Organizational Original Design: Parental Responsibility for Christian Education and Faith Development in the Home

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Whether in society or in religion, the future hope lies with the next generation of children. The intentional grooming and education of the next generation is essential for the survival of traditions and culture. The most important elements of education must be passed on in order to ensure that they live beyond the current generation. While there is a general assumption that the home be the preliminary sowing ground for education, in particular Christian education, the traditional home is showing signs of fragmentation and decay. Birch (1983) said, "Industrialization, urbanization, technology, inflation, secularism, and the 'self' cult have each had their impact on the traditional home" (p. 30). Parents are relying more heavily on the public education system and the local church to educate their children rather than carrying the mantle to groom their own children. In the Church at large, rather than being the first educators of faith development in their lives of their children, parents are neglecting the responsibility of ensuring that the biblical truths and traditions are passed on the next generation. Bunge (2008) expounds on this crisis by stating, "Even young people who attend church regularly and are confessing Christians know very little about their faith traditions, and have difficulty perceiving or articulating the relation between faith and their daily lives" (p. 348) .

In order to turn the tide of this faith crisis and refortify the biblical mandate surrounding Christian education in the home, parents must take seriously the divine responsibility to educate their own children. This paper will argue that although there is a presumption that Christian education find its roots in the primary and higher education institutions, there is biblical evidence to prove that Christian education was intended first to be a primary function of parental

jurisdiction and responsibility. Biblical, historical and cultural evidence will show that Christian education was designed by God to begin first in the home with the parents as educators.

Parental Jurisdiction in Christian Education

If the biblical expectation is that Christian education is mandated to begin in the home between the parents and the children, then a definition of Christian education must first be established. It is necessary to examine the biblical mandate from the primary Parent, God the Father, to human parents in order to define the biblical definition of Christian education in its original intent. One must first determine what is the biblical expectation on the parents' performance in the home. Anthony (2006) defines Christian education as "the deliberate, systematic, and sustained divine and human effort to share or appropriate the knowledge, values, attitudes, skills, sensitivities, and behaviors that comprise or are consistent with the Christian faith" (p. 26). Christian education teaches the next generation of God's children his way of life. It is the intentional integration of God's commands, stipulations and patterns of life into the home. There is a biblical expectation to form the lives of children according to the word of God. Parents are responsible for ensuring that their children are not only familiar with these divine expectations, but that they are molded to them, as well.

Consequently, the parents are responsible for the faith development of their children. Van Niekerk and Breed (2018) said, "Faith development is an intentional process by which the faithful are guided to grow in their relationship with God and the accompanying change in lifestyle" (p. 1). Using this definition as a model for faith development, parents guide their children to grow in their relationship with the Lord and assist in molding their lifestyle to please him. The parents have to address the sin issue that is inherit in all of God's children, including their own, and teach their children to abstain from sin and please God by dedicating their lives to

spiritual formation. "Our human spirit is now dominated by these dynamics of corruption. A big part of spiritual formation is about transforming our human spirit from corruption to godliness" (Pettit, 2008, p. 56). If parents do not address the fundamental sin issue, children will yield to sin nature and begin to show signs of that strain on their lives, experiencing the side-effects of the faith crisis that is evident in this generation of children. Walton (2001) confirms this by saying, "Sin does not just impact our relationship with God; it impacts our relationship to our families and the people around us… Sinful people inevitably result in dysfunctional families and societies. The best families and best friendships are only shadows of what relationships should be in and could be but for sin" (p. 269-70). The primary responsibility of the parents as caretakers of God's children is to correct the sin nature, assisting with the shaping and molding of their child to God's standard, exposing them to his glory and his love by teaching them his ways as they have been commanded in the biblical decree found in Deuteronomy 4.

The *Shema* in Deuteronomy 4:5-9

In Deuteronomy 4:5-9, known as the *shema*, God clearly articulates his expectations of the parents in the home:

> See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today? Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes

have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your

children and to their children after them (NIV).

It is necessary to place this scripture in light of the biblical and historical context. The

people of God have finally exited the wilderness period of lives, and have entered into the

promised land. God reminds them that just as they were dependent upon him to supply for and

care for them in the wilderness, they must be as equally dependent upon him in their settlement.

God declared that the decrees and laws that he had imparted to them in their wandering will not

only safeguard their survival in this new season, but the passing of those laws to their children

will also ensure the survival of their faith, as well. Birch (1983) said:

> No longer would these people see the fire by night and the pillar of cloud by day. Instead,
>
> the people were now to have God's written Word as their guide. But how could the
>
> reality of those past experiences be passed on to the succeeding generations? God's
>
> answer was to make it the responsibility of each individual home and each parent of that
>
> home, to teach the truths of His Word to their children. Of course, parents are in the best
>
> position to train their children, both in terms of time and potential for impact. Children
>
> copy their parents (p. 31).

Children were not merely to be taught so that they could recall God's commands from

rote memory, but to understand that these commands must be written on their hearts. They were

to *love* their God who had delivered them and cared for them. "Deuteronomy 6:4-9, the *shema*,

presented both the goal and process of education. The people were called to acknowledge and

love the one true God and to teach his Word to their children in the daily activities of life"

(Anthony, 2006, p. 17). Their homes were to be the training ground for the *shema*, the place

where the children interacted with and were imprinted with God's goodness. Anthony and

Benson (2011) said, "Rabbis believed that the Hebrew home should be viewed, much like the temple, as a private sanctuary for religious observances, including the worship of God (house of prayer), the instruction in the Torah (house of study), and meeting needs found in the community (house of assembly)" (p. 26). God's original intent for Christian education in the home was centered on the relational process of parents teaching their children to fall in love with God as they had, to center their lives around him as they had, and to follow his commands as they had. Faith was intended to integrate into every element of life. It was the central focal point through which all other activities in life were to be viewed. This is how the definition of Christian education came to life in the home. From this example in the Old Testament, one can construct a picture of what the educational environment in the Christian home is intended to look like today.

The Educational Environment of the Home

The parent's primary responsibility in educating their children is forming their heart condition toward God. They are to, by the example of their own lifestyle and attitude, create an environment that in turn shapes the lifestyle and attitude of their child. Gaebelin (1976) concludes that "the [Hebrew] people were not to concern themselves only with their own attitudes towards the Lord. They were to concern themselves with impressing these attitudes on their children as well. The Israelites were to talk about God's commands always, whether at home or on the road" (p. 66). The creation of this educational environment was considered to be, as it is today, first the father's responsibility to his children. Cox (2006) said, "That is, the scriptures, both Old and New, make parents, and fathers in particular, the ultimate educational authority (cf. Deut. 6:7; Eph. 6:4). Even when the child is taught by others, the father is still responsible as suggested by Galatians 4:2" (p. 106). The parents, in particular the fathers, bare the weight of ensuring that the faith of those that come before them, and their own faith, is

intergenerationally passed on. It is a command that must be taken seriously because the command to orally pass on the faith came from God. "Perhaps the most telling passage in this regard is Ps 78, where God's interventions on Israel behalf are recounted with the exhortation for parents to recount these events to their children. Christian education has always included passing down of the history and traditions of the faith community, so our faith becomes an intergenerational affair" (Estep, et al., 2008, p. 53). Therefore, the educational environment that the parents build to ensure the passing on of the faith is very important. It is necessary to examine what the bible commands the Christian educational environment in the home looks like between a parent and child.

Education is Relationship

Education in the home is first and foremost about relationship. If parents are the key educators responsible for the education of the children, then the medium of that educational exchange is relationship. Parents have more time with their children than any other organization or activity. Hall (1981) concluded, "Parents spend more time with their children than anyone else does. Howard Hendricks quotes statistics showing that the church only has the child about one percent of the time. The school, though taking up a much larger block of time—sixteen percent—still cannot compare with the amount of time the parent has with the child. He may have as much as eighty-three percent of his child's time" (p. 48). The child's relationship with their parents is the most influential relationship they have in their formative years. Through a loving relationship with their parents, children will come to understand holiness in a loving and relational God. "The linking of love with holiness reminds us that the love of which the gospel speaks is not merely a matter of moral striving, though moral effort is indeed involved" (Gunton,

2002, p. 151). Moral striving cannot replace loving relationship, and loving relationship exemplifies holy living. It is the embodiment of the faith development process.

Education is Domestic

Education in the home is domestic in nature. This means that education must happen within the confines of a family unit or the running of a home. The home is the child's first interaction with the church, because the parents must create a home environment of worship and love. Expounding on the teachings of Horace Bushnell, Bunge (2008) said:

> Horace Bushnell, a leading Congregationalist pastor and scholar of the 19th century, also speaks of the family as a "little church." Although he sees the important role of the church in the faith development of children, he believes that the primary agent of grace is the family, not the church. "Religion never thoroughly penetrates life," he said, "until it becomes domestic" (p. 351).

Parents create an environment in their home that influences the behavior of their children outside the home. More than ever before, this contemporary society needs the next generation of the church to experience home lives that encourage them to exemplify the mission of knowing and serving God publicly before their peers. Dreher (2017) said, "Just as the monastery's life is ordered toward God, so must the family home be… If we are the abbot and abbess of our domestic monastery, we will see to it that our family's life is structured in such a way as to make the mission knowing and serving God clear to all its members" (p .124-25).

Education is Discipline

Education in the home must contain discipline. Discipline is a crucial component in personal development, but also in a loving relationship. In Revelations 3:19, God proclaims that "those whom I love, I rebuke and discipline" (NIV). Training up a child correctly is dependent

upon discipline. The word "discipline" in its earliest use meant "instruction imparted to disciples or scholars; teaching; learning; education..." (Hall, 1981, p. 51). To discipline a child is to educate the child. Parents who are too lax in this area of their home life experience rebellion, anger and wayward behavior. Parents who neglect discipline risk spoiling the child, a crime the bible holds them culpable for before God. Hebrews 12:7-8 states, "Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined--and everyone undergoes discipline--then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all" (NIV). Parents need to not only demonstrate discipline, but to teach discipline, as well – the spiritual disciplines. These are the faith practices that shape a Christian life. These spiritual disciplines include "Bible intake, prayer, worship, evangelism, service, stewardship, fasting, silence and solitude, journaling, and learning" (Whitney, 2014, p. 7). Spiritual disciplines comprise the curriculum of Christian education. The boundaries parents set for their children do not only direct the future of the child, they also teach the child the benefits of living a life with limitations, limitations that help and do not hinder. A home that creates an educational environment that is guided by love, is centered on worship and creates healthy boundaries is a home raising children with the tools necessary to impact culture for Christ.

<div align="center">**Contemporary Significance in Culture**</div>

The home that creates an educational environment of faith is one that has the capacity to impact culture. Revisiting, the *shema* in Deut. 4, cultural influence is a clear expectation of faith development: "Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people'" (NIV). The original intent of the Christian home was that it would stand as a witness and a testimony to the nations. This means that parents must raise children to be

influencers of culture, not to be influenced by culture. The Christian home is the catalyst for transforming culture. Parents transfer God's truths to their children, and then send them out into society as conduits of change. The educational environment of the home is the incubator that serves to develop and release the next generation of God's children who are equipped to do his work and build his kingdom.

Influence Change in Culture

Christian education is founded on the paradigm that the knowledge of Christ as savior transforms – not merely the exchange of knowledge or the practice of learning, but by the *assimilation* of that knowledge. The knowledge of Christ transforms the believer and transformation creates waves of influence in culture. As Carson (2008) said, "Christ is the transformer of culture…in the sense that he redirects, reinvigorates, and regenerates that life of man…" (p. 27). Children who are raised in an educational environment of faith in the home become carriers of this transformation. It is the manifestation of John 1:4-5 which says: "In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (NIV). When a life is transformed, it is infused with the light and the life of Christ, and that light pushes back the darkness that resides in secular culture. Children who carry the truth of God's word in them have the capacity to push back darkness.

Model the Way

Parents who model the way for their children in turn teach their children how to be models themselves. Boa (2001) states, "We are living models for children. what we are communicates far more than what we say – spirituality is more caught than taught… Modeling is the most effective method of teaching" (p. 234). Parents must teach their children with the intent of leaving a legacy behind – the legacy of faith. "The worst possible heritage to leave with

children is: spiritual pretensions and low performance. My parents were the opposite: few pretensions, and disciplined performance. I wonder if, should the Lord give us another 30 years, [my children] will remember their father is a man of prayer… This quiet reflection often helps me to order my days" (Carson, 2014, p. 8). Parents must model their love for and their faith in God before their children to such a degree that it influences their children to do the same with their children. Parents are raising intergenerational people of influence.

Move to Maturity

Ultimately, parents who create Christian educational environments in the home are producing children not only of quality, but of maturity. "Healthy families are made up of individuals who have discovered their identity and purpose in Christ, are growing to their maximum potential in Him, and are sowing seeds that benefit others" (Pipes & Lee, 1999, p. 14). Parents who teach their children to find their significance and their purpose in Christ produce mature believers who are in turn able to have mature relationships with others. "Relationships through family, friendship, and marriage now find their significance for the Christian in and through Christ… It is faithfulness to Jesus that defines the value of life for everyone who is 'in Christ'. All other relationships derive their significance in and through the Christian's relationship with Christ" (French, 2013, p. 90). Their ultimate mission is to move their children from being dependents of their parents to being dependents of God, able to thrive in their own relationship with God, and able to stand against the temptations of culture.

<div align="center">**Conclusion**</div>

Biblical and historical evidence in the Hebrew culture suggests that Christian education was designed by God to begin first in the home with the parents as educators. It is the original organizational design for Christian education. Christian education was intended to be first a

primary function of parental jurisdiction and responsibility. This kind of education is essential for faith development. Parents have a divinely appointed role in raising the next generation of God's kingdom. They carry the weight and the responsibility of ensuring that the Christian faith survives and is passed on to those who are not only the future, but to those that are the most prepared to engage and influence their culture. While churches and schools are certainly an influential part of educating children, parents have more opportunity to groom their children and to guide their faith development from a young age. "There is a great need for parents, church workers and school teachers to gain greater insight into the interdependent nature of their educative functions and to develop effective channels of appreciation and communication… The home, church, and school are working with the most valuable objects on earth, God's children" (Knight, 2006, p. 204). Parents should partner together with churches and schools, but it is essential that they take seriously that they are the primary influencers in the lives of their children. After all, they are tasked with molding the most valuable objects on earth for God, for his glory and for his kingdom – the next generation.

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