

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

82 Is Christian Education Biblical?

Scripture: Matthew 28:19-20; Deuteronomy 31:12; II Timothy 2:2

INTRODUCTION

There is much being said and written about Christian education today. Some colleges offer majors in this discipline and even seminaries now seek to give adequate training in Christian education as well as in theology, church history, Greek, Hebrew and related subjects having to do with ministry. Local churches have Departments of Christian Education and hire full time workers to specialize in this field. Many churches have Christian Education committees made up of certain responsible people from the congregation. It would be rare to find a real Christian who does not feel that educating people in the Christian truth is important. Even Christian elementary schools are emerging across the land. But is such a thrust Biblical? Is there a Scriptural basis for this kind of organized effort? Or is Christian education something which is extraneous to the real purpose of the local church? Let us consider several aspects of this issue this morning.

I. THE DEFINITION OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION:

Christian Education has been defined in the following way: "It is the Christ centered, Bible based, pupil related process of communicating God's truth through the power of the Holy Spirit with the purpose of leading others to Christ and building them up in the Christian faith." (**The Holy Spirit In Your Teaching;** Dr. Roy B. Zuck, Scripture Press Foundation)

It may be important to note as part of this definition that Christian Education is built upon a particular philosophy. The philosophy of Christian Education can be summed up on one verse from Scripture. It is Proverbs 1:7, "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*" Dr. Mark Fakkema, one of the leading Christian educators in the country, defines the philosophy of Christian Education in these words. "It is the integration of all things as one whole with God as the ultimate." The process has a purpose. That purpose is not to line up a collection of facts which may or may not be related. It is the **integration of all things with God as the ultimate**. In education there must be some ultimate principle. There must

be some unifying factor, or else education becomes fragmented and even meaningless. Secular education strives for an ultimate principle. The closest it comes in integrating its various areas of study is “the preparation of people for responsible citizenship.” But this does not define what responsible citizenship really is, and there is much difference of opinion at this point.

Also, Christian education begins at an entirely different point from where secular education begins. Dr. Gordon Clark, an outstanding Christian philosopher gives the philosophy of Christian education in these words, “God, who has revealed Himself in nature has given for man certain specific principles and norms. Christian education is the study of this God and of the principles and norms which He has given.” Secular education holds there is no frame of inference within which truth may be found except that which is allowed by scientific investigation and discovery. Christian education holds that what is revealed in Scripture may be supplemented by scientific inquiry; but such discovery becomes secondary to the revealed truth of the Word of God.

II. THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION:

Let us look at several passages from Scripture which form a basis for the practice of Christian education.

1. Matthew 28:19-20:

These are familiar missionary verses, but few know they are even more significant as a challenge to Christian education. The verb “*go*” is not an imperative, it is a participle and more correctly it means “while you are going” or “having gone.” There is only one imperative in Matthew 28:19-20 and it is the verb translated “teach” in the King James. A better rendering is “make disciples.” This is the imperative! How do we make disciples? By “*baptizing*” and by “*teaching them to observe all things.*”

2. Deuteronomy 31:12:

There are four reasons for gathering the people here; so that they may **(1)** hear, **(2)** learn, **(3)** fear the Lord, **(4)** obey Him and His Word. It is important to see that hearing and learning are listed as two separate things. This implies listening is not necessarily learning, and telling may not be teaching. Also, these activities are very much related to life. The teaching of facts, the impartation of knowledge is not all.

3. **II Timothy 2:2:**

"Faithful men" could be translated "believers." Paul's concern was that Timothy might so commit God's truth to others that his pupils might be equipped to do the same thing. If each of the other witnesses taught by Paul were to do as Timothy did the ministry of one man would have a great mushrooming effect. Someone has said that God's mathematics are multiplication, not addition. It is estimated that by the year 2000 there will be more than six and a half billion people in the world. It is apparent that a strategically important way to reach others is this Pauline principle.

4. **Acts 14:21-23:**

This same concept is seen in the ministry of Paul and Barnabas in this passage. Here are the steps. **(1) Evangelizing** in the sense that they *"had preached the Gospel to that city."* **(2) Teaching** in that they *"taught many, and returned again to Lystra and Iconium, and to Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples and exhorting them to continue in the faith."* **(3) Training leaders** by virtue of the fact that they *"ordained them elders."* All three steps are necessary if churches are to be planted.

5. **Ephesians 4:11-13:**

One particular phrase here is *"that they might do the work of the ministry."* Who is they? The saints! The saints, not just the pastor or missionary are to do the work of the ministry. Being taught, the saints are to teach others.

6. **I Thessalonians 1:5-8:**

In this passage Paul shows how the ministry of the Holy Spirit is related to his work. The Holy Spirit is the one who makes Christian education distinctive and dynamic. It is not enough to teach facts. As someone has said, "it is not pouring material from the teachers jug into the pupils mug. If the mug has holes in it, the material goes right through (in one ear and out the other)." How can life from a Christian perspective be taught and retained? It is by the Spirit's power.

7. **Acts 2:42-47:**

Here we have a New Testament church described. It is a Biblical pattern which describes life in the primitive church. Four elements are mentioned in the New Testament church: **(1) instruction (doctrine)**, **(2) fellowship**

(3) worship (breaking of bread) and **(4)** concern for others (45-47) We would do well to consider the practical ways we might make provision for these four elements. The New Testament church appeared not to be a center of evangelism. It was a place where believers were instructed, worshiped, had fellowship and then went out to help others and evangelize them. We might be greatly challenged to realize that the early churches were not evangelistic centers, **they were schools**. Henry Ward Beecher has well said, "The church is not a gallery for the exhibition of eminent Christians, but a school for the education of imperfect ones."

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