

CHRISTIAN HOMESCHOOLING – SOME PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS

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A. Scripture Passages of Relevance to Christian Education

Genesis 1.1 - the starting point - what hope is there for an education if it begins with error and sin on this point?

Genesis 18.19 - God intends his people to ensure that their children keep the way of the LORD

Deuteronomy 4.9-10 - children must be taught the ways and works and will of God

Deuteronomy 6.4-7, 11.19 - at all times and in all places we are to be teaching our children to please the LORD by obedience of thought and deed

Psalms 1.1-6 - the people with whom we associate and the things upon which we meditate are of immense spiritual significance

Psalms 78.1-8 - children must be taught the works and will of God

Proverbs 1-9 - the most important thing is to get wisdom which begins with (is founded upon?) the fear of the LORD, is passed on from parents to children and is essential to a righteous life

Proverbs 13.24 - to deprive your child of proper correction and chastisement is an evidence of not truly wanting the best for him

Proverbs 22.6 - The LORD encourages us that giving our children a godly education will have lasting consequences for good

Matthew 18.5-6 - terrible woes on those who cause believing children to sin

Mark 10.13-16 - Jesus' anger against any who stand in the way of children coming to him for blessing

John 8.31-32 - to know the truth and enjoy real freedom we must hold to the teaching which Christ gives

John 14.6 - Jesus is the truth

2 Corinthians 10.5 - we want everything which sets itself up against the knowledge of God to be destroyed and every thought made captive to the obedience of Christ.

Ephesians 6.4 - fathers are to bring up their children in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Colossians 1.15-18 - the reality that the education we give our children must conform to - an essential description of the origin and purpose of all things and of their sustenance by and subjection to Christ

Colossians 2.3-8 - right thinking and living is based on Christ in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are deposited.

1 Timothy 6.20 - we must keep away from what is falsely called knowledge

2 Timothy 3.14-17 - the all-sufficiency of Scripture and the benefit of knowing the Scriptures from infancy

B. English Proverbs of Relevance to Christian Education

- No answer is also an answer
- Diet cures more than lancet
- He must have a long spoon that supps with the Devil
- He that lies with dogs rises with fleas
- No worse thief than a bad book
- Virtue and a trade are the best inheritance for children
- A man talks of what he loves
- A blind man is no judge of colours
- Knowledge is folly except grace guide it
- The rotten apple injures its neighbour
- Live with wolves and you will start to howl
- No worse thief than a bad book
- A book that is shut is but a block
- Accusing the times is but excusing ourselves
- Better do it than wish it done
- A good cause makes a stout heart and a strong arm
- One hour today is worth two tomorrow
- Try and Trust will move mountains

C. Some helpful resources

1. <http://www.home-service.org/index.html>
Good UK site for UK Christian homeschoolers including a very good 'briefing paper'
2. <http://www.home-education.org.uk/>
Good UK site for UK homeschoolers including a useful FAQ page
3. <http://www.education-otherwise.org/>
A major UK homeschoolers' network.
4. Greg L Bahnsen – “Keeping Covenant with God in the Education of our Children”
http://www.reformed.org/christian_education/index.html?mainframe=index_educ.html
A carefully worded and concise position statement on Christian education
5. Dorothy L Sayers - “The Lost Tools of Learning” – <http://www.gbt.org/text/sayers.html>
Famous essay which has influenced the growth of “Classical Christian education”
6. James Tooley - *Reclaiming Education*, 2000
A thorough look at state education from a leading educationalist who stands outside of the liberal establishment. Professor Tooley understands and is highly sympathetic to Christian reasons for homeschooling.
7. James Tooley - *Education without the State*, 1996
See 6.

Websites: - a selection of Christian education and homeschooling websites containing some excellent material, illustrating what is available, and providing innumerable links beyond:

1. <http://www.familyreformation.com/>
2. <http://www.gomilpitas.com/homeschooling/>
3. <http://www.homeschools.org/>

Other Christian websites of the 'worldview' and 'commentary' type

4. <http://www.credenda.org/>
5. <http://www.razormouth.com/>
6. http://www.thirdmill.org/english_frameset.asp
7. <http://www.chalcedon.edu/>

D. A catena of questions, thoughts and quotations urging Christian education

1. Parents have primary responsibility for the nurture of their children.
2. That nurture includes the cultivation of their spirit, the formation of their character, the education of their mind, the growth of their body and the development of their gifts.
3. This nurture will include protecting children from certain evils and dangers such as poison, predatory paedophiles, busy railway lines and so on.
4. And it will include providing children with what they need to flourish such as a healthy diet, good company, reasonable exercise and so on.
5. Parents want 'the best' for their children.
6. 'The best' is a life of glorifying God and enjoying him forever. Their true human personhood will be found in the knowledge of God in the Lord Jesus Christ and in the life of worship and service which flows from this.
7. God remakes human beings and brings them definitively and progressively to full and true human personhood by the work of the Holy Spirit who unites a person to the Lord Jesus Christ so that they have a new principle of life within (regeneration) and a new status before God (justification).
8. God the Holy Spirit uses the truth of the gospel / of the Word of God to accomplish human renewal. Sinners are set free by the truth and set apart by the truth. Their lives are transformed through the renewing of their minds.
9. Thus when parents want the best for their children they will want to ensure that they provide, to the best of their ability, the means by which their children can come to enjoy and experience 'the best'. And the way by which their children will come to enjoy and experience 'the best' of the knowledge of God is – under the sovereign will and in the faithful power of the Holy Spirit – by them being brought up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.
10. Children, that is to say, are to be taught the truth of God.
11. The 'truth of God' is all truth and in the proportions and with the presuppositions and the priorities that the Scriptures provide.
12. Some of the key presuppositions or cornerstone truths which are likely to be of relevance to a child's schooling include the following:

- God exists, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and is the creator, sustainer, ruler, redeemer and judge of all things.
- The Bible is the Word of God and is the ultimate authority for all human knowledge – as both source and criterion.
- Life is about living to the glory of God, knowing, loving, worshipping and serving him.
- Jesus Christ is Lord of all things, has all authority in heaven and on earth and, as firstborn from the dead, is to have first place in all things.

13. There is no such thing as neutrality. There are not neutral ‘facts’. All things have been made and purposed by God and have their meaning from him. If we submit to God’s assessment, interpretation and judgment of events, objects and persons (and with the corresponding and proper emotional responses and alignment of our conduct) then we have the truth. If we do not, we do not.

14. Thus the statement of a ‘fact’ in a framework which denies its foundation in the interpretation which God gives is itself misleading. There is a difference between the last phrase of the following two sentences – and the difference comes from what precedes in each case:

a) God made all things and for his glory. All my thoughts are subject to the authority of the Bible. I think this thought in the presence of my Maker, Redeemer and Judge. Every human being has been made by God for his pleasure. *There are currently around 6.5 billion people alive on earth.*

b) There is not a God or if there is he is irrelevant to the statement I am about to make. The autonomous human mind is the ultimate authority for human knowledge. I think this thought as the one who must decide for himself what he believes to be true. Whether God made all things and for his pleasure is irrelevant to the statement I am about to make. *There are currently around 6.5 billion people alive on earth.*

Put this another way. Would a thoroughly Christian encyclopaedia article on the following topics be the same as that article in a ‘middle of the road’ encyclopaedia such as World, Encarta, Grolier, Britannica etc? Evolution, AIDS, United Nations, 1789, the speed of light, ancient civilizations, stone age men, Karl Marx, the reign of Queen Mary, earthquakes, surrealism, Hinduism, the Crusades, boxing, Marilyn Monroe, fossil fuels, quantum theory, global warming.

15. And so ...

- since Christian parents want the best for their children
- since the best is to know God
- since the knowledge of God comes to us through the truth and
- since the truth is not merely the statement of given propositions but also
 - the framework in which those propositions are placed
 - the associations which are made with those propositions
 - the presuppositions which underpin those propositions and
 - the emotional and behavioural responses made to those propositions

... then in these days of targets and league tables and so on, Christians will want to measure the performance of non-Christian schools against the standards of God’s word in respect of questions such as these:

- what is the **purpose** of education as understood in this school?
- what is the **authority** for truth as understood in this school?
- what is the **perspective** on life, God, the world which informs the lessons here?
- **ethos** – is the fear of the Lord a mark of the school’s life?
- is the **content** of the lessons consistent with the teaching of Scripture and how much is left unsaid that would be better said?
- **effectiveness** – what do students look like after receiving an education here?

16. Education: ‘the systematic instruction, schooling or training given to the young in preparation for the work of life.’ (*Shorter OED*). We know what the work of life is - to fulfil the end of our creation - the purpose for which God made us. And the purpose for which God made us was that we should glorify him

and enjoy him forever. Thus the education which our children receive is to be judged according to its effectiveness in instructing, schooling and training children to live to the glory of God.

17. In order for them to be able to live to the glory of God they will need to know about God, about themselves, and about the world. Where are the underlying, framework, first order truths about these things to be found? In the Bible. And which book can alone claim to be sufficient to equip the man of God for every good work? The Bible. Any education which is not based upon the Bible and which does not constantly and explicitly refer (defer) to the Bible as the supreme authority in all knowledge of all things is bound to be defective.
18. What is not said in the course of an education can be as important as what is said. The worst thing about non-Christian teachers (and inconsistent Christian ones) is that they ignore God. He is not important enough or relevant enough to mention in the class-room. He is dead as far as teaching their subject is concerned. If what is not said - lesson by lesson, hour by hour, day by day and year by year is that life is about glorifying God, that we cannot properly understand ourselves or the world except as made by him and for him, and that the Bible is the Word of God which is sufficient, relevant, reliable and authoritative, then what is being received is not education but miseducation.
19. It is not, however, simply a matter of underlying assumptions, worldviews, premises and frameworks. The academic disciplines of physics, biology, chemistry, history, geography, economics, music, art, RE, and English literature are only the more obvious ones in which what is taught and the way it is taught will differ greatly according to whether the education given is Christian or non- (anti-) Christian.
20. Christ is the one through whom and for whom all things were made. He is ruling over all things in all history. He alone brings men into right relationship with God. If we are to live to the glory of God we must be able to say with the apostle, 'for me to live is Christ.' And the substance and shape of such a life are laid down for us infallibly only in the Bible. An education which ignores or denies these things is out of touch with reality and is displeasing to God who is determined that all shall honour the Son, and who raised him from the dead so that in all things he might have the pre-eminence.
21. From these things it can be seen that the debate is not primarily about educational standards or the moral and social environment of schools but about the purpose, authority, perspective and content of the instruction, training and schooling that children receive.
22. In addition, it is necessary to ask with whom the responsibility for educating children lies. The Bible is clear - the education of children is a parental responsibility. Presumably parents may enlist or purchase the help of others in discharging this responsibility - but that does not transfer the responsibility. Parents will give account to God for the education that their children receive. And in the light of what was said above, we must assert that God is obeyed/disobeyed, pleased/displeased in this area to the extent that parents secure for their children an education designed to prepare them to live to the glory of God, characterised by submission to Scripture, beginning with the fear of the Lord, and giving Christ first place in all things.
23. Jesus is Lord. The world is mad to deny this. Do you want your children taught in a madhouse by madmen and madwomen?
24. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Then what should a Christian look for in a school?
25. Christ is to have first place in all things. Then what should a Christian look for in a school?
26. If we accept that teachers are *in loco parentis* are we happy for God-deniers and God-ignorers to have more waking, working, talking, teaching time with our little children than we do? Would you cheerfully sit at your kitchen window and watch a JW, a Muslim, a gay rights campaigner talking to your child in the garden for hours on end day after day after day?
27. Is God the Creator? Does this matter? Then what do we make of an education which denies or ignores this fact? Will it equip people to live to God's glory?

28. What are the goals of a national curriculum organised education? What is the philosophy of education taught in British teacher training? Is the education provided by a school following the national curriculum designed to equip pupils to live to the glory of God?
29. God is Creator, the Bible is his perfect and sufficient revelation, all things are to be understood in terms of his truth and purpose: an education which is based upon denial or neglect of these truths is out of touch with reality and is sinful. Sinful because “the sins forbidden in the first commandment are atheism, in denying or not having a God; idolatry in having or worshipping more gods than one, or any with or instead of the true God ...” (Westminster Larger Catechism, 105).
30. If God did make the world and us for his glory; if all things are under his control and worked by him according to the counsel of his will; if the true meaning of all things and of all events is the meaning assigned to them by God ... do we help our children by pretending for large chunks of their education that these things are not so?
31. If all the treasures of knowledge and wisdom are hid in Christ, do we help our children to knowledge and wisdom by giving them over to 12,000 hours of education which does not give Christ the pre-eminence?
32. If we believe that the Bible relevant to everything and foundational for everything then will a non-Christian schooling help us in our task to teach this to our children?
33. We teach our children to pray ‘lead us not into temptation’. Is it possible that we put before them the temptation of doubting the truth and relevance of Scripture by giving them 12,000 hours of God-less education - sending them into biology lessons which deny God as creator, into history lessons which deny him as Lord, into RE lessons which teach polytheism, into geography and social science lessons which regard him as an irrelevance and into music, art and literature lessons which teach the freedom of the artist from him and his standards?
34. What would we say to a Christian who sent their child to a JW school or a Muslim school, arguing that maths is maths and history is history wherever it is taught and anyway their children receive a Christian framework at home and at church?
35. Liberal and secular bias may be primarily accomplished by exclusion. The essence of censorship what is not allowed to be said - what is left out? G.K. Chesterton – ‘Every education teaches a philosophy; if not by dogma then by suggestion, by implication, by atmosphere. Every part of that education has a connection with every other part. If it does not all combine to convey some general view of life, it is not an education at all.’
36. Do children belong to the state or to parents? Neither – they belong to GOD ! God owns them - we are stewards who must give account of what we have done to, with and for these treasures.
37. The Lord Jesus Christ is angry with those who lead children away from him or prevent children being brought to him – Mark 10. Might this include liberal humanist Christ-hating schoolteachers? Or parents who put their little children in such people’s hands?
38. The Lord Jesus Christ utters a dire warning to those who cause a little one to stumble – Matthew 18. Might this include liberal humanist, Christ-hating schoolteachers? Or parents who put their little children in such people’s hands?
39. May a child’s mind as well as a child’s body be violated? Is a polytheistic liberal humanist the intellectual equivalent of a convicted paedophile – capable of indecently assaulting our little children’s minds?
40. Under what conditions would a Christian parent allow another person to babysit or feed their child or take them to the park or to the zoo? Should these not be somewhat lighter than the conditions imposed on primary school teachers who will look after and educate our children for hundreds and hundreds of hours in our absence?
41. John Gresham Machen: “I can see little consistency in a type of Christian activity which preaches the gospel on street corners and at the ends of the earth but neglects the children [of the Christian family] by abandoning them to a cold and unbelieving secularism.”

42. Does not an anti-Christian education at school and a Christian upbringing at home lead to schizophrenia at best and hypocrisy at worst?
43. But if we over-protect our children then surely they will not be able to cope in the long run? A little exposure is a good thing isn't it? Well, it can be – but the question is a little exposure to what and for how long and for what reasons? A little exposure to the AIDS virus? A little while with your head under water – how long?
44. Does God have control of history or doesn't he? Is he Creator or isn't he? Is the Bible infallible and sufficient or isn't it? Is Christ the only Saviour and the Sovereign Lord or not? Is life about glorifying and enjoying God or something else? If the former of each of these alternatives is true then what good is an education that teaches, suggests or is based on the working assumption that the latter of each of them is true?
45. Genuine knowledge of any subject whatsoever begins with reverence and submission to God (Proverbs 1.9), particularly the fundamentals and philosophy which adhere to the Lord Jesus Christ rather than the fallen world or human traditions (Col 2.8, I Tim 6.20) It is the Word of God which sets apart his people in the truth (John 17.17). ... The aim of Christian parents must be to encourage their children to 'bring every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.' (2 Cor 10.5) For 'in him are deposited all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.' Only if they are first disciples of Christ will they know the truth and enjoy real freedom. (John 8.31-32)

E. Some Clarifications

1. Christian education and homeschooling are, of course, two very different things. What is urged above is Christian education. Homeschooling is but one way of acquiring a Christian education for our children, although one which in the short term may prove to be necessary for many parents. Christian education is a must. Homeschooling is not.
2. It is not the case that “any parent can homeschool”. Many, many more could than think they could – and some of the websites above address this very issue. But it would irresponsible to suggest that homeschooling is within the power – intellectual, financial, and emotional – of every single Christian parent.
3. The role of the Church in the education of children has not received the attention which it needs. Should a local church devote its energies to establishing a Christian school? Or allow its facilities to be used by them?
4. The role of the state in the education of children almost invariably deleterious. The funding, regulation and provision of education by the state will inevitably follow the philosophy of ‘the state’ which is, so far in history, almost always at variance with Biblical principles. Unfortunately – and without Biblical warrant - Christians seem to have begun to assume that universal 'free' education is a 'right' or some sort. And / or to believe that the state is responsible for educating children.
5. Are not Christian parents allowed to delegate responsibility for the education of their children? Well, of course, we bring in expert help when we need it. We are responsible for feeding our children but we do not necessarily grow all the food ourselves ! However, we are responsible to ensure that what they receive is really and truly for their good.
6. Is it possible to provide a Christian framework for education at home – morning and evening and at the weekends – and in combination with a healthy church life. Then the specifics of maths and history and so on can be learned at school. Technically, yes. And all parents are involved in this sort of delegation. The question for Christian parents is simply whether they are seriously doing all they can to minimize inappropriately early (and parentally unsupervised) exposure to the lies of the devil. Six hours a day, five days a week, forty weeks a year is a serious amount of liberal humanist indoctrination to overcome or provide a framework for in rather fewer hours morning, evening and weekends.

F. Homeschooling - Frequently Asked Questions

These are the sorts of questions which frequently arise and which are addressed in detail on the websites listed above:

1. Is it legal? (Yes)
2. Do you get inspected? (Sort of, but hardly)
3. Do you have to follow the national curriculum? (No)
4. What do you have to do to withdraw your child? (Not much, sometimes nothing)
5. What about socialization? (As if sitting in a room with 30 exact contemporaries and one or two adults is a normal social life ...?)
6. What about socialization? (Ever heard of other families, brothers and sisters, wider family, church, Guides, Scouts, Judo, French Club, Tennis Club, Swimming Club etc)
7. What about socialization? (Yes, it is dreadful in state schools, isn't it? Perhaps we should think about homeschooling !)
8. Are not homeschooled children overprotected? (Some are, some are not)
9. But what about the schoolgate relationships you'll miss out on? (Are our children a means to an end?)
10. Are there any educational advantages? (Development of self-discipline; time and opportunity to follow leads, leave the beaten path ...)
11. Are not our children to be 'salt' and 'light'? (Indeed, but would we send them to brothels and drughouses to evangelise at age 11?)
12. What about exams and qualifications? (Can be a struggle but is do-able)
13. What about team games, scientific experiments, class discussions? (Yes, a real drawback of homeschooling. But not insurmountable with some effort and imagination.)
14. If you homeschool then presumably you get a per capita grant from the Government or are exempt from that part of your taxation which covers your children's education? (That question, in case you had not guessed, is a joke!)
15. But what about time for yourself? (No Christian has time for himself – it's all the Lord's time and we do with it what we believe pleases him.)
16. Isn't this indoctrination? (In one sense, yes – like indoctrinating our children not to put their hand in the fire or not to take car-rides or little white tablets from strangers.)
17. Where do you start? What curriculum do you use? Where do you get the materials? What about subjects that you know almost nothing about?
18. Are there co-operatives? (Varies from place to place)

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## THE SMALL PRINT

Underlying principles of our free tuition:

1. There is no God, or if there is we cannot know him, or if we can he has nothing to say about the topics covered, or if he has it must be learned outside of our classrooms
2. The universe and world as we know them are the products of millions of years plus chance
3. The ultimate authority for human knowledge is the human mind
4. There is no meaning to life or if there is you are to work it out yourself.

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THE EVEN SMALLER PRINT

It depends how you define "free" !