
Pro Rege

Volume 51 | Number 1

Article 5

September 2022

Christian Education: Can We Afford It?

Calvin VanderMeyden

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

VanderMeyden, Calvin (2022) "Christian Education: Can We Afford It?," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 51: No. 1, 35 - 37.

Available at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol51/iss1/5

This Feature Article is brought to you for free and open access by the University Publications at Dordt Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in Pro Rege by an authorized administrator of Dordt Digital Collections. For more information, please contact ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu.

Christian Education: Can We Afford It?

by Calvin VanderMeyden

Deuteronomy 6:4-7 has some very pertinent things to say to parents about their God-given duty to instruct their children in the ways of the Lord. The passage referred to reads as follows: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, 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 arise.”

Several observations can be made after reflecting upon this text. First of all, a basic idea of this passage is that there is one God in the universe. And Israel is commanded to love that one God. This love for the Lord must not be half-hearted or lukewarm. Rather, it must be energetic, dynamic, and full-orbed. Israel is called upon by God to love Him with all the resources at its disposal. Every facet, dimension, and segment of its existence must be utilized to reach the all-important goal of loving Jehovah God. Inherent in such love is a total response of dedication and commitment to the Lord.

This dedicated love for the Lord was so necessary that God wanted it to occupy center stage in the lives

of each Israelite: “These words I command you this day shall be *upon your heart*.” This commandment to love God in an all-inclusive way was so important that it was to impinge itself on the core of each Israelite’s life so that the demands of obedience and service to God would never be forgotten.

Once the Israelites understood this commandment and put it into practice by loving God with the totality of their personalities, they were commanded by the Lord to introduce this concept of love for God to their children. The Israelite parents were in God’s school. He taught them what love for Him involved and commanded them to practice it. Subsequently, the Israelite children were in their parents’ school. The parents were the teachers. The children were their pupils. The subject matter that was to be dealt with in this familial school involved the words which were spoken to Israel about their duties to love God with all the energies at their disposal. God, speaking to the parents, says, “You shall diligently teach the words about love for God to your children, 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 arise.”

It’s instructive to note that the *parents* were supposed to teach their children how to love God. This educative process was to be permeated with enthusiasm and dedication. This love for God was meant to be taught and practiced in grateful response to the Lord, who released Israel from the “house of bondage” (cf. Deut.5:6).

Not only were the parents commanded to diligently teach their children to love God, but they

Rev. Calvin VanderMeyden, a minister in the Christian Reformed Church in North America, graduated from Calvin University and Seminary; he earned his Th.M. from Princeton Seminary. He is also a nephew of the late Rev. Cornelius VanSchouwen, “an original professor at Dordt.”

were required by God to *continually* instruct their children to love God. To the parents, God says, “You shall talk of them (the concepts of love for God) when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way and when you lie down, and when you arise.” The implication involved in these words is that religious education within the home was a full-time occupation. Parents were commanded to instruct their children to love God at sunrise and sunset (when you arise and when you lie down) and at every point of the day in between (when you sit in your house; when you walk by the way). Religious instruction was designed to be an all-pervasive activity. Children were to hear the concepts of love for God throughout the whole day. In fact, the entire home life was supposed to pulsate with God-focused love.

A bit of reflection on Hebrew history will indicate why the Israelite parents had the opportunity to spend so much time teaching their children to love God. These words (Deut. 6: 4-7) were spoken to the Israelites just after they had wandered in the wilderness for 40 years and just before they began an agricultural society in Canaan. They were now assembled in the uplands of Moab, amid its green and fertile fields and pastures, overlooking Jericho and the plain of Jordan. Before them lies the promised land of Canaan—a land flowing with milk and honey. And these words of Deuteronomy are designed to influence the new age of history that the Israelites are going to write in Canaan. This commandment concerning love for God was intended to offer them guidance for their conduct in the promised land—including guidance with reference to the children. A basic consideration at this point is the following: What type of life style would the Israelites experience in the land of Canaan? As Max Dimont says, in his book entitled *Jews, God and History*, “Under the system of the judges, Israel had an agricultural economy” (50-41).¹ This period of the judges was to last for about 300 years after entrance into the promised land.

Now, in the context of an agricultural economy, it is easy to see how parents could teach their children continually, from sunrise to sunset, how to love God. Under such circumstances the family was the central unit of society. Fathers could spend much time with their sons as they sowed the seeds in the spring, worked the fields in the summer, and gath-

ered the harvest in the fall. Much time was also spent by father and son in joint efforts such as tending the sheep and cattle. Such an environment offered the father many opportunities to inculcate in his child the spirit of love for God. While observing the newly planted seeds spring to life; while watching the tender plants develop into husky stalks of grain; while reaping the golden harvest—in all of the activities—the Hebrew father had numerous opportunities to speak of the greatness of God’s creativity. Such conversations about the majesty of God in nature would elicit a response of love for God from the child as he could see and hear about the work of his Creator.

In a similar way, sons and daughters in the home were part of an environment where the miracle of child birth was open to the scrutiny of the entire family—children included. This situation allowed the parents to remind their children of the greatness and majesty of a creating God. Such a reminder was intended to call forth from the children a response of love toward their Creator. In short, in Israel’s early history, including the time during the judges, the home was the basic school. And the parents were the teachers. The parents offered to the children an ongoing process of instruction—all of which was given in a spirit of religious earnestness and obedience to God. No matter if the subject of instruction was the task of husbandry or some useful art, or if it was instruction in farming or the teaching of Israel’s sacred history; it was all done out of reverence and respect for God. All the instruction given was designed to elicit from the children a wholehearted love for their Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.

So much for Deut. 6:4-7 and the Israelites. How does this passage apply to us? We, for the most part, do not live in an agricultural society where the parent-child relationships are as closely-knit as was the case referred to above with reference to the Israelites. Ours is an industrialized, technological society. Thus, fathers spend many hours away from home at the office, in the factory, or at the lab. And if they are in the business world, they may even spend several days away from home. In many (and most) cases, mothers are also absent from the home for sizable portions of time each week due to work. Thus, twenty-first-century parents do not spend nearly as much time with their children as did the ancient Hebrews.

Education requirements in our society also need

to be considered by each one of us. Parents are no longer the primary teachers of our children—at least not in the formal sense of the word. Our government requires that our children spend their time in day schools from age five through high school. This is the law of the land. Such a law automatically removes the child from the home environment for many hours each week. And when such children are placed in a government school, they are deprived of the freedom to pray or to study the Bible from a Christian perspective and are forbidden to study God’s world from the perspective of God’s WORD.

When students in a secular school study the creation from the perspective of naturalistic evolutionism (which leaves no room for the creation by Divine fiat), are they being taught how to love the Creator? When students in a government school study astronomy, mathematics, or physics from a secular point of view in which no reference is made to the divine intelligence that orders and structures the universe, are they then being instructed how to better appreciate the Lord of the universe? When economics and the business-administration disciplines are taught within a purely competitive, dog-eat-dog frame of reference, are students then learning how to use their financial resources in the service of the Lord and fellow human beings in a loving way? The answer to all of these questions is “no.” Secular education does not promote love for God. Rather, it encourages respect for theories like evolution and promotes appreciation for systems like secular humanism (and Marxism). And in the process, God is not presented as the Divine Creator, who forms, structures, and sustains the universe of which we are a part. As a result, secular education does not elicit from the pupil a wholehearted love for God. It simply cannot do so because God and all that He stands for has no place in the curriculum. Yet, it is transparently clear that Deuteronomy 6:7 requires that our children be taught to love God from sunrise to sunset. Certainly, school is somewhere in between.

What options are then open to us? Our children, by law, must be in school 30-35 hours each week. This means they are no longer under the influence of the parents during that period of time. The option, of course, which is available to us is a Christ-centered education. While our children are at home, we are obligated to teach them to love God “when we sit in

our houses, when we walk by the way, when we lie down and when we arrive.” Religious instruction is a full-time job. The fact remains, however, that the government wants our children to absent themselves from the religious greenhouse called home for 30-35 hours a week. How can we practice the inherent dynamics of Deut. 6:7 under those circumstances? Certainly not by placing our children in an environment where the lordship of the Creator is denied and forbidden expression. The remaining option is to place our children in the context of the Christian school (or even home school), where Christ is proclaimed as Lord of the whole creation. When our children are trained to see that Christ has something to say about how we do chemistry, religion, mathematics, physics, psychology, literature, art, and politics, only then will they be taught how to love God with the totality of their beings. And that is what love for God is all about.

The comment is frequently made that Christian education is “too costly.” It deprives us of our savings accounts—and, therefore, we are deprived of the opportunity to purchase luxurious cars, snowmobiles, motorboats, Hondas, and palatial homes.

The fact remains, however, that secular education is also “costly.” For it deprives our children of the opportunity to see Christ in the classroom as Lord over every dimension of time and life. In fact, secular education is so costly that we cannot afford it. Thirty to thirty-five hours a week of government education deprives our children of an environment that teaches love for God. Thus, government instruction is too costly—so much so that children in such a setting learn to bow the knee to the god of secularism. Deuteronomy 6: 4-7 is telling us that we cannot afford that type of education! There is only *one* God. And learning how to love Him is a full-time endeavor. Praise God, then, for parents who feel that secular education is too costly. Thank God for Christian parents who for years *have afforded Christian education* even though it involved a great deal of sacrifice.

Endnotes

1. See Max Dimont, *Jews, God, and History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Penguin, 2004).