



# *The Christian*

## **LIVING IN TODAY'S EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT**

Five hundred years ago Martin Luther wrote: "I am much afraid that the universities will prove to be the great gates of hell, unless they diligently labour in explaining the Holy Scriptures, and engraving them in the hearts of youth. I advise no one to place his child where the Scriptures do not reign paramount. Every institution in which men are not unceasingly occupied with the Word of God must become corrupt." Certainly when we read this statement our thoughts are easily drawn to our country's own failed educational system. Reports show that our public schools are failing to produce children proficient in essential areas. Parent involvement is at an all-time low, and many of our schools are no longer safe areas for our children's physical, emotional and spiritual well-being. Schools now are required to teach evolution and other areas of life which are in direct conflict with the Bible. Between 1940 and 1962 the top five complaints of teachers were talking, chewing gum, making noise, running in the halls, and getting out of turn in line. Today the top five include rape, robbery, assault, burglary, and arson. How did we get to this point, and how does today's Christian live in this environment?

### **EDUCATION IN THE BIBLE**

The idea of teaching the young is as old as Adam and Eve. However in those days there were no written textbooks or salaried instructors. Instead, the head of the family taught his offspring their history and the ways of God. Moses, author of the very first textbooks for God's people, gave a directive that was very clear in Deuteronomy 6:6-9 "These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates." David echoed those words in Psalm 34:11, "Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD." In addition, boys were taught the trades and girls household chores.

History seems to indicate that after their return from Babylon, synagogues and schools were added to assist with the teaching and learning. This included memorization and recitation of Scripture. However, the primary responsibility remained with the parents. This pattern continued through the time of Jesus. At age twelve we see Jesus in the temple speaking with the teachers. Eventually Jesus himself was referred to as "rabbi" or "teacher" (over 70 times in the gospels,) because he was considered a master teacher.

After Pentecost, the apostles focused much attention on the continuing education of the church. Paul writes in Ephesians 4:11,12, "So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up." He wrote again in Romans 12:6,7, "We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach." Again we notice that the main purpose for teaching children was to impart the ways of the Lord. So it is true today. We can educate the next generation in many arts and skills, but we must always place our main focus on the "one thing needful." Without the knowledge of God, the next generation will lack true wisdom, "For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding" (Proverbs 2:6.) Without knowledge of God's will people will be, "always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7.)

***According to Deuteronomy 6, what is the prime purpose for education and how much must it be stressed?***

**Shortly before Joshua's death, he declared: "As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD." Joshua was a busy man overseeing several million Israelites as they settled in the Promised Land. Yet his final words were not about the nation. Instead his thoughts were on his own personal family. As a parent, what were some of the things Joshua might have done to live up to these words? What can we learn from this?**

**As Master Teacher, what were some of the methods Jesus used?**

**Someone has said that a first grader who believes in Jesus as his or her Savior and acknowledges a heartfelt love for the Lord has more wisdom than a college professor. How can this be true according to the words of Proverbs 9:10: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom."**

## **EDUCATION AND MARTIN LUTHER**

Throughout the Dark Ages and into the Middle Ages educators relied on a catechetical method of questions and answers to prepare students for baptism. By the time Martin Luther entered the picture, church schools and religious universities were already part of the landscape. Luther himself was a teacher at the University of Wittenberg. Luther must be credited for promoting substantial changes within the educational system of his day. His views of educating all children, regardless of wealth or sex, led to many needed changes in the school system.

In a paper delivered by Professor Em. Arnold Koeplin, he cites a column written by Franklin Painter who lists these accomplishments of Martin Luther.

1. *In his writings he [Luther] laid the foundation of an educational system which begins with the popular school and ends with the university.*
2. *He exhibited the necessity of schools both for the Church and the State, and emphasized the dignity and worth of the teacher's vocation.*
3. *He set up as the noble ideal of education a Christian man, fitted through instruction and discipline to discharge the duties of every relation of life.*
4. *He impressed on parents, ministers, and civil officers their obligation to educate the young.*
5. *He brought about a reorganization of schools, introducing graded instruction, an improved course of study and rational methods.*
6. *In his appreciation of nature and child-life, he laid the foundation for education science.*
7. *He made great improvements in method; he sought to adapt instruction to the capacity of children, to make learning pleasant, to awaken mind through skillful questioning, to study things as well as words, and to temper discipline with love.*
8. *He advocated compulsory education on the part of the State.*

Luther was very fond of children, being blessed with six of his own, and often his home became a classroom for his children and others. He showed his love of teaching when he said, "When Christ wished to teach men, he became a man. If we wish to teach children, we must become children." The writings of Luther bear this out. Today we see the importance he placed on education in his Small Catechism which was not intended for pastors, but rather for parents to instruct their children. Luther's Christmas carol, "From Heaven above to Earth I Come" was said to have been inspired by one of his children and was written for children to enjoy.

Luther's ideas on education went beyond religion. He stressed the importance of writing and language, grammar, as well as mathematics, singing and music instruction. He especially emphasized the need for language and reading instruction so people could read and understand Scripture. He was also a strong advocate of girls' schools, once commenting, "Would God that every town had a girls' school where all girls would be taught the gospel." Two years after his marriage he started his own school for girls in Wittenberg and offered room and board in his home.

## EDUCATION IN AMERICA

It is sad to see that the focus of today's education has made an about face from God's original intent. Once used to teach the next generation first about the love of God, education has evolved into the complete opposite, now closing its doors to anything related to God and his ways. How did we arrive at this point?

The concept of public education in America was begun by the Pilgrims who had emigrated from England that they might avoid religious persecution. In 1647 they penned the *Old Deluder Satan Act* that said "every township in this jurisdiction after the Lord hath increased them to fifty households shall forthwith appoint one within their town to teach all such children as shall resort to him to write and to read." Their thought was that a literate society that could read Scripture would be ready to fight Satan. Public education had begun.

Many of the founding fathers insisted that education must always have a scriptural foundation. Signer of the Constitution, Gouverneur Morris, wrote, "I believe that religion is the only solid base of morals and that morals are the only possible support of free governments. Therefore education should teach the precepts of religion and the duties of man towards God." Benjamin Rush, another signer of the Constitution, wrote a publication titled, "A Defense of the Use of the Bible as a Schoolbook." Likewise the vast majority of the first universities and colleges in America including Harvard, William and Mary, Yale, Rutgers, the University of Pennsylvania, and Princeton, began as Christian institutions.

Noah Webster, author of the first dictionary, was a strong advocate for religious education. He said, "In my view, the Christian religion is the most important and one of the first things in which all children, under a free government, ought to be instructed." He is also credited with writing textbooks such as the *Blue Back Speller* in 1783. Filled with Bible references, it was a staple in public schools for the next hundred years. Another popular series of reading text books was called the *McGuffey Reader*. Between 1836 and 1920, over 120 million copies of *McGuffey's Readers* were sold. Practically every American who attended public schools during the second half of the nineteenth century learned moral and ethical lessons from *McGuffey's Reader*. These books included many biblical passages and religious stories.

In the early 1900s efforts were made to remove the biblical foundations of public education. Perhaps the greatest blow came from the philosophy of John Dewey, often called the father of modern education. Dewey's intention was to design an educational system that would be atheist in nature and prove to students there was no longer any need for God. His plan was to remove the existence of God and the Bible from the classroom. It should be noted that John Dewey was also a signer of the original "Humanist Manifesto", a weapon of Satan opposed to God. Today many public school teachers are also supporters of the "Humanist Manifesto." The opening statement on The American Humanist Association's website says, "We strive to bring about a progressive society where being good without a god is an accepted and respected way to live life. We are accomplishing this through our defense of civil liberties and secular governance, by our outreach to the growing number of people without traditional religious faith, and through a continued refinement and advancement of the humanist worldview."

Beginning in the 1960s, Christian conservatives received several defeats in the courts. These rulings outlawed prayer and any form of religious indoctrination in the public schools. Since that time there has been a continued onslaught not only against prayer and the Bible in public schools, but against any reference to the Christian God whatsoever. In many cases the Christian religion has been replaced with the religion of humanism. Today public education falsely claims to have a strictly secular purpose. Sadly all that has happened is Christian values have been replaced with humanist values.

***How is the comment (that is not part of the constitution), "separation of church and state" used as a fake argument?***

## WHAT ABOUT TODAY?

What has become of public education today? Certainly there is a direct correlation between the absence of God in the classroom and the steady decline of morals and excellence in our culture. However it is also true

that although some would like to see prayer and Bible reading back in the schools, we should not force Christian virtues and values onto the school system. We cannot change people from without. Rather we must be at work changing people from within by sharing the gospel of salvation. We should pray that the Holy Spirit would lead our nation's schools in a godly direction.

Proverbs 22:6 says parents should train up a child "in the way he should go." Certainly the writer intended to mean in the way of godliness. Regarding attendance in public schools, one must consider that throughout the years of a child's public education, God is carefully kept out of the picture in everything that is taught. Certainly, many school districts try to convince well-meaning parents that the curriculum they teach is neutral. However, this is an illusion. Although that may be said of individual teachers in some districts, the basic principles of public education are to steer children toward a secular, liberal-minded direction. Consider what has happened to prayer, the Pledge of Allegiance, student public speaking rules, and holiday programs. Add to these the emphasis on anti-biblical social issues such as homosexuality and political correctness, advocating heathen religions, and especially the deception of evolution. These have become the norm in many of the textbooks used today. They are all part of the same philosophy. That is not neutral. That is one-sided. Public education professes a life without God while the Bible teaches that everything in life is dependent on the Lord. Is it any wonder that by the end of high school many children decide that God no longer fits into their lives? Consider that by the time a child graduates from high school, he or she will have spent 15,000 hours in school classrooms. During the same years if they are faithful, they will spend 650 hours in Sunday school. Can we be certain that during those 15,000 hours nothing influenced them that was anti-God?

Certainly there are occasions when parents have little option but to make use of public education. When that is the case, parents must be especially diligent to know the teachers, the curriculum, and the textbooks. Parents should also be reminded of their options for higher education. There remain many quality Christian colleges and universities where parents can be confident that the materials being presented give glory to God and that the professors teach Scripture in its truth and purity. Fortunately, we can thank the Lord that thus far our country has allowed the establishment of religious schools and the option to home school so that God's Word can still be a part of every subject taught.

This brings us full circle back to the Old Testament form of education. God's plan in the formation of the family unit was for parents to raise their children as followers of Jesus Christ, from one generation to the next. Education is beneficial only as it enables us to carry out God's purposes for our lives and those of our families. How true the words of Ephesians 6:4 are today, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

***Ecclesiastes 12:12-14 says, "Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body. Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind." What message was wise King Solomon trying to share with us?***

***You send your children to a Christian school. In talking with a friend about the possibility of their children also attending your school, they confront you with these arguments: the school does not offer enough sports; the school doesn't have a gymnasium; the school is not state accredited; there is more than one grade in a classroom; hot lunch isn't provided five days a week; the school library is too small; one of the teachers is not state certified; the school's technology budget isn't sufficient; and it is rather expensive compared to public schools. How would you respond?***

***How important that our children learn to critically discern what is taught them? How do we teach that?***