

Thinking Through Public School: 7 Questions for Christian Parents

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Week in and week out I talk to Christian parents who have chosen to send their children to public school. These are good people. Many have given the matter a lot of consideration and really tried to seek God's Word. I have no intention of villainizing these parents. They truly believe that God has given them the responsibility over their children's education, and they have chosen to delegate the academic portion of that responsibility. They stay involved in what's going on in their children's classroom and textbooks and school district and work hard to give their children a firm foundation in the Scriptures.

Now, I will also say that for every Christian family that stays deeply involved, there's at least one family that doesn't. Let's not kid ourselves. But I'm not really talking to those parents—the ones who don't look at their children's textbooks or get to know their children's teachers or go to school board meetings to stay apprised on the direction of the school or discuss the contents of the day's lessons with their children to make sure they correct false worldviews.

I'm talking to the parents who take their children's education seriously. They want their children to grow strong in the faith by countering other worldviews and resisting the temptations of the world. They want their children to face these issues while still at home so that the parents can guide them and train them in how to respond. They want their children to be lights for Christ. To these good parents I would simply like to offer some food for thought.

Are Academic Subjects Neutral?

I hear a lot of parents talk about how they can counter the problems of public school with their children by grounding their children in things like Creationism, biblical sexuality, conservative history and politics, and the evils of sin (drugs and fornication often come up here). However, on the whole, parents have no issue with handing their children over to be taught academic subjects by an unbeliever. After all, facts are just facts. I'd like to offer a few considerations here.

First, it's no longer necessarily true that facts are facts. Not every teacher and not in every school, but as a top-down institution, government education really does have an anti-God agenda, and this has gotten *exponentially* worse in the last decade and especially the last few years. Public school curricula no longer follows even the problematic postmodern agenda that says the truth is "whatever you want." The program moving forward is that accepted "truth" is the *opposite* of God's Word, and believe it or be Canceled. Again, I'm not indicting every school district and certainly not every teacher, but that is the direction the government education system is headed, and that's being played out in larger cities already.

Second, are facts just facts? In light of biblical truth, even facts are not neutral. Someone chooses which facts are presented. Someone presents those facts a certain way. Someone grades the learned facts and says whether those facts are accepted truth. (And someone picked the correct answers.)

Furthermore, academics are more than just facts because education is not mere information accumulation. Through each academic discipline, children should be learning how to love God and their neighbor—how to be like Christ in thought, word, and deed. Each book read

should teach the child about the human condition, each history lesson about the human plight and Sovereign hope of living in a Psalm 2 world, each science lesson about the endless wonder of creation. Can an unbeliever really teach these things?

Shouldn't Our Children Be Salt and Light?

First, is your child a Christian? I've heard so many people give this argument when their children have either, one, never made a profession of faith or, two, don't show any evidence of fruit of the Spirit to indicate that the childhood profession is genuine. A child who is not a Christian *cannot* be salt and light.

Second, Christ is talking to his disciples here, those grown men who had spent so much time under his teaching. He is not talking to the multitudes and the children in Matthew 5. These are spiritually-mature grown-ups. If a mature Christian adult feels called to be a public school teacher as a mission field, wonderful! "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account." That is not where we send our immature baby Christian children any more than we send them alone into any other kind of persecution.

Parents are commanded to train up their children into discipleship, to point their children to Christ. These discipleship years are a precious gift from God to ground our children in the gospel so that they *can* grow up to be salt and light in a dark world. Can children be a witness for Christ? Of course. But the Scriptures never send children into a battlefield. *We*, parents, are the missionaries; *our children are our mission field*. Let's not get mixed up about who's supposed to be doing what.

Third, notice that Christ says that salt can lose its saltiness and become good for nothing—an ineffective witness. Have you ever asked yourself how salt loses its saltiness? Salt loses its saltiness by absorbing impurities or being over immersed in humidity so as to evaporate. Public school is a prime environment for absorbing impurities and being over-immersed in the humid culture of the world, and "unseasoned" (immature) children are particularly susceptible to those impurities and that immersion.

Shouldn't We Want to Train Our Children to Face the Real World?

Maybe you feel like Christian school or homeschool is a bubble of un-reality. But so is public school. The real world isn't anything like public school. Where in the real world are people congregated in groups of people only their own age? Where in the real world will they face such an over-balance of peer-related temptations? Surely they will face temptations as adults. But generally those temptations will not be so concentrated, and, more to the point, adults have the maturity to handle them. We can train our children in the issues of the real, sinful world without sending them into it.

Is God with our children, if they're Christians, to help them face temptation? Of course. But in sending our children to public school, we must know that we're casting them into a myriad of temptations that they could be shielded from in their immaturity and some that they very likely wouldn't ever have to face otherwise.

Public school is an intensified battlefield, not the real world. If Christian school or homeschool is a bubble of protection and immersion in Christian values, public school is a bubble of immersion in secular values and intensified temptations.

If your child is attending public school, you may be actively teaching your child to swim against the culture, but realize that you've put him not into the lap pool but into the ocean with a strong riptide. A thousand arms of current are trying to pull him under. (Or, how many unbelieving students are in your child's school? How many unbelieving teachers? That many people are potentially trying to pull your child under.) That doesn't mean I'm saying that all those teachers or students are as bad as they could be. But see my point below. At the end of the day, all unbelievers hate God in their hearts and have rejected the Truth.

Haven't Christians Been Sending Their Children to Public Schools for Hundreds or Thousands of Years?

Well, first of all, this isn't really a biblical reason to make a decision. But to answer that question: Not really, no. In general, Christians have always been educated by Christians until the 1800s—whether that be parents, private tutors, pastors, or church members. If by public school you mean the schools of the Massachusetts Bay Colony of the 1600s, for example, those were public schools only in that they were education for all. Massachusetts Bay Colony was a theocracy, so the government was run by the churches and so were the schools. This was true all over Europe (until the 1800s), where education was run by churches and teachers were heavily vetted for their firmness in the faith.

Public education as we know it in America didn't exist until the 1870s, when Horace Mann, “Father of the American Public School System” and a US Congressman, led the United States into a system of free government-led education. The difference between his public schools and that of the Puritans, for instance, cannot be overstated. One of his primary goals in creating government “common” (public) schools was to eradicate Calvinism (and Catholicism) from the growing American populace. Mann, who had rejected his Calvinist upbringing, believed that education could save American democracy—but only if doctrine was removed from the academic subjects. He wanted Americans to hold everything in common, and the government got to decide what those common elements were.

We see this philosophy today in the extreme, when the government is even further from a Judeo-Christian worldview and “common” elements include children being taught a “common” view of LGBTQ ideology, “common” CRT ideology, etc. This situation is not improving. “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil.”

Anyway, does anyone *really* believe that public school is the same as it was 150 years ago? 50 years ago? 5 years ago even??

What Is an Unbeliever?

Even the most kind-hearted unbelieving teacher, *even one who is politically conservative*, has rejected the authority of God, has turned his or her back on the Sovereign Ruler of the universe and his Divine Plan for human history. Can that person disciple your child toward Christlikeness, i.e. educate?

Who and What Educates at School?

Is it just the textbooks and the teachers' lecture material? No. The common practices (liturgies) of the students and the school, the character of companions, the talk in the hallways and lunchroom (school culture), the example of the teachers, and other implicit education happens every single day. While certainly parents can prepare their children for these things and shore up their children's faith, children *will* be educated by the "hidden curriculum," even without their knowledge or explicit participation. A child would have to be hyper-vigilant to be aware of this enough to combat it, and I contend that especially young children will almost certainly not be aware enough or strong enough to avoid being educated by the hidden curriculum.

Does Government Have the Authority to Educate?

We have been conditioned for approximately 100 years that professionally trained teachers are better equipped to educate children. The idea that teachers needed specialized training resulted primarily from the new field of child psychology in the early 1900s, which itself is a result of evolutionary science. Many parents simply assume that government-certified teachers know best.

But besides the fact that government teacher certification is wholly unnecessary as a qualification, does the government have the authority to teach teachers or offer a program of education to children? The biblical answer is no. Governments are not given the authority by God to have any part in education. Parents are given the authority (and primary responsibility) by God to educate, churches are given the authority to educate, fellow believers are given the authority to educate (older women, older men, etc.)—but not governments. God has given governments only two responsibilities: To protect the innocent and reward the good. By involving themselves in education, governments are overstepping their God-given authority. We must then ask ourselves, can we legitimately delegate our children's education to an institution that does not have God's permission to undertake the task?

Is God greater than the public school system? Indeed he is. But that doesn't mean that it's his moral will that children be disciplined for any part of their education by governments and unbelievers. The discipleship of our children isn't a secondary issue. It's a sanctification issue. Our children deserve that we think through these things.

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