

Education for the Kingdom of God
“Facing Sin in Education”
For the August 2002 Chalcedon Report

Ronald Kirk
Created April 5, 2002
Modified March 2, 2012

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To neglect inherent sin in our own children is to fly in the face of Christ’s sacrifice with respect to those dearest to us, with perhaps dire consequences. On the other hand, careful training and correction constitute education and will help prepare the child to walk with Christ for a life of service and positive influence for the Kingdom of God.

The ravage of sin among men ought to put Christian parents on high alert. Because of a natural predisposition toward it, sin spreads like wild fire. To save mankind from the fatal influence of the sin of the time, God, in the Great Flood, destroyed a population conservatively estimated at over a billion.¹ From the ancient Roman practice of crucifixion, to the medieval torture chambers, to the mass murder perpetrated by twentieth century communist regimes, grotesque evil arising from sin is quite the natural and historic norm. Parents ought to remember that those capable of such horrendous acts were all once babies.

On the other hand, the profoundly Biblical faith of the Reformation and early America inhibited the growth and spread of evil. Christian influence, beginning with child training, produced a norm of goodness and liberty. However, evil has once more become rampant. This should not be surprising when the Biblical doctrine of sin scarcely gets airtime even among Christians. Today, with Christ, now reigning by the Holy Spirit from the right hand of the Father (Psalm 110) and giving power to his saints to do good (2 Corinthians 12:9; Ephesians 1:19; 2:10), slothful complacency regarding sin has no excuse.

Christ’s Parable of the Sower declares that evangelism consists in *two* parts. In this parable, the Seed is the Word of God proclaimed. The Seed produces its effect in good soil. However, no good soil occurs in nature because it is cursed. Just so, no goodness naturally occurs in the heart of man. Sin hardens the heart and chokes the Gospel message. According to God’s providence, good soil results from toil both in nature and in the human heart. Toil is an act of faith. God Himself then effectually brings the crop or the saved soul to fruition. Such sacrificial work is the Christian’s reasonable service for the gift of grace. However, due to historical pietism, for two hundred years the church has concentrated almost solely upon a verbal evangelism.

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Biblically and evangelically minded Christians ought once more to confront sin through godly influence. In this work, there is no more important frontier for the Gospel than our own homes. Effectual evangelization of our children must include effacing the effects of sin through the educational process. Such training will not only prepare families for salvation, but will prepare the children to take their godly influence to a society in desperate need, contributing to the Gospel preparation of others. Successfully rearing one child for Christ can produce a multiplicative effect toward the salvation of many. Therefore, as an essential part of educational, let us face the sin of our children.

Here is the essential psychology and educational premise of the Scriptures: While created in God’s image, the child is fallen into sin. Although he possesses an inherent value, independent of his achievement or contribution, he is lazy and recalcitrant against God’s requirement to take dominion over the earth. In God’s likeness, he possesses great potential. Yet the child requires correction and redemption. Children are sons of Adam and possess the same deeply rebellious nature. The natural child, a slave to sin, races headlong toward death. Sin scrambles the child’s very faculties. Parents will either prepare the soil of the heart and mind of the pliable young child to receive God’s grace or condemn him to the school of hard knocks in the world of sin, presuming upon God to chasten the child through the harsh experiences of life “on the streets.” Though there is no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus, correction is a way of life, and we parents must rise to the call.

The message of Ephesians 4:20-29 declares that Christians need discipline, that is, directed practice. Passages such as Galatians 3:24-4:3 and Proverbs 22:6 indicate the child needs *training*. Consistent practice forms habits of conduct for good or evil. Like a slave, the child must be told what to do and how, and be directed into proper *practice*. Otherwise, he will slavishly obey the flesh and not what is right. Dr. Rushdoony says, “We are not permitted to call our stubbornness and rebellion anything but sin.”² Rather, the child, trained to cast off sin and to embrace Christ, like the shedding of a caterpillar’s chrysalis, grows to become a beautiful butterfly able to carry grace in a worthy manner.

“Minor” Manifestations of a Rebel Heart

Children are capable of great and godly appreciation of spiritual things, but not if the flesh is in control. Therefore, parents must minutely correct, not out of irritation or other selfish reason, but because parenting is a holy trust with eternal consequences before God. Every time a child smirks, he shows his contempt of authority and love. Every time he avoids a parent’s gaze, every time he speaks or acts

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rudely, he expresses the sin of Adam, which, if it hardens becomes ever more difficult to correct. The loving parent will address the heart of the child through requiring confession and, according to the child's ability, explaining the Biblical reasons for correction. It is a good idea to teach the child to thank the parent (or teacher) for correction. Such a practice will prepare a habit of gratitude to Christ for His correcting work. Children who laugh or cry uncontrollably are bound by foolishness (Proverbs 22:15) and must be corrected for God's glory and their good. Habitual frenzy is an evil to the child, which may easily harden into habit and perhaps lead to worse behavioral problems such as ADHD or bipolar disorder. Likewise, teachers who allow sloppy learning habits encourage hardening into permanent character the natural short-circuiting of the human faculties under the curse of the Fall. The child who must appear perfect or otherwise refuses to attempt to learn must be corrected. Perfectionism in the child is sin, disallowing the correction and growth which amounts to true education. Children of Christian parents often learn to *look* righteous, but find sneaky ways to exert independence and autonomy. Eye rolling indicates an attitude of the heart toward rightful authority—ultimately God's authority. Small signs reveal the heart of the child. Children must learn to respect parental authority so that they will respect God's authority. Parents must correct even innocent appearing actions, if, as conduct habituates, something less than godly love is the result. What a child lives and practices becomes his character. Parents who refuse to correct their children lovingly and minutely destine them to sinful habits and dispositions.

Sin resists the investment of training because these constitute *work*. Children are naturally lazy. Aren't we all? Life by faith under the Curse requires that children must accept the economy of difficulty, so they may work by faith and have their faith imputed as righteousness. Child-centered educational views which allow the child to determine the magnitude and direction of his educational effort encourage the child in his natural disposition to laziness.

Men, including very young ones, naturally and sinfully hold women in contempt. In the manner of the Fall, men blame women (Genesis 3:12). Throughout history, men have therefore naturally subjugated and humiliated women. In answer to this disposition, the father must require the son to give respect and to obey his mother. The child must accept the teaching and correction of the mother as well as the father. If he shows disrespect, he will answer to dad. Single mothers suffer a pointed disadvantage in this regard. To compensate, single mothers should muster a suitable toughness. (The men of the church

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community can help in this regard.) The young man quickly assumes a self-appointed leadership role in the home, but without firm training, does so upon a sinful basis. Adolescent young men believe in their autonomy even against the authority of an involved father. It is part of growing up. God made men to go head on with the world—to take leadership and dominion. Consequently He made men tough minded—masculine. However, natural sin inclines the young man’s hard-headedness toward destruction. Therefore, parents must correct children who exhibit fawning, slavish compliance, while harboring an attitude of rebellion. Parents and teachers must be tough and determined enough consistently to correct bad conduct, so that tough-mindedness finally resides in God’s righteousness, initially trained, and subsequently fulfilled by grace.

It is never too early to start training a child. When parents say, “Don’t touch that hot stove!” what does the toddler do but touch the stove? A baby will seek to *liberate* himself against the embrace of his mother, though a fall means injury or worse. The same baby will roll himself out of his mother’s hands and off his changing table. We must take sin seriously. Parents must resist and correct manifest sin particularly in young children. The remediation of sin will be much less painful than if we allow the weeds and the woods of the radical sin nature to establish and prosper. Young California coast live oak trees are naturally gawky and awkward in form. If left to a natural growth, the young tree remains ungainly for a long time. To correct the form of a mature tree requires a chain saw. It is sweaty work and leaves scars. It is far easier to pinch wayward branches from the seedling and train the form from the start.

Love rules with godly mercy. A practice designed to efface the effect of natural sin does *not* recommend harshness and severity. An arbitrary standard of accomplishment rather than a standard of progress and growth frustrate the child and give him an excuse to rebel. If the child cannot please his parents, why try? If discipline never yields liberty, why cooperate? Children are young moral individuals, in need of guidance toward ultimate independence of parents and dictators. Parents must accept their children and grant them affection unconditionally. Christian liberty is the goal. Indeed, the more the child requires discipline, the more unconditional affection we owe. Consider Jesus’ disposition of patience and mercy toward us in this regard.

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Parents and teachers who simultaneously correct the sinful and direct the educational process toward the attitudes, character, wisdom and skills to support a Gospel life will go far to hasten the day, to see His will done on earth as it is in heaven.

¹ John C. Whitcomb and Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and Its Scientific Implications* (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co.: 1961), p. 26.

² Rousas J. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1973), p. 69.