

CHRISTIAN HOME AND FAMILY LIVING

by

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CHAPTER SEVEN

PARENTS AND EDUCATION

Deuteronomy 6:1-9; Proverbs 1:1-9; 4:1-13; Ephesians 6:1-4

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy . . . mind (Matthew 22:37)

Education concerns all of us. It may be good, bad or mediocre; pagan or Christian, public or private, academic or vocational, conventional or progressive; it is often resisted but is always irresistible. It includes any process or shaping of the individual personality and potentiality, whether of formal or informal character.

Informal education results from the constant effect of environment, and the interacting of personalities. Parents might be called the principal teachers and directors, for they are legally responsible for the next generation. They choose the home and the place to live; they choose the church and schools in which they wish to have their children educated; and they select, from among the programs offered by the church, school and other organizations, those activities and values which they prefer for their family. The daily and total influence of their own personalities and values on their children cannot be over-estimated.

Formal education is the systematic development and cultivation of the mind (learning to know). Training is practical education (learning to do) usually under supervision, in some art, trade or profession. In Russia all teaching is saturated with communistic principles, while in the United States democracy is stressed. In Christian education, which flourishes best in a democracy, the thought of God is basic and central. Freedom of thought and equality of educational opportunities are basic principles.

Education, which began in the long ago as a family task, has gone through various stages of development and availability. In a democracy such as ours thousands of schools have been built and education is made available to all: the bright, average and dull, the handicapped and maladjusted, increasingly to the preschoolers, extending through high school, college and the university, and to the ever- expanding adult education programs. This is not true everywhere. In some countries higher education is the privilege of only those with high intellectual acumen, and in such a country as Egypt, a much older civilization than ours, the blind Hussein pioneered for education for the masses not many years ago.

Today Nassar is making the dream come true and is building schools for the land of the pyramids, but not nearly enough. Some governments seem to thrive on the ignorance of the masses, but a democracy requires an enlightened and participating people.

More and better education is the need of the hour. Within the recollection of today's great-grandmothers finishing grade school was not compulsory; now not only high school but a junior college education, at the least, is fast becoming essential because of the rapid advance of science and the competitive world in which we live. The challenge of an expanding age and more leisure time also accounts for the popularity of adult education programs. In Britain's University of Durham a man who had quit school at twelve was admitted last year at sixty-eight. Research in mathematics has advanced so rapidly that in a Portland, Oregon, school many teachers recently joined a special class of gifted pupils to learn the latest terms and symbols. Education is hailed as a necessity and as a means of survival, but that was proven long ago by the Greeks, among others, who were free as long as they were a thinking people.

The immensity of the program which we are attempting has dawned on us only lately. We are attempting to do what no other nation has ever accomplished in education. We are trying to give an adequate education to all the young in a nation of one hundred and seventy million, and to fill in and continue the education of every willing adult. It has proved to be a task of gigantic proportions, and has accumulated staggering problems and complications.

William James (1842-1910), great American teacher and philosopher, once said that there are two subjects which would stop a conversation and make people listen. One is religion; education is the other. Religion may now be somewhat eclipsed by Russia, but education is still second. The more we hear about it, the more we want to know about it; and it has come to have cosmic significance.

Many factors have contributed to what has come to be known as a recession in education.

The great economic and social changes of this century have seriously affected the American family. The loosening of moral fibers, breakdown of homes, and child delinquency have had their effect on educational policies. The schools pulled in all directions in their effort to stem the rising tide of delinquency and to help the American child.

They extended curriculums to include all kinds of courses which might be helpful; they tried to be parents, too, taking teaching time for things which rightfully belonged to the home sphere. They introduced nursery schools, clinics, child guidance bureaus, various character building enterprises, and built huge gymnasiums and great new schools.

In this all-out effort for the whole man there was not enough time for, or emphasis on, basic intellectual needs. Many educators now admit that the schools tried to do too much, that in trying to do everything for everyone they did nothing for anyone, but most schools still operate on an extensive curriculum. At many colleges a student may choose his thirty-two to forty courses from among six hundred, eight hundred or one thousand courses.

As long as schools continue to do this, or prosperous parents think that money, not intellectual ability is an entrance requirement, and as long as college is an “absurd badge of prestige” (as a popular columnist dubbed it), we will continue to have embarrassing complications.

Some think that the educational upset was brought about largely by the “progressive” trend in education. In this system there is an emphasis on “life adjustment” rather than on academic excellence; the students set the class pace, and pick the subjects as they like, with a minimum of discipline. It is generally believed today that progressive education has done more harm than good, and now there is a widespread agitation to halt and reverse the trend.

The progressive idea of “learning by doing” has a good side, as it is seen in modern vocational training, and as it is carried over into school clubs and extra-curricular activities. But the idea that a child learns best from an education which is directed by the child instead of by the teacher, has been found wanting. There is considerable opinion that many precarious home situations, much delinquency and curriculum and building expansion problems, can be related to the progressive movement in education.

However, the great scientific achievements and superior education of Russia are responsible, more than any other fact, for the re-evaluation of the method, quality and aim of education. Thousands of schools have responded to Sputnik by making curriculum changes, and by making some movements away from the “progressive” theory, with its emphasis on “life adjustment.”

In a way, Russia has become the hickory stick of American education. It is a blessing that Christian education has steered clear of the popular “progressive” trend of these past years. But it is regrettable, to say the least, that renewed interest in real education is inspired more by fear than by the challenge of the mind.

The Christian feels a deep interest in education because he is involved in it by his creation in the image of God, who is rational and moral, and who is Wisdom incarnate (Proverbs 1:7; 8:14, 22; Colossians 2:3). The importance of reason, which is the richest and highest possession God has given to man and by which he can know God (Isaiah 1:18; Acts 24:25; I Peter 1:13), and the excellence of learning, of wisdom and understanding are stressed throughout the Scriptures (Proverbs 1:1-9; 2:1-6; 4:1-13; Matthew 11:29; Romans 15:4). There is both urgency and command in: **“Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life.”**

Christianity is committed to education in its broadest sense, for it declares the pre-eminence of God in every sphere of life.

“For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist” (Colossians 1:16, 17; Job 38; Romans 11:36; Hebrews 1:2, 3). **“. . . we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear”** (Hebrews 11:3). He is the Way, the Truth, the Light and the Life, and we believe that nothing can be fully understood apart from Him (Romans 1:18-21).

If God is pre-eminent in all things He is also the Lord of the minds of men. We are to know God as He reveals Himself in His world, in His Word, and in Jesus Christ whom He has sent (Ezekiel 38:23; John 14:9; 17:3; I Corinthians 13:12).

It is not enough merely to love Him with our hearts, to live for Him with all our strength, but we are also to serve Him with the fullest and highest capacity of our minds. Our minds, as well as our bodies (I Corinthians 6:18-20), must be kept clean, properly nourished, and exercised that they may be fit temples for the Holy Spirit. We must think things through, read, listen and learn all our lives. Observing people have said that the American people have lost, not the ability, but the inclination to think, read and listen, but that should not be true of a Christian whose mind is renewed by the Spirit of God (Ephesians 4:17-24). The Spirit has promised to teach us all things, to guide us into all truth (John 14:17; 16:13; I John 2:27).

To know God, to “**have the mind of Christ**” (I Corinthians 2:16), is to have wisdom for life with all its social and moral implications: to see the truth, to love the good, to choose the right and fulfill our destiny. Christ is the center of all nature, history, man, and all spheres of study, and to have the mind of Christ is to have the key to the universe, with all its signs, symbols, problems, questions and mysteries (Job 26,28; Isaiah 40:9-28; 48:16, 17; Galatians 4:8, 9; Hebrews 8:10; II Peter 1: 2, 3). If one is unaware of the primacy of Christ in the world of learning, his education follows an unpredictable, often confusing and fruitless course (Romans 1:18-22; I Corinthians 2:13-16).

The Spirit who leads us into all truth directs and commits us to a Christian education. “**Fathers . . . bring them [your children] up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,**” can have no other meaning. This nurture (education and training, especially by those who love and know the value of a child) and admonition (counsel and advice) must be of the Lord and of his Christ, and therefore it follows that it must be Christian in method, content and aim.

J. B. Conant, brilliant teacher and past president of Harvard said that the aim of all education is preparation for good citizenship, and Henry Schultze, late president of Calvin College, once said that the objective of Christian education is to train students for effective citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven. A hundred years ago Horace Bushnell wrote a book, *Christian Nurture*, which is a religious and educational classic, in which he defined the aim, effort and result of Christian education to be this: That the child is to grow up a Christian, and never know himself as being otherwise.

Ephesians 6:1-4 also determines parental control and responsibility for education.

The Lord gave children to parents, not to the state, or to society, or even to the church, to bring up and educate. It is to fathers that the Lord says: “**Train up a child in the way he should go . . .**” Again and again God charges fathers and mothers: “**Ye shall teach them . . . ye shall tell them . . . ye shall answer them . . . teach thy sons and thy sons’ sons.**” We are to teach them diligently how to think, to talk, to act and to live in this world of darkness as children of Light (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Psalm 34:11; I Peter 2:9).

To children he says: “**Hear the instruction of a father . . . and of a mother . . . continue in the things thou hast learned and been assured of**” (Proverbs 1:8; 2:1; 4:1-4; 6:20-23; II Timothy 3:14-17). The object, according to Paul, was, “**That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.**”

When does this nurture or education begin? On the first day of school, or Sunday school, perhaps? Paul intimates that it begins long before birth, in the faith and teaching of grandparents (II Timothy 1:5).

Manoah prayed, “**O my Lord . . . teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born**” (Judges 13:8).

God’s wise plan for transmitting education is seen in the organic unity of the family. When a child is born into a home, his character must still be formed. It is formed from infancy by parents whose spirit and ideals, fears and attitudes, pass into the child “by a law that is natural, and well nigh irresistible.”

Parents love their children much, yet can be careless about the impressions they give to their children when they are little, thinking that as long as the child cannot talk he is learning nothing from them. Horace Bushnell gives us something to think about when he says: “Let every Christian father and mother understand, when a child is three years old, that they have done more than half of all they will ever do for his character.” Jesus spoke “**with authority**” of the impressionableness and eternal value of little children (Matthew 18:3-6; 10, 14).

The way our children turn out is closely related to what kind of Christians and parents we are.

What a parent is always speaks louder, more authoritatively, than what he says. The Lord said of Abraham: “**For I know him** [his qualifications, disposition, principles and way of living], **that he will command his children and his household after him** [educate, train and counsel], **and they shall keep the way of the Lord**” (Genesis 18:19). Even though a child may later, through his formal training and other contacts, acquire new ideas and habits, the stamp of home and parental impressions remains indelible, and the internal difficulties with which he has to struggle will usually come of family seeds implanted in his nature.

It stands to reason that parents have neither the time, nor the qualifications, to attend to the formal schooling of their children. We read in the Bible of no formal education before the time of Moses, but we do know that the early education of the child depended on the father or, in some cases, a tutor (Exodus 12:26-28; Numbers 11:12; Proverbs 2:1; Isaiah 49:22, 23; Galatians 4:1, 2), and that the first teaching would be that of the mother (Proverbs 31:1; II Timothy 3:15). From infancy the child was daily impressed with thoughts of God (Deuteronomy 6: 7-9). We learn from historians that gradually schools came into being with a “**nurture of the Lord**” philosophy of education. The “**fear of the Lord**” was the beginning of wisdom, and the aim was to teach all subjects as helps or as related to the law and service of God. Schools were strictly supervised as to teacher qualifications, pupil load, and curriculum and teaching methods; and parents retained the responsibility for education.

Perhaps not in theory, but certainly in practice, many parents think that their responsibility ends when formal schooling begins. Education in the school or in the Sunday school or catechism class is never a substitute for home training. It is rather an extension of it, like a room added to the house, and parents are responsible for continuing the “**nurture of the Lord**” kind of education throughout the many years of formal schooling which their children will need in this fast changing world. They must maintain an interest in the educational standards, the content, method and aim of education in the school. At the same time they must instill a respect for learning, for accomplishment, for excellence in education, in their children.

The Christian has a great responsibility in these days of crisis in education; and he will not begin to effectively meet that challenge if he concentrates all his energies and interests on the elementary level.

Carl F. Henry, Editor of *Christianity Today*, writes: “What remarkable social forces would be loosed in our century if devout faculties, cognizant that the Logos, the source and fountain of all truth, is none other than Jesus Christ the Word made flesh for our salvation, piloted the University of Moscow . . . of Harvard . . . of Chicago . . . of California . . . If the influence of a great Christian university could permeate educational enterprise throughout the world, if every realm of learning could face with sobriety the supremacy of Jesus Christ, who can predict what great blessing even one nation—may it yet be America—could bring to the world, and to the cause of truth.”

We can walk confidently into the future, knowing that even one faithful parent, and the Lord, make a great host (II Kings 6:16, 17; I Corinthians 7:14). “**In him we live, and move, and have our being,**” and can fulfill our destiny.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Discuss the meaning of Ephesians 6:4: “**Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.**”
2. What is Christian education?
3. What can we learn about education from the following references: I Samuel 10:5, 19, 20; II Kings 2:3, 5; 4:38; 22:14; Proverbs 1:8; Luke 2:46; 5:17; Acts 5:34; 7:22; 19:9; 22:3; 26:24; II Timothy 3:14, 15?
4. What special place should the Sunday school find in the educational program of our children? The church?
5. Is it necessary that the Bible be taught formally in the school if it is well integrated into the other subjects that are taught? Why or why not?
6. Do you think that parents should take responsibility for the educational standards and policies of the schools to which they send their children? If so, how much and why?
7. Can you see divine wisdom in making parents responsible for the education of their children? Give reasons.
8. Do you think that parents have fulfilled their obligation to make Christ pre-eminent in the sphere of education by building as many fine elementary schools as possible? Why or why not?

9. Do parents have a responsibility to build Christian colleges and universities? Are they necessary? Why or why not? Discuss the influence that they could have on American education; on society as a whole; on the nation; for the Kingdom of God.
10. Using Deuteronomy 6:7-9 and Proverbs 22:6 for your references, determine when and to what extent parents are released from their responsibility for the education of their children.
11. Determine from Matthew 22:37 when a parent's own education may be called completed (Also see I Corinthians 13:12.)

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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