

# The Necessity of Christian Education

Deuteronomy 6:1-9 & Ephesians 6:1-4

School has almost started and so the most structured form of discipleship begins again. This enormous and costly endeavor is the first step of evangelism, the way we fulfill the Great Commission to disciple the nations. It's an investment that begins with our children, but one that changes the world for generations to come.

## Summary of the Texts

Moses and Paul are in different times and places but they are teaching the same thing, calling God's people to disciple their children and their children to obey so that they would be blessed for multiple generations, have long life, and multiply greatly (Deut. 6:1-3; Eph. 6:1-3). In order to receive these blessings from God, they have to teach their children faithfully all the time whether at home, on the road, finishing the day or starting a new one, all an expression of love for God in their hearts (Deut. 6:5-7). The commands of God characterize the work of their hands, their view of the world, life at home, and actions in the public square (Deut. 6:8-9). Paul uses the term "paideia" which means total enculturation such that all of life would be understood and lived to the glory of God (Eph. 6:3-4).

## Deuteronomical & New Covenant Blessings

There is always continuity and discontinuity between the old and new covenants, but we have to get the contrasts and comparisons correct. Old Israel would be blessed in the Promise Land, roughly from Dan to Beersheba. In the New Testament, as the new Israel, we are not told to invade that contested piece of ground in order to flourish. Should we conclude that there are no earthly blessings for us? No, there's a connection between faithfully discipling your children and enjoying a blessed life whether you are in Canaan, Ephesus, or Washington State (Deut. 6:3; Eph. 6:2-3). The discontinuity is not earthly blessings for old covenant Jews, and now in the new covenant we just suffer until we get to heaven. Rather, the difference is that whereas one nation sought these blessings in a small land, now believers seek them in all the nations as we raise our children in the education and instruction of the Lord. The continuity is God's blessings of long life, dominion, and multi-generational faithfulness (cf. Is. 65:23). All people know that in order to thrive in a job you need to have knowledge, training, and diligence. You need to pursue excellence. As Christians we know that life is more than money, and that you can't serve God and Mammon. Covetousness is idolatry (Col. 3:5). But this doesn't erase these passages where God connects true obedience to Him, particularly in delivering total enculturation into His way of thinking and living to our children, to prosperity on the earth. Wealth is not an automatic blessing, which is why you must write His commands on your heart and teach them to your children so they don't forget He gave it (Deut. 8:18-20). So believe God, receive from Him, and don't forget.

## Parental Power & Responsibility

God established the three governments of family, church, and state. The responsibility to raise, disciple, and educate children is assigned solely to parents, and fathers in particular (Eph. 6:4). Paul warns fathers not to provoke your children to wrath. This can be done by being harsh and overbearing as when the father (or mother) is never pleased. Instead we should cue from our Father who is well pleased with His beloved Son and with us who come to Him through Jesus (Matt. 3:17). Children can also be provoked—frustrated, deceived, left vulnerable and helpless—through abdication. At a school where the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not honored as God, at best children are learning that He is irrelevant—a direct contradiction to the requirement to teach them to fear and obey Him (Deut. 6:2). The church bears the responsibility to instruct fathers and mothers to take up this responsibility with joy, to make the sacrifices necessary to disciple your children, to teach them how to take every thought captive to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). There's no area of life, no subject in school, no activity or endeavor where God is not to be acknowledged and loved: "You shall love the

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LORD your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, and with all of your strength” (Deut. 6:5). Is there something in the universe He doesn't care about, where He has no sovereignty and opinion? Therefore fathers and mothers must know what's going on in the classroom, in the relationships of teachers and other students to their kids, and in the curriculum and culture of the school. It's lawful (and wise) to hire someone to teach *in loco parentis*, but only as an extension of yourself and not as a replacement. A fundamentally compromised Christian school is a terrible option. Fathers must not be uninformed and passive, but aware of what his kids need and what it takes to deliver it to them. Some parents feel the weight of this responsibility and get nervous and overprotective, helicoptering and controlling in response. But the answer is to love God, educate your children in an environment where He is honored, and prepare them to go out into the world and take dominion for Christ. You have to let them make mistakes, and let them deal with challenging situations. Because kids are sinners like us, they will deal with gossip, rudeness, cliques, foolishness in both themselves and others, and all this in a good school environment. This is the best place to learn to deal with it. The only way to take responsibility for this is by trusting in God's promises to bless you and your children. There's no magic formula, no perfect school or homeschool, no bullet-proof curriculum. We do this by faith from first to last, but it's a living faith that believes and takes action. Show them how to obey, how to trust the Lord, how to cover a multitude of sins in love, and how to stand up for the truth. There is more than just the subjects you are enrolling in.

## Soulful Children

Last, Christian education is necessary because we want competent, curious, soul-filled children. God made physics and language and math and poetry and music and flora and fauna—all of it. Our job is love Him and this means getting to know and love Him in the world He made. You are not allowed to hate what He loves. This might seem obvious, but when God tells us to love Him with all that we have and are, He's not talking just about prayer, Bible reading, or worship. You should love Him by loving to do your job because He made you to do it, giving you skills and desires and power to do it heartily unto Him. This doesn't mean you can't have preferences and subjects you enjoy more than others, but it does mean you can't check out or despise parts of God's creation or the privilege of learning about them. It's true that some people are color-blind, but it would be oddly ignorant for someone to despise colors who can't see them. A liberal arts education is one for the free (Latin *liber*) man, the one who can pursue truth, beauty, and goodness because he isn't a slave with nothing but a job to do. If a welder's son asked you 800 years ago why he should study literature, music, math, history, and theology when all he is going to do his whole life is weld, what would you say? Hopefully you'd ask him if that's really all he is going to do. Does he want to understand Scripture, read the Magna Carta, build things, function as a citizen, sing (if not play another instrument) to praise God, and know where he came from and what is going on? Good education and educators open us up to the world God made and who He made us to be in Christ. You're supposed to be a disciple—a learner—and not a worker-cog. Christian education centers on loving God with all we have and giving that love to our children and receiving it from our parents.