



Editorial: Educating our children

God has spoken; yes, even about education. It is true that the word 'education' is not in our English versions of his word, but the concept is very much there. It is a much fuller idea, and often very different, from what we hear discussed all around us today. We can sum up what the Bible says by answering four questions.

1. Why is education necessary?

Generally speaking, modern educational theory tends to see children as basically good, each one having certain aptitudes and gifts which must be encouraged to develop and flourish. God's Word looks at children in a completely different way. Each one is a moral and spiritual creature who is in a dangerous condition. Foolishness is bound up in his heart (Proverbs 22:15). His natural bent is to do evil (Jeremiah 4:22). He is without spiritual understanding, far from God, guilty in his sight, and certain to display his sinful nature by his thoughts, words and action (Romans 3:9-20). It is true that he is a creature who is 'fearfully and wonderfully made' (Psalms 139:14). Who has not gazed in awe at a new-born baby? But this does not alter the fact that he is fallen, in open rebellion against God and hell-bound. This is the way he will remain unless he is turned back to the Lord by the intervention of His marvellous grace. The child's great need is education – an education which will restrain his foolishness, tell him the truth about his nature and danger, teach him the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and prepare him to live for God's glory both in this life and the next.

2. What should education aim at?

It should aim, with the Lord's blessing, to turn the child round! Every boy and girl is like a cyclist who, head down, is pedalling furiously towards a precipice of which they know nothing. Turn them round! Turn them round! What could be more important? Isn't this why Proverbs 22:6 (in Hebrew) says, 'Start a child off on the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn off it'.

We must underline, however, that education on its own cannot do this. No child will be saved unless the Holy Spirit works inside his soul, giving him a new nature which will cause him to embrace Jesus Christ and to follow Him throughout his life. But recognising the sovereignty of God in salvation can never be a reason to turn our back on the duties that God has commanded us. It should, rather, drive us to continually pray that He will be pleased to bless our feeble efforts to educate our children in the way that pleases Him.

No education is neutral. It either puts obstacles on the road to the precipice or it takes obstacles off. It either puts obstacles on the way to eternal life in Christ or it takes them off. This is true even of the informal education that parents give their children at home. Their words, actions, attitudes, values, habits, routines, relationships with others – the child will witness them all, and every one of them will either reinforce his desire to remain on the road to destruction, or will challenge and call him to walk the way of life.

3. Who should do the educating?

Although schools are found at various points on the page of Scripture, there is no getting round the fact that God holds parents responsible for the education of their children. On twenty-six occasions the Book of Proverbs calls fathers to instruct their children, and on thirteen occasions it calls mothers to the same task. This is typical of the emphasis found throughout God's Word.

Although both the state and the church are institutions set up by God, neither of them has educating children as its primary mandate. This role is conferred upon parents and upon fathers in particular. If parents decide to entrust a part of their children's education to one or both of these divine institutions, all concerned must understand what has happened – a parental responsibility has been partially delegated, but has not been given away. The parents constantly hold the institution answerable for what it is teaching their children, and reserve their God-given right to take them out of its educational programme at any point. In practice, this means that they get to know the teachers, inspect the textbooks and teaching materials, and correct and complete their children's education by teaching and discussions at home. On these points, it is staggering how many British Christian parents are abdicating their God-given responsibilities at the present time.

Whether the total education is at home, or also partially at school or church, children are to be made aware of a vital distinction: there are those who know (and who therefore teach) and those who don't (who therefore learn). These roles are never to be muddled. To the child, the word of God says, 'Listen ... obey ... remember ... pay attention ... do not forget ... honour'. To the parents it says, 'Train ... admonish ... instruct ... bring them up'. This last expression, found in Ephesians 6:4, means to nourish, to take care of what is essential, with a view to bringing the child to maturity. Biblical education is done in an atmosphere of loving authority.

4. How is education to be carried out?

In today's society, children are idolised. At all costs, they must be spared suffering, setbacks, difficulties and disappointments. They must be allowed to realise their potential as easily as possible, and ideally should not be exposed to sanctions or measures which might repress or frustrate them. The Bible's approach is not like that at all! It requires parents to stop their children's bad habits and to inculcate good ones, to stifle their evil thoughts and to nourish new ones. Education is both corrective and constructive.

Corrective measures required by God imply real suffering by the child receiving them, and genuine sorrow and grief in the person administering them. They include warnings, reprimands, criticisms and corporal punishment. The child's evil attitudes and actions must be confronted!

Constructive measures required by God promote real encouragement in the child, and joy in the parent or teacher. They include explanations, demonstrations, learning by heart, learning through repetition, rewards, listening to sermons and participating in family worship – everything being adapted to the age and ability of the child. God's glory and the child's eternal welfare are always in mind and never – not even for a moment – overlooked.

In short, parents, and those acting for them, are to *love*, *discipline* and *instruct* their children, always relying on the grace of God which is at work where his word is taught and lived out in practice.