

Dr. Alan Pue

# Rethinking Discipleship



**Why Christian Schooling Matters**

Foreword by Larry Taylor, Ph.D.

Alan Pue

# *Re*thinking *Discipleship*

Why Christian Schooling Matters



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This book is dedicated to Dr. Al Janney, Dr. Verle and Mrs. Lucile Ackerman, Lynn and Janet Warner, and all the others at New Testament Baptist Church who encouraged me as a young man and ignited my passion for Christ and Christian schooling.

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## Foreword

Before becoming president of the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI), I had the privilege of serving in two of the great churches in America—First Baptist Church of Orlando, Florida; and, Prestonwood Baptist Church, Plano (North Dallas), Texas. And, during this time that spanned thirty-two years I was blessed to serve with two amazing pastors and leaders—Pastor Jim Henry, in Orlando, and Pastor Jack Graham in Dallas. I have witnessed firsthand a variety of training practices provided by these two churches, especially ones geared to children and youth. I have also been blessed by these two pastors' love and priority for kingdom education provided by their two schools, of which I served.

Early in my transition from public school teaching and coaching to Christian school teaching, coaching, and administration, I heard about Dr. Alan Pue. I admired Dr. Pue from a distance usually through reading one of his journal or book publications or attending one of his seminars at a conference. The one word I would choose to describe my respect for Dr. Pue is *wisdom*. The consistent thread through his articles, books, and speeches was always wisdom. And not just theoretical-based wisdom, but experiential-based wisdom. When he spoke or wrote, his practical wisdom and application came from a deep reservoir of experience. I liked learning from a leader who had been in the same trenches God had called me to. I also liked Dr. Pue, the person who I now call Alan, my friend.

Through conversations, serving together on nonprofit boards, and collaborating on like-minded missions, I discovered another word describing my friend Alan—*courage*. Wisdom is great, but Alan has the courage to convey this knowledge, understanding, and insight. I have experienced it up close most recently when our board of directors selected him to facilitate ACSI's strategic planning process. His wisdom helped us categorize what our organization needed to review, but it was his courage that forced us to ask the tough questions. As I read through this book, *Rethinking Discipleship*, I found myself once again valuing Alan's wisdom and courage.

From the preface to the concluding chapter, *Rethinking Discipleship* deals with the questions that should be front and center for every parent, pastor, educator, and parachurch ministry. The initial question, and quite frankly the one that pulled my curiosity strings throughout the entire book, asked—what does it take to flourish as a follower of Jesus Christ in the kind of world we live in today? There are a lot of important questions we need to be asking, but few, if any, are more critical than what

it takes to flourish as a follower of Jesus Christ. Knowing Alan as long as I have, this is not the first time he has asked this question. He has devoted his life to what I consider the noblest of all causes—training and passing on our faith to the next generation. He has eloquently delivered this flourishing question in churches, schools, universities, and parachurch ministries. But never have I sensed Alan’s plea to get our attention as much as I did when reading this book.

Alan’s blend of wisdom and courage is undoubtedly what I consider the major strength of this book. He asks the readers to consider the best way to fulfill the responsibility of training our children. More specifically, Alan is challenging us to rethink our approach to the discipleship of our children. He urges us to alter the training paradigms that have long been used by parents, churches, and schools. Characteristic of Alan’s style, again the blend of wisdom and courage, he spends no time in the shallow waters. He wastes no time in offering pragmatic steps to transform our discipleship models. He does not just preach another sermon on why we need to change how we train our children; he walks us through specific ideas, strategies, and plans.

*Rethinking Discipleship* is not for the faint of heart. It is not another feel-good book for parents and pastors. Alan does not tiptoe in the least. And he is specifically straightforward when addressing our children’s education. Alan, the scholar, theologian, and practitioner, positions his claims with empirically based research. His arguments are not based on emotion or personal preference, but rather on educational methodology and philosophical assumptions. He provides reasonable and persuasive evidence to support his assumptions. He respectfully challenges those in leadership positions at churches to rethink the correlation between education and disciple making. His appeal is for parents and churches to recognize their need for one another, as well as for additional training and education options for their children. He argues that without a truly Christian approach to education, then producing children who flourish for the cause of Christ will continue to languish.

One would think that Alan’s claims and arguments represent a one-sided view in favor of Christian schools. As a fellow Christian educator one of my favorite parts of this book is the repudiation of how many Christian schools teach and train their students. I am deeply grateful for how Alan spurs Christian schools to engage in real-life faith training practices. His petition to Christian school leaders and faculty members to change their pedagogical approach is as strong as the other claims in the book. In other words, he does not endorse Christian schooling with blinders on. He is as

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forthright about Christian schools making adaptive level change as he is about countering the longstanding positions against sending our children to Christian schools.

I am honored to write the foreword for *Rethinking Discipleship*. But not just because of my friendship with the author, Alan Pue. Rather, because I believe this book addresses the most important factor facing Christianity today—the discipleship-making process. This book elevates above the many opinions of those for or against Christian schooling. This book fearlessly enters the debate of Christian schooling by focusing on God’s Word. Allowing God’s Word to inform us on one of the greatest mandates in all of Scripture is at the heart of the author. This does not surprise me about my friend, Dr. Alan Pue. I believe that this book answers the fundamental question—what does it take to flourish as a follower of Jesus Christ in the kind of world we live in today?

Larry Taylor, Ph.D.

President/CEO, ACSI

President-Emeritus, Prestonwood Christian Academy School System

Author, *Running With the Horses*





## Chapter 2

### **It Is Possible—If**

I opened the last chapter with a reference to the television and movie series *Mission Impossible*. If you've ever watched any of the old TV episodes or the more recent movies, you will soon note a few common themes. The first theme, unsurprisingly, is the seeming impossibility of all the missions. Having been a fan of the series for years, I find myself asking the same question over and over: "How are they ever going to accomplish this mission?"

A second theme, of course, is the overarching story line. First comes failure. Then comes reassessment and a somewhat different strategy. Third comes the eventual triumph, but not until the very last second and not before several near misses and heart-stopping action sequences. In the end, however, the good guys win.

There is, however, one key theme that nearly always unfolds at the beginning of each episode. That is when the leader of the IMF (Impossible Mission Force), be it Peter Graves in the old TV series or Tom Cruise in the recent movie series, puts together his team. As any leader knows, choose the wrong team members, and chances of success diminish significantly. Fortunately for both Peter and Tom, they choose wisely more often than not. When they make a bad choice or have a bad choice forced on them, however, there is always a price to be paid.

The same could be said about our choices for who should serve on the team we assemble to engage in the crucial job of making disciples of our children. Choose a good team and employ an effective strategy, and the chances of success increase dramatically. Choose poorly, either team members or strategy, and the possibility of success declines just as dramatically. That is a reality we can ill afford to ignore.

In my first chapter I tried to highlight the crucial role that the church must play in this drama. It was to the church that Jesus delivered the Great Commission. Thus, it is through the church that we are to fulfill that calling. The church, however, is not simply an organization. Rather, it is a body made up of redeemed people, all of whom are

given gifts with the expectation that they will use those gifts to advance God’s purposes in this world. Chief among those purposes is the call to make disciples.

In the following five chapters I will focus my attention on the members of that team and the strategies that should be employed in the mission of disciple making. Significant emphasis will be placed on the role of parents. They are not, however—indeed cannot be—the only members of the team for a simple, singular reason.

Permit me to explain it this way. The more you dilute something, the less potent it becomes. It’s the difference between placing two grains of salt into a cup of water and adding two spoonfuls to that same cup of water. Modern life, which takes kids out of the home and into a complex array of influences, acts to dilute the crucial impact that a parent can have on the life and thinking of a child. It doesn’t eliminate that influence, but it can, and often does, diminish that influence. So, what can a parent do in the context of today’s reality?

## **Biblical Principle 2: Remember That the Gift of a Christ-Centered Education Is a Parent’s Obligation.**

There’s a big difference between the thoughtful advice of a friend who says, “Hey, you might consider” and a summons to appear in court. To one you might reply, “Thanks for the recommendation, but I think I’ll pass.” That same response probably wouldn’t work in the other case. It’s the difference between a suggestion and a mandate.

For example, when Paul writes to his young protégé Timothy, he often uses both kinds of language. In one case he suggests that it might do Timothy well to take a little wine for his stomach’s sake. It is the kind of thing we do all of the time when talking to a friend with a health issue. I’m sure that you’ve heard that kind of advice and equally sure that you’ve given out that same kind of advice. My wife has been encouraging people to add barley green to their daily diet for years. Almost no one does. Her recommendation simply does not carry the force of law.

There are other times, however, when Paul’s language is far more authoritative and directive. For example, in 2 Timothy 4:1 we read, “I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus . . . preach the word.” “Solemnly charge” translates a form of the verb *diamarturomai*, which carries the idea of giving a forceful order or directive. The apostle has twice before used the verb to admonish Timothy (1 Timothy 5:21; 2 Timothy 2:14). The aged warrior of the faith, whose godly life was totally committed to the service of Christ, again seeks to capture Timothy’s undivided

attention for what he is about to say.”<sup>1</sup>

Because it is spoken as a directive by someone possessing the authority to do so, the recipient, in this case the young pastor Timothy, doesn’t get to say, “Oh well, that just doesn’t suit me. I think I’ll go in a different direction.” You either take the action indicated by the command, or you choose a course of disobedience.

In the military, the price for choosing to disobey an order is typically time in the brig. At your place of employment, it can cost you your job. If it’s the IRS calling, well, you ignore that letter at your own peril. So, in addressing questions about disciple making it is crucial to determine whether the Scripture provides some thoughts to ponder or whether the Scripture makes a demand of us. To answer that question, I am going to plunge into an examination of one of the key texts on the matter of parents’ responsibility as it relates to the schooling of their children.

## Parents, Don’t Do This; Do This Instead

In the apostle Paul’s letter to the church in Ephesus, we read what should be familiar words: “Children obey your parents in the Lord for this is right.” Let me stop right there to ask you a question. Are those words given as a command or as a suggestion? I think most of you would say, “Well, that clearly sounds like a command.” I think you would be right in making that observation.

Paul continues, “Honor your father and mother (for this is the first commandment with promise) that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” What do you think? Commandment or suggestion?

Next, Paul speaks to fathers and mothers: “Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” So again, what do you think? Commandment or suggestion? I suspect all reading this book would agree. Paul isn’t giving parents a suggestion here. He is issuing a mandate. We certainly would agree that provoking a child to wrath is wrong. I don’t think there is much of an argument about that point. And I think we have a fairly good idea of what wrath is and what behavior on the part of a parent would produce that kind of response.

What about the second part of that directive, however? What does Paul mean when he uses the words, “*bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord*”? It is in understanding the meaning of those words that we begin to get at the heart of finding an answer to this question: Is Christ-centered education a mandate or a maybe?

Let's begin with that phrase, "*bring them up.*" The meaning is simple: Parents have the responsibility to provide for their children, and certainly this involves providing them with the basics of life—food, clothing, and shelter; but the phrase has a broader sense as well. Parents must also provide for the emotional and spiritual welfare of their children. They must seek to protect them from harm, and not just physical harm but all that would harm their heart and mind, that would threaten their well-being. By the way, did you know that the number one reason that parents choose to enroll their children in a Christ-centered school is safety? Interesting.

So here is an observation. The world we inhabit is a fascinating, wondrous place—so much beauty, so many intriguing places, so much to explore and know. As a parent, don't you want your children to have the opportunity to explore and experience all that God has given us in His majestic creation? I suspect so. I suspect, as well, that you are doing all within your ability to give that gift to your children, just as you should.

The world is, however, also a dangerous place. I don't think most of you would just hand your young children the keys to your car and say, "Here you go. Have fun." Your kids might want you to do just that, but you are too wise to give in to their immature desire. You understand that the possibility of disaster is just too great.

I spent my summers growing up on my granddad's ranch in the Hill Country of central Texas. During those summers I learned to do a lot of things, but high on my list of fun activities were riding and hunting. In both cases I was carefully shown how to act around horses and how to handle firearms. And I can tell you that whenever I violated the strict standards that both my grandfather and dad laid down for me, the consequences were immediate and severe.

I also remember my first solo deer-hunting experience. I knew I had achieved a certain level of independence because I had demonstrated that I understood how to act when in the field with a high-powered rifle and had learned as well how to respect the wildlife I was hunting. I had been brought up well. In a sense that's your job as a parent, and frankly, it is the job of pastors and churches as well.

To fully understand the whole phrase, however, we must dig more deeply into the next two words: discipline and instruction.

The word *discipline* is translated from the Greek word *paideia*. Paul uses that same word in 2 Timothy 3:16 when he reminds his young protégé that, "All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching [*paideia*], for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for

every good work” (1 Timothy 3:16).

Please forgive a bit of a side trip, but I think it’s important to point out that Paul says, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable.” The all Scripture to which Paul would have been referring at that time in history was not just the emerging New Testament writings, but the full Old Testament as well. To suggest, as some have, that we can or must decouple the Old Testament from the New is a completely flawed and remarkably dangerous idea—one that, if adopted by the church, will have tragic consequences. This is not the time or place to dive deeply into why that concept must be rejected, but reject it we must if our goal is to equip people for every good work.

It is crucial to consider why Paul would use the word *paideia* in these instructions to parents in the church at Ephesus. Throughout his various letters to the churches of the Greco-Roman world, we observe that Paul is always careful, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to use words that would resonate in the culture to which he is speaking. For example, when he communicates the redemptive work of Christ to the church in Rome, he doesn’t have to spend a great deal of time explaining the meaning of the word redemption. Those people were well-acquainted with slavery. They understood redemption as an act that purchases a slave out of the marketplace and then sets that slave free. People who have never lived as slaves may miss the full implication of the meaning of redemption. Believe me, however, when I say that the people of ancient Rome got the meaning right away.

The same would be true of a word like *paideia*. It is not a word in common usage today, except in some education circles. It surprises me, however, that even quality Bible scholars don’t always grasp the implications of its use in this text. I love, however, what John Piper has to say about *paideia*. He writes, “This word signifies the actions that a father takes to give his children the abilities and skills and character to live life to the glory of God.” It “involves being shown how to do the things the Christ-exalting life requires and being held accountable to them as well as you can.”<sup>2</sup>

He goes on to observe, “That is, a father will guide all his words and ways by God’s Word and depend on God’s wisdom (and remember that the fear of God is the place we begin to discover that wisdom) and strength to apply them and make everything serve the glory of God. In other words, the most important thing in raising children is that they come to see Christ, the Lord, as supremely valuable as Savior and Lord and Treasure of Life.”<sup>3</sup>

Now try to imagine that happening at your local public school.

There is more to understanding *paideia*, however, and it is nearly always overlooked by even the most careful of biblical scholars. Remember, as I said, that Paul chooses his words with care as he seeks to communicate eternal truth in culturally relevant language. He does so because he rightly understands that people's understanding of things is often shaped by the cultural context in which they live. The use of the word *paideia* is an example of this.

So how would a citizen of Ephesus and a member of the church in that city have understood Paul's use of that word? What was meant by *paideia* in the Greco-Roman culture? Richard Tarnass helps provide an answer to those questions. *Paideia* was understood as, "The classical Greek system of education and training which came to include gymnastics, grammar, rhetoric, poetry, mathematics, geography, natural history, astronomy, and the physical sciences, history of society, and ethics and philosophy, *the complete pedagogical course of study necessary to produce a well-rounded, fully educated citizen*"<sup>4</sup> (my emphasis).

That the evangelical church of the 19th, 20th, and now the 21st centuries has for the most part not understood that reality is, as Mark Noll observed, a genuine scandal.<sup>5</sup> That we have so easily been able to separate all knowledge into two broad categories, the secular and the sacred, has done incalculable harm to the church and the culture in which we live. Sometimes I just want to cry, "Wake up!" Can't we see the damage being done by our actions? We think we are doing good by insisting that our kids be "salt and light" in the public schools. In reality we are doing far more to contribute to the decline of our culture and the weakening of the church than any good we think we may be accomplishing.

If there was any real hope of redeeming the public-school system as it currently functions in the USA, I would still think the same thing. Indeed, our job as parents and pastors is first and foremost the task of developing followers of Jesus Christ who are both fully devoted and fully discerning.

There are already many adults seeking to make a difference in the public-school arena. And on a one-by-one basis those adults do make a difference in the lives of a handful of kids. But let's be honest. On a larger scale their efforts, while heroic, haven't changed the overall direction of American public schooling. If the Christian teachers and educators and board members in public education haven't been able to turn the ship, I don't think that our children, who are ill-equipped for the task, are going to make any real difference.



If the church wants to make a positive impact in the lives of kids, I would suggest that they begin thinking about how they can make a quality Christ-centered education accessible to the tens of thousands of kids struggling to make sense of the world while attending the truly broken schools in our urban centers. It is the greatest mission field in the world, and it is right on our doorstep. Sadly, our response has been pretty feeble. We spend millions funding mission efforts all over the emerging world, but we ignore an area of great need right here. It's time that we figure out how to reach our own world. And please don't speak about a parent's responsibility as though that absolves us from reaching out to the "least of these." Sadly, 70% of children in urban African American communities live in single-parent homes. If parents in middle America can't do it alone, how can we expect those moms to do it alone?

I have an intimate understanding of that reality. My dad walked out on my mom, my brother, and me when I was in middle school. I know the anger and pain that comes with that abandonment. I know the difficulty a single mom faces in that situation. I know what it is like to try and figure out how to make financial ends meet at the end of the month. And I know that I would not be sitting here pounding away at my keyboard working on this book had it not been for a church—and school—that took seriously the job of discipling.

We, as the church, like the nation of Israel, have an obligation to those who are in the greatest need. Francis Schaeffer, that great theologian and prophet from the last decades of the 20th century, once remarked that God would hold America accountable for two great sins. The first sin was our long embrace of slavery and our consequent failure to address that sin even after shedding so much blood to abolish slavery. Is there anyone living in the USA today who doesn't see the price we are still paying for allowing that evil institution? The second sin flows directly from that first one. It is our lack of compassionate and wise use of our wealth. Maybe giving "the least of these" an opportunity to learn more of the Lord and how that knowledge can transform life would be a good place to start a better work.

Now back to that second word. The KJV gives us the word "admonition" or "instruction" as a translation for the Greek word *nouthesia*. Some of you might be familiar with the nouthetic counseling movement. Those who are part of that movement take direction from the word *nouthesia*, which literally means, "putting in mind." Paul uses this word in his letter to the church in Colossae when he writes, "Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may

present everyone mature in Christ” (Colossians 1:28).

As John Piper observes, “The idea of warning is prominent. One major Greek lexicon defines the word like this: ‘to counsel about avoidance or cessation of an improper course of conduct [see 1 Thessalonians 5:14, I Corinthians 4:14, 2 Thessalonians 3:15].” Piper then goes on to make this key observation: “The responsibility is given primarily to parents but they are free to enlist help from others—indeed they are encouraged to do so.”<sup>6</sup> Absolutely, because in all reality we can’t do it alone.

This second word is crucial because as all of us know from personal experience, information alone is not enough. We all need people to come alongside us to encourage us, to pray for us, to challenge us, to hold us accountable, to sharpen our thinking. That again is why we need one another and need a healthy body. Have I said it enough times? We can’t do it alone. And believe me, neither can your kids. And believe me on this as well: A couple of hours a week just won’t get the job done. Not even close.

What Paul is saying to these parents is simple. There is a cultural *paideia* of which we must all be aware. There is, however, a distinctively Christian *paideia* that helps us understand

- How we can know what we know
- How we can know what we know about ourselves and the world in which we live
- How we can best act in light of what we know to be true truth
- How we can process that into a fully integrated life
- And here is the key: It is a process for which God holds parents, not the state, responsible.

The responsibility of parents and of the church working together is to find the best way to ensure that all children and young people are fully aware of both the cultural *paideia* and the Christian *paideia*. Without the ability to think through and apply both to the decisions all of us are required to make on a daily basis, and on the actions that all of us are required to take on a daily basis, we put our children at grave risk.

### **Biblical Principle 3: The Guide for Christ-Centered Education Must Be a Servant of Christ.**

Sometimes the simplest words have the most profound impact. Just spend a few minutes each day in reading through Psalms and Proverbs. Just a chapter a day. You

don't have to dig deep every day, but I suspect that you will end up wanting to better understand the insights that lie behind such beautiful and evocative language.

Jesus frequently used similar kinds of imagery when He spoke. Think of the Sermon on the Mount. Think of His parables. Think of His many confrontations with the scribes and Pharisees. Here is one of our Lord's statements that caught my attention. Jesus asks a pretty simple question and then makes an equally profound observation. "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:39–40).

That observation brings us to a crucial observation: We live in turbulent times, times from which we cannot disengage, times that require a wise guide. I don't think many of us would choose a blind person as our guide for a rafting trip down the raging Colorado River. It wouldn't matter whether that person was exceptionally bright, or caring, or hard-working, or committed to saving the environment. Blindness might not keep a person from doing a lot of things, but it would most likely disqualify him or her from acting as a river-rafting guide.

A lot of public-school teachers—in fact, the majority of them—possess the qualities I mentioned above. Plus, many of them are truly good at the art and science of instruction. Put simply, they are skilled, competent educators. Many of them, however, are spiritually blind, and at the end of the day they are pretty likely to lead their students into a ditch.

Even Christian teachers in public schools, while not personally blind, are handicapped by the curricular choices made by people whose worldview is certainly not consistent with the Scriptures. Those teachers may do all that is possible to limit the impact of that curriculum, but at the end of the day they are employees of a system that doesn't leave a lot of wiggle room for either content or instructional strategy. I applaud those Christian teachers in the public system who do all they can to be an incarnation of Christ in a dark place, but I also know that such efforts are often thwarted by legal and cultural realities.

And, while I am a strong proponent of charter schools, at the end of the day they are still public schools and are limited as to what they can do to elevate Christ through the curriculum they may utilize. Depending on who serves as head of school and who serves on the school board, there may be a bit more flexibility for teachers. At the end of the day, however, the laws governing the public-school system in this country, laws

that have long outlawed God, still apply to charter schools.

I know that a lot of churches are finding ways to work with charter schools and even local public schools. I certainly applaud those efforts. At the end of the day, however, it is still the blind leading the blind in the classroom, and there is little probability on the horizon of any meaningful change in public policy. If churches want to make a difference for kids, then it's time to step beyond current strategies and get serious about how to make Christ-centered education more accessible to a broader segment of the population. Half-measures won't get the job done. I will address this more fully in my final chapter.

### Godly Wisdom Instead

Let me begin this section with a simple definition: The fool is a person who has decided, "There is no God" (Psalm 14:1). Now it would be tempting to include in that definition only those who claim to be atheists. That would be a mistake. Many people claim to believe that God exists. Far fewer, however, would describe God in the same way as you probably do. Even fewer would be able to articulate what needs to be known of God and how what is known should shape how all of us are to live life in a fallen world. Fewer still have what we would call a well-developed biblical worldview.

One thing is certain, however, and the Scriptures make this quite clear. To systematically expose our children, our young people, or ourselves to the teaching and example of those the Bible identifies as fools is not simply discouraged by God, it is prohibited.

The book of Proverbs makes this clear in numerous places:

- "O simple ones, learn prudence; O fools, learn sense. Hear for I will speak noble things, and from my lips will come what is right, for my mouth will utter truth; wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All the words of my mouth are righteous; there is nothing twisted or crooked in them." (Proverbs 8:5–8)
- "Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm." (Proverbs 13:20)
- "A scoffer seeks wisdom in vain, but knowledge is easy for a man of understanding. Leave the presence of a fool, for there you do not meet words of knowledge." (Proverbs 14:6–7)
- "The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouths of fools pour out

folly.” (Proverbs 15:2)

- “The lips of the wise spread knowledge; not so the hearts of fools.” (Proverbs 15:7)
- “A scoffer does not like to be reproved; he will not go to the wise.” (Proverbs 15:12)
- “The heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge, but the mouths of fools feed on folly.” (Proverbs 15:14)
- “The heart of the righteous ponders on how to answer but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.” (Proverbs 15:28)
- “Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment. A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion. An intelligent heart acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.” (Proverbs 18: 1–2, 15)
- “Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him. Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise, and apply your heart to knowledge, for it will be pleasant if you keep them within you, if all of them are ready on your lips. That your trust may be in the Lord, I have made them known to you today, even to you.” (Proverbs 22:15, 17–19)
- “By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches. A wise man is full of strength, and a man of knowledge enhances his might, for by wise guidance you can wage your war, and in abundance of counselors there is victory.” (Proverbs 24:3–6)
- “If a wise man has an argument with a fool, the fool only rages and laughs and there is no quiet.” (Proverbs 29:9)

David speaks to this reality as well in Psalm 1, where he writes, “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.”<sup>7</sup>

If those words aren’t enough to capture your attention and challenge your current view of how we should educate kingdom kids, then I hope that you might consider one additional observation from our Lord.

Matthew tells us of a moment in the ministry of Jesus when His disciples came to Him with an intriguing question, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” You may be familiar with what happens next. Jesus calls a child to stand next to Him

and says the following: “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” In a less technologically advanced age we would say, “Lots of ink has been spilt” in attempting to explain what Jesus was actually saying with that comment.

I’d like to focus, however, on what comes next in that text. While continuing to answer the initial question, He says something that to anyone’s ear would sound harsh: “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:1–6).

Wow! That’s pretty severe language, by anyone’s estimation. Imagine if that was said from any pulpit today. Imagine if by chance someone in the congregation recorded a video of that part of the sermon. Now imagine that video uploaded to the internet. How long do you think it would take before that pastor became a target of scorn? Can you hear the commentaries from the 24/7 news mob dripping with contempt for such an evil thought? I certainly can.

By the way, this is just one of many passages that give the lie to the picture of Jesus as just some meek and mild teacher who only went about imploring people to love one another. Sometimes He was anything but meek and mild. I’m pretty certain that “meek and mild” would not be the words used by the moneylenders to describe the man who kicked over their tables and ran them out of the temple courts. Nor do I believe that is the portrait the high priest, scribes, and Pharisees would paint of the man who described them as “nests of vipers” and “tombs filled with bleached bones.”

Yes, Jesus was gentle when gentleness was called for. He was, however, also unsparing to those whose beliefs and behaviors caused harm to others. And no greater harm can be done than causing a little one to stumble in faith and, as a result, stumble in life. Please put this thought firmly in your mind: *Nothing is so harmful to a developing mind than systematic exposure to error.* It is in that kind of context that stumbling is most likely to occur. Yet that is exactly what happens daily in any educational environment that has declared, “No God!” Here is why.

The apostle Paul, writing to the leaders of the church at Ephesus, gives some clarity about a key purpose of the church when he writes, “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity



of faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.”<sup>8</sup> Whew! That’s quite a sentence and quite a task.

In his commentary on Paul’s letter to the church in Ephesus, John MacArthur provides some insight on the language Paul employs in this text. Please give careful attention to what he has to say.

Kubia (trickery) is the term from which we get cube, and was used of dice-playing. Just as today, the dice were often “loaded” or otherwise manipulated by professional gamblers to their own advantage. The term for dice therefore became synonymous with dishonest trickery of any sort. Craftiness is a similar term, carrying the idea of clever manipulation of error made to look like truth. Methodia (scheming) is used later in the letter to refer to the schemes of the devil. No doubt it has reference to planned, subtle, systematized error.

It is spiritual children, such as were many of the Corinthian believers, who are in constant danger of falling prey to every new religious fad or novel interpretation of Scripture that comes along. Having no thorough knowledge of God’s Word, they are tossed here and there by waves of popular sentiment and are carried about by every wind of new doctrine (or I might add of every new cultural fad) that seems appealing. Because they are not anchored in God’s truth, they are subject to every sort of counterfeit truth—humanistic, cultic, pagan, demonic, or whatever. The New Testament is replete with warnings against this danger.<sup>9</sup>

James Boice adds this insight on what Paul is sharing here: “Children may be easily fooled. That is why parents have a special responsibility for the sound education and careful guidance of children.”<sup>10</sup>

We forget sometimes just how vulnerable our children are, how easily they can be deceived and led astray, how quick they are to embrace flawed thinking for no other reason than that they haven’t yet developed a robust way of evaluating what they hear

in the classroom every day. We also forget that the world is filled with people who are willing and able to take advantage of immature minds and underdeveloped discernment.

Please don't misunderstand what I'm saying. I'm not suggesting that every teacher in the public system is seeking to undermine your kid's faith. We are naïve, however, if we don't recognize the reality that everyone speaks through a particular worldview perspective, and for most teachers in the public system that perspective is thoroughly secular in nature. Sadly, the same could be said of far too many Christians. We can be relatively orthodox in our theology but completely secular in our worldview.

We hear so much from professional educators that they are able to keep personal opinions and beliefs out of the classroom. That might have been the case a hundred years ago, and even then it was difficult to do. Today it is a virtual impossibility, especially when teachers often view their work the way a missionary would view theirs.

As Steven Garber notes, "The great tragedy is that in the twentieth century, laboring under the myth of neutrality, education in the West attempts to offer a value-free answer to the questions 'What is man?' and 'What is man for?' Not only is it philosophically and pedagogically impossible in terms of truthfulness about what is actually happening in education—but its fruit is Postman's [Neil Postman, *The End of Education*] technocrat's ideal: a person with no commitment and no point of view but with plenty of marketable skills."<sup>11</sup>

That is the grim truth about the current state of education in the USA, and no amount of wistful thinking will alter that reality. So, here are my questions. Parents, given Paul's clear instruction in his letter to the church at Ephesus, what must you do to ensure that your children are brought up in the *paideia* of Christ? Pastors, what responsibility do you bear as a shepherd, especially toward the most vulnerable in the flock over which you have been given responsibility? Are you allowing the wolves of false teaching to tear your flock apart, or are you standing in their way, saying with J. R. R. Tolkien's great character Gandalf, who when confronting the demon Balrog declares, "You shall not pass"?

Hard words, I know, but I think we have reached the place where tough talk is necessary. The time for timidity is past. It's time to put our best team in place—let me repeat, *our best team* in place—in our effort to fulfill the mission given us by our Lord Jesus Christ. No more half-measures. Remember: You can't do it alone. You can't.

So, where do we go from here? In the next chapter I am going to look more fully at the role of parents in the education of their children—a role that is crucial, especially in the context of our modern world.

## For Reflection

1. Considering the challenges inherent in the command to “Bring up your children in the *paideia* and *nouthsia* of Christ,” what would be truly helpful to you as a parent? As a pastor? How does understanding the meaning of those two words impact how you think about the education of children?
2. Study Steven Garber’s statement on the previous page. If what Garber says is accurate, how should that reality shape how you think about the education of your children and the education of the children who attend your church or school?
3. Ponder a bit on these questions and observations: Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when fully trained will be like his teacher. Now ask yourself: How does that observation apply to your children and their education?
4. If Paul’s instruction to parents in Ephesians 6:1–3 are commands and not suggestions, how should that reality impact your decisions about the education of your children?



15

**The number of minutes a dad spends with a child in face-to-face conversation each day.**

47

**The number of hours a child typically spends in church in a year.**

1,350

**The number of hours a child spends at school in a year.**

Whether you are a parent, educator or in children's ministry, you have a tremendous opportunity to help the children in your life live their lives for Jesus. But with the towering influence of today's culture, how can you make the most of the precious time you have to shape a child's worldview for Jesus? How can you train up a child instead of putting them in a bubble?

In "Rethinking Discipleship," Dr. Alan Pue explores the importance of shepherding a child's heart by looking at the biblical principles that should drive behavior, values and beliefs. Plus, he details how a joint approach of home, church and school is foundational to Christ-centered education and weaving faith into every aspect of life.

You have an incredible mission. Now it is the time to seize it.



**Alan Pue, EdD** has spent a lifetime in Christian schooling as a student, teacher, coach, head of school, pastor, and for five years as Provost of The Master's College (now University) in Santa Clarita, CA. He currently serves as President of The Barnabas Group, Inc providing strategic/scenario planning, leadership development, and governance training assistance to Christian schools and other faith based organizations.

He has been a featured speaker at hundreds of conferences worldwide, is the author of three books; *Rethinking Sustainability: A Strategic Finance Model for Christian Schools*, *Rethinking Strategic Planning for Christian Schools*, and *Rethinking Discipleship: Why Christian Schooling Matter*, and several dozen journal articles and book reviews, and was co-founder of ACSI's Leadership University.

Alan lives in beautiful Castle Pines, Colorado and has been married to his wonderful wife Linda for fifty years. They have two children, Amy and Ryan and seven lovely and talented granddaughters.