

BIBLICAL REASONS FOR SENDING CHILDREN TO A CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Wayne Grudem, Ph. D.
Research Professor of Bible and Theology
Phoenix Seminary
Phoenix, Arizona

The main reason my wife Margaret and I sent our children to our local Christian school was a conviction that Scripture directs Christian parents to give their children a Bible-based education whenever they have opportunity to do so. I have listed here six biblical principles which we found very persuasive.

1. All of a child's education should be Bible-centered and God-centered.

“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4).

I'm saddened when Christian parents tell me of the frustration and stress their children experience in secular schools, but I also wonder if the parents aren't doing exactly what Ephesians 6:4 says *not* to do: putting their children day after day in situations that “provoke them to anger,” or to sorrow or frustration.

Training that is not “of the Lord” will do that: the contrast in the verse (“*do not* provoke your children to anger, *but* bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord”) tells us we should expect children “provoked” to anger from secular education.

But doesn't this verse only apply to home and church?

The single most common objection to Christian schools—and one I used to believe—says that Ephesians 6:4 only applies to home and church. “We *do* bring our children up in the ‘training and instruction of the Lord,’” parents tell me. “We have a Christ-centered family life and we're involved in a sound church with a great youth program. We *are* obeying Ephesians 6:4.”

But are they? Yes, in two of the three major influences in their children's lives (family, church, and school). We must be thankful for that.

But parents who say “church and home are enough Christian training” probably haven't realized the tremendous influence school has on all of life. Church training receives 3 to 5 hours per week (3% to 5% of a child's waking hours), whereas school training receives 30 to 40 hours per week (30% to 40% of a child's waking hours)—nearly 10 times as much as church!

I am simply unable to see a valid way to interpret Ephesians 6:4 without applying it to children's schooling. The present-tense Greek verb here (*ektrepheete*) implies continual activity: “*keep on bringing them up, continually bring them up, in the training and instruction of the Lord.*” All of their education, all of their training, is to be “of the Lord.”

If we give our children “training and instruction” that excludes God's words 6 hours a day, 5 days a week, for 12 formative years, can we honestly say we have *continually* brought up our children in *instruction* that is “of the Lord”? We were convinced we could not.

Deuteronomy 6:6-7 speaks of God's commands:

“And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. [7] You shall teach them diligently to your children, 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.”

Every part of the day should be “educational” from a biblical perspective. Can we then exclude the *most important* learning times for 12 years of a child's life and say these should be “secular,” *empty* of biblical teachings? Could Moses have said, “Talk of God's words all day long—*except* when your children are being educated”? No, I am convinced he could not.

Psalm 1:1-2 says the “blessed man” whom God approves is one who

walks not in the counsel (or advice) of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers,” but

“on [God's] law he meditates day and night.”

Think of a child in public school. Then think of a child in a Christian school. Then ask yourself: Which part of Psalm 1:1-2 best describes children in public schools? Which part best describes children in Christian schools?

2. Education should be positive and truthful.

Sometimes parents think that a secular environment will “strengthen” their children by forcing them to stand up for their own beliefs. But God's Word does not endorse that viewpoint. It does not say, “Give a child 12 years of training in the way he should *not* go, and he will be made strong by it.” Instead, God tells us,

“Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6).

I know of no verse of Scripture that tells me that secular training will “strengthen” Christian children. It may *callous* them so they view sin as more “normal.” It may *harden* them so they care more about the things of the world and less about God. It may *desensitize* them so they are more comfortable living in the midst of repeated sin against their Lord. But it will not *strengthen* them as Christian men and women: “Train up a child in the way he *should go*” (Prov. 22:6).

3. Peer influence should be positive and Christ-like.

Parents sometimes think it helps or strengthens their children to spend much time with children who have different moral standards and goals for life. But God’s Word disagrees and reminds us that children will tend to become more and more like their frequent companions:

“Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm” (Prov. 13:20).

“The fear of the Lord is instruction in wisdom, and humility comes before honor” (Prov. 15:33).

This year we’ve seen the results of good peer influence in our boys’ lives. They’ve picked up from friends at Christian Heritage Academy a deeper concern for prayer, for purity of speech, for missions, for kindness to others, for respect for authority, etc. And in general they’re happier! They *love* their school. Their education is the kind God wants it to be—and even very young children sense that, although they can’t explain it.

4. Every teacher’s pattern of life should be worthy of imitation.

Children are great imitators. A teacher they like will have tremendous impact not only on studies, but on attitudes toward all aspects of life. Jesus knew that, for he said,

“A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40).

Parents, do you want your children to be *like* a teacher who never applies principles from God’s Word to the subject being taught or the real life situation being faced? Or do you want your child to become *like* a teacher whose love for the Lord Jesus and his Word is the central focus of all of life?

But aren’t there some excellent Christian teachers in public schools?

I realize that there are many excellent Christian teachers in public schools. I am thankful for their valuable ministry and for their positive influence on students. Their presence is restraining somewhat the secular trend in public education.

Yet since the 1947 Supreme Court decision *Everson v. Board of Education of Ewing Township* (which prohibited for the first time government laws that aid “all religions” generally)—and especially in the last 20 years—the iron grip of government restriction has been tightening around what freedom they have left.

How many Christian teachers in public schools lead their students each day in prayer—or in celebrating Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter with genuine hymns of praise? How many regularly counsel from Scripture to deal with interpersonal problems among students? How many can lead a class discussion on how *biblical* principles apply to job choices, or marriage, or sports conduct, or watching TV—or to national and world events? These things are part of a normal day in Christian schools. But they are forbidden by law in public schools.

5. Only God-centered education gives true wisdom.

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Ps. 111:10).

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight” (Prov. 9:10).

“...in [Christ] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3).

This is the reason our secular education systems have strayed from the truth. Isn't it foolish to think we can get a true perspective on God's creation from a system that begins by excluding his words? I rejoice that my children this past year gained *wisdom* in some areas of life that I did not gain until theological seminary—because I grew up in a secular education system (howbeit one much less secular than schools today).

Here is the issue: Do we really think the Bible works in the real world? That it gives crucial guidance in modern life? If not—if we quietly assume the Bible is mainly intended for use inside Sunday School classes—then secular education will be our natural choice. But if we *do* think the Bible guides us in all areas of life, then we'll give our children education that applies Scripture to every area of training for life.

6. Christian schooling is the best hope for transforming society.

Jesus tells us,

“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be

thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden" (Matt. 5:13-14).

Society is to be influenced and guided by Christians! But why aren't we doing this more today?

I think the largest reason is our meek acceptance of secular education all the way from kindergarten to the university Ph.D.

School is where we learn how to *think*. It's where we learn how to *work* and *relate to others* and *influence the world*. But if that whole process excludes God's own viewpoint in Scripture for 12 years our Christian witness grows accustomed to being mute. And it remains *uneducated*, never growing beyond the "Sunday School" level. Our lamp is "no longer good for anything" (Matt. 5:13, 15).

Christian parents sometimes say they want their children to "be salt and light" in secular schools. But how much salt and light can *untrained, silent* Christians be?

If we keep our children in public schools, "when they are old they will not depart" from keeping their Christianity just where society says it "belongs"—at home and in church—in *private*, where it will not be noticed, and where it will have little effect on our politics, our laws, our corporations, our universities, our news media, or our nation's public conscience. If we shall keep Christianity out of *influencing society* in the next generation, for secular education trains children to be secularized Christians.

Must we not rather train our children in Christian schools that they may become *salty* salt and *brilliant* lights to transform a society wandering in darkness?

What will you do?

Last year Margaret and I considered what Scripture said about our children's education. We wanted God's will for our children. We wanted God's best for them! Quite honestly, it was out of obedience to Scripture that we put our boys in a Christian school. And this past year we have seen the reward in their lives.

Christian parents, what does God's Word say to you about your children's education? *What is God's will for their schooling?* Can you find any passage in Scripture that encourages you to give your children 12 years of training that now by law and custom will leave God out?

I suspect that the verses discussed here may convince you (as they convinced us) that Scripture directs you to put your children in a Christian school. I assure you, if you do so you will see God's blessing on your children and your whole family, and you will not for all eternity regret it.