

BIG TRUTH little books®

**Educating Your Child:
Public, Private,
or Homeschool?
A Biblical Perspective**

Cliff McManis

**With All Wisdom Publications
Cupertino, California**

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or Homeschool?
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Published by WITH ALL WISDOM PUBLICATIONS

Requests for information about **BIG TRUTH little books**®
can be sent to:

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ISBN-13:978-0692987827
ISBN-10:0692987827

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Cover Design: Josh Guglielmo

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*Educating Your Child: Public, Private,
or Homeschool? A Biblical Perspective*
is Volume 9 in the
BIG TRUTH little books® series.

General Editor

Cliff McManis

Series Editor

Derek Brown

Associate Editors

Breanna Paniagua

J. R. Cuevas

Jasmine Patton

Dedicated to Dr. J. Gregory Behle,

Master-teacher of Christian Education
at The Master's University for three decades
who, in 1987, introduced me
to the Christian Worldview

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SERIES PREFACE

Our mission with the *BIG TRUTH little books*[®] series is to provide edifying, accessible literature for Christian readers from all walks of life. We understand that it is often difficult to find time to read good books. But we also understand that reading is a valuable means of spiritual growth. The answer? Get some really big truth into some little books. These books may be small, but each is full of Scripture, theological reflection, and pastoral insight. Our hope is that Christians young and old will benefit from these books as they grow in their knowledge of Christ through his Word.

Cliff McManis, General Editor
Derek Brown, Series Editor

INTRODUCTION

Christian parents are typically quite concerned about educating their children, and rightfully so. How we educate our children is fundamentally important. Christian parents can also be quite passionate and even very emotional about how they choose to educate their children. And sometimes such passion and emotion can lead to butting heads with other parents. As a result, the issue of how we educate our children has become a hot topic of debate in the church over the course of the past several decades. The “education” question is definitely a “hot-potato” topic in the church abroad, even a lightning-rod topic for some. Churches have split over the issue. Some churches have even formed around the topic. And entire parachurch movements have coalesced around the issue.

While teaching at a Christian high school during the 1990s, the church I attended had youth group leaders who openly, and dogmatically, opposed Christian schools. They preached that Christian schools were false cocoons that shunned the world. They told

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the teens in their youth group, “To be truly biblical you should be attending a public school where you can witness to unbelievers!” Several of these teens were in my Bible class at the Christian school where I taught.

My own church was in essence telling my students that my job and my entire institution of employment were illegitimate. My students felt guilty, got confused and began asking me repeatedly what I thought about all this. They would inquire, “Mr. McManis, is it wrong for me to be here at this Christian school?” What a horrible position for a young person to be put in. It went on for months and months until it came to a head.

Finally, the chairman of the Bible department at my school and I requested a meeting with the elders at our church to address the issue. The elders agreed, and we met. We explained that the Christian parents should have the right to educate their kids as they see fit and the teens should not be publicly excoriated and called out and told on Wednesday nights at youth group in front of 300 other high school kids that it was unbiblical for their parents to be sending them to a Christian school. The elders agreed with us and assured us that they would address the issue. Fortunately, they followed through and the overly zealous anti-Christian school youth ministers were told to “stand down.”

The above real life illustration is just one example among many showing how divisive this issue can be within the Christian community. At the heart of

the debate are questions like, “Should we as Christian parents send our kids to a public or private school? Or should we do homeschool?” Corollary questions include, “What does the Bible say about educating your child? Is one of these three options the truly biblical option, or at least more spiritual than the others? How do we treat other Christians who have a different view on the topic?”

This issue is relevant to just about every Christian one way or another. If you are a Christian parent with children still living in your home, this subject definitely pertains to you. If you are a parent and you still have children living at home, this definitely pertains to you as a Christian. My wife and I have four children, and the youngest is still in high school—under our roof and eating our cereal. We are responsible. We have to think about our child’s education.

If you are a student—in fourth grade, junior high or high school—you can benefit from this book and the discussion we’ll raise. If your parents are Christians, then you need to be aware of how they think and how they make decisions and what challenges they are confronted with as they seek the best for your development.

Hopefully you will gain a greater appreciation for your parents as you become aware of the many difficult issues they have to contend with as they seek to trust God with this complicated topic that centers around...you!

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Maybe you are a Christian grandparent with an empty nest. I trust you will find this book edifying and also as a catalyst to reflect on what you did with your children. God intends the experienced generation of saints to be a reservoir of wisdom for the younger generation. Lord willing, God will continue to use you as an instrument to impart ongoing practical wisdom to young parents under your purview in your family and in the church community. Hopefully this book will prove to be an edifying resource to that end.

Or, maybe you are newly married and don't have kids yet. There are certain issues in life that we tend to ignore until we are confronted with them. When you first get married, living on cloud nine, all you think about is your wonderful spouse and how delightful marriage is, and you don't really care about parenting philosophy. Then you get pregnant and all of a sudden you care about parenting philosophy! Then your kids get a little older and all of a sudden you care about where they go to school! All the while, you feel behind the curve, feverishly playing catch-up, regretting you did not prepare for this issue a lot sooner. I think this book will help you and provide some relief.

Regardless of the season of life you are in, it's not too late to think more deliberately and biblically about this issue. My wife and I thank God for people He brought into our lives before we were married who helped us think through the areas of marriage and parenting from the perspective of a comprehensive

Christian worldview. I thank God for that preparation and training, and my hope is that this book would serve as a way to help you develop a philosophy of parenting with respect to the education of your children.

I got a little bit of a late start on this topic. I did not grow up in a Bible-believing home. And I was not a Christian during the years of my primary, elementary, and secondary education, so I did not get a biblical education. I went through twelve years of private, religious schooling, but it was not *biblical* education. It was private schooling with a secular perspective. I didn't know I was being brainwashed with views of the world that are antithetical to what the Bible clearly teaches. At that time, being a lost pagan, I didn't care either.

Take evolution for example. I remember my fourth grade teacher unveiling the "truth" of evolution and the Big Bang during a science lesson. I was amazed to learn at that time that the universe was about 2 billion years old (that was in the early 1970's—now they try to tell us the universe is 13 billion years old...evolution theory keeps evolving). It wasn't until I became a Christian at age nineteen that I began a process of de-programming and re-programming in order to remove all that wrong information from my soul and brain and replace it with truth. I had to intellectually detox big time from almost twenty years of false indoctrination.

The re-programming process is still going on more than thirty years later. This reality of re-programming pertains to everyone. If you're a Christian,

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you have to think about how you were educated, how you were reared, and what worldview was pumped into you. Was it consistent with the Bible? Is there some de-programming and re-programing that needs to happen? Do you need to be spiritually leached? Hopefully, everybody can benefit from this book in one way or another.

1

EDUCATION MODELS IN THE BIBLE

There is an assumption I am making when I say, “What the Bible says about educating your child.” Does the Bible really say something about public, private, and homeschool education? I firmly believe it does, because I believe in the doctrine of “the sufficiency of Scripture,” which means that the Bible addresses every area of life—if not explicitly by name, then definitely by principle and implication. And the Bible answers all the questions we need to know in order to live a life that pleases God. The Bible is not exhaustive on every topic, but it is sufficient on every topic we are expected to know from God’s vantage point.

The topic of educating children is definitely in the Bible. That is not in dispute. But what about secular public schooling, private Christian schooling and

homeschool? Are those three in the Bible, and if they are, what does the Bible say about each?

Secular Education in the Bible

Regarding public school, for the sake of the discussion we can also call it “secular education.” Moses, one of the godliest men in the Bible, was definitely raised with a secular education in Egypt, with the pagans. Scripture is clear that around 1520 BC Moses was born and at three months old he was taken in and raised by Pharaoh’s daughter in Egypt. This means he was reared with a pagan worldview from his infancy until he was almost forty! Acts 7 summarizes as follows:

It was at this time that Moses was born; and he was lovely in the sight of God, and he was nurtured three months in his father’s home. And after he had been set outside, Pharaoh’s daughter took him away and nurtured him as her own son. Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds. But when he was approaching the age of forty, it entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel (Acts 7:20-23).

In addition to Moses, there was Daniel, another godly man in the Bible. He was subjected to a secular education, probably as a junior-higher or teenager, by the pagan King Nebuchadnezzar around 600 BC.

Daniel 1 reads as follows:

Then the king [Nebuchadnezzar] ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials, to bring in some of the sons of Israel, including some of the royal family and of the nobles, youths in whom was no defect, who were good-looking, showing intelligence in every branch of wisdom, endowed with understanding and discerning knowledge, and who had ability for serving in the king's court; and he ordered him to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans...Now among them from the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (Dan 1:3-4, 6).

So it is clear that at this time Daniel's formal education was utterly secular, pagan and not supervised by his parents.

Homeschooling in the Bible

Homeschooling has a long, unbroken tradition for Christians and Jews that extends back to the time of Abraham, the first Jew (2000 BC). After Abraham was saved in his eighties, no doubt he began teaching his family about the true God, YHWH. Abraham did not have the Bible, *ABEKA* or Bob Jones Publishing as resources, but he did have occasional direct revelation from God.

The patriarchs Isaac and Jacob were nomads, always on the move, so they did not put their children in an educational institution outside their home. They taught their children at home in their tents—they did tentschooling! This was the case until the twelve sons of Jacob moved to Egypt. After becoming enslaved, the education process became abnormal for 400 years, but nevertheless was centered in the home.

After God raised up Moses and gave Israel the Torah, He brought them to the Promised Land. From 1400 BC till about 600 BC, religious homeschooling was the norm for God’s covenant people. As a matter of fact, homeschooling was to be deliberate, formal and systematic as God gave the Hebrews divine mandates and guidelines about educating their children from holy Scripture. Parents were expected to teach their own children directly from the Law of Moses (cf. Deut 6), the Psalms and the Proverbs. For example, the godly mother in Proverbs 31 is known for being an outstanding and respected educator of her own children: “She opens her mouth in wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue...Her children rise up and bless her” (Prov 31:26, 28).

But even during this time parents did not teach their children in isolation; the whole nation of Israel was one community before God and had built-in corporate and societal identities and practices—including education—that extended beyond the immediate nuclear family. In the covenant community, you were

not just part of a family, but you were also part of a larger tribe and nation.

Fast forward to the New Testament several centuries and it is apparent that homeschooling was still the norm for the Jews. For example, Timothy, the disciple of Paul, was Jewish on his mother's side. It is apparent that he was homeschooled. His Jewish mother taught him the Hebrew Scriptures in a formal manner from the time he was very young until he became a young man. Second Timothy provides a little insight here as Paul wrote the following:

For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well...You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim 1:5; 3:14-15).

From the select examples above it is clear that homeschooling can definitely be found in the Bible.

Private Religious Education in the Bible

What about Christian schools? Are they in the Bible? Well, I'd say definitely the predecessor to Christian

schools is in the Bible as well as the foundational principles that warrant Christian schools.

The New Testament mentions synagogues. Synagogues were places where Jews gathered for worship, studied the Law of Moses and educated the children. The synagogue was different from the Jewish Temple. There was only one Jewish Temple, yet there were hundreds of synagogues. The Temple was to be built only in Jerusalem, God's designated epicenter of Israelite religion. Synagogues existed everywhere, even outside Palestine in places like Alexandria, Asia and Greece. The Temple was the center of animal sacrifice; the synagogues did not perform sacrifices. The Temple was instituted in the Old Testament at the time of King David and King Solomon (1000 BC). Synagogues are not mentioned in the Old Testament and first appear in the Gospels. Priests ran the Temple; Rabbis ran the synagogues.

Nowhere in Scripture did God explicitly command His people to build synagogues, or to worship, teach and study in them. Nevertheless, Jesus attended synagogue as a Jew and even taught in the synagogue. As a matter of fact, the first place Jesus ever taught publicly upon starting His three-year ministry after getting baptized by John the Baptist was in the synagogue:

And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread

through all the surrounding district. And He began teaching in their synagogues and was praised by all. And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read (Luke 4:14-16).

The apostle Paul also taught regularly in the Jewish synagogues during his three missionary journeys. For example, when Paul arrived for the first time in Thessalonica, “there was a synagogue of the Jews. And according to Paul’s custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures” (Acts 17:1-2). Priscilla and Aquila were Christians who also attended synagogue to hear the Scriptures taught (Acts 18:26).

It is clear from Scripture and also from history that the synagogue was a formal educational facility outside the home where people came to receive formal religious education from Scripture—women as well as men; girls as well as boys. The synagogue actually became a pattern for formal education that the early church adopted and perpetuated all through church history. It was extensively formalized in the days of Martin Luther (1483-1546) and he wrote much about Christian school education. Today’s Christian schools definitely have roots in the Jewish synagogue.

Proceed with Caution

In light of the above three realities, parents should proceed with caution before being overly dogmatic about which mode of educating children is the most biblical or spiritual. Secular, private and homeschool education all exist in the Bible. So to argue superficially that your one view is the only one in the Bible obviously does not hold water.

The next important question to address is, “Which of the three does God sanction or expect?” That is a different question and an important one. On the flip-side is the related question, “Are any of the three approaches sinful or specifically condemned by Scripture?”

Before answering these questions it needs to be recognized that the mode of education does not guarantee either ultimate success or failure for your child’s spiritual condition later in life. Remember that Moses and Daniel were brainwashed with pagan ideologies and unbiblical worldviews growing up when they were most impressionable, and yet they proved to be two of the greatest examples of godly faith in all human history (Num 12:3; Dan 1:9; Heb 11:23, 33, 39). Their educational history did not determine their spiritual destiny.

Countless modern-day examples could be added to that of Moses and Daniel, including my own story. From kindergarten to my senior year in high school, I was deprived of a biblical education and

instead was trained in secular, pagan ideology. Worldliness was in my DNA. Then God saved me, regenerated me and made me a new creation in Christ. At salvation, He gave me the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16), the indwelling Holy Spirit (Rom 8:9) and made all things new for me (2 Cor 5:17). God was able to override my nineteen-year-long pedagogical deficit. God is able to restore the years that the locusts have eaten (Joel 2:25). In my case, that comes with God's grace as well as ongoing remedial spiritual education.

Parents, God is absolutely sovereign, and we need to take comfort in that. This is actually lesson number one. Actually, it's the foundation for a truly biblical philosophy of parenting when it comes to deciding what to do with your kids in the area of education. First, put your total trust in God, knowing He controls all things, including the future of your child's life, let alone their educational experience. Scripture is emphatic: "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Rom 8:28).

The converse to my story is also true. There are plenty of people who were raised in Christian schools with loving Christian parents, or who were home-schooled with a solid biblical education, yet later abandoned the faith altogether. No doubt Judas was raised in the Hebrew Scriptures, at home and in the synagogue, and yet he turned out to be the son of

perdition (John 17:12). And in the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), the father was an exemplary, loving, godly Jewish parent, yet his two boys, who were at least teenagers, were spiritual ciphers at the beginning of the story. Being a wise, faithful father did not guarantee having spirit-filled, teenage offspring.

We need to get away from all mechanistic, behavioral, programmatic and legalistic models of parenting and educating our children. Input does not always equal the desired output. Our children are not automatons. Successful parenting starts with God and seeking His guidance and wisdom in this area and all areas of life: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight” (Prov 3:5-6).

2

A HOUSE DIVIDED

Maintaining the Balance

If you don't proceed with caution on this topic as a parent, you could lose your balance and perspective and then be the instigator of controversy and division among the Body of Christ—either knowingly or unwittingly. I have seen this first-hand over many years as a parent, educator and pastor. But the first time I saw it was when I was a new believer in college.

My salvation experience in college was radical—a night and day experience. I spent the first nineteen years of my life as a blind, self-centered pagan with no hope or purpose in life. When I got saved all that changed. I was fired up, enthusiastic, outspoken, evangelistic and a sponge when it came to learning the Bible. I was meeting Christian friends for the first time, worshipping God in spirit and truth for the first time,

and enjoying a sense of true liberation for the first time. I was no longer blind. Everything was great! It was bliss for at least the first couple years of my Christian life. Christianity seemed so simple—just love God, love Jesus, and love people. That’s all there is to it! At least, that’s what I naïvely believed.

Another thing I assumed about Christianity as a new believer was the silly notion that all Christians got along; I also assumed that all Christians believed the same thing on all the various topics in life. It was a naïve view not uncommon for someone who does not grow up as a Christian. You get saved later in life, and then you enter into the honeymoon phase. You read the Bible, you take it literally, and you believe Christians should just love each other and get along! That brand new, naïve view of Christianity was rattled several times early on in college. One memorable rattling happened during a class I took my junior year.

The Great Debate

The year was around 1988, when I was a new transfer student to The Master’s College (now The Master’s University). I took a required class called Christian Worldview, and the professor tried to show us how the Bible speaks to every area and issue of life, whether it’s spiritual, social, political, legal, economic or even if it regards entertainment. This was all new to me, and it was amazing. My professor was an excellent teacher, and he would often cover a specific topic for a week and

then have students debate the issues in class. At times, he would invite a specialist who represented a specific view on the matter and at the end of studying a given topic he would host a question-and-answer session. The topics of choice were usually controversial such as abortion, homosexuality, media bias, etc.

Sometimes, he would bring in experts who didn't necessarily agree on an issue, and then those experts would debate in front of the class. One of these topics was, "What the Bible says about education: public, private, or homeschool?" The professor invited three experts to class who were leaders in a given area: (1) a Christian principal of a Christian private school; (2) a headmaster of a Christian homeschool co-op; (3) and a Christian principal of a public high school.

Each expert had very strong convictions, and, for the most part, all three of them believed that their way was the "Christian" way. In other words, they were representing what they perceived to be the biblical view. Keep in mind that I was a new Christian, totally naïve, and thinking that we were all going to sit around as Christians and agree about everything. At the time I didn't know anything about education either, so that did not help.

The professor laid down the ground rules for the three guests. They each gave a short presentation after which a heated debate broke out. I was startled and taken aback. I was not prepared for how hardline each person was going to be for their respective positions.

Public School Rules!

First up was the public school principal, who was a Christian. He boldly stated that parents should send their kids to public school so that they could fulfill the mandate given by Jesus to be “salt and light” in a dark, lost world (Matt 5:13-14).

He argued strongly that Christians who send their kids to a Christian school or homeschool are retreating from the world, being isolationists, reneging on the Great Commission, and are displaying a lack of love and concern for the lost. Christian families need to infiltrate the unbelieving world in every way possible and the public school is one obvious opportunity to do that. Jesus told the disciples to “Go!” and to start in your own backyard, your Jerusalem. Your local public school is your Jerusalem! The unsaved students, unsaved teachers, unsaved staff and unsaved administration need to see Christ. Getting involved in your local public school is ideal for living out the divine mandate given by Christ. Believers should be volunteering to help and serve in the public school classroom, the library, and sporting events. They especially should be trying to have a voice and influence on the local school board. God did not call Christians to put their heads in the sand or to retreat into their comfortable holy huddles!

Upon completing his passionate plea, I was actually quite convicted by what he said and even felt guilty. When he was done with his presentation I thought to myself, “When I grow up, if I ever get

married and have kids then I am sending them to public school!”

Christian Schools Rule!

Next up was the Christian school principal. He argued that the mandate to be “salt and light” was for adult Christians, not for immature six-year-old first graders who don’t know anything yet.

He also asked, “You expect some six-year-old to be salt and light and be able to persuade the hardened, seasoned pagan public school teacher who’s the designated authority in the classroom to abandon his beliefs and worldview? Not! The pagan public school teacher is a wolf who will devour your helpless six-year-old lamb who has been led to slaughter. Jesus said to protect and tend His lambs, not send them to the wolves’ den. The environment of the Christian school fulfills that mandate for our young people.”

He also said that we are commanded from Scripture as parents to be the stewards of our children. Parents are given the primary responsibility of training their children in the discipline and admonition of the Lord. But God also gives us legitimate resources we can use to accomplish this task, and good Christian schools are such a resource. That doesn’t mean that parents abdicate their responsibility; parents still need to be in charge. But the Bible—from Genesis to Revelation—clearly says we are to live in community. God said that it’s not good for man to be alone, so He gave the nation

of Israel as a community to cooperate with and help the parents raise their children in the Lord. In the New Testament, God gave the Christian parents a spiritual community of believers to help raise their children in the Lord. It doesn't just take a family; it takes a community, and it takes the Christian church at large. These communities are gifts from God, and Christians need to take advantage of these resources. That's what the Christian school is—it is an extension of the believing community and an extension of the church to complement what the parents are doing.

He said many other things from the Bible as well that were quite convincing. When he was done with his presentation I thought to myself, “When I grow up, if I ever get married and have children then I am sending my kids to a Christian school!”

Homeschool Rules!

Last up was the homeschool advocate, who was actually a headmaster of a Christian homeschool co-op. He had two grown children who were home-schooled and at that time he was overseeing about ten families who were jointly homeschooling. He gave his presentation, focusing on the command in Ephesians 6:4 that said, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” He accentuated the obvious here that parents are the ones commanded by God to instruct their children.

The verse does not tell parents to abdicate that

most basic parenting responsibility to some other person or some other institution, even if it is a Christian institution like a Christian school. He also read Deuteronomy 6:7, another command from God to parents telling them to teach their children. He argued that Scripture made it clear that parents are hands-on and in the driver's seat when it comes to educating their children.

He went on further and waxed eloquent: "Public school is an accursed institution that is totally void of God, and no Christian has any business putting their children under the subjection of such godless leaders and curriculum. In doing so, you are abdicating your responsibility as a Christian parent, as you are the steward who is responsible for raising up your child in the admonition and discipline of the Lord. How can that be done or fulfilled in a public school institution under godless teachers and godless curriculum? I wouldn't send my dog to a public school!"

He spoke very authoritatively and convincingly. When he was done with his presentation I thought to myself, "When I grow up, if I ever get married and have kids I am definitely going to homeschool them!"

Now What?

Needless to say, by the end of the class I was thoroughly confused. At that time I actually didn't know which of the three was the biblical option. Fortunately, I was not

yet married and did not have kids, so I had time to think through the issues.

Now it's thirty-plus years later and it's amazing what has transpired. My wife and I earned teaching credentials in college; hers in public education and mine with ACSI in Christian education. My wife first taught in a Christian high school, then a few years in the public high schools, and for the past decade-plus she's been teaching at a private homeschool co-op that has over 150 students and dozens of teachers. She also homeschooled all four of our kids at different points of their upbringing, utilizing every conceivable homeschool curriculum out there.

Over the years I have taught at six different Christian schools in three different states, having taught every grade from kindergarten to seniors, as well as college and at the post-graduate level. I have homeschooled all four of my kids at one time or another, have taught a few years at a homeschool co-op, have served as a library assistant at a local public school and coached at a public high school and several Christian schools. I have also served on two school boards.

Between the two of us, my wife and I have taught at the public school, private Christian schools, homeschool co-ops and have homeschooled our children. Our four children have attended public elementary and high school, homeschool, a homeschool co-op and a few Christian schools. So we have actually

experienced first-hand, as parents and as educators, all the educational options out there. Little did I know way back, when I was a confused college student, that I would indeed educate my children through homeschool, Christian school and public school, even though at the time I never could have imagined how it would all actually pan out.

We have spent the past twenty-five years as professional educators, parents, and servants in the local church. We have committed our lives personally and professionally to education. With some depth and breadth of personal experience in the field now, my desire is to be a resource to younger Christian parents who are currently grappling with all the issues confronting them as they ask themselves, “What should we do about schooling for our child? What is the best and most biblical way to go?”

There is no simple, pat answer; there are a lot of variables and factors to consider. However, I want you to be aware of where I am coming from, the training I have received, my experience in teaching and raising our own children and my first-hand understanding of the benefits and drawbacks of each educational system. I want to share those experiences with you through the grid of Scripture to the best of my ability. Let’s jump into it!

3

THE PARENTAL MANDATE

Parents—You are Responsible!

Before tackling some specific issues related to the various options for educating your child, I first want to lay the biblical groundwork by surveying a key Bible passage. How would you answer if I asked you as a Christian parent, “What is the most basic, fundamental Bible passage in the Old Testament about training our children?” Hopefully, you would immediately blurt out, “Deuteronomy 6!” because that is the right answer. Jesus Himself said that the Great Commandment found in Deuteronomy 6 was the first, greatest and priority commandment and that obedience to it brought life (Matt 22:37-38; Mk 12:29-30; Luke 10:27). As such, we should heed it.

Deuteronomy 6:1-9 has much to offer Christian parents who want to have a rock-solid philosophy of educating their children. Entire Christian parenting

The Parental Mandate

books have been written in light of this passage. Let's survey some of its priority principles. The passage reads as follows:

¹Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which the LORD your God has commanded *me* to teach you, that you might do *them* in the land where you are going over to possess it, ²so that you and your son and your grandson might fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. ³O Israel, you should listen and be careful to do *it*, that it may be well with you and that you may multiply greatly, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, *in* a land flowing with milk and honey.

⁴Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! ⁵You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. ⁷You shall teach them diligently to your sons 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 up. ⁸You shall bind them as a

sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. ⁹You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Moses wrote Deuteronomy around 1400 BC after the Israelites had been wandering in the wilderness for forty years. They were now ready to enter the Promised Land and there was a whole new generation of Hebrews who needed to be reminded of God's great deliverance from Egypt and of the Law He had given to Moses.

Two times in this passage God tells parents they are to teach their children the commandments of God (vv. 2 and 7), the more specific command being in verse 7. But before teaching our children, God says there are essential prerequisites for the parents personally outlined in verses 1 through 6.

Parents are to be Doers of the Word

The first prerequisite is in verse 1. Before parents can teach their children the commands of God, they need to know them and practice them—Moses says, “do them.” For us today, the commands of God are all contained in the Bible and nowhere else. Parents need to be doers of the Word, not hearers only (James 1:22). If they are not doers then they are mere hypocrites. And children are keen to when their parents are living hypocrites. Sadly, some parents send their kids off to Christian school in the hopes of reforming or restraining their child's behavior at a superficial level.

All the while the same parents have no intention of submitting to God's commands in their own lives. Christian schools do well to interview the parents before allowing their children to enroll, ensuring that at least one parent truly knows Jesus Christ personally and is committed to supporting the spiritual mission of the institution.

Parents Need to Fear God

The second prerequisite for parents is given in verse 2: they need to "fear God." To fear God is to be in awe of God as the holy Creator and Judge to whom we have to give account as fallen, finite sinners. To fear God is to revere Him and not think or speak of Him flippantly. To fear God is to hallow Him. Fearing God is giving Him His due in worship and deference. To fear God is to be keenly aware of your own sinfulness. Fearing God is the beginning of wisdom (Prov 1:7). Fearing God is in short supply today.

Parents are Part of the Body of Christ

The third prerequisite for parents is given in verses 3 and 4 when Moses says, "O Israel." The command to teach the children was given in the context of the believing community, the whole nation of Israel; it was not given to isolated families. Individual families are not islands unto themselves. From Genesis to Revelation, all through history, God's covenant has always been with a body of people, a corporate entity, a community of saints who are interdependent. In the New

Testament, that is the Body of Christ; we are all individual members of it. This is where the homeschoolers get dinged sometimes, and at times, legitimately so—being independent operators from the rest of the Church; assuming too much autonomy; not being accountable to the greater community.

Parents Need a Biblical View of God

The fourth prerequisite for parents is in verse 4. Parents need to have a proper, biblical view of God: “The LORD is our God, the LORD is one.” Doctrine matters. Here Moses says priority number one is knowing the true nature of God—He is one, wholly unique, the only God. A sober view of God breeds a sober view of all reality. A compromised view of God compromises all else. Christian parents need to continue to study God’s Word carefully with the main goal of always seeking to know God better. Jesus said the essence of eternal life is to know God and His Son (John 17:3). Christian parents should have this as a goal whether they choose public, private or homeschool.

Parents Need to Love Jesus with all Their Being

The fifth prerequisite for parents is in verse 5—love God “with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” The “heart” here emphasizes the emotions; the “soul” highlights the mind and self-consciousness. “Might” emphasizes the physical constitution. The three together speak of the whole person. “All” being repeated three times emphasizes the

comprehensive reality of this greatest of priorities. Keep it simple, mom and dad. Instead of fretting over your child's education career, keep coming back to the question for self-evaluation and ask, "God, am I loving you with my whole being? I know that if I do then you will take care of the rest" (see Matt 6:33).

It should be noted that these five prerequisites all overlap and envelop each other organically. You can't do the first one without the fifth one, otherwise you will be a manipulative legalist. True obedience flows from a heart of love for God. Also, these five points are not exhaustive—but they are priorities.

The Mandate to Teach

Having established the spiritual prerequisites for parents, we now look at the specific obligation parents have to educate their children. This is outlined in 6:7-9.

The parents are indeed the primary ones called to educate their children. Moses wrote, "teach...your sons." This is also affirmed in the New Testament when Paul commanded Christian parents to raise and nurture "your children...in the discipline and admonition of the Lord" (Eph 6:4). Teaching the children is the parents' responsibility and is not to be pawned off or abdicated. Paul emphasizes that fathers need to take the lead in this solemn duty (Eph 6:4; Col 3:21). Too many dads are missing in action today in the Church—as they passively defer to mom time and again, or are absent altogether.

Repetition

In addition to giving a mandate, Deuteronomy 6 also gives practical suggestions of “how” to teach our children. The first principle is that we teach our children with systematic “repetition.” Verse 7 is specific. The NASB translation says, “and you shall teach them diligently.” In Hebrew this is actually just one word—*nʹsinantām*; it’s a verb and it actually means “to repeat, to recite.” The NIV translates it as “impress upon.” At the heart of diligently teaching children is being repetitious—strategically repetitious.

We should be teaching our children the same thing over and over again, in as many ways and in as many contexts as possible in the hopes that the truth will someday truly sink into your kid’s brain. This is practically instructive for us as parents. Hey parents, do you ever find yourself repeating yourself to your kids with your instructions? Hey parents, do you ever find yourself repeating yourself to your kids with your instructions? I do...all the time. God knows this to be so—He knows our kids better than we do. Actually, all good pedagogy entails repetition. Our minds are finite, fallen, distracted and we don’t always remember important details.

Modeling

The second principle of how we teach is “modeling.” Moses said, “teach...your sons” as you “talk...sit...walk...lie down and when you rise up.” Here are

five action verbs—they are things we do. Our children are supposed to learn to love God and the commandments of God by watching our behavior; parents are supposed to model godly behavior. All great, effective teachers are masters at modeling instruction. Jesus was the greatest of all. That’s why He was called the “Master” (Luke 5:5). Jesus did not confine His teaching to oral instruction—He was the Master demonstrator; He frequently told His disciples, “Follow Me!” (Matt 4:19). He wanted them to walk in His shadow and learn from observation and His modeling. Parents—we need to do the same. Don’t just bark out orders. Live it out for your children to see. Be a living parable.

Comprehensive

The third principle of how we teach our children is “comprehensively.” We teach them a complete worldview; we don’t compartmentalize life for them. Christianity is a lifestyle, a complete way of life, something we pursue every day, 24 hours a day. Moses said to teach your sons “when you lie down” and “when you rise up”—that is dusk to dawn; all the time. Verse 8 adds that parents are to have “signs” or symbols of God’s commands on their “hands” and on their “foreheads,” or literally, “between the eyes.” This means that everything we do (the hands) and everything we think (between the eyes) is in play as we teach our children. And this teaching is not just for the home (“on

your doorposts”), but we are to teach our sons about God with symbols “on your gates,” which means out in the community and society—not confined to our holy huddle.

So, three great methods are given by Moses to parents—teach your children how to love God with your whole being through repetition, modeling and in a comprehensive manner.

The Promise

We can't forget the promises God gives to faithful parents in this passage. God assures parents in Moses' day that if they were faithful to love Him, obey His commandments and to teach their children diligently, then there would be rewards. God is not out to get you if you are a believer. He loves you and cares for you, Christian parents. Two consequential blessings for obeying are stated in this passage: quantity of life (“your days may be prolonged”; v. 2) and quality of life (“flowing...milk and honey”; v. 3). These promises were actually literally fulfilled when Israel entered the Promised Land. But similar promises are made to Christians in the New Testament. Jesus promised quality of life and the fullness of days to believers when they entrust their lives to the Father (Matt 6:19-34; cf. Gal 5:16-25).

Emphasize the Spiritual

Two summary observations need to be made about Deuteronomy 6:1-9 now that we have surveyed it and

gleaned some principles. The first observation is that the topic of teaching or education mentioned in the passage has to do with the spiritual and religious rearing of our children. It does not specifically talk about calculus, physics or chemistry. The greatest concern I have for my children is their spiritual well-being. God makes it clear that from the time they enter this world, the parents make the greatest difference in laying that foundation. As a father, if I am faithfully attending to the ongoing spiritual nurture of my children as a priority, I don't think there is anything wrong with letting them learn from others in areas where I have no knowledge or expertise, such as piano, Spanish, soccer, anatomy or business law.

The second observation is a complement to the first: all the principles of education we gleaned from Deuteronomy above can be implemented, applied and fully honored in any context, regardless of how you choose to educate your child. As a parent you can fully comply with Deuteronomy 6 if you send your kids to public, private or homeschool. The way they are applied will just look different in each instance.

4

THE COMMUNITY MANDATE

One key sticking point between the respective proponents of home, private and public schooling has to do with “control.” How much control should the parents maintain in the education process of their children and should they delegate any control to others? Homeschoolers argue that parents need to retain autonomy and are not comfortable delegating the training of their children to others, especially to the pagan school system. Christian school parents may delegate some things to teachers outside their home but may not be comfortable with the public system either. Christian parents who utilize the public school put their trust in the public school system at various levels. Does the Bible have anything to say about the issues of trusting others outside the home to help train the children? Can parents delegate any of their authority to others to help with the education process?

The Bible does indeed have examples of other adults outside the family helping parents with basic household chores and duties, as well as assisting in the training of their children in various ways. The primary examples in the Bible of these helpers include stewards, maids/servants and tutors.

Stewards

First, there was the “house steward.” The steward is recognized by different terms and words, but appears several times in the Old and New Testament, usually in the homes of the more wealthy. Joseph had a “house steward” (Gen 43:16). Joseph is commended as a godly man in Scripture (Heb 11:22). He is never condemned or considered to be a compromiser for utilizing a house steward. Joseph had his house steward help with preparing meals, running errands, hospitality, carrying messages...things I ask my teenagers to do around our house (Gen 43:25; 44:1-13). David, another godly man, had house stewards (1 Chron 28:1), as did Solomon (1 King 4:6), Hezekiah (Isa 22:15) and many others.

In the New Testament Joanna, a disciple of Jesus (Luke 8:3) was married to a man named Chuza who was a house steward. Summarizing all the biblical data on the occurrences of the house steward, John Stott makes this observation about the role of the steward in Bible times: “the steward was a man of authority in the household, exercising a fatherly supervision over its members, and that the symbol of

this office was a key, no doubt to the stores” (*The Preacher’s Portrait*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961, 18).

Servants

In addition to the house steward, there were maidens or “female servants” (NIV) (Prov 31:15). Although most contemporary families don’t have “female servants,” most Christians would probably agree that Christian women should try to follow the model of the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31...even homeschoolers. The virtuous woman is not said to be a queen. For the most part she seems to be a fairly normal Jewish wife and mother, despite being a woman of means. But she works hard for the money and does not sit idly by on an inheritance she did not earn. She works by the sweat of her brow to survive and help provide for the family. She is married, has several children, keeps the house, educates the children, works outside the home, ministers to the poor...but she does not do it all alone! She had maidens who help her. She delegates some household responsibilities to non-family members who can be trusted with certain tasks.

This is good for some demanding Christian husbands out there to keep in mind. I have met a few over the years—they expect their wives to be the virtuous spiritual super-woman; she needs to homeschool all seven kids, maintain perfect order in the home, have a warm supper on the table on time, pay the bills, keep the books, run the errands, do the dry

cleaning, feed the animals, do the shopping, be hospitable, serve in the church...all on her own, unassisted. In contrast, the virtuous woman had a plurality of female helpers in the home to pull off her herculean efforts. Maybe today we should consider allowing our wives and mothers the same kind of help with some of the household duties.

Servant girls appear in the New Testament church as well as the Old Testament. After the church started in Jerusalem, Peter goes to a home where Christians are gathered for prayer and fellowship. When he knocks on the door he is greeted by “a servant-girl named Rhoda” (Acts 12:13). Rhoda served as a maid in the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark. Mary was a disciple of Jesus who loved the saints, was hospitable and opened her home to fellow believers. And to help maintain order in her busy home of ministry and fellowship she employed female servants.

Tutors

The last category of domestic helpers found in the Bible are tutors, or *paidagōges* which is the Greek term. *Paidagoge* is from two Greek words, *pais* (child) plus *ago* (to lead); hence it means to “lead a child.” *Paidagoge* is where we get our English word “pedagogy” which means “the science of teaching,” and our English word “pedagogue” which means “teacher” or “tutor.” These tutors probably originated in the time of Plato and

Aristotle (around 400 BC) and they were servants who assisted parents in the training of their children.

In Paul's day they were commonplace in the Greek world and beyond. Tutors were so normative in Paul's day that he could refer to them as a helpful universal metaphor when explaining the purpose of the Old Testament Law to new believers, including both Jews and Gentiles. Note how he uses this word twice in Galatians: "the Law has become our tutor [*paidagōgos*] to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor [*paidagōgos*]" (3:24-25).

And again in First Corinthians Paul likens legitimate Christian disciples and Bible teachers to pedagogues: "For if you were to have countless tutors [*paidagōgos*] in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel" (4:15). Paul condones the use of tutors, as is plainly evident from the context in which he refers to them. In Paul's day, a tutor was a servant in a home responsible to watch over younger boys from ages six to sixteen on behalf of the parents. They did not usurp the role of the parents but simply aided the parents, especially the father, in practical matters of training children. The tutor took orders from the parents, was paid by the parents, was accountable to the parents, and was utilized on a temporary basis. I have resorted to tutors myself as my kids got older when I no longer

could help them with Latin III, calculus and chemistry. I thank God for those modern day pedagogues!

Balance

So it is clear that the Bible allows for parental helpers in the form of house stewards, maids/servants and tutors. The maids and the tutors helped directly with taking care of the children in various ways. Christian parents should not be afraid to solicit help at times with training their children. With prayer, wise counsel, research, informed referrals and biblical guidelines it is possible to delegate some domestic duties to others who can be trusted. Today that would have to be case-by-case.

If there is a public school that has a godly principal in charge or a classroom teacher that loves Jesus, then it's possible to utilize the public school setting to your advantage as a Christian parent. Christian schools vary—there are some great ones and there are some that compromise on important doctrinal issues. A solid Christian school, with an administration and teachers who are biblical across the board, can be a big help to parents. A Christian school that employs unsaved teachers, or teachers who reject a literal view of the Bible (i.e., Genesis 1-11, miracles, etc.), which is more and more commonplace, can pose a threat. Homeschool parents can have Christian tutors help with some of the classes that are beyond their scope of expertise and still be official “homeschoolers.” It's possible to strike a healthy balance without being

legalistic, overly dogmatic or unnecessarily judgmental toward others with different pedagogical preferences.

Two areas where the Bible does not allow the parents to delegate childrearing responsibilities are with (1) corporal punishment and (2) the child's spiritual development. Proverbs tells parents to spank their own children (Prov 13:24; 29:15; cf. Heb 12:7-9) and Paul tells fathers to raise their children in the nourishment of the Lord (Eph 6:4).

Counterfeit Community

In 1996 Hilary Clinton wrote a book called, *It Takes a Village*. It discussed how to care for and nurture children. The idea was that parents cannot adequately raise healthy children alone—they need the help of other adults in the world, all the other people in “the village” need to chip in.

The book was highly popular and at the same time highly controversial. It was controversial because Clinton's perspective leans left and was written with undertones of socialist ideology; namely she argued for aggressive government intervention and oversight when it came to childrearing. She proposed many state-run and government-mandated programs to help oversee general childcare, childhood education, children's health as well as liberal social engineering. Sadly, many in America believe the same thing—that government should be a main source of provision, care, and education for our children. But nothing could be further

from the truth when it comes to God's perspective as outlined in Scripture.

The Bible says parents are responsible for the education of their children; not the state. Children belong to the parents, not the government. In ancient Sparta, the pagan government did claim rights on children, saying they were wards of the State. Dictators throughout history have said the same. But God's Word clearly obliterates that dangerous notion as it accentuates the primacy of parents as God's designated authority for children: "Hear, my son, your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching" (Prov 1:8). "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (Eph 6:1).

True Community

So it does not take the secular government-run socialist village to raise a child...but it does take more than the parents. The Bible actually teaches that it takes the Body of Christ to raise children, or one could say, *It Takes the Church*. We noted earlier that beginning in the Old Testament, God expected His people to be part of a thriving community, with the nuclear family at the core, but extending beyond that to the greater household of the faith. In the Old Testament, that was the nation of Israel. In the New Testament, that is the Body of Christ, the Church. The Church is even called the family of God, with God as Father (Eph 1:2), Jesus as the elder brother of believers (Heb 2:11), and believers as the

children of God (1 John 3:1) and brothers and sisters of one another (Rom 1:13; 16:15).

Parents need the community of believers in the church to help them raise their children in a godly manner. Before sin entered the world, God said that it was not good for man to be alone (Gen 2:18). First and foremost, that meant that Adam was to marry and have a wife that would complement him. But it also meant that they would have a family, and by extension, become part of a believing community.

That truth hasn't changed. It is not good for any person to live in isolation (Prov 18:1). The worst form of punishment in prison is solitary confinement, and for good reason. People can go insane when they are locked away by themselves for an extended amount of time. God knew what He was talking about. God created us in His image. God is a social entity—He is a community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We are made in His image, and we are created to be in community with one another. God made us to be social beings. Eschewing social interactions and relationships is unnatural and unhealthy.

Old Testament Community

Within the nation of Israel, education was first and foremost the responsibility of the parents, but there was also an obligation on the community and the leaders of Israel to help parent that child in a godly manner. This was fulfilled both positively and negatively: positively

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through proper instruction, the laws from God, celebration of the annual feasts, and the tools provided to teach a child. This was carried out negatively through the various levels of discipline for the child when warranted. Deuteronomy delineates an extreme case of community discipline on a child:

If any man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father or his mother, and when they chastise him, he will not even listen to them, then his father and mother shall seize him, and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gateway of his hometown. They shall say to the elders of his city, “This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey us, he is a glutton and a drunkard.” Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death; so you shall remove the evil from your midst, and all Israel will hear *of it* and fear (Deut 21:18-21).

This passage sounds barbaric to those in our culture today. But the fact of the matter is God’s standard has not changed. In the beginning when He made the first man, God told Adam if he disobeyed then, “you will surely die” (Gen 2:17). In Ezekiel, around 600 BC, God reiterated His standard: “Behold, all souls are Mine...The soul who sins will die” (18:4). In the New Testament, after the church began, in about 57 AD God declared that, “the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23).

Every sin deserves the penalty of death from a holy God. That is the bad news. The good news is that Jesus died as a substitute for sinners to satisfy that biblical requirement of justice. Instead of stoning defiant children to death today, they can be offered forgiveness in Christ because of His death on the cross if they repent of their sins. That is the good news—that is the gospel of Christianity.

Church Community

That community structure and expectation seen in the Old Testament does not change in the New Testament—God has given believers the community of the Church, which is the Body of Christ. The word “Body” inherently speaks of community: there isn’t just one body part—there are many members. There are many Scripture references that inform this community mandate, but one will suffice: 1 Peter 5.

In 1 Peter 5 we see a command from Peter who was a pastor and apostle. He’s speaking to other elders in local churches and giving them a few mandates:

¹Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, ²shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; ³nor

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yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock (1 Pet 5:1-3).

Peter gives a command to local church elders in verse two to “shepherd the flock of God.” The word “shepherd” here is a verb; it’s an action. Shepherding includes teaching, preaching, praying, leading, protecting and discipling. With this imperatival phrase, Peter means, “provide spiritual ministry to the people in your local congregation.” The command is given to “elders” in the local church. Elders are the same as pastors, bishops and overseers, since all those terms are interchangeable in the New Testament (cf. Acts 20:17, 28).

I am a pastor and an elder at my local church, so this command applies to me. The Bible here commands me to shepherd all the people in my congregation, which includes all the adults and their children. Shepherding includes educating the people in the things of the Lord. So then, pastors have a divine mandate to help their parents educate their children in the things of the Lord. That is part of shepherding. If you are a Christian, you are part of the church community, the Body of Christ, where God expects you to be fully committed, willingly accountable, actively involved and regularly serving. It is also where you can receive ongoing shepherding from your pastors, which includes biblical education for you and your children.

Too many Christians seek community obligations, fulfillment, identity and affiliation elsewhere before seeking those realities in a local church. These other social entities can become their pseudo spiritual havens that actually supplant God's intended role of the church. Jesus promised to build only one institution, and that was His church (Matt 16:18). Therefore, the community of the church is God's priority over all others.

Where do You Have Community?

I have known Christians who were totally gung-ho about serving in the local public school—in the booster club, the local school board—while at the same time they rarely darkened the doors of the church. I know Christian school parents who try to find all their spiritual encouragement, fellowship, friendship and service with the Christian school families, and in turn they have no time to spare for the local church. Their church is *de facto* their local Christian school. And I know plenty of isolationist Christian homeschoolers who do everything at home with their family—schooling, social time, and fellowship. Some even do “worship” in isolation in their “home churches” where dad serves as the pastor, mom the worship leader and the five kids as the congregation. This is a total abandonment of the community mandate for the church that is clearly outlined in the Bible.

The main point here is quite simple: when

thinking about and praying about answering the question, “How should we educate our children?” don’t forget to include the local church as central to the equation. Too many Christians neglect the priority of the church in such a discussion. God does not want you to raise your children all by yourself—He has made you a part of His spiritual family, the Body of Christ. Begin by finding your social identity there.

I know that my wife and I wouldn’t be the parents that we are without the countless godly people we knew from our local churches who went before us and mentored us when we first got married and started having kids. Their counsel and godly examples were invaluable to us, and I am always being reminded of the principles from Scripture that were given to us by those who had gone before us. And for over twenty-five years we continue to rely on God’s people in the church as a support system in all areas of life, including help with our children. The New Testament is filled with dozens of “one another” commands given to all Christians (John 13:34; Rom 15:14; Gal 5:13; 6:2; Heb 10:24; James 5:16) and they are to be fulfilled to a great measure within the church community. As a parent, you need to arm yourself with an arsenal of godly information and resources, and the believing community of the church is tremendously helpful in fulfilling that need.

5

THE FREEDOM CLAUSE

Parental Choice

So far we have seen that the topic of child education can be controversial, so we need to be sober-minded and proceed with caution. We also looked at the biblical priorities established in Deuteronomy 6 and other passages. And we were reminded of the community mandate found in the local church. In this chapter, we will consider parental freedom, or “the freedom clause,” as well as some basic student obligations in the education process.

First, I want to address the “freedom clause.” Because parents are the primary caretakers of their children and will be accountable to God someday, God does give parents freedom, liberty, and choice, especially in grey area issues. Whether you send your child to a public, private, or homeschool is not a biblical issue in terms of its relation to sin. I believe it falls within

the category of grey areas, which means that the freedom of choice is granted to the parents in discerning the will of God in how they will be most successful as parents.

Psalm 127 is a beautifully inspired portrait of family life. Verse 3 is specifically helpful as a guiding principle about raising a godly family. Some of the Hebrew terms in the verse are picturesque and enlightening in describing God's expectation of parents. It reads as follows:

Behold, children are a gift of the LORD, The
fruit of the womb is a reward.

The NIV says, “children are a *heritage* from the LORD,” which is actually a better rendition of the Hebrew. The Hebrew word for “gift” or “heritage” is *nahal* which occurs more than 220 times as a noun in the Old Testament. Most of the time it literally refers to the land that YHWH gave to the Israelites as a gift or an inheritance—the Promised Land. Moses reminded the Jews as they were about to cross the Jordan, “your **inheritance** [*nabalat*] which you will inherit in the land that the LORD your God gives you to possess” (Deut 19:14). The land was a personal, precious inheritance (*nahal*) that God gave to the Israelites as a promise; and He intended them to own the land, work it, manage it and enjoy it.

In Psalm 127:3, *nahal* is used metaphorically in reference to children; like the Promised Land, children

are a precious, personal gift from God to be owned, enjoyed, managed and cared for on behalf of God. In this regard parents own their children and are stewards of their children. They own their children from birth until independence (Gen 2:24). And they are stewards of their children in that they have to give account to God for how they raised their children in light of biblical imperatives (i.e., Deut 6:7; Eph 6:4).

Summary Principles

Summary principles can be gleaned from the many uses of *nabal* regarding God's expectations for how Israel was to care for the Promised Land:

- (1) God is the original owner of that land and He is giving it to you as a gift that is neither earned nor deserved.
- (2) You'd better be a good and faithful steward of that Promised Land.
- (3) If you take care of that land, you will be blessed by God.

This is how parents need think of their children from the moment they are born—as a gift from God. Children are neither earned nor deserved. God has given us children with the intention of blessing us as believers. Parents, are your children a blessing to you? There are a lot of ways that our children can bless us, be it through the things they've taught us; how they've

made us grow; their cute personalities; and the unique gifts they have. God's description of children and the intention He has for them is beautiful.

These Hebrew words also play into the idea that the Israelites literally owned the Promised Land. Thus, they had freedom and liberty as stewards. The same is true of parents with their children. As a parent, I have freedom as well as the right and obligation to take the issue of education before God and ask for His wisdom as I make decisions on behalf of my children.

In my own life, I have experienced the same scenario every year for more than twenty years now: my wife and I will sit down, usually in December, and ask, "What are we going to do with this kid for school next year? Homeschool, private, or public? Where are we going to send them? How are we going to pay for it?" It's the same conversation every year. We know that we are responsible, but at the same time, we know that God has given us privileges and the freedom to make decisions that don't violate His will. I believe that this freedom plays into your decision about how to educate your child.

If other Christians are looking down their noses at you for putting your kid in public school or a Christian cocoon of a private school, that is wrong, and it is infringing upon your parental right and responsibility. I remember when we were new parents and I asked an older Christian couple who had kids what we should do. They were well-meaning "Christian-

school-only” advocates and they said to me, “Whatever you do, don’t do homeschool! You don’t want your kids to grow up as clueless social retards!”

Recently, a pastor friend of mine had a Christian mom go up to him when she found out he, as a pastor, put his kid in the public school, and said, “I can’t believe you are dedicating your children to Molech!” Molech was the detestable false god of the Ammonites that pagans sacrificed their babies to in order to appease him (1 Kgs 11:7; 2 Kgs 23:10). And I already mentioned the “public-school-only” youth pastors at my previous church that castigated Christian parents as compromisers for sending their children to Christian cocoon schools out of fear and lack of love for the lost. Three real life, unbalanced, off-the-rails examples of Christians who illegitimately judge other Christians, and undermine their right before God to make their own choices about training their children. Your children are God’s gift to you—be good stewards of His gifts.

Students....Listen Up!

Now a word to the children or the students—at least those old enough to read. Too often when discussing the education of our children we overlook getting the children involved in the discussion. They need to be a part of the process, and the older they get the more they need to be a part of the process. Hey children, it’s not all on the parents. You have a responsibility in your education, whether you’re three years old, thirteen years

old, or twenty-three years old (if you're still living at home and dependent upon your parents).

Children need to maintain the proper attitude and perspective. And it helps our children when the parents keep the children informed and up to date. Parents also need to let their children express their thoughts—parents need to listen. Parents also need to clearly teach their children biblical expectations through this whole process. The kids don't have the experience parents have; they don't learn by osmosis; and these matters are not intuitive. Hey parents, don't have unrealistic expectations for your young, immature, inexperienced kids.

Listen to Your Parents!

God gave the book of Proverbs to parents as a gift for teaching children. If you are a parent, you should be regularly reading the book of Proverbs and teaching it to your children. In the first nine chapters, we are given a picture of this mom and dad who love God and are highly concerned about their children, regardless of their ages. They are pleading with their kids with the phrase, "Listen to me!" Have you ever said that as a parent? In Proverbs 1, we see that these writings were given to help young, naïve people grow up with knowledge. It is specifically given to the youth (verse 4). In verse 8, the author says, "Hear, my son, your father's instruction And do not forsake your mother's

teaching.” If you have a child, put their name in this verse. This is a persistent and ongoing pleading.

This same pleading is seen in the first verse of chapter 2: “My son, if you will receive my words and treasure my commandments within you.” It is easy to imagine the pleading in this father’s voice. “If you only knew what I had to give to you!” “If you only knew the mistakes that I made that I don’t want you to make!”

“My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments” (Prov 3:1).

“Hear, O sons, the instruction of a father, and give attention that you may gain understanding” (Prov 4:1).

“My son, give attention to my wisdom, incline your ear to my understanding” (Prov 5:1).

“My son, if you have become surety for your neighbor, have given a pledge for a stranger” (Prov 6:1).

“My son, observe the commandment of your father and do not forsake the teaching of your mother” (Prov 6:20).

“My son, keep my words and treasure my commandments within you” (Prov 7:1).

The Proverbs cover all areas of life: how to deal with finances, moral purity, tough decisions, speech, and how to choose friends. Proverbs provides topics for a comprehensive education that parents need to instill in their children.

As a pastor, I have heard many stories and testimonies over the years from believers who testify that the book of Proverbs had an impact in their lives because of the diligent teaching they received from their parents over the years. Many times these believers don't realize it until later in life, in hindsight. They admit that when they were in process, especially in their teen years, they did not think their parents knew anything. But with time they came to appreciate the divine wisdom flowing from their parents' lips as they were guided by God's Word.

These Proverbs also show us that keeping the conversation open with your child is key. Don't shut them down or cut them off. The lines of communication are open in Proverbs 1-9, even in the midst of pleading.

To all of you children who still live at home and are under the authority of your parents: these passages are for you. Therefore, your first priority needs to be to evaluate yourself when it comes to listening to mom and dad. If one of your favorite lines when your parents are talking to you is, "I know," then you are violating these principles, and that is pride. This probably means that you don't have a teachable spirit, even when your

parents are attempting to impart godly wisdom to you. Instead, choose the other alternative—listen to your parents with a submissive attitude and God will bless you!

6

DECISION TIME!

It is time to decide. And to help you make these all-important decisions I want to close with three considerations to add to your arsenal: (1) strengths and weaknesses of all three educational options; (2) some parental priorities to keep in mind; and (3) a suggested list of helpful resources. I will start with the strengths and weaknesses.

Strengths and Weaknesses

These diagnostic vignettes are based on several considerations: what I think the Bible says in terms of mandates, boundaries and parameters; my perspective as a trained Bible teacher and pastor; my perspective as a Christian; my perspective as a parent who has raised four children in public, private, and homeschool; my perspective as a professional educator; and formal input other wise saints have given me over the decades.

Hopefully they are practically helpful in your decision-making process.

Public School Strengths

- *The financial issue:* If you don't have the money for private school or all the curriculum required for homeschooling, public school can be a huge benefit. My wife and I have faced this trial firsthand, and it is certainly a considerable challenge for many families. After all, if you pay taxes it is your money that is funding the public schools already...why not get some of your money back?
- *Homeschool resources:* Recently some public schools are actually supplying homeschool families with books and other resources; they do this so they can count that family as quasi enrolled at their public school.
- *Extra-curricular activities:* Here, I am specifically thinking of the resources that many public schools provide, such as the track and field or swimming pool, or even classroom resources that many private and homeschool institutions don't provide, such as science and lab equipment. At times, they provide more electives as well for study. Sports can also be a huge factor.
- *Exposure to unbelievers:* Enrolling your child in a public school definitely opens their eyes to a whole new world...the world. This can allow the

Christian parents to get involved in the lives of unbelievers as well. Christians are called to be in the world but not of the world. Ironically this exposure to the world can also be the public school's greatest threat to the Christian student.

Private School Strengths

- *Insulation/protection:* A good Christian school can provide healthy insulation. As a parent, you don't want isolation, but you should want insulation. You should want to protect your children legitimately from threats in the world that could undermine their young, precious, impressionable spirits and minds. The Christian school can protect the student from dangerous worldviews that are rampant at public schools.
- *Complementary education:* In a solid Christian school that takes the Bible seriously, parents can develop a very strong partnership that supports the parents' goals of education for their children. A godly school board, an uncompromising principal who operates according to biblical truth, prayer and the leading of the Spirit, in addition to having all teachers and staff members who are born again, are prerequisites that make for a solid Christian school. Godly Christian teachers who love Jesus and the saved students are part of the Body of Christ and can be a part of that church community that was discussed earlier.

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- *Resources/opportunities:* Public schools aren't the only ones who can provide resources across the board—Christian schools pursuing excellence can do the same, from academics, to electives, to sports, music, and art. Some Christian schools provide quality opportunities of Christian service through short-term missions trips—these experiences can be life-changing for some young people.

Homeschool Strengths

- *Control:* As parents, you have more control. This is the biggest concern that homeschool parents seem to have. As a homeschool parent you've got control of the curriculum as well as how you run your day. If you're in the public school, you have to get exactly 186 days in, but the beauty of homeschool is that you don't need to be in class 186 days of the year. You have this amazing flexibility and freedom with homeschooling. The flexible schedule was definitely a perk for my family. We could go to Disneyland in the middle of the year when nobody else was there! Ultimately, parents should always be in control of their child's education, but this is certainly easiest in a homeschool environment.
- *Depth and breadth in education:* One of the perks we found in homeschooling was the freedom we had to pursue depth and breadth in certain areas we thought were important that might be short-changed in a formal Christian classroom or

snuffed out altogether at the public school. Science can be studied from a biblical point of view and not through the lens of evolution. Field trips to real historical places made for a real history lesson. My son learned more about Peter the Great when he went to St. Petersburg, Russia with me than he ever learned from a textbook.

- *Homework load:* My kids were not drowning in homework into the late evenings when they were homeschooled because they were doing work for seven to eight hours during the day, in a concentrated, efficient manner. You can accomplish a lot more teaching, learning and rehearsing in a class with two or three students versus a class of twenty-five to thirty-five.
- *A family affair:* Another perk of home-schooling for us was that the whole family was involved. Mom taught some subjects; dad taught his subjects of expertise... English, P.E., politics, Bible and wrestling. We were all learning together.
- *Productivity/efficiency:* Homeschooling done right can put your student on track to get a head start, or just be ahead academically. One of our children was able to take high school classes that also gave her college units. The end result was her graduating from college in three years instead of the typical 4.5 years, the current national average. That was a savings of \$40K, based on

the annual median cost for a year of college here in America!

Public School Weaknesses

- *Secular influences:* The public school prides itself on diversity and tolerance. The more worldliness the public school tolerates, the grosser the immoralities and the less tolerance of the Bible and Christians they tend to have. The public school is becoming overtly hostile to Christians. Bibles are even being confiscated on campuses. Christian students are humiliated publicly or privately scorned. The trend toward promoting immorality is exponentially getting worse.
- *False science:* Evolution is actually a “theory” but in the public school system it is taught as a fact—and it dominates “across the curriculum.” Global warming is also taught as true science and is said to be the greatest pressing crisis of the day when in fact it is conjured-up junk science.
- *Political agendas:* The public school is controlled by ideological politicians, so in the end, the students’ best interests do not rule the day, political agendas do. Today, those political ideologies that undergird American public education include progressivism, secular humanism, socialism, Marxism, evolution, and atheism, to name a few. They are all overtly antagonistic to the Bible.

- *Anti-traditional family:* We have found that the public schools are unfriendly to the traditional family—in what it teaches, promotes and tolerates. At the public schools where our kids attended, the administrations actually told the students that the parents “did not need to be on campus.” And that is pretty much how we were treated.
- *Social engineering:* The public schools are not interested in the educational priorities of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Today, progressive, non-traditional social issues rule the day and dominate the curriculum. But this is not education—this is brainwashing.
- *Discipline:* I have a Christian buddy who is a public school teacher here in California. He has been in the role for over twenty years. He just told me of a recent regional-wide policy that prohibits the teachers from disciplining trouble-makers. In other words, no student can be expelled. The reason: if a child is expelled, then that school district’s enrollment goes down and they will then lose allocated money from the state and federal government...your tax dollars. So, school officials have decreed that no students can be expelled (it’s all about the money)—so the teachers are told they just have to keep verbally admonishing the rebel until summer rolls around. The students have caught on to the policy and as a result, the rebellious behavior has

increased exponentially since the delinquents know that the teachers have no recourse.

Private School Weaknesses

- *Inculcating a false security:* If your children have grown up in a Christian home and church and attend a Christian school, it is easy for them to associate these things with salvation. Sadly, there are a lot of unsaved kids at Christian schools. As parents, you need to watch out for false security. I even saw this among the employees of the Christian schools where I worked. Some of them did not participate or serve in their local church, while others would forego attending church altogether. This was because some of them believed all their spiritual needs were being met at school.
- *Watered-down Christianity:* It does not take much to compromise the truth of the Bible at a Christian school—just ignore some elements of the Statement of Faith, or hire some staff that are not Christians, or ignore the local churches, or ignore the pastors in the community, or tell all the students at the school that they are Christians, or fail to fire a heretical teacher out of fear of the board or some big-donor parents. These are all real issues of compromise I have witnessed first-hand in the Christian schools that I was a part of and they are all issues of integrity.

- *Lower educational standards:* “Because we are not a public school we don’t have to be credentialed or accredited by the secular organizations.” I have heard this before from private Christian schools. And as a result, sometimes they will hire people who are not qualified or people who have zero experience teaching kids. And it is always a disaster. And the ones who lose out the most are the students.
- *Juvenile ball?:* I can’t tell you how many times I have seen a Christian school enroll some rebel who just got expelled from the “tolerant” public school for dangerous or life-threatening behavior. Some Christians think that Christian schools are for reforming social rebels instead of first educating students. Standards in a school community need to be clear and enforced for the safety and success of everyone else.

Home School Weaknesses

- *Isolation:* There is a certain level of isolation that often exists in the homeschooling world that can be unhealthy, depending upon how you homeschool your kid. If your child is never getting any social interaction, that is not good. Children are social beings, and they need to get out and interact with other children. If a child doesn’t get to interface with other children or authorities while they are young, they often grow up thinking that they are the king or queen of the world. This is because the only authority figures

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they ever recognize is their mom and dad, and when they finally go out in the world they will have trouble submitting to other authorities in their life, whether it's the policeman or another adult in Sunday school or the coach or the piano teacher. Children need to learn the principle of submission to authority in every area of life. There are homeschoolers that do a great job at that, and there are others who don't even think about it.

- *Myopic tendencies:* I have also observed in my own life that with homeschooling can come the tendency to be myopic. It is easy to neglect the greater community of the church and the Christian community abroad. Because of this, the immediate family can become an idol. Again, this is not true of all homeschoolers, but it can be a vulnerability or temptation. I have heard firsthand from many former homeschoolers that growing up in that environment was a smothering experience, especially in junior high and high school. Parents, do not smother your children, for that is part of the sin of exasperation that Ephesians 6:4 and Colossians 3:17 warn against.
- *Not qualified:* My wife and I were trained as schoolteachers, at the college and graduate level. Teaching is hard work. And with my thirty-plus years of teaching and school board experience, I still know I am not qualified to teach some

subjects. That's why to this day I delegate high math and science to teacher-friends of mine who have a mastery in calculus, trigonometry, chemistry and cage-fighting. Parents need to know their limitations. Over the years as a pastor I have encountered plenty of parents, moms in particular, who have no business homeschooling. They don't have the gift or desire for teaching. And they usually have no training. Many times they are not good at organization or keeping a home in order. Or they lack efficiency. The weaknesses are many. But usually they feel compelled to homeschool because "that is what real spiritual Christians do," so they think, and so they have been told. Many times it is the dad, their husband, who is pushing the issue. If that is the case with you...then stop! Regroup, pray, get counsel...ask my opinion. Consider a homeschool co-op or a Christian school for a part-time enrollment where your child can take a class or two to give you some relief and bandwidth.

In the end, all three venues of education have strengths and weaknesses, and you as the parents have the freedom and liberty to decide what God wants you to do in your family and with each child. It is important to remember that every kid is different. I have four, and my wife and I didn't do the same thing with any of them. Their education was ongoing and dynamic and we sought God's leading from semester to semester.

Parental Priorities

I want to end this book with some parental priorities to keep in mind and some suggested parental resources.

- (1) The parents are responsible for their children first and foremost above everyone else, regardless of whether their children attend public, private, or homeschool.
- (2) The parents need to give priority to the spiritual education of their children from the time they are born. Parents must exemplify what it means to know God, love Him by modeling it in their own lives and verbalizing it to their children (Prov 22:6).
- (3) The subject of education is a grey area, so don't be overly dogmatic and divisive. And don't be mesmerized, or fall under the sway of the so-called Christian experts who are extreme and overly dogmatic on education. There are plenty of them out there.
- (4) Parents are free to use the tools of education that God provides for them. As parents, you have the freedom to seek God's wisdom and decide what is best for your family and for each child.
- (5) Every child is different—treat them accordingly. Cookie-cutter Christianity doesn't work.
- (6) Depend on God's leading and pray very specifically about your child's education.

- (7) Keep the right priorities in education.
- (8) If you are a Christian, then you are a member of the Body of Christ spiritually, and practically you need to be committed to a local church that teaches the Bible. True Christian education does not thrive outside the purview of Christ's Church.
- (9) There may be scenarios for Christian parents that do not fall into the three categories presented here—Christian, public, home-school. Maybe your child attends a secular private school. If so, the principles addressed above still apply to you and your child. Why? Because God's Word is sufficient. The same is also true if you are a parent that is unequally yoked. If you are a Christian mom with an unsaved husband, all the more you need to depend upon the church community in helping you with godly counsel, prayer and encouragement with the goal of raising your children in the faith.
- (10) A special word to parents who have adopted children: every Christian entered God's family by adoption. The Bible says, "He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself" (Eph 1:5). God is the Father of all believers. God is the best father there is. Therefore, all of God's principles given in the Bible apply to parents with adopted children because God had you parents in mind when He gave us His Word. So this book applies to you just as it does to any other parent.

What are your greatest priorities regarding the education

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of your children? Is it what prestigious university they go to? Is it that they one day have a lucrative career? Is it to elevate the status of your own image? If you do have some of these desires, lay those before God and let Him do whatever He wants with those desires (Ps 37:4). In the meantime, trust Him and maintain the right biblical priorities: pray for your children; evangelize them; pray for their salvation; ask God to use your children for His glory; model godliness to them; maintain a forgiving home; exalt Christ in your home. Seek God's glory and His righteousness, and He will take care of the rest (1 Cor 10:31).

PARENTAL RESOURCES

Today there is no shortage of parenting books written from a Christian perspective. But there are not very many quality ones that specifically discuss the education of your child. Below are some of my favorites that have helped me. They will never become irrelevant because they are rooted in biblical truth. Many parents today want the newest and latest book about children, when some of the best and most reliable have already been written...and in many cases, forgotten. Build up your personal parenting library; you will be edified and helped. Here are some of the books that have been a tremendous help to me over the years as a pastor and parent.

Introduction to Biblical Christian Education, edited by Werner C. Graendorf (Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute, 1981).

A History of Christian School Education, volumes 1 & 2, by Paul A. Kienel (Colorado Springs: ACSI, 1998 & 2005).

You and Your Child, by Charles R. Swindoll (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1977).

The Faithful Parent: A Biblical Guide to Raising a Family, by Martha Peace and Stuart Scott (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2010).

Christian Living In the Home, by Jay E. Adams (Nutley, NJ: P & R, 1972).

To Christian School Parents, by Roy W. Lowrie, Jr. (Whittier, CA: ACSI, 1982).

Shepherding a Child's Heart, by Tedd Tripp (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 1995).

Your Family God's Way, by Wayne Mack (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1991).

The Age of Opportunity, by Paul David Tripp (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2001).

What the Bible Says About Parenting, by John MacArthur (Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2000).

Brave Dad: Raising Your Kids to Love and Follow God, by John MacArthur (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2014).

The Biblical View of Self-Esteem, Self-Love & Self Image, by Jay E. Adams (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1986).

The Shaping of a Christian Family, by Elisabeth Elliot (Rebell, 2000).

Christian Education: Its History and Philosophy, by Kenneth O. Gangel & Warren S. Benson (Chicago: Moody Publishing, 1983).

Teaching to Change Lives, by Howard Hendricks (Multnomah, 1987).

Christian Education: Seeking to Become Like Jesus Christ, by Lawrence O. Richards (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988).

The Heart of Anger, by Lou Priolo (Grace and Truth Books, 2015).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rev. Cliff McManis has been in pastoral ministry since 1989. He graduated from The Master's University with a B.A. in Biblical Studies and earned an MDiv from The Master's Seminary. He went on to earn his ThM and his PhD in Ecclesiology from the Bible Seminary in Independence, Missouri. He is the author of *Christian Living Beyond Belief*, *Apologetics by the Book*, and *The Biblically Driven Church* and editor and contributing author of *Rescued by Grace*. He has served in churches in southern California, Utah, Texas, and the San Francisco Bay Area, and is an elder and teaching pastor at Creekside Bible Church in Cupertino, California. He and his family currently reside in Northern California.

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*God's Glorious Story:
The Truth of What It's All About*
Colin Eakin

*Strong and Courageous:
The Character and Calling of Mature Manhood*
Derek Brown

*The Gospel, the Church, and Homosexuality:
How the Gospel is Still the Power of God
for Redemption and Transformation*
Edited by Michael Sanelli and Derek Brown

*Skillfully Surveying the Scriptures, Vol. 1: Genesis
through Esther*
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Beware of Dogs: Exposing Error in the Modern Church
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