

CHRISTIAN *School* COMMENT

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CHRISTIAN SCHOOL PARENTS, BE ENCOURAGED!

When you're making a financial investment, your advisor will counsel you to consider the long-term impact of what you spend today. The same is true of Christian education: tomorrow's dividends far outweigh today's investment costs. Dr. Larry Taylor, head of school at Prestonwood Christian Academy (Plano, Texas), offers some great proof of that here.

Researchers and God's Word have long recognized that schools are powerful environments that shape one's worldview. Deckard and Smithwick's research (2002) suggests a strong correlation between a biblical Christian worldview and the type of school a student attends. The implication is that students tend to adopt the worldview of the teachers who teach them, which God's Word also states in Luke 6:40.

I am not claiming that sending your children to a Christian school will guarantee they will develop a biblically based worldview. What I am suggesting is that there is a strategic connection between the Christian school and the other key influences in worldview formation. The transmission of one's values, beliefs, and worldview comes from a variety of sources. One's family, neighborhood, church group, peers, and school are examples of the multiple influences on our child's belief system. M. D. Regnerus (2004) calls this the "linked-lives" paradigm.

So there is truth in the old adage that it takes a village—to develop a child's Christian-based worldview. I would add that developing a child's Christian-based worldview requires that the village have a Christian school! Parents continue to be the primary influence in shaping their children's values and overall spiritual formation, according to Regnerus (and Deuteronomy 6:6–8!); however, this same research claims that peers and schoolmates also play a significant role. J. A. Erickson's research (1992) implies that parents must model beliefs and values at home, as well as clearly and firmly direct the children into activities—such as a Christian school—that foster a similar worldview.

One of the major influencers inside a child's "village" is the Christian school teacher. Again, the research significantly credits a teacher with having a major impact on the worldview formation of children. More specifically, the personal worldview and belief system of teachers plays a pivotal role. In his book *Piety and Philosophy* (2002), Richard Riesen notes that students' intellectual development is not separated from their spiritual and worldview development. Riesen also points out that essentially no education takes place in a worldview-free vacuum. A 2007 study by J. A. Fyock indicates that a course taught from a biblical Christian worldview by an experienced faculty member increases biblical understanding on several worldview issues.

Indeed, there are logical, biblical, and research-based reasons for parents to send their children to Christian schools. For many

Christians, this is a lightning-rod issue. Some vehemently argue against pulling our children out of secular schools based on the principle of Christians being "salt and light" to the secular culture. However, I stand with Dr. Richard Land, former executive director of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention: "The culture has influenced us more than we have influenced the culture. Instead of becoming 'salt' and 'light' (Matt. 5:13–16), we have been salted and lit by the culture."

I agree with my brothers and sisters in Christ that we must honor the "salt and light" biblical principle. However, we just need to recognize that Jesus was encouraging mature disciples to accomplish this objective—not children. There is no arguing that a dualistic training paradigm has potentially devastating results on one's worldview. Dividing life into different parts (secular Monday through Friday at school and Christian on Sunday at church) and navigating through life by operating each part from a different worldview has proven to fragment one's belief system. The greatest biblical mandate for parents is the discipleship process of our children, which begins, of course, with their salvation. The role Christian schools play in the discipleship process and in transmitting a biblical worldview to the next generation is vital. Be encouraged, parents!

Larry

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