schools, at the same time training their children in a proper relationship, and giving them all the education they need. Another may be using a private school, and accomplishing the same thing. Others may be home schooling and gaining excellent results. All must train, and all must be sensitive to what is happening, being open for God to direct a change. Each one needs to know the power of God. Just because parents may choose home schooling for the moment does not mean that they do not need the ability of God moment by moment.

The Influence of the World

Probably the greatest arguments against using the public school system to educate our children are its worldly philosophies and low morals. Coupled closely with this is what is called "peer pressure" from other children. Are these valid reasons to never use the public school system?

In answer to this question, I would like to ask one key question: How much influence do parents have with their children? My answer is "as much as they want to have." The main reason some parents are not able to contradict the philosophies and standards of the world is that they themselves do not have standards which are based in God; thus they are not able to communicate those same standards to their children. God said that He knew Abraham, and that he was able to "command his children."

Can we command our children? Have we built such a relationship with them that they trust us and our judgment whether they understand or not? Will they do our will, desiring to please us above all else? The ability to do this does not depend on the amount of time we are with them, but rather on our relationship with them. Do our lives command their respect? No matter what educational system we choose, parents still hold the deciding factor. If the parents do not control, it is because they have chosen not to control, not because of other influences in their children's lives. If we are alive to God, the example of our lives and the life of God flowing through us will dominate.

The philosophies of this world that our children face will be only a "laugh," if the children have seen God in us. The problem many times is that our children have not seen the power of God in us. They have only heard religious philosophies regarding what they should believe. They have seen a form of godliness which denies the *power* of God. Are we showing them a living God in our lives, or a dead theology about God? Do they see prayer answered? Do they see lives that match our words? If they do, our lives will dominate even if we see them for only a few hours a week. Have we taught them at an early age to obey even when we are not around? If we have, they will obey when they face their school friends.

I am not saying that we will not experience conflict, because we will. But we do not need to fear the devil (he is defeated) and we do not need to fear the world (we need to be wise). We do need to fear God, and if we do, then we will obey. Many Christians pay tuition money to send their children to "Christian schools" to escape the world, and then allow the world into their homes through the television, which in the form of entertainment brings far more detriment into their lives than the public school ever could. As parents, we do control the environment of the home, and the home sets the course of the life.

The question of morality is very similar. If we have done our job in training at home, our children will have our moral standards. They will not attract the sinners of this world, and every new situation they face will be brought to us for direction. We cannot do this without a close relationship, however, and that is built at home under the direction of God. There are some places in the world where children are forcibly taken away from the home at the age of seven. Could the power and wisdom of God stand, to keep our children there? Most of us do not face anything close to this, yet we have available to us the power that raised Christ from the dead. Are we channels of God, no matter what the educational structure?

Christian Schools

A word needs to be said about so-called "Christian schools." May I challenge us on our terminology, and the concepts behind that terminology? Is there such a thing as a "Christian school"? What makes a school "Christian"? Can we find any support in the scriptures for any Christian institutions in the new covenant other than the church and the home?

My own answer to these questions is that there is no such thing as a Christian school, as far as God is concerned. All of His working is in the home and in the church. We may use a private school for certain reasons, and if we are moving in faith before God (that is, we have heard God, and the direction we are moving in fits into His plan), then there certainly is no problem. But we must be very careful that we are not trying to hire a school to do what only parents can do. If there is any element of this, then in the end we will surely fail.

Home School

There is a growing movement today which advocates doing all of the education at home. There are many good things to be said about this. Parents are more involved, discipline can be high (although not necessarily), and children can be taught more because of individual attention, assuming parents know what they are doing. In the few words here, I am not discouraging anyone from using this form, but would only caution parents to be sure they know what they are doing.

Home school is not the cure-all to every problem, and is very demanding on the parents. If the father is working, it can throw a very heavy load on the wife. It requires utmost diligence in God to maintain discipline 24 hours a day so that the proper training is taking place. It is very easy to "let down" to a lower place, and the resulting effects can be long-lasting. Extra care must be taken to properly involve children with other children under supervision. If home schooling is the choice that God is leading a person to make, the underlying motivation should be carefully examined to make sure it is not just being done to cover up a weakness which is being revealed elsewhere. Under these circumstances, home schooling will not solve the problem but hide it for a while, and in the end make matters worse.

Training With God In View

The bottom line is this: are we training our children for God? If the revelation of God and His purpose is filling our vision, and we are given over completely to God, then God will show us how to take care of the education of our children. Education should not dominate; training should. In education, we can train, but training goes far beyond education. We may find a certain amount of education necessary in the culture we find ourselves in, and it may vary from child to child. If we are sensitive to the Holy Spirit, He will lead us through the maze, and God will be glorified.

Without a controlling revelation of God, we will fail, no matter what the outward form of education. We need God. We need to know the power of God, and we need the wisdom of God. We must be under His control, not the control of our own ideas or philosophies. This is demanding, because it means we must be in relationship with God. If we are in relationship with God, He can direct us in our individual situations and in our relationships with our children. Let us not fall into the trap of making any form of education the answer. God is the answer. Are we being led by Him? *"These are the sons of God, those who are led by the Spirit of God"* (Romans 8:14).

May the Lord direct us for His glory and lead us in His triumph.