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## Biblical Education in the Home and the Church

We discovered in the first chapters what kind of modern pressures face the pastor and the Christian home in the twentieth century. Before the turn of the decade, nine out of ten mothers will be working outside the home. One study suggested that on the average, the typical father spends less than a minute a day with his preschool children. Needless to say, the challenge to the church is great.

What is the intent of God for the educational process in both the home and the church? How is the husband to be a principal teacher for his wife and children? How can the church encourage parents to be good teachers in their homes and *then* good teachers of the Body of Christ?

To this point we have been rediscovering a biblical blueprint for the church. After establishing the dilemma of the typical traditional approach to ministry (Section 1), we built a new biblical framework for evaluating the church. This included a refocusing on the character and conduct of the church: the centrality of relationships in any ministry and the guidelines for ministry modeled by Christ and the apostles (Section 2). Having overviewed the church from that perspective, we have focused on the nature of the New Testament

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church organization—in both its meeting and its leadership structure. In addition, the gifted ministry of the body to its individual parts has been analyzed (Section 3). It still remains for us, though, to evaluate the teaching-learning process—the process of education and indoctrination that is vital for the church to continue to meet the challenges it faces. An evaluation of the education process in the Scriptures is always twofold: first, the concern for spiritual growth in the home; and second, subsequent to the first, the spiritual growth in the community of believers. These concerns will be evaluated from both the teaching and learning perspective.

### **BIBLICAL TEACHING: THE MODEL AND METHOD**

Does the typical approach to education in the church ever amuse you? We remember being instructed on the inefficiencies of the lecture method—through a lecture! It surprised us when we first realized that 95 percent of all pastoral training takes place in the classroom—a place devoid of reality. Likewise, the traditional sanctuary does not fare much better. Certainly, there is a place for the teaching of doctrine. And we are convinced that the supreme value of verse-by-verse exposition of Scripture is applicable in our day and culture. But, we cannot rely on the lecture method on its own merit to change lives.

How was education performed in the nation of Israel? Young boys and girls were taught at home by their parents. When boys were old enough, they followed their fathers in a specific occupation. In the life and ministry of Christ, He selected men from several trades and taught them in the context of situations they faced. When He taught them about the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan, it was in the midst of actual confrontations with the adversary (Mark 1:21-28; 3:20-30). The concerns of perseverance and prosperity in the disciple's life were taught through parables common to their experiences (Mark 4:1-20, 26-34). When He asked them to develop as ministry teams apart from Him, He remained available to help

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them evaluate the results (Mark 6:6b-13, 30-44). There can be no education apart from life-experiences.

### THE TEACHING PROCESS IN THE HOME

In matters of teaching truth in the home, God has spoken clearly. For Israel, the principal vehicle of education was instruction of the parents:

*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates (Deut. 6:4-9).*

In this second giving of the covenant to the new generation that grew up while their parents suffered the discipline of God in the wilderness, Moses points toward the need for weaving the truths of Yahweh into the fabric of family life.

There are three stages to the teaching process. *First, biblical teaching begins with initiation.* Based on God's uniqueness, the Israelite parent recognized an initial responsibility to love Him with one's total heart, soul, and strength.

There is no better starting point for spiritual transformation than the heart. In chapter 4 we learned that "loving the Lord your God," as quoted from this Old Testament text, was the first and greatest commandment. All orthodoxy and orthopraxy is rooted in the fact. If truth is dry to the heart, it is dry to the family. There is no spiritual glaze that can fool the family. If truth is not lived out in the home, it will not penetrate the heart.

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Second, biblical teaching continues with indoctrination. There are three ways that the text pictures indoctrination: impress, talk, and tie. The first step is personal conviction (cf. Deut. 4:5; 6:13-19). Then, the parent is to use opportunities and situations to transfer these truths to the child. As we have said, the purpose of biblical teaching is life transformation. A truth cannot be adopted without seeing how it applies to life.

In that section of Deuteronomy there is a special focus on the son. This is typical to the Old Testament view of transmission of truth, as the book of Proverbs repeatedly shows. Twice in Deuteronomy 6 the son or grandsons are in view (6:2, 20; cf. 4:9). This teaching is to be from generation to generation. The emphasis is on parental initiative, planting these truths into the lives of the sons.

For Israel, as the fathers went, so went the sons and the nation's future. That is graphically, yet negatively, illustrated in later Old Testament writings. Judgment was on the generations who deserted the faith of their fathers during the period of the Judges. Similarly, the sons of Eli, Samuel, Saul, David, and Solomon all portray the effects of neglecting the important truths of Deuteronomy 6.

*Third, biblical teaching concludes with impartation.* The reality that was believed and lived by the parents, and that was creatively planted in the lives of the children, blossoms into expression in the community. The message is heard, felt, and then lived out. This was the normal, though supernatural, spiritual life commanded by God in the life of the nation.

In the New Testament, a similarly central passage give us God's pattern for parental instruction:

*Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).*

In the midst of guidelines for marital and work relationships, Paul gives the believers at Ephesus important glimpses into the home's teaching process.

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*First, biblical teaching comes through parental control.* What we began in the Old Testament is fully affirmed in the New Testament. The key to passing biblical truth from parent to child is seen in the father. If he teaches one thing and live another, the dry desert of Deuteronomy will be the child's experience. The Greek word for *exasperate* means literally "an angry impulse from the side." It is usually a father who teaches by intimidation and believes a strict and harsh approach will most effectively sober his children to their responsibilities (cf. Col. 3:21). But that does not work. Paul clearly states that it is not to be a part of biblical parenting and teaching.

*Second, biblical teaching is corrective.* The Word, when referring to children, implies reform and improvement. It stresses the importance of discipline for affirming that there are fences that the child cannot leap over without consequences. It should be said that discipline can, and should, be accomplished without anger and explosive impulses. We have tried, as parents, always to communicate to our children that we love *and* discipline them, rather than love *but* discipline them. Discipline is not inconsistent with the Lord's love for us, nor a parent's love for his child. Done correctly, it is a sign of a loving father (cf. Heb. 12:7-11).

*Third, biblical teaching is instructive.* Can you imagine that home where, regardless of what the child does, the father disapproves? The Greek word means "to warn." It is our word *admonish*, which means "to put (on) or influence the mind." Here the warnings and counsel of the father are given in a way to help the child avoid problems later in life. Again, this is most effective when wedded to the behavior of the father.

The biblical teaching process for the home, whether the culture is Hebrew or Greek or American, is the same. It involves the parents, accepting and believing the truths about their God, then living them out in word and deed among their families. Remember Christ's summation of the matter when He said that the greatest commandment was "love the Lord your God;" and the second is like the first, "love your neighbor as yourself!"

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### THE TEACHING PROCESS IN THE CHURCH

*Developing teaching credentials.* There are more vital questions for Christian education in the church than choice of curriculum and plans for a Sunday school rally day. In the New Testament, the teaching process was an extension of the home. The principles of personal commitment and the communication of the truth by word and life are all significant features of a teaching ministry in the church.

First Timothy's stated purpose is that "you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth" (3:15). In chapter 3 Paul lists the qualification for men desiring the office of overseer, or bishop. This position of elder, or pastor, carries with it the responsibilities of church leadership. In that passage and a similar one in Titus 1, we find twenty-five criteria for leadership:

| CHARACTERISTIC         | EXPLANATION   | PASSAGE                          |
|------------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| 1. Above reproach      | Unquestionably of good reputation   | 1 Tim. 3:2                       |
| 2. Husband of one wife | Adulterous attitudes, as well as relationships, in view   | 1 Tim. 3:2;<br>Titus 1:6         |
| 3. Temperate           | Disciplined; not in bondage to one's desires  | 1 Tim. 3:2                       |
| 4. Sensible            | Wise; observing a godly course of conduct   | 1 Tim. 3:2                       |
| 5. Respectable         | Honorable; well-ordered conduct   | 1 Tim. 3:2                       |
| 6. Hospitable          | Accepting others and willing to share with others what God has provided                         | 1 Tim. 3:2                       |
| 7. Able to teach       | Able to communicate the truth of Scripture in a manner that brings clarification and conviction | 1 Tim. 3:2<br>2 Tim. 2:<br>24-26 |
| 8. Not given to wine   | Not addicted to alcohol   | 1 Tim. 3:3;<br>Titus 1:7         |
| 9. Not a striker       | Not prone to physical violence  | 1 Tim. 3:3;<br>Titus 1:7         |

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| CHARACTERISTIC                             | EXPLANATION  | PASSAGE                  |
|--|--|--------------------------|
| 10. Gentle                                 | Forbearing; manifesting kindness   | 1 Tim. 3:3               |
| 11. Uncontentious                          | Peaceful; not quarrelsome  | 1 Tim. 3:3               |
| 12. Free from love of money                | Not a money lover  | 1 Tim. 3:3               |
| 13. Leads well his own house               | Leading and ruling one's family in an exceptional manner; evidencing an ability to lead in church    | 1 Tim. 3:4               |
| 14. Having children in subjection          | Keeping one's children under control   | 1 Tim. 3:4;<br>Titus 1:6 |
| 15. Not a new convert                      | Not spiritually immature in Christ   | 1 Tim. 3:6               |
| 16. Have a good witness with those outside | Personal life before unbelievers declaring the reality of Christ within; having unquestioned conduct | 1 Tim. 3:7               |
| 17. Blameless                              | No grounds for accusation (to call to account); similar to being "above reproach"                    | Titus 1:6-7              |
| 18. Not self-pleasing                      | Not insensitive to others  | Titus 1:7                |
| 19. Not quick-tempered                     | Not inclined to anger  | Titus 1:7                |
| 20. Not fond of sordid gain                | Not taking advantage of others   | Titus 1:7                |
| 21. A lover of what is good                | Seeking the desires of God   | Titus 1:8                |
| 22. Just                                   | Righteous; godly in conduct  | Titus 1:8                |
| 23. Devout                                 | Holy; pure in conduct  | Titus 1:8                |
| 24. Self-controlled                        | Dominion over one's desires; similar to being "temperate"  | Titus 1:8                |
| 25. Holding fast the faithful word         | Knowing, living, and teaching the Word of God  | Titus 1:9                |

*Good teaching and the gift of teaching.* Before all of us in church leadership fall into despair, a few observations and qualifications may help our perspective. The leader is one who is above

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reproach, that is, no charge made against him will be proved true. It does not mean that he, or anyone else, is perfect. James settles that matter: “Not many of you should presume to be teacher, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.” Why? “We all stumble in many ways” (James 3:1-2a). At least James did not say “we all stumble in *all* ways!”

Second, this passage focuses on a man’s being “able to teach.” Communication skills are to be used in conjunction with other character qualities (2 Tim. 2:24-26). There are two interesting omissions in the lists of qualifications: (1) There is no direct reference to spiritual gifts as a qualification for leadership in the church. However, we do see this reference in 1 Timothy 4:14, in relation to Timothy. And (2) there is no academic or school certification for the ministry. That is especially interesting since Acts 19 speaks of the school of Tyrannus in Ephesus.

Now before we empty the halls of Bible schools and seminaries, let us explain those omissions. Paul’s concern for Timothy is that men who serve in leadership should be more concerned with knowing and performing the truth than with excessive preoccupation with school credentialing. If academic disciplines aid a man in developing an elder’s characteristics, then he should pursue his schooling. The point is that the criteria of 1 Timothy 3 is the first and primary consideration for leadership qualification.

That does have a significant application for schools that train pastors. But, with all the curricular requirements of a pastoral program, we dare not miss the priority of life transformation: the ability of the Word of God, by the Spirit of God, to transform the servant of God.

Having said that, we are now ready to consider Paul’s usage of the concept of teacher. Of the seven times Paul uses the term *teacher*, five refer to the gift or the office of teacher. In other words, the predominate usage of this term assumes a context of giftedness. As such, the gift of teaching is probably in view in 1 Timothy 3:2



and 2 Timothy 2:24. The gift of leading is also likely in view in 1 Timothy 3:4. The gift of teaching produced a teacher. The gift of leading produced a pastor (cf. 1 Tim. 3:4 with 5:17 and Rom. 12:7-8). This teacher and pastor, combined in the phrase *pastor-teacher* in Ephesians 4:11, was responsible for the household of faith.

Finally, we need to excise one word from our theological vocabulary: *layman*. That person, as an entity separate from *clergy*, does not exist in the New Testament. The word *layman* was coined in the third century when an emphasis on the head pastor, or head bishop, under Emperor Constantine, reached prominence. That position was advanced first by Ignatius, who encouraged one bishop to be over each local assembly. From that point a dichotomy developed between the “common” man, or layman, and the “professional” minister, called the bishop or clergy.

Not only does moniscopacy, the term for that practice, ignore specific Scripture (see chapter 8) but also the continued emphasis in second-century churches and communities that followed the plurality-of-elders design. Trained and untrained elders have no difference in parity. They are both, in the eyes of God, co-laborers in the team ministry of shepherding and instructing the flock.

### **SPIRITUAL MATURITY: THE LEARNING MODEL FOR LIFE TRANSFORMATION**

The educational process involves both giving and receiving. There are teachers and there are learners. Remembering two former conclusions will be helpful. First, we noted in chapter 6 that the discipleship process is not a one-way ministry but a two-way mutual ministry in the body. Second, we discovered in chapter 8 that the church leader is not the quarterback but rather a player-coach. He is a part of the team—a member of the body. But he also has additional responsibilities that are not applicable to the group at large.

Given those general observations, it is safe to conclude that

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spiritual maturity, as a learning stage in the educational process, is universally applicable in the church. The Body of Christ is a family of brothers and sisters, carrying mutual responsibilities for building up one other in the faith. As such, the need for believing and modeling those truths is again universally applicable to both leadership and the local assembly.

### THE LEARNING PROCESS IN THE HOME

You can fool some of the people most of the time. You can fool most of the people some of the time. But you can't fool . . . the home! We think there are at least two reasons for Paul's recommending that leaders in the church are to be married and are to have families (cf. 1 Tim. 3). The first is that the church is a family of believers, and leadership of a family unit aids in preparing for leadership of the church (cf. 1 Tim. 3:4-5). Much is learned about pastoring by parenting!

But the second is equally practical. We think it is helpful that leaders in the church be men who are married and have been raising a family, because it reminds Dad that he is human. Gentlemen, let us face it—we are a proud lot. And it is humbling to realize regularly the need to work on our homes—on being true to one woman and on having children who “are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient” (Titus 1:6). Yet we are convinced that the family is one of God's primary tools for shaping spiritual shepherds. Please note that as important as the home is for determining leadership qualification, nevertheless that cannot rule out single men serving as elders. If the phrase *husband of one wife* demands marriage, then the phrase *not given to much wine* demands given to a little wine. Single men are not to be excluded.

Some would say that a pastor's priorities are always changing, depending on the current demands of his family, ministry, and lifestyle. But, the home should have a higher priority than the church. That fact is taken from the context of 1 Timothy 3. Vocational

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Christian leaders make a serious mistake when they attempt to draw a parallel between a commitment to the Lord and a commitment to the ministry. Everyone must make the Lord his first priority, his family as a second priority, and all other matters, including his ministry, as a third priority. Remember, Paul clearly states that the home is a God-given barometer for measuring a man's qualification for leadership in the church: if he does not measure up in the home, then he should be disqualified for leadership service in the church (1 Tim. 3:4-5).

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For both the leadership and the entire assembly, learning is a necessity. In relationship to leaders in the church, Paul gives us a glimpse into his philosophy of ministry and learning:

*Brothers loved by God, we know that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia (1 Thess. 1:4-7).*

There are three spiritual learning generations in this passage. First, there is the learner Paul. His ministry emphases included a confidence in the gospel and in the Holy Spirit. But he also says, "You know how we lived among you for your sake." Like the toy rabbit's experience in the children's classic *The Velveteen Rabbit*, being real requires hard work. Your fuzz gets worn off; your ears droop; one eye might even pop out. But that is part of life. Likewise, Paul lived or literally "came to be" among these believers. There is nothing that motivates people like the genuine article.

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Second, there are the learners at Thessalonica. They heard the gospel and welcomed it with joy. They made the priorities of Paul their own, committing themselves to transparency.

Third, the message went out to Macedonia and Achaia. This life transmission, summarized in 2 Timothy 2:2, and historically visualized here, shows us the long-range perspective on learning in the church.

### CONCLUSIONS

The Christian church and the Christian home are desperately looking for velveteen rabbits. In this book, the rabbit's friend was the skin horse. His advice was, "Real isn't how you are made. It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but really loves you, then you become real!"

Stretched throughout the church is a line of lives waiting for the real—to be held as the goal and to be modeled in life. These lives, young and old, are willing to commit themselves to the *real* cause of life transformation in the church. They are waiting for ones with the counsel of the skin horse and the character of the velveteen rabbit.