

Homeschooling - Why?

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Introduction

Perhaps the most basic question in the sphere of child education is this: "Why educate our children?" Very few, if any, would deny the need to educate children, but people hardly agree upon the purpose or goal of this education!

It is important to ask this basic question and to define our goals for educating our children because our methods must be suited to reach the goal. That is, one's goal in education will inevitably define one's methods.

So, back to "square one": for what purpose do we educate our children?

The Secular Society's Answer to This Question

1. To prepare our children for the general work force
 - socialization is an integral part of education
 - skills and attitudes necessary for the job site are the core subjects studied
 - performance in these basic skills marks success or failure

2. To prepare our children for specialized positions
 - arts, sciences, etc. / military, government, etc.
 - basic education requirements plus specialized courses
 - abilities beyond the simple skills mark success

God's Answer to This Question

1. To teach our children the truth about Him
 - this will be demonstrated more than told
 - all truth will be viewed as revealed by God, and therefore coherent
 - knowledge will never be separated from obedience

2. To train our children to carry the truth to the next generation
 - this presupposes a dependence upon the Spirit in salvation
 - this education will never be seen as separated from the believing community in which the truth flourishes (family, clan, faith community)

The Secular Society's Mindset for Education

Organized education in America was born during the industrial revolution for the simple reason that a work force was needed to "man" the factories. Since assembly line worked for producing a product, assembly line mentality was adopted for the education model. A "curriculum" was devised which would assure the systematic educating of children from beginning to end as well as consistency in the finished product.

That the "assembly line mentality" is foundational to organized education in America can be seen by the presuppositions revealed in the educational philosophy that exists in organized education. All of the classroom education starts from these premises:

- One must learn only in the accepted order of the curriculum
- All must learn the same material at the same time
- All are graded according to a single standard (like quality control on "the assembly line")

As the Colfaxes write:

. . . American schools have become, for a variety of good and bad reasons, industrialized — centralized, hierarchical, and standardized. And whereas these organizationally "rational" characteristics may be entirely appropriate to the production of automobiles or television sets, they are clearly antithetical to education. In practice, industrialized education means that almost from the moment a child enters school he or she is age-graded, sorted, labelled, and resorted according to currently fashionable criteria. This is assembly-line education, in which the child is processed, over the years, much like a can of soup or a piece of hardware.¹

Organized education in America maintains the following:

1. An educated person is someone who knows a little about everything
 - this is the basic tenant of a curriculum: cover all the bases
 - often this achieved knowledge has no real "life" validity. (It's the fresh graduate that is hated by the seasoned worker).
2. True learning does not require the desire to learn
 - students who have no desire to learn the prescribed material are forced into "learning." The teacher considers it good enough to repeat the material and be able to speak it back (via verbal or written testing). Following this procedure is the only way for the student to "get out," or "graduate."
3. Everyone learns the same way (at the same time in life; at the same rate; etc.)
 - The same methods used for all, proving that those in charge believe everyone learns the same way (even though they admit this is not true)

1. David & Micki Colfax, *Homeschooling For Excellence* (Philo, CA: Mountain House Press, 1987), pp. 31-32.

- One standard is used to grade everyone (the curriculum)
- Students who do not fit the "norm" are either mentally inferior, possess behavioral problems, are lazy, or have some chemical imbalance (usually "fixed" with prescription drugs).

I submit that true education consists in knowing the truth about God and viewing the world and life from His perspective; that true learning usually occurs only when a person is motivated by a desire to learn and that people learn differently. I further submit that homeschooling creates the environment for true education by its ability to be God-centered in the context of life, by allowing a child to want to learn before being forced to, and by its ability to adapt educational methods to suit the individual.

In short, I think homeschooling is best suited to fulfill the commands of God in Deuteronomy 6:4ff:

“Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. “These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons 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 rise up. “You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. “You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Several questions that often arise when homeschooling is encouraged

1. How will our children receive the proper socialization?

First of all, the need for socialization so often brought up by modern educators comes from the socialistic perspectives of the “Fathers” of modern education, Mann and Dewey. The idea that the family unit could be the first and most important aspect of “socialization” is discounted by those who see the family as essentially detrimental to education and society at large. But God’s perspective is that the family is the foundation of society and thus of socialization. The fifth commandment, to honor one’s father and mother, is the starting place of biblical socialization. One regularly encountered reality of homeschooling is the character of the children, and their respect for parents and authority in general.

Secondly, homeschooling builds community. Our experience in homeschooling is that families with the same high, biblical values, form genuine communities around these values, and thus create a wider social contact for their children with biblical, moral values at the core of this socialization.

Finally, the socialization so much prized by the modern educators is one of the best reason to adopt homeschooling! I challenge any parent who is thinking about enrolling their children in organized education to go to one of their local schools and spend an afternoon just watching what goes on. I’ve done that, and was even more appalled than I expected. The socialization that God intends for His people is not found in organized education—even the best organized education. In these “schools” the children are removed from their parents, sometimes overtly, but most often subtly (yet with devastating significance). The peer pressure to conform to the immorality of our society (both in thought and actions) is often overwhelming. Top students are viewed by the rest as “geeks” and “being cool” is usually displayed by various levels of rebellion. I do not even need to mention the obvious factor that organized schools have become increasingly dangerous (why have many schools resorted to metal detectors?). Even aside from this fact (one that any thinking parent should deeply consider), the “socialization” at organized schools should be considered a poison to which no thinking parent would subject their children.

2. How will my children receive the kind of specialized education they need to get the top career positions they deserve?

If our purpose for educating our children is to give them top career jobs, then by all means we should send them to the most prestigious schools in the country and forget our obligation to build their character. But if, before God, we believe our first and primary obligation is to train them (by God's grace) to know God and to follow His commandments, then we must set ourselves to this priority and leave the top career jobs in His hands.

But let me hasten to say that this is not an "either-or" proposition. The facts of history show clearly that children trained first and foremost to know God and do His will have regularly excelled in their occupations. I would much rather have my son spend his life in the service of HaShem at the corner gas station and be greeted by the Almighty with "well done, good and faithful servant" than to have him making a six-figure salary and end life wondering if he really did anything that could be characterized as having eternal value. Don't get me wrong—there is nothing wrong with making a six-figured salary! And one can do that and still be following hard after God. But a six-figured salary without a genuine walk with God in life will bring sorrow and despair, and that I do not want for my children. So instilling within them, first by how I live, and then by what I teach them, is a priority that demands a willingness to educate my sons, daughters, and grandchildren as God intends, not as the godless society we live in would try to educate them.

If we define "success" as God does (cf. Joshua 1:8), then we must take a bold and radical approach to how we educate our children.

3. I don't want my children to be thought of as "odd." All their friends go to school, and are constantly talking about all the activities they are involved in. Won't my children feel "left out?"

Yes, at times homeschooling children my feel "left out." I know that through the nearly 26 years that we have homeschooled our children, there were times when we heard complaining about wanting to be involved in the many activities offered at the local organized schools. But this is where our involvement in the community of which we are a part played such an important role. Inevitably, when we sat with our teens and talked with them about what they honestly desired, and why they felt "left out," the conclusion they reached was that loving God sometimes requires standing alone against the majority. It wasn't always easy for us to see that, but we knew it was right, and we also saw that this was a life-long lesson that needed to be well grounded in the hearts of our children. In the end, our children came to realize that, in fact, they were not missing anything, but that their homeschooling afforded them many more advantages than disadvantages. They also realized that we, as a family, were working hard to see to it that they were given opportunities to be involved in a wide range of activities: music, athletics, social services, etc.

Once again, our close community of homeschooling families were the place where our children made their close friends, and thus the values we put as a priority were being reinforced in their friendships as well.

4. Isn't "Christian School" a valid option? Isn't this "organized education" in an atmosphere that does put God's standards as a priority yet gives a quality education as well?

Don't be fooled by "Christian Education." While I admit that many Christian schools are doing their best, and that most of the teachers and administrators have a genuine zeal to give the children in

their care the best possible Christian education, the fact remains that they are giving the children “assembly line education” with all of its problems. What is more, Christian education in our modern world has often conformed to many of the social “standards” (I put that in quotes because our society has adopted the position that “no standards” is the acceptable norm).

For example, does the Bible teach that teens should be absorbed with the “boy-friend/girl-friend” mindset? Yet ever Christian school I’ve been in evidences the same perspective among the teens (and even earlier). The peer pressure of boy-girl relations sets into place the unspoken norm that if you are a teenager, you should have a boy friend or a girl friend. Most secondary Christian schools even promote this through banquets (or proms) where “dates” are encouraged and where other activities presume a boy-girl kind of relationship.

Sounds radical, doesn’t it?—to suggest that “dating” is unbiblical, but it is. Dating only sets our children up for divorce when they marry. Why not? They have learned the pattern of close, intimate relationships with the opposite sex, which must end in “breaking up” and starting over with a new “boy friend” or “girl friend.” When the relationship is no longer satisfying, “breaking up” is the accepted way out. After that is experienced throughout the teen years, it is no wonder that divorce looms as the answer to a marriage that no longer satisfies.

Christian schools cannot do away with the peer pressures that take the norms of our godless society as acceptable to one extent or another. Like it or not, the majority of children in Christian schools are constantly affected by the entertainment industry, filled as it is with immorality, a demeaning of parental authority, and the humanistic values of self-satisfaction. I have spent time in Christian schools, listening, watching, and talking to the kids. It’s not their fault—they are only acting out what they are being taught. Not overtly, mind you, but subtlety and powerfully—that the sexual, self-indulgent messages of the entertainment industry are okay because they are allowed to watch and listen, and to mimic this behavior in the socialization of their peers. That teenage pregnancy is on the rise within the Christian community ought to be a clear indication that something is terribly wrong. Rather than stemming the tide of our nation’s slide into an utter disregard for morals, the Christian education being given to our children is following the same trends.

Please don’t hear me saying that any of the teachers or administrators are for such a trend! Of course not. And I applaud their efforts to do all in their power to teach otherwise. I’m not speaking against them or their valiant efforts to train the children in their care for God and His kingdom. What I am saying is that the method they are trying to use is self-defeating. God never intended parents to relinquish their responsibility to educate their children, because He created the family setting to be the best place for true education. It is not as though trained educators are less qualified than parents (though surely parents know their own children better than outside educators). But the methods and environment of organized education present the problem—these are not God’s design and they don’t work for the number one priority of education—godly character. If parents want to accept this priority of education (teaching godly character to their children), then they are the ones that must do the educating—that is God’s plan.

5. What do we do when it comes time for our children to enter college? Don’t most colleges and universities require a transcript from organized education?

Once again, the priority of education, building godly character into the lives of our children, must be presented first. We must take the position that if dedicating ourselves to this priority means our children may not be able to enter this college or that university, then so be it.

But this is a “scare tactic” used by those who (for some reason) hate homeschooling. The facts

speaking differently. I personally know a homeschooling family whose son (homeschooled from day one) was given a congressional appointment to the Air Force Academy. He was chosen over hundreds of other candidates, all of whom were schooled in organized education. My own son entered vocational college, attended the Art Institute of Seattle, and currently works as a graphic artist and web developer for a firm in Seattle. To enter these schools, we supplied records of his homeschooling years, and that was enough. If you take the time to investigate the success of homeschooling, you will find many more examples of young people who enter higher education without any difficulty. They usually score very high in entrance exams.

The bottom line is this: colleges and universities are looking for quality students who have proven they are serious about their studies, and who are not carrying the emotional baggage so prevalent in our godless society. In the majority of situations, homeschooling students have already proven their higher-than-normal abilities to be good students, and many colleges and universities are therefore looking for them to enroll. If they have to be on academic “probation” for the first semester to prove their abilities, fine. They usually come out with flying colors and the rest is history.

Give your children the ability to learn in an environment of love, understanding, and godly life, and they will do what they were created to do—learn. But their learning will be an adventure, not a chore they have to perform and hope it will soon be over. In fact, homeschooling instills within our children a love of learning that becomes a life-time habit.

But the greatest benefit is that their learning will be based upon the foundation of knowing God, not through facts, but through life conformed to the truth of Scripture as they learn in the context of family and community where the truth is lived out, not just studied.