

The BIBLICAL MANDATE for Christian Schooling

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The Word of God is extremely clear concerning the training of children. God gives believers instruction about who is responsible for the education of children, as well as what Christian principles and philosophy to teach them.

The responsibility for educating children belongs to parents, who received them as a gift from God. Psalm 127:3 (KJV) notes that “children *are* an heritage of the LORD: *and* the fruit of the womb *is his* reward.” The word *heritage* means “something inherited; an estate inherited from one’s father or ancestor” (Strong 1886). Each child is created by God in His own image (Genesis 1:27) and then given to parents, who are responsible to educate the child according to God’s Word.

While parents may elect to use the assistance of other people in educating their children, the responsibility clearly belongs to them—not to the government, the church, or the school. This means that parents are responsible to God for the educators they choose to assist them in the education process. Two passages that instruct parents to educate their children in the ways of the Lord provide important insights into the kind of education process mandated by God.

Deuteronomy 6:6–7 (KJV) instructs parents: “And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shall talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.” The first thing that stands out about these two commands is the significance of their order. The first command requires the children of Israel to keep God’s Word in their



hearts. What is the heart? The first three times the word *heart* is used in Scripture, it is used in three ways: in reference to the intellect (Genesis 6:5), then to the affections (Genesis 6:6), and then to the will (Genesis 8:21).

God commands parents to keep His words in their mind, to love Him and His Word with their affections and to “observe to do *it*” (Deuteronomy 6:3, KJV) as an act of their will. David understood this principle: “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psalm 119:11, KJV).

Parents must obey this first command before they will be capable of obeying the second one: “And thou shalt teach [God’s commandments] diligently unto thy children.” The Hebrew word for *teach* means “to whet the appetite or senses for learning” (Chadwick 1982, 28). This teaching is to take place when families are doing the following:

1. sitting in their house (usually at mealtime)
2. walking by the way

3. lying down (at bedtime)

4. rising up (at the beginning of each day)

In other words, parents are to integrate the Word of God into every aspect of the waking hours of their children's lives. This constant informal teaching will be possible only if the parents have hidden God's Word in their own heart.

Ephesians 6:4 (KJV) admonishes, "And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." This verse is directed specifically to fathers, but this fact "does not relieve mothers from acting as supervisors of their children also, but it does indicate the fathers as heads of their households on whom the ultimate responsibility for supervision rests" (Kent 1971, 108). The important truth of the verse is that God commands Christian parents to bring up (to rear to maturity, to train) their children in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord. But what exactly does it mean to nurture and admonish children?

The Greek word for *nurture* means "child training." It means "to give guidance, to instruct or train in the sense of child training or child raising. It also refers to the corrective or disciplinary aspect of education" (Chadwick 1982, 29). The same word is translated as "chasten" in Hebrews 12:6. The Greek word for *admonition* means "training by word of encouragement," but it can take a negative meaning and emphasize a warning or reproof. It is translated as "warn" in 1 Corinthians 4:14 and as "warning" in Colossians 1:28 in the King James Version (p. 189). "Literally, it means 'mind-shaping'" (pp. 29, 189). Thus one could paraphrase Ephesians 6:4 as, "Train them up in the discipline and encouragement of the Lord."

Kent (1971, 109) summarizes the meaning of bringing up children in the "discipline" and "instruction" of the Lord: "Discipline implies training in proper conduct and chastening in times of failure. Instruction involves teaching, whether by praise, warning, censure, or explanation of principles. As fathers (and mothers) rear their children, they must not neglect the spiritual aspects of their education. All of their dealings with their children should be in accord with the Lord's standards as revealed in Scripture. Parents can give their children no better preparation for life than to provide them with a thorough awareness of and respect for the righteous precepts of the Lord." The result of this child-training process should be a mature child of God, whose mind is shaped like the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5), whose will is disciplined "to do

of *his* good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13, KJV), and whose affections are set "on things above, not things on the earth" (Colossians 3:2, KJV).

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Parents who have unresolved problems that cause them to have an angry or a critical spirit will be unsuccessful in training their children for the Lord. The Apostle Paul speaks to this issue in the first line of Ephesians 6:4 (KJV): "Provoke not your children to wrath." This instruction does not mean that if parents ever get frustrated or angry with their children, all former and future training will be destroyed. No parents are without sin. Therefore, from time to time when they have failed to instruct and discipline in love, they must ask forgiveness of their children. "The present tense of the verb [provoke not] prohibits the continual arousing to anger. It is a warning against the sort of iron-handed discipline that eventually breaks the spirit of a child (See Colossians 3:21). Unjust demands, unreasonable severity, and unremitting criticism produce bitterness instead of training" (Kent 1971, 108–9).

It is imperative for all parents who desire training their children for the Lord to give serious consideration to Ephesians 6:4. This verse has the following implications:

1. Parents must understand what a biblical worldview is and apply this worldview in their own lives. Parents must be growing "in grace, and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18, KJV). This verse means that parents must be students of the Bible. We as parents cannot expect to train our children in "the discipline and instruction of the Lord" if we are not disciplined in learning and obeying His instruction ourselves. We must be "an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12, KJV).

2. Parents must appropriate God's grace in resolving personal conflicts and problems from the past. This task may require seeking help from a wise pastor or biblical counselor. Hebrews 12:15 (KJV) warns about "looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble *you*, and thereby many be defiled" (KJV). The Greek word for *defiled* means "contaminated" (Strong 1886). Hurtful problems from the past have a way of "springing up" when parents are dealing with their children's problems. When parents give instruction, warning, or correction in the context of anger or resentment, they are provoking their children to anger, contaminating the training process and eventually their children.

3. Parents must select godly Christian educators to assist them in training their children for the Lord. Some parents are choosing to homeschool their children in order to fulfill their responsibility to "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Other parents are enlisting the services of a school to assist them in training their children. When the second option is chosen, parents must be careful to choose a school that is genuinely Christian in philosophy and practice. Otherwise, these parents are compromising the quality of their children's spiritual training during the school day. This fact is true for elementary and secondary education, and it applies to a college education as well. Charles Spurgeon (n.d., 12) believed that every level of education for a child must be based on the Word of God:

Parents sin in the same way when they omit religion from the education of their children. Perhaps the thought is that their children cannot be converted while they are children, and so they think it of small consequence where they go to school in their tender years. But it is not so. Many parents even forget this when their girls and boys are closing their school-days. They send them away to the Continent, to places foul with every moral and spiritual danger, with the idea that there, they can complete an elegant education. In how many cases I have seen that education completed, and it has produced young men who are thorough-paced profligates, and young women who

are mere flirts. As we sow we reap. Let us expect our children to know the Lord. Let us from the beginning mingle the name of Jesus with their ABCs. Let them read their first lessons from the Bible. It is a remarkable thing that there is no book from which children learn to read so quickly as from the New Testament: there is a charm about that book which draws forth the infant mind. But let us never be guilty, as parents, of forgetting the religious training of our children; for if we do we may be guilty of the blood of their souls.

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I would add that we as Christian school educators should never be guilty of forgetting our responsibility to offer an education that is spiritually excellent. Other schools offer academic excellence, and so should we; but in order for us to assist parents in training up their children in the discipline and in-

struction of the Lord, our first priority is to offer an education that is spiritually excellent. "Behold, God exalteth by his power: who teacheth like him?" (Job 36:22, KJV).

"O dear teachers—and I speak here to myself also—let our teaching be more and more scriptural.... The generation now ruling seems bent on departing from the eternal truth of God: but we shall not despair if the gospel be impressed upon the memory of the rising race" (Spurgeon 1976, 61–62).

References

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