

An Open Letter to Pastors to Promote Christian Education

by William F. Cox Jr.

Dear Pastors,

Perceiving that you and I may feel different about Christian education, I'd like to offer my understandings regarding biblical perspectives on education.

In both the Old and New Testaments, God holds parents and particularly fathers responsible for their children's education, communicating to them both the content and the methods of education (Deuteronomy 4–7; Psalm 78:1–7; Proverbs 22:6, 23:23; and Ephesians 6:4). By God's grace, this parental responsibility extends to enlisting the aid of others (Galatians 4:2). It is alignment with such biblical expectations that by definition constitutes Christian education.

Obedience and disobedience to God's educational commands should generally result in commensurate educational outcomes (see 2 Timothy 3:16). After all, His commandments are for generational well-being: "So that you and your son and your grandson might fear the Lord your God ... that your days may be prolonged" (Deuteronomy 6:2, NASB). Tragically, studies by the Nehemiah Institute (www.nehemiahinstitute.com), Josh McDowell's ministry (www.Josh.org), and the Barna Group (www.barna.org) show that Christian youth are increasingly adopting secular worldviews. More than half do not believe that Christ rose from the dead, that He is the Son of the one true God, and that the Holy Spirit and Satan are real entities; but they do believe that all faiths teach equally valid truths. Predictably, these findings are commensurate with the findings that born-again adults have similar belief profiles. Just as it was prophetically portrayed in Psalm 78, this intergenerational tragedy dramatically underscores a major problem in—and hence a warning to—the Church.

Public schools, attended by the vast majority of U.S. children, are legally prohibited from supplying the kind of education that God commands. Consequently, textbooks typically teach relativistic values, tolerance for all beliefs, feelings as a reliable test for truth, personal invention of truths, evolution of the human species, and human self-sufficiency. Even when textbooks promote morality, it typically is a civic morality rather than a biblical morality, regularly omitting reference to the Bible as the ultimate standard for morality or to the loving ministry and empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

Promotion of any such system of values that does not comport with God's ultimate truth is, in fact, not even education in truth; it is indoctrination *against* truth. As a result, children come to believe that there is no God or that He is essentially irrelevant to life's circumstances. This ungodly perspective is actually a substitute religion for Christianity, and classrooms serve as the pulpit for such orthodoxy.

Christian schools presumably provide a God-centered education. Some Christian school educators, however, are not particularly optimistic, noting that their textbooks do not always integrate or promote a biblical worldview, that their curriculum inadequately equips students to think Christianly, that teachers need training for integrating faith with academics, and that teachers often do not model Christlike character.

Homeschooled children are doing as well as, if not better than, their public school counterparts on measures of academics; social, emotional, and psychological development; and success in college and adulthood (Ray 1999). It is not clear how homeschooled children compare with children in Christian schools, but parents who homeschool are often poorly prepared to biblically educate their children.

Overall, it appears that Christian children are ill prepared to enter life as committed Christians. About 70 percent of teens involved in church youth groups stop attending church two years after graduation, and only 7 percent of born-again teenagers regularly base moral choices on biblical principles (McDowell 2006).

Ultimately, two issues prevail. Children need to receive an education, whether public or private, that honors God's ways; and parents need to become better equipped to raise their children as unto God.

As pastors, you constitute a very influential group for bringing conviction and guidance regarding children's education. Ephesians 4:11–12 indicates that the fivefold offices, which include pastors, are the ones appointed by the Lord to equip His people for ministry work and to edify the Body of Christ. Since the proper education of children is a prime parental ministry leading to Body edification, pastoral leadership in Christian education is imperative on both counts.

Many pastors say their hesitancy to advocate for Christian schooling is related to factors such as reduction of tithes (that is, parents and the church itself divert tithes to school expenses), Christian teachers who may feel criticized for working in public schools, parents who may resent being “corrected” regarding their educational choices for their children, and the added burden on pastors of addressing Christian education. Yet tithing and godly upbringing are commands from God, neither to be compromised for the other. Moreover, public schools are reasonably a mission field for Christian educators, but not generally for children.

Parents, it seems, typically view Christian schools as similar to public schools, though often substandard especially in academics and extracurricular activities. Many parents may also feel insecure about their educational responsibilities because they are not equipped to examine academic content through a biblical filter. Arguably, material affluence and professional fulfillment sidetrack parents from their God-directed educational obedience. Therefore, as pastors, you have ample reasons for shepherding influence toward biblical educational obedience.

In view of God’s mandate for biblically centered education, I ask you to consider promoting these ideas:

- pulpit messages that focus on building a biblical vision, including a call for research, standards, vision, and excellent curriculum in Christian education
- equipping of fathers for their educational responsibilities
- sensitivity to Christian education issues by the governing/advisory church board
- specific instruction and counseling in parenting and educating children
- sponsoring or cooperatively working with Christian schools
- building connections between home, school, and church
- regular prayer for schools: public schools, private schools, and homeschools
- a resource library of educational materials for parents
- expert advice for parents and teachers regarding quality and appropriateness of educational resources
- preparation in Christian education for expectant parents
- periodic meetings, perhaps during lunchtime, between students in public schools and the students’ youth ministers
- consulting and testing-service assistance to parents for their children
- assistance to church families from congregation members who have educational expertise
- integration of church youth activities with home, public, and Christian school activities
- help from men’s and women’s ministries for homeschoolers, academically challenged parents, and others who have educational needs

According to Malachi 2:15, a purpose for marriage is godly offspring, an outcome that can happen only through Christian education. As Malachi 4:6 suggests, fathers who demonstrate a godly heart for their children will probably have children who reciprocate. Without these heart attitudes, the last verse in the Old Testament warns about a curse that will come upon the land. The fact that about 40 percent of the households in the United States do not contain a father suggests that the curse has already been manifested (Morley 2005). Most important, as children see their father, so shall they see God!

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godly education of their children? Surely this is an ordained answer to the Lord’s model prayer (Matthew 6:9–13) that His will be done and His kingdom come—for the good of children, parents, families, the nation, and the Church. Pastors, please help promote Christian education.

References

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