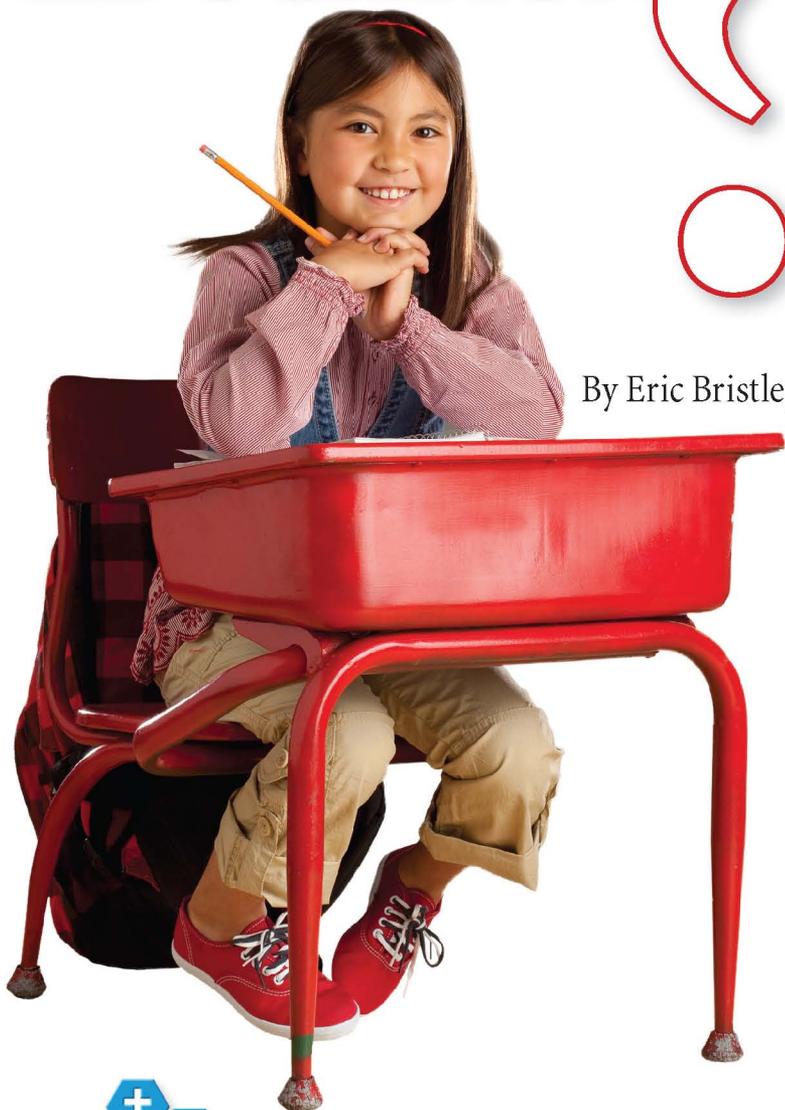


What is

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION



By Eric Bristley



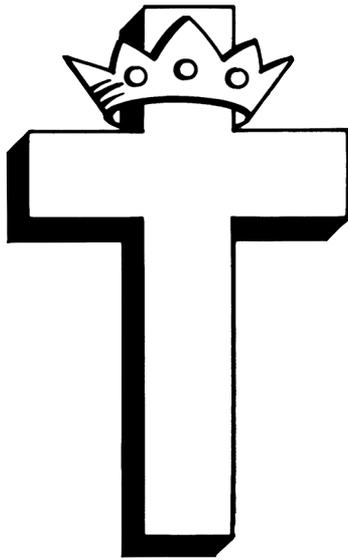
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WHAT is CHRISTIAN Education?

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WHAT IS CHRISTIAN EDUCATION?

by *Eric D. Bristley*

As Dr. D. James Kennedy avows, “Few Americans realize that, from 1620 when the Pilgrims landed until 1837, virtually all education in this country was private and Christian.”¹ In the light of this great heritage, we as parents should seek to recapture the vision of our God-given responsibility of bringing up our children “in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). In so doing, we must embrace a biblical philosophy of education, provide a biblical curriculum that reflects the Christian worldview in each subject, and practice a biblical method of teaching that seeks to make disciples of Christ. Our ultimate goal as Christian home educators is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

Christian home educators should be committed to an educational philosophy that is not after the traditions of men, or the principles of this world, but after Christ, “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3). *Christian education means that Christ is central to education.* Consequently, our educational theory, methods, and practice must be built upon Christ as their cornerstone. But how can we know Christ apart from His Word, which is the truth? The sacred Scriptures are the Word of Christ written. In them God has revealed Himself and His saving purpose in Christ.



Because there is only one God and one Christ, there is only one truth. This truth is the center and criterion of Christian education.

1 From the forward by Dr. D. James Kennedy to Christopher J. Klika's *The Right Choice: The Incredible Failure of Public Education and the Rising Hope of Home Schooling* (Sisters, OR: Loyal Publishing, 1995), p. 6.

While the Bible is not used as the textbook in every subject, it is the foundational handbook for every course and the standard for teaching. As the foundational book, Scripture is the only infallible rule for faith and practice, for grammar and literature, for mathematics and science, for health and physical education, for geography and history, and for social studies and the arts. The beginning of wisdom is the fear of God.

Biblical Principles

For education to be consistently Christian it must self-consciously teach all subjects in the framework of biblical authority. To accomplish this we must have a methodology that guarantees its biblical character; the proper methodology, therefore, is to use the Bible in each and every course both directly and indirectly. It is applied directly when we derive our understanding of each topic from the actual statements of the Bible and use the text of Scripture appropriately in each subject. It is applied indirectly as we work out the implications of biblical truth as the proper framework for understanding each subject.

These basic principles and fundamental truths are the teachings of Scripture. *Biblical doctrines must regulate the way we teach and learn.* One key goal of Christian education is to teach students to reason biblically. Because of this, the educational process must show how the doctrinal truths of God's Word provide students with the Christian worldview. This worldview is a unified system of principles that guides the way we educate. It requires that every thought be made captive to the obedience of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Christian home educators, who are committed to the Bible as the standard for education, should seek to interpret God's Word in line with the authority of biblical truth and the faith of historic Christianity. This authority and faith is outlined by the following biblical principles:

The Sovereign Triune God

The most fundamental teaching of the Bible is the sovereignty of the Triune God. This truth is foundational for all Christian teaching. It

alone separates Christian education from all forms of humanism and naturalism. Education that is truly and distinctly Christian must be dedicated to the glory of God above all else. Because the Creator is the sovereign God, He is Lord of Heaven and Earth, and He speaks with absolute authority about all things. There is nothing in this universe that can be truly learned apart from Him. He speaks as the Triune God. Unity in education is possible only on the basis of one God who is absolutely self-existent and independent of His creation. As the Trinity, He is the source of both unity and diversity in the world and in human life, for He exists as one God in three Persons.

Creation in Six Days

When God created all things in the universe *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) in six days, He created everything with meaning and purpose. Since all studies deal in one way or another with God's creation, all studies should be subordinate to God's revelation concerning His handiwork. The way to properly understand any subject is to study it in relation to its Creator. Because God created all things, there is nothing unknown to Him. Consequently, God's understanding—not man's—is first. All facts take their significance from the place God has assigned to them in creation. There are no uninterpreted facts that man can ever discover. Without God's revealed truth, these facts cannot be properly selected, systematized, and given a meaningful interpretation. Without the framework of a biblical worldview, all education in science is futile.

Man, the Image of God

Because God created man in His own image, the ultimate purpose, meaning, and standards for human life and society come from God. Christian education must therefore reject all speculations of the evolutionary theory of human origins and rights. Man is a unique creature of God formed distinct from the animals. Endowed by his Creator with the gifts of religion, language, reason, choice, creativity, and society, man is like God in every way a creature can be. Created to serve and glorify God in the earth, Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden talked directly with God and received from Him their original

education. God taught man the truth about his role in the universe and his relationships with other people. God taught them that their most fundamental relationship is with Him as their Creator. Culture, society, and education are thus bound to religion. The student must be continually confronted with this pivotal truth about himself and society.

Man's Fall into Sin

The biblical record of the fall of Adam has serious and far-reaching implications for all of education. Because of the fall, man's entire nature, as well as all of human society, has been corrupted by sin. Not only is his heart hostile to God and His law, but his will is enslaved to corruption, and his mind is darkened by error. His whole nature has been corrupted by the evil influence of sin. Because of this, Christian education cannot start in a supposedly neutral fashion, as though the child were an innocent person who simply needs the spark of goodness to be ignited within him.

Likewise, the human teacher is also corrupted by sin and does not always properly present God's truth. Because of sin's power, the teacher must acknowledge that he cannot change the heart of the student. Because sin has corrupted the whole of human thought and education throughout history, unbelieving scholarship can have a pervasive influence, even upon those who seek to teach from a biblical worldview. The Christian teacher must grow in awareness of the influence of the sin that affects his thinking from his educational background and the society around him. Apart from abiding in Christ and His truth, he is liable to be made captive to ideas promoted by the various forms of the non-Christian worldview.

Christ the Redeemer

As a result of Adam's sin, God and man have become alienated. But God, in His grace, took the initiative to restore the relationship. After setting forth the requirements of redemption in the Old Testament, He fulfilled them in the New Testament in His Son, Jesus Christ. The Messiah came as the second Adam to undo the sin of the first Adam and its results. As the perfect Son of God, He became man and was

crucified as the only Redeemer of mankind.

By His redemptive work, Christ restores believers to a right relationship with their Creator. This restoration involves education. As part of His mediatorial work, Christ has an educational program that involves teaching all the things He has commanded. Christ teaches His people as the Bible is read, taught, and applied. All Christian education must therefore be



subject to Christ as God's final Prophet, Priest, and King. Jesus Christ is the only way, truth, and life, also in education.

The Holy Spirit and Salvation

Jesus Christ sent the Holy Spirit to teach the truth. The Holy Spirit is the only One who can make Christian education effective. For the teacher, to impart wisdom is a gift of God. For the student's heart to be opened to God's truth, a change of heart is required. In the new birth, the Spirit opens the mind and frees the will to embrace Christ by faith. Without this new birth, the Bible will never be the ultimate authority over the student's reasoning. Faith is the proper response to biblical truth, the only means by which the heart submits to it. While Christian education can be used by the Holy Spirit to bring the student to saving faith and to benefit a student after he comes to faith, ideally its full effect comes to those who already believe. Without faith, Christian education is ineffectual. Thus, both the teacher and the student are dependent upon the Holy Spirit and His work of grace.

The Holy Spirit uses believers as a means of leading students to Christ, in Whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Christian parents have the unique opportunity and privilege to train up their children in the fear and admonition of Christ. By combining teaching with prayer, exhortation, and discipline, the parent can be used by God to disciple his children to Christ. Thus Christian education, while not to be reduced to evangelism, will include the

positive presentation of gospel truth as the answer to the ultimate questions in each subject. The gospel will be proclaimed as the answer to the student's deepest need for purpose, meaning, and goals in learning.

The Kingdom of Christ and the Antithesis

Because the Word of God is the only standard for education, Christian education is at odds with all pagan thought. Since it is part of Christ's program for building His kingdom, Christian education is engaged in spiritual and intellectual warfare with the kingdom of darkness. The fact of the new birth creates a distinction between two types of people—Christians and non-Christians. Christians are bringing every thought captive to the obedience of Christ and earnestly contending for the faith. The non-Christian, however, looks to man as the standard of all things, reasons according to the flesh, and calls his education neutral.

Because all education is inescapably religious, it can never take place in an ideological vacuum. Neutrality is impossible, for the educational worldview will either be Christian or non-Christian. Christ clearly taught, "He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad" (Matthew 12:30). Therefore, all non-Christian education is ultimately anti-Christian because it does not submit to the claims of Jesus Christ. Well-trained Christian students must be prepared to battle intellectually against the spirit of this age with an aggressive yet humble approach; therefore, Christian home educators seek to help train Christian warriors and leaders who will go forth in the power of the Holy Spirit to win decisive victories for the honor, glory, and kingdom of Christ.

The Return of Christ

Christian education is a part of God's purpose to put everything in creation under the feet of Christ. Christ is now reigning, but not everyone has bowed the knee to His authority. Not every area of life and thought has been made subject to Him. Christian education serves as part of His purpose to subdue people from all nations to the glory of God. He is calling out a people unto Himself who will learn

His ways. Christian education is never an end in itself, but serves to magnify the glory of God. It should never lose sight of the fact that there is no final perfection in human life, in society, or in education itself apart from the appearance of Jesus Christ. At His return, Christ will bring a conclusion to history through judgment of both the living and the dead.



Biblical Worldview CURRICULUM

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, not only in our educational philosophy, but also for each discipline of study. Education is not made Christian by merely adding a course in Bible, or by beginning a class in prayer. If the course content or teaching method is humanistic, Christian supplements will do little to change the orientation. A Christian curriculum must derive its fundamental principles from God's Holy Word and work these out in a self-conscious manner. Christian home educators should seek to provide students with these principles, as well as the content and skills that enable them to develop a biblical worldview in each subject. The following is an overview of such a curriculum.

Biblical Studies

Foundational to the Christian curriculum is the study of the Bible. Students need to be mastered by the Word of God before they can properly evaluate the writings of men. Bible study focuses the student's attention on the inspired text of the Bible as they are taught to understand and interpret it correctly. Its purpose is not the mere study of religion, nor even historical studies of Bible characters, but to arrive at a unified understanding of the biblical system of truth. It is this system of truth that provides the fundamental principles of a Christian worldview that must be applied to every area of life and thought.



To properly learn each subject, the student must not only be able to read, but he must also have the standard by which to judge what he reads. Therefore, the very first book a child should be taught is the Holy Bible. The Bible is the mind of God revealed to man. From it we learn about the creation, the fall

into sin, and God's gracious plan of redemption. It is this knowledge that provides the key to correct understanding and enables the student to correctly interpret all he learns in the light of God's truth.

A Biblical View of Language and Literature

In the beginning, God spoke and it came to pass. The three Persons of the Trinity have spoken to each other eternally. When God created man in His own image, He gave him the gift of language. The Bible tells us that after the Great Flood, the whole earth used the same language. Men, however, sought unity apart from God when they built the Tower of Babel. Seeing this, God confused their one language by changing it into many languages, and scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth. Language thus originated with God and is to be used for His glory. Men in their sin misuse and corrupt this gift. To discern the proper use of language, we need to study the Bible. It is only from the Bible that we come to know truth and error.

Reading and writing are foundational skills all children must learn. Without reading, they cannot study the Bible for themselves. Reading and writing are also basic to learning all other subjects in the light of God's Word. The teaching of phonics, therefore, is very important. If students cannot read the Bible, they will be truly illiterate. They must be taught to read, write, speak, study, and think in terms of the Word that makes language and life meaningful. They must develop the linguistic abilities that God has given them to glorify Himself. Language skills thus are not neutral, but must be oriented toward reading, writing, and speaking the truth in love.