

## **Great Commission Leadership Institute - Fall 2008**

### **PARENT-LED EDUCATION**

*John Hopler*

### **Why this paper?**

As followers of Jesus Christ, our mission is to fulfill His Great Commission:

*“All authority in heaven and earth has been given to Me. Go therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Matt 28: 18-20*

We are called to make disciples who believe and love Jesus Christ, to baptize them, and to teach them obey His commands from the heart. For most people, their first disciples are their own children. Parents (and fathers in particular) are exhorted to *“bring their children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord”* (Ephesians 6:4). Therefore, parents are to fulfill the Great Commission first by training the children in their own families.

A major part of training children involves their education. The educational method chosen by parents will have a life-long impact on their son or daughter.

For this reason, I thought it would be good to write this paper to pastors and leaders in Great Commission Churches. In this paper I make five statements about education. The first two statements are two key principles to live by. The last three are practices that I ask pastors and leaders to consider.

I ask that each pastor and leader in Great Commission Churches prayerfully consider these statements as he develops his own convictions before the Lord and forms his own practices on the matter of education.

### **Principle #1: THE PRIORITY OF GODLY PARENTING**

*The most important factor in training a child is the personal engagement of godly parents (particularly the father) in the life of the child. Although the schooling option parents choose can either greatly enable or hinder the effectiveness of their parenting, the parents’ faith, love, example, relationship and teaching of the child has more impact than the educational option chosen.*

The overall goal of educating our children is that a child be brought up to

glorify God, to learn, believe and obey the Scriptures, to become a mature follower of Jesus Christ, equipped and skilled to live a productive life in this world, devoted to fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus Christ.

In Ephesians 6, the Apostle Paul writes:

*“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. (v.1) Honor your father and your mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), (v.2) so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth. (v.3) Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (v.4).”*

Based on this passage, I believe, first and foremost, the best results occur where children have a close heart relationship with parents who are themselves Great Commission Christians. Children who love and respect their parents, combined with parents who are relationally imparting a love for Christ and the Great Commission—that is a winning combination, regardless of the educational method chosen.

## **Principle #2: THE IMPORTANCE OF PARENT- LED EDUCATION**

*Education must be parent-led. Regardless of the educational option chosen, it is important that parents not abdicate their role in being the God-designated leaders to educate their children.*

A child’s spiritual development is God’s work, through the power of His word and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. It is a work of God, not man. However, God works through human beings to train children.

From Ephesians 6:4 quoted above, parents (and especially fathers) are the primary human beings God has entrusted with the responsibility to develop and train the child to love Jesus Christ and to do His will. God also uses family, the church, and the unbelieving world to train each child. But God has entrusted parents alone—not the church or the government—with the *ultimate* responsibility to train and educate children.

Parents are responsible to train their children in the ways of Christ—and to select an educational option towards that end. Regardless of the educational option chosen, parents are never to abdicate to another person or institution their ultimate responsibility of training and educating their child for Christ. Teachers in a Christian or public school need to be seen as servants to the parents, who have the ultimate responsibility for training their children.

In light of this responsibility, I advocate “parent-led” education. Parents are to take the lead in educating their children, whether those children are

educated at home exclusively, or they put them into a public or Christian school.

## **Practice #1: PASTORS SUPPORTING PARENTS IN THEIR EDUCATIONAL CHOICES**

*I believe that elders should be actively pastoring the church by supporting, counseling and equipping all parents as they make educational choices for their children.*

In 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 5:1-3, elders are exhorted to shepherd the flock:

*“Therefore, 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, shepherd 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; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.”*

How can pastors shepherd parents as they seek to educate their children? In general, I recommend that pastors in Great Commission churches actively support parent-led education. And I urge pastors to provide both personal and ministry support to all parents in this very personal choice of their child’s education.

The educational option chosen by parents is not the most important issue in their lives. The gospel, Christ’s Lordship, and reading and obeying the Scriptures are more important topics for most parents in the church. However, educational options are important to address.

As pastors, we need to begin by publicly teaching the Biblical perspective found in Ephesians 6:4 that parents (and especially fathers) need to lead—and to lead strongly. Second, I urge pastors to provide information on the various options of education, either on Sunday morning or in a special seminar. Many parents, in effect, make no decision as to their child’s education, by simply doing what the “crowd” does. That “crowd” may be the people in the church or the people in the community. But parents are to diligently consider every option before making a decision. Third, I recommend that pastors give one on one counseling to parents who are making educational choices, asking the question: *“Is this educational option yielding the spiritual, character, and academic results you want for your child?”*

Finally, I urge pastors to consider taking steps to provide specific ministries to support parents in their educational choices. For parents of public school students, pastors might consider:

1. Starting a Moms In Touch ministry in the church.
2. Doing an evangelistic outreach to the schools to support children from the church who want to reach their classmates.
3. Urging church members to participate in school functions (sports, e.g.).
4. Mobilizing members for servant evangelism projects in the school.

For parents of students in a Christian school, pastors might consider:

1. Establishing a partnership, promoting the school.
2. Teaching classes at the school.
3. Giving financial assistance to needy Christian school parents.
4. Offering the school to use the church building.

For parents who home educate their children, see Practice #3 below.

Overall, I urge pastors to shepherd their church by giving counsel, grace and support to parents as they lead out in educating their children, in whatever option they choose.

## **Practice #2: THE HOME SCHOOL OPTION**

*As to parents who are committed to Christ-centered parent-led education; who are willing and able to do any option; and who seek my counsel as a pastor on what educational option to use, I usually encourage them to consider home schooling their children, particularly during the early school years.*

I believe that God has sovereignly entrusted parents with the education of their children. Therefore, my practice is to support parents in whatever option they choose. That being understood, in the case of those parents who are willing to do whatever it takes to train their children for Christ, I generally encourage them to home school their children, particularly if their children are younger.

I see three main benefits to home schooling:

1. Opportunity for godly training Home schooling gives parents flexibility as to what is taught, spiritually and academically. In particular, home education is an option where parents can exalt Jesus Christ and teach the Bible 24/7 without hindrance. As stated in Deuteronomy 6:6,7, immersing children in the Bible is a parent's first priority:

*“These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and you shall talk of them when you sit down and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.”*

In a home schooling environment, there is an opportunity to train a child in godly character during the 6-7 hours of the school day. Parents are able to set the agenda—particularly, the agenda of Christ’s word—in the entire education process.

2. *Parental protection from ungodly influences.* Parents are to train their children to resist the influences of the world, first, and then to influence the world for Christ. Home education protects naïve children from the negative effects of the unbelieving world: “*The companion of fools suffers harm*” (Proverbs 13:20). This is particularly important when they are younger and are the most easily influenced.

3. *Building the relationship between parents and children.* Based on Ephesians 6:1-4, the most important human relationship a child has is with his or her parents. The home schooling option enables that relationship to develop and grow more intimate as parents imprint their values on the life of the child.

I recognize that home schooling is not the best option for everyone. I do not think home schooling parents are “better” than those who do not home school. And I realize that there are many real-life factors that hinder godly parents from effectively home schooling their children. Nonetheless, the benefits of home schooling are so significant that I think it is an option worth considering by parents who aspire to train their children to follow Christ.

Therefore, for Christian parents who ask my counsel as a pastor, my practice is to encourage them to prayerfully consider home schooling their children, particularly during the early school years.

### **Practice #3: A CHURCH STRATEGY FOR THE FUTURE**

*As we look to lead churches into the future, I think it is a good strategy and practice for Great Commission church pastors to build a culture, structure, and systems that supports home schooling.*

As pastors we counsel people—and we also provide leadership by anticipating needs and preparing to meet those needs. Practice #3 is not about counseling people. It’s about pastors taking leadership for the future by building churches that enable parents to effectively disciple their children.

I have concerns about the U.S. educational system as it stands today. And I have concerns about where it is headed in the future.

We all realize that public schools vary from city to city. For example, some Great Commission church families in the Bible Belt have had different

experiences than those in communities where the Christian influence is weak. Also, in some public schools, Christian teachers have had a powerful ministry, reaching lost students for Christ and building up students from Christian homes.

Nonetheless, we all recognize that public schools do not teach a Christian world view. My opinion is that too many Christian children have been negatively influenced in the government school system. In my dialogue with Great Commission pastors, a large number of them have said that they were naive as to the negative effect that public schools had on their children and on the children of church members. Although it is true that some Christian parents have seen their child's faith strengthened through being tested in the public school setting, many others have regretted putting their children in a public school.

In addition, in many parts of the country, schools are becoming increasingly antagonistic to Christians. Therefore, some leaders are sounding the alarm and warning Christians to take heed. (See Attachment #1.) They see the Christian student in the public schools as the proverbial "frog in the kettle."

My personal opinion is that these warnings have merit. In light of this, how do we as pastors of Great Commission churches prepare for the future?

Some (like the Southern Baptists) would say, "Start more Christian schools." Although I see many positives about this approach, I question the economic feasibility of Christian schools for the future. Most Christian parents are unable to afford a Christian school—and most Great Commission churches do not have the financial resources to underwrite a Christian school.

Instead, I recommend that Great Commission churches build a strong culture, structure, and systems that helps parents home school their children.

Many parents would like to home school their children, but do not have the confidence that they can do so. They need support and help. Therefore, I encourage pastors to take two approaches. First, as I stated in Practice #1, I encourage them to support all parents, regardless of their educational option. Second, I recommend that we make a special effort to build in our churches support structures that will strengthen home schoolers. We can do this by:

1. Developing home school support groups
2. Communicating with young parents, young couples and singles about the advantages of home schooling, as well as factors to consider before home schooling your children. (See Attachment #2)
3. Orienting home school parents on how to supplement their teaching with classes at a home school co-op, local college or Christian or public school.
4. Developing a church-based home-school co-op with group classes.
5. Promoting examples of successful home schooling parents as mentors.
6. Helping parents work through some of the obstacles of home schooling

7. Asking empty nesters who home-schooled their children or who taught in public or Christian schools to have a ministry of tutoring the children of parents who both need to work in order to survive financially.

8. Provide whatever is needed to help people home school their children.

Again, this is my personal opinion. As leaders in Great Commission churches who are committed to building passionate disciples for Christ, I think we need to support all parents in their educational choices, while also building a culture, structure and system that supports home schoolers. I believe that this practice and strategy will yield the most fruit in our churches in years to come.

## **Conclusion**

God has entrusted parents with a great responsibility to train their children to love and obey Jesus Christ. A child's education is a key aspect of that training. As pastors, God wants us to support all parents, whether they home school, or send their children to a Christian school or public school.

In Great Commission churches, home schooling has been a common method used by church members for over 30 years. In a recent survey, it was discovered that 90% of Great Commission church pastors have used the home education option, at least during the early years of their child's schooling. I believe that home schooling has been a gift from God to our movement. We have seen marvelous fruit from this educational approach. Although it is not a fool-proof method and there are many sacrifices involved in home schooling, the benefits of this option make it worth considering by parents in Great Commission churches, particularly for younger children. And I think it is a good leadership strategy for Great Commission church pastors to take practical steps to provide special support to home schooling parents.

That being said, it is vital that pastors put the *primary* emphasis, not on educational methods, but on the simple Biblical value of parents actively leading their children. For this reason, I want to make it clear that I consider the first two points to be the most important statements of this paper. Therefore, it is fitting that I conclude this paper with a re-stating of those two principles:

1. *The most important factor in training a child is the personal engagement of godly parents (particularly the father) in the life of the child. Although the schooling option parents choose can either greatly enable or hinder the effectiveness of their parenting, the parents' faith, love, example, relationship and teaching of the child has more impact than the educational option chosen.*
2. *Education must be parent-led. Regardless of the educational option chosen, it is important that parents not abdicate their role in being the God-designated leaders to educate their children.*

## **Christian Leaders' Concerns with Public Schools**

More and more Christian leaders are expressing concerns about the public school system. Here are some examples:

1. James Dobson has advocated that Christians remove their children from the public schools in certain states—those which advocate a pro-homosexual agenda. (<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2002/julyweb-only/22.0a.html>)

2. Over the last few years some segments of the Southern Baptists have asked for the Convention to pass a resolution calling for parents in their churches to educate their children at home or send them to a Christian school. So far, the Convention has not passed this resolution. However, one leading Southern Baptist, Albert Mohler, has written "*I believe that now is the time for responsible Southern Baptists to develop an exit strategy from the public schools.*" [http://www.albertmohler.com/commentary\\_read.php?cdate=2005-06-17](http://www.albertmohler.com/commentary_read.php?cdate=2005-06-17))

3. In 2002, the Southern Baptist Convention's Council on Family Life reported that roughly 88 percent of evangelical children are leaving the church shortly after they graduate from high school. This means that only 12% will continue in the church after high school. <http://www.sbcannualmeeting.net/sbc02/newsroom/newspage.asp?ID=261>

*In contrast*, The National Home Education Research Institute claims from their findings that after high school 94% of Christian children educated at home keep the faith and 93% of home educated children continue to attend church. (<http://www.exploringhomeschooling.com>.)

Although ones might dispute the exactness of these two statistics (12% of all students from Christian homes versus 93% of home schoolers) the wide gap between these two statistics is difficult to dismiss. Some have also argued that the home schooling statistics simply indicate that children will continue in the faith if their parents are actively imparting their values in a relational setting. Others have countered by saying that home schooling is the most effective and practical way for serious minded parents to impart their values to their children.

## Attachment #2

### HOME SCHOOLING: ADVANTAGES AND FACTORS TO CONSIDER

*By John Hopler*

#### ADVANTAGES OF HOME SCHOOLING

1. Parents have freedom to teach the word of God unhindered (Deut. 6:6,7)
2. Parents can filter the negative influences and false teachings of the world. (Prov. 13:20)
3. The bond between parent and child is strengthened. (Eph. 6:1-4)
4. The physical safety of the child can be overseen throughout the day.
5. Parents can tailor the academics to the need of the child. (Eph. 4:29)
6. Parents can focus on the character of the child more diligently. (Prov.22:6)
7. The child's schooling is not interrupted by a parent's job change or move.
8. A child's schooling can be supplemented by group classes at a home school co-op, college, or Christian or public school.
9. Society is more accepting of home schooling. It is legal in the U.S. And colleges accept home schooling as a legitimate form of education.
10. Home schooling provides maximum flexibility. After each annual evaluation, parents always have the option of enrolling a child in a school.

#### FACTORS TO CONSIDER BEFORE HOME SCHOOLING

1. Are you convinced that training a child to believe and obey the Scriptures is more important than academic training?
2. For married couples, do both parents agree that home schooling is the best option for your child?
3. Are you prepared to prioritize and work through character issues with your child—especially the child's teachability and respect for you as a parent?
4. Will you make the financial sacrifices needed in order to home school?
5. Are you ready to give the needed structure and discipline to train your child in qualities such as punctuality, responsibility, faithfulness, and hard work?
6. The purpose of education is not isolation but to train children to influence the world for Christ. Are you prepared to work with your child to train him/her socially for relating to the unbelieving world?
7. Are you able to provide the desired academic and skill training through home schooling or through supplemental classes to your home schooling?
8. Husbands, are you prepared to oversee the home schooling of your family?
9. Do you have the needed support (from the husband, grandparents, your church or a home school support group) in order to home school?
10. Do you have some outside accountability that will help you evaluate the effectiveness of your home schooling?
11. Are you "mixing educational systems?" (FYI, some find it difficult to home school one child while overseeing a child in the public or Christian school.)