

**Pastor, how should I educate my children?  
SEBTS Faculty Lecture  
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I believe the Lord has led me today to seize this opportunity to equip future pastors and church leaders to answer a question you will undoubtedly be confronted with through out your ministry, “Pastor, how should I educate my children?” Will you respond with advice from your past? Will you avoid conflict by simply pointing them to the school down the street? It is my hope that you will direct each and every one to God’s Word and remind parents that this discussion is quite possibly *the most significant choice they will make for their children*. Though my responses may take on the tone of a sort of apologetic dialogue, I want strongly to urge you not to be argumentative or condescending in any way. Likewise I implore you not to make use of demagoguery, that is leadership that preys on followers’ fears and prejudices which employs statements such as, “All Christian parents must remove their children from public school” or “No one can claim to be a Christian parent and allow his child to attend a government school.” This statement has been made by numerous evangelical leaders of late and the response has not been very positive. This topic is complex and emotionally charged. I have found it best to avoid clever, overly simplistic sound bites.

My parents had at least two choices before them – a county school system which provided bus transportation or a city school system with a better reputation which would mean an annual transfer fee and hundreds of trips to and from a school outside our geographic district. They chose the latter and in so doing selected the more difficult path. Woven into this educational plan were the educational opportunities of our Southern Baptist Church—Sunday school, training union, choirs, and frequent youth activities. Once again they chose to make a serious commitment and sacrifice. As many of you, attending one church two or three times per week throughout my childhood and young adulthood was a foundational part of my training. I want to ask you about yours in just a moment...

The first objective of this morning’s lecture is to establish what we as Christian parents are trying to accomplish as we train our children. I want to invite you to examine a few of the many passages to which the Holy Spirit has taken me over the years. Another objective is to clarify and respond to some of the most frequently voiced objections to Christian schools. I hope to equip ministers with clear explanations and responses to these challenges. At the outset let me clearly state our number-one mandate: As a Christian parent we are to lead our children to the Lord and guide them as they transition into adulthood with a Christian worldview.

As you turn to Deuteronomy 6 let me state again what I believe is our goal, when your son or daughter receives a diploma and leaves home—does he or she have a biblical worldview? I believe this is the task to which the Lord calls each parent—will the days ahead as your child enters into adulthood reflect a lifestyle and personal and professional choices that reflect a Christian worldview?

The Lord spoke through Moses as the time period of desert wanderings were drawing to a close. We have this account in Deuteronomy, or the second giving of the law, a refresher course on the covenant God had made with His people. What were the important concepts that needed to be repeated one more time before this new generation would enter into the Promised Land? What did the Lord want riveted to their minds and hearts before they became distracted by the wonders of a land flowing with milk and honey?

Begin reading with v. 4 with the word ‘Hear’ or ‘Shema’ in Hebrew. This has become the Jewish confession of faith, still recited daily by pious Jews.

<sup>4</sup>“Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! <sup>5</sup>You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. <sup>6</sup>These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. <sup>7</sup>You shall teach them diligently to your sons [or impress—that is recite over and over] and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.” [This adds up to be our mandate to teach our children 24-7.] <sup>8</sup>You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead.” [As you know, they use leather pouches or phylacteries and tie them to the left arm and forehead – literally “frontals” between the eyes.] <sup>9</sup>You shall write them on the doorposts of your house [private] and on your gates [public].” [Some Jews takes this literally and attach a *mezuzah* (a small wooden or metal container in which passages of Scriptures are placed) to the doorframes of their houses.] These verses establish clear biblical instructions as parents—we are charged with the serious responsibility of passing on to the next generation our commitment to make God first place in our lives.

There is only one conclusion: Every dad is a homeschooling father! Every mom is a homeschooling teacher! How will you respond to your biblical mandate? Let’s examine how a few religious and educational leaders have responded. . . .

Martin Luther on Education – “There is nothing which will more surely earn hell for a man than the improper training of his children; and parents can perform no more damaging bit of work than to neglect their offspring, to let them curse, swear, learn indecent words and songs, and permit them to live as they please. It is highly necessary that every married person regard the soul of his child with greater concern than the flesh which has come from him, that he consider the child nothing less than a precious, eternal treasure, entrusted to his protection by God so that the devil, the world, and the flesh do not steal and destroy it. For the child will be required from the parent on Judgment Day in a very strict reckoning.”

Regarding appropriate schools and universities, Luther wrote: “Where the Holy Scriptures do not rule, there I advise no one to send his son. Everyone not unceasingly busy with the Word of God must become corrupt; that is why the people who are in the universities and who are trained there are the kind of people they are. . . . I greatly fear that the universities are wide gates of hell if they do not diligently teach the Holy Scriptures and impress them on youth.”

While considering our responsibility to pass the torch of our faith to the next generation, I ran across this insight from Alexis de Tocqueville. “We therefore should not console ourselves by thinking that the barbarians are still a long way off. Some peoples may let the torch be snatched from their hands, but others stamp it out themselves.”

A significant Baptist leader from the state of Virginia during the 1800s, Jeremiah B. Jeter is noted for saying, “Education is another and a most efficient means of supporting their principles, which Baptists should not neglect. The religious training of children is the great business of human life. They do not need to be baptized, or to have a quasi church membership; but they need to be carefully and thoroughly instructed in divine truth; and God has graciously provided for securing to them this benefit, not through an unmeaning ceremony, but by implanting in the parental heart an affection, which neither time nor toil can exhaust, nor ingratitude can repress for the instruction of children in all that pertains to their welfare, in time and in eternity.”

“Why should they be taught anything, if they are not taught religion? The knowledge of

it is not instinctive, or does it come by chance? The apostolic direction to parents concerning their children is: ‘Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.’”

A contemporary of Jeter, C. H. Spurgeon, said, “Withdraw from a child the only divine rule of life, and the result will be most lamentable. An education purely secular is the handmaiden of godless skeptics.”

However, there was a counter voice during the 1800s and it came from the man who is known as “The Father of American Public Schools” – Horace Mann. “If American taxpayers could provide education for every child in America, within a short period of time the effect of the public school system would empty all the jails and prisons in the country....Let the home and church teach faith and values, and the school teach facts.” Thus began the active removal of God’s influence in our public schools!

We must reframe the question for this discussion: Who will you choose to partner with you as you fulfill your mandate? The question is not, “What school will my children attend?”

### **Do you have a response to these questions regarding Christian education?**

Many Christians during the past two decades have been candid with me about personal reservations they have about enrolling their children in a Christian school. Because the possibility of considering a Christ-centered education is something new to many believers, I have selected the ten most frequently asked questions and the responses I have given over the years to people who ask, “Why should I have my child in a Christian school?” or “Why should I consider homeschooling?”

*#1 Doesn't God expect Christian children to attend public school where He wants them to witness to unsaved classmates?*

Again, our ultimate goal for our children must be for each one to view all of life including all learning and decision making from the perspective of God’s Word rather than a man-centered perspective taught in secular schools.

A frequently used analogy is the comparison of training troops for war, an apt one in light of the Apostle Paul’s admonition to prepare ourselves for battle. What if the United States would gather its best eighteen-year-olds together and send them to Russia to be trained for four years in the very best military schools in that nation? Could we then confidently commission them four years later to be U. S. Marines, soldiers who are ready to fight and die in accordance with their training? Such a plan is ludicrous! Aren’t Christian parents approaching the education of their children in this way, however, when they send God’s soldiers for the 21<sup>st</sup> century to be taught in schools that have removed His Word and His standards?

If you purchased a new computer and loaded only Excel and itunes, would you be surprised when you could not use it for word processing? Why would an adult who has been saved for a number of years and who believes he is called to the mission field take precious time to go to seminary rather than charging out into the field? What are they waiting for? Why delay? Of course the answer is obvious—the future missionary needs training. But I have an idea, let’s take our five-year-olds and march them into alien territory!

#2 *If we focus on the training of our children and decide to remove them from secular schools, are we not abandoning the unsaved children left behind?*

Absolutely not! We must approach this arena as we do any mission field. Certainly there are Christian teachers who have a special call to teach in public schools. I was one of those who took seriously my opportunity to be salt and light for kids who were lost and hurting. I miss these kids! Many other adults use their God-given abilities to lead school clubs such as Fellowship of Christian Athletes and Young Life. Some sponsor fifth-quarter get-togethers after ball games. I would encourage churches to hire a youth leader who has as his number one responsibility the outreach into secular schools. Many churches are involved with successful after-school tutoring programs. Southeastern College has established a very successful teacher education program and our graduates are immediately hired. Others have chosen to become active in the political arena in an effort to effect change in local schools. Special occasions should be set aside for the commissioning of all those who serve Christ in this way. Christians must not abandon public schools! But I will not give them my children! God has entrusted them to me.

#3 *Aren't Christians removing their children from reality?*

Here's why you take philosophy – to recognize an issue of metaphysics, what is real, which often leads to an issue of epistemology – how do you know what you know? When you reflect on God's Word, have you ever thought, "This is reality." This is truth and anything set against it is non-reality, is deception, is falsehood. And how do we know this – our source of truth is His Word as established in the Person of His Son: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

God's truth and His instruction found in the Bible are the realities Christians must pursue. Anything that opposes these is deception. Satan beckoned Eve to experience a new perspective and gain new knowledge. We all see this as counterfeit and confront daily the consequences of the sin of Adam and Eve because they were deceived. Our children must grow in an environment that presents a Christian worldview of God's one and only reality. You notice that I didn't say *our* view of reality.

Dr. Allan Moseley has explored this challenge in his book, *Thinking Against the Grain* which he explains "This modernist approach to moral law allows no transcendent principles. All that is left is human opinion. If there are no transcendent principles, but only moral opinions, anyone who asserts that a particular moral system (e.g., the one found in the Bible) should be applied universally is hopelessly out of date, ignorant as to the existence of other systems, or pathologically dogmatic. Many Christians do not yet fully see this inescapable application because they have been educated in schools monopolized by the worldview of naturalism and entertained through media monopolized by modernist presuppositions. Most Western Christians have been so saturated with these assumptions about reality that they know this worldview better than they know the Bible."

As one Christian educator wrote: 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" (Spring 1996). 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 (Hartzler 2004-2005, 26). Challenge people in your sphere of influence to think seriously about the impact an unbeliever can have on a young mind that is still developing.

Alvin Toffler, the author of *Future Shock*, warns us, “All education springs from some image of the future. If the image of the future, held by society, is inaccurate, its educational system will betray its youth.” If we are not diligent, our children will be taught a Disney Land view of their personal future—“there is good inside of you—just listen to your heart.” Rather, let us listen to the Psalmist.

Psalm 19:7-11 - “The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.”

Colossians 1:18 - “And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.”

So can you casually or cavalierly partner with professionals who don't agree with reality or who may even be hostile to the Truth of the universe?

#4 *Aren't Christian schools like “hot houses,” sheltering kids from harsh or unpleasant experiences?*

Many Christian school leaders simply point to the strong advantages of a special plant raised in the nurturing environment of a greenhouse. Such a setting provides the much-needed opportunity for the development of a strong, unshakable root system to be established so that once the plant is placed in a hostile setting, it will be healthy enough to survive. Our children must have an opportunity to be firmly grounded in God's Word.

There are numerous passages that emphasize this concept including Deuteronomy 6 discussed earlier. Proverbs 22:6 instructs parents to “train children in the way they should go.” At one time, the Hebrew wording for “training” was understood to mean “touch the palate,” because of a possible reference to mouth in the Hebrew phrase “according to”. This was thought to refer to the practice of a Hebrew mother chewing bits of food and placing it on the tongue of her baby. As the baby was fed, he not only received nourishment, but he also developed appetites for foods that were good for him. In the same way, each of us is to lead our children to develop godly appetites as they grow. More recent research in Hebrew scholarship and other contemporary languages in Solomon's day has more accurately translated the first word as “start” and continues on “start a child in his natural bent.” Also, there is no word ‘should’ in the Hebrew text. That is to say, “Let him find his own way and even when he is old he will not leave it.” (So much for the romanticized view of the noble savage given to us by Rousseau in *Emile*.) Though this is certainly a startling change from our previous understanding of this verse, it vividly makes a powerful point – How we start training our young children is crucial in their

development of right attitudes toward things of the Lord. As we commit ourselves to raising the next generation for Christ, the Holy Spirit will bless our efforts to develop a Christian worldview in the minds and hearts of the children God has entrusted to us.

Psalms 1:1-6 - “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.”

**#5** *Will my child have the opportunity to know and witness to non-Christians?*

This can be approached in a number of ways. First, few Christian schools would claim that every one of their students are saved. Most will admit students who are unsaved or unchurched as long as they have a positive attitude. Beyond the interaction they have with their classmates, students have weekly opportunities to witness to others their own age at school athletic events with other schools, at church-sponsored events, at community recreational activities, as well as to kids in their own neighborhoods.

For those of you who will be future leaders of Christian schools I urge you to admit students who want to attend, but who may not have a close walk with the Lord. Listen to this letter I received from a fifteen-year-old who had just been released from a de-tox unit where she was treated for alcoholism.

“Dear Mr. Coley, I wanted to thank you for everything you’ve given me. At my interview, the first time we met, I was almost positive that you wouldn’t accept me into your school because of my past history. But I was wrong. Other schools would have turned me down for sure, thinking I would bring a bad name for them and influencing their kids.

At Montrose I’ve learned a lot of things. I’ve learned about pride, honor, respect, and God. Those things I will carry on for the rest of my life—and I thank you and all my teachers. I’m going to be proud to say I graduated from Montrose and that you were my principal.

In the next three years that I go to Montrose I’m sure there will be many doors opening for me so I may learn more—and I can’t wait!

I just wanted to say thank you and I appreciate how you don’t look at kids past records even though they may be long and great. You have a great gift that God gave you. God bless, Nicole.”

It was a great blessing to watch Nicole become an honor-roll student who had only one minor infraction during her first year.

**#6** *If public school was good enough for past generations, why is it not acceptable today?*

This is perhaps at the core of most people’s objections and easily the most volatile. Many parents and church leaders today look back to their high-school days with rich nostalgia

and wonder why anyone would call into question the school systems which helped produce so many fond memories. At this time of year when I hear a drum line and a cheering crowd .... By the way, as I travel to different areas around the country, the presence of fond memories is not always the case. I attended a public high school in Wake County, North Carolina. Our head custodian was a bi-vocational pastor who preached to us and shared the gospel on every occasion, especially if he saw you smoking in the bathroom. Every Christmas, Pastor Andrew read to the entire student body about the birth of Christ from one of the Gospels over the high-school public-address system. Andrew is no longer there, and that's not the only thing that has changed! The Bible is out. My strong urging to every adult who has been gone longer than five years is to go back and investigate for himself/herself. If you find your local schools to be a positive environment for a growing Christian teenager, then express thanks to the Lord and encourage them to continue. However, such is not the case for the vast majority of the secular schools of which I am aware.

**#7    *Aren't some Christian teenagers successful in public school?***

Without a doubt. I am reminded of Daniel and his three friends standing firm in the face of opposition in a hostile land. These young men were ready for the challenges to their faith. In much the same way Esther was confronted with the challenge of standing against a culture that opposed her Lord. My response is, "If your child is a Daniel or an Esther, then he or she may be ready if he or she believes God is leading that way." However, those kids are rare indeed. Also each parent must consider the amount of de-programming that must occur as his or her child is confronted with non-biblical teaching.

Daniel 1:19-20 - "The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom." Will this be said of the students in your household and your ministry?

Consider this contemporary illustration. "At one point, Cassie Bernall claimed, 'Mom, I can't witness to the kids at Christian school. I could reach out to many more people if I were in a public one.' I've never doubted that she meant what she said—that her desire to witness to others was a genuine one." And so she died a martyr's death at Columbine High School.

However, there is good reason for many Christian leaders to be sounding an alarm for the godless and destructive activities that are present today. Consider the events leading to the case of *Fields vs. Palmdale School District* in California. "Parents of elementary age schoolchildren in the Palmdale School District, California brought suit in the district court and alleged, that the school district violated their fundamental right "to control the upbringing of their children by introducing them to matters of and relating to sex in accordance with their personal and religious values and beliefs" by administering a psychological assessment questionnaire containing several questions that referred to subjects of a sexual nature."

The decision by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals --- "Parents of public school children are not possessed of a constitutional right, either under the Substantive Due Process Clause or the related right to privacy, to restrict the public schools from providing information on the subject of sex."

A survey was conducted systemwide with elementary-aged children. Here are sample

questions. Children were supposed to answer “Yes” or “No” to questions including these samples:

8. Touching my private parts too much
17. Thinking about having sex
22. Thinking about touching other people’s private parts
23. Thinking about sex when I don’t want to
26. Washing myself because I feel dirty on the inside
34. Not trusting people because they might want sex
40. Getting scared or upset when I think about sex
44. Having sex feelings in my body
47. Can’t stop thinking about sex
54. Getting upset when people talk about sex

The court concluded, “Thus the right of the parents “to control the upbringing of their children by introducing them to matters of and relating to sex in according with their personal and religious values and beliefs” – the right to privacy here asserted – does not entitle them to prohibit public schools from providing students with information that the schools deem to be educationally appropriate.”

**#8 *Can graduates of Christian high schools gain acceptance into the college of their choice?***

The track record of Christian school graduates is so well established that this is no longer a serious concern for most parents. My first response is to encourage parents to check with the admissions office of any college or university in which they are interested. I have never heard a negative response from an admission committee when asked about admitting graduates from Christian schools or home-schools. Another perspective is to remind ourselves of Matt. 6:33 and be confident that God’s best awaits our children if we teach them to put Him first.

Matthew 6:33 - “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

My wife was the guidance counselor at our Christian school and was frequently asked about our school’s college acceptance reputation. Though our graduates had been successful at major universities and service academics, she would conclude the discussion with a question, “what does it profit a man if he gained an Ivy League college but loses his soul?”

**#9 *Aren’t some students prevented from attending a Christian school because of high tuition costs?***

something. One approach is to challenge every church in the area to establish a scholarship fund. Each church would administer its own fund which could be used to support students in grades K-12, homeschooling, college, and seminary. Imagine if each church made a \$1,000 scholarship available for a student who attends a Christian school.

No one goes to college without a scholarship, yet many decline financial aid at Christian

schools. We must create a new paradigm.

ACSI tuition studies show on average, tuition generates 85% of a school's operational funding. Obviously, many struggle financially because of this shortfall. Ken Smitherman, the President of ACSI in Colorado Springs, expresses this warning: the cost of school tuition is growing much more rapidly than the consumer price index. But my wife and I agree that we would downsize our home to the barest essentials in order to keep our children in a Christian school.

#### #10 *What Scripture supports the decision to send children to Christian schools?*

Derek Keenan, vice president of ACSI, uses the phrase, "teaching our kids to swim beyond the buoys." Isn't that what we want in the final analysis? We must plan for our graduates of Christian schools to leave the confines of our homes, churches, and schools prepared to meet the rough currents of workplaces and the open hostility found on most college campuses.

Warm their hearts and tutor their minds with God's Word.

Proverbs 3:5-6 - "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."

Luke 6:52 - "And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men."

Luke 6:40 - "A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher." Could God's Word be any clearer? With whom you partner will certainly have a powerful influence on your children. In light of this I share this quote from...

Robert Fulgham said, "Don't worry that they never listen to you; worry that they are always *watching* you."

Ephesians 2:10 - "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Christian Worldview – Romans 12:2 - "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

Colossians 2:8-9 - "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form." --- "hollow and deceptive philosophy," "human tradition and the basic principles," beyond context of loss of freedom due to works-based salvation.

2 Corinthians 10:5 - "We demolish arguments and every pretention that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

In the first century, Hellenistic or Greek philosophy could be divided into several schools or traditions including the continued influence of Plato and Aristotle (classical philosophy), also, the Skeptics who were descendants of Plato's Academy and their contemporary critics, the Stoics. Still another prominent school were the Epicureans, who regarded pleasure as the ultimate good. Today our children are confronted daily with the claims of competing religious faiths, multiculturalism, witchcraft, as well as the seductive enticement of materialism.

Let's conclude where we began... What does a Christian worldview look like? Do you know the game, "capture the flag"? You cross into your opponents' territory in an effort to "capture his flag" while avoiding capture yourself. Though this analogy has its weaknesses, I

believe this is a fitting metaphor for the Christian life and the training of our next generation of warriors. Paul exhorts us... “Do not be taken captive.” “Take every thought captive.”

As we respond to the question “Pastor, how should I educate my children?” we must exhort every parent to take seriously the biblical mandate to be a homeschool teacher. We must challenge the parents of young children to start their training with a godly foundation. We must warn parents as they select who will partner with them to not allow their children, their heritage, to be taken captive.

Will you fight for your children while you train them to be warriors for Christ?