

What Are They Teaching Our Children?

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The July 2000 issue of this publication carried my article titled “What Are We Teaching Our Children?” The thrust of that piece was that Christians (parents, teachers, and others) need to be very careful and thoughtful about the kinds of messages we send to our children regarding the importance of Bible study, worship, and godly living. The conscious emphasis was internal (i.e., the “we” – those within the church) for the simple reason that deficiencies in our own behavior are typically the most difficult to identify and objectively assess. Having said that, however, we can never forget that our children also receive messages from external sources. The influences of this world are powerful, deceptive, and constant, particularly on young, trusting, impressionable minds. In this essay, therefore, the emphasis will be on what our children are learning from the world (i.e., “they”), and what we are and/or should be doing in response.

The Word of God is replete with warnings, both implicit and explicit, about the wisdom, the values, the allure, and the fate of this world (e.g., Mark 4:19; John 15:18-19; Rom. 12:2; 1 Cor. 1:20ff; 2:6ff; 2 Cor. 4:3-4; Gal. 1:3-4; Eph. 2:1-2; 6:11ff; Col. 2:8; Jam. 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17; et al.). The principle set forth to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 6 seems particularly relevant to this topic. Concerning the words and commands of God, we should follow the inspired orders Moses gave to Israel and

...teach them diligently unto [our] children, and... talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thy hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the door-posts of thy house, and upon thy gates (vv. 7-9).

In other words, now as then, godly parents must constantly be engaged in an effort to imbed the precepts of our Creator within the minds of our children. The passage goes on to warn that many distractions of this world are going to be encountered, and that the temptation to forget God will be great. This fact highlights the need to make the most of every opportunity to teach and to influence our children – to train them in the way that they think. Ours are not the only voices they are hearing, and, as they get older, the time we have to interact directly with them decreases.

Though the idea may sound quaint to some in our fast-paced society, the dinner table is still probably the single best opportunity for parents to engage their children in regular

conversation about the events of the day. For families who no longer have meals together on any type of regular basis, maybe it is time to re-evaluate some priorities. Obviously, there are countless activities which can occupy our lives and the lives of our children, and many of these pursuits are, intrinsically speaking, harmless or even beneficial (e.g., jobs, sports, school clubs, civic organizations, and even “church functions”). These activities, however, have the potential to consume far too much of our time and to prevent families from behaving like families (i.e., spending time together, maintaining close relationships, influencing one another for good, etc.) To counteract or to inoculate against the voices of the world, it is vital that we know what is going on in the lives of our children on a daily basis. This assertion, of course, assumes that we are **interested** in what is going on in their lives. It assumes that our children **know** that we are interested, and that they feel comfortable talking with us about such things in some detail. These assumptions, in turn, are predicated upon the notion that we have a good, healthy relationship with our children. It would be naïve, to say the least, to think that parents could have a distant, disinterested relationship with their children for a period of years and then suddenly become intimately involved at the onset of adolescence. Such behavior would, in all likelihood, be met with a great deal of suspicion and resentment on the part of the children.

It will, perhaps, help us to list and consider some of the major messages with which our children are bombarded on any given day. It is also worth noting that these messages are typically presented in very subtle, attractive, and entertaining ways. Though this list is admittedly rather long, it is by no means exhaustive. Our children are being told that:

- Organic evolution is a proven fact, and any reasonable, well-educated, intellectual person knows it.
- The earth is billions of years old, and dinosaurs existed millions of years before humans appeared.
- The earth is our “mother,” and the other creatures inhabiting it are our “relatives.”
- Human beings are the worst enemies this earth has, and we must be extremely careful to avoid destroying “her.”
- Animals and plants (yea, the whole of the environment) are to be accorded the same status and protection as are human beings.
- Unborn human beings, however, are not really human beings, and deserve no protection at all.
- Human beings, via science alone, can solve any problem and create a perfect world.
- Nothing is intrinsically good or bad, right or wrong. These matters are determined by

individuals, on the basis of situation ethics or pragmatism.

- Human beings who possess certain desirable traits (e.g., physical beauty or athletic or intellectual prowess) are more valuable than are those who do not.
- All viewpoints (e.g., concerning God, religion, or our purpose for living) are equally true and valid (unless of course they are dictated by strict faith in the teachings of the Bible).
- Everyone cheats, everyone lies, everyone steals, everyone uses profanity (including euphemisms), everyone dresses immodestly, and everyone drinks, ad infinitum.
- If your current marriage partner is not making you happy, you can always get a divorce and find another.
- Homosexuality is a normal, healthy “lifestyle,” which characterizes a large percentage of our population (most of whom are “model citizens”).
- Homosexuality (much as alcoholism) is genetically pre-determined. Its practitioners have no choice about “the way they are.”
- Adolescents **will** have sex. They cannot help it, and it is foolish to try to stop them. Therefore, it is imperative that we teach them how to “protect” themselves.
- You have to experience things for yourself (e.g., alcohol, illicit drugs, fornication) to know if they are really bad.
- The public-school system is far better qualified to provide sex education than are parents.
- Any reference to God in the public life of this nation is a violation of its constitution.
- It is improper (at best) to criticize, label, or make judgments about anyone or anything.
- The United States, as a nation, is a big, greedy, wasteful bully.
- Strict faith in the Bible is a mark of ignorance, superstition, and/or insecurity.
- The injustices that have occurred (and still exist) in this nation are the only injustices that have ever occurred in the history of the world.
- Whatever suffering you may be experiencing is the fault of someone else and can probably be remedied with a lawsuit.
- God’s pattern for the home (including a submissive role for the wife) constitutes an abuse of the rights of women and is tantamount to slavery.
- Spanking is, without exception, a form of child abuse.
- Conservative viewpoints (whether religious or political) are obviously founded upon hard-headedness, narrow-mindedness, cold-heartedness, bigotry, radical xenophobia, and so on.

Our children are not only exposed to these ideas – and others like them – on a daily basis, but in many cases (because of the insidious and subtle nature of the presentation), they are not even conscious of what they are seeing and hearing.

Many parents may do a poor job of combating these messages simply because they do not realize just how powerful the voices of the world have become. In the mid-to late-1990s (when many of the parents of today were growing up) such assaults were far less common and far easier to recognize. Times have definitely changed. One of the most significant factors behind these changes has been the consistent promotion of the theory of evolution at all levels within our educational system. This philosophy, because it has been accepted as fact, has given rise to a number of other secular ideas. Humanism, moral relativism (particularly regarding sexuality), materialism, socialism, pluralism, pantheism, and “new age” thinking appear to dominate our world today. They certainly dominate the message it preaches.

It is sad that, over the same time period when these forces were gaining so much ground, many who ought to have offered the fiercest opposition to them were retreating. Theological liberalism has been responsible for the persistent “watering down” (and eventual destruction, for many) of such fundamental Biblical concepts as God, Satan, Heaven, Hell, sin, judgment, grace, and faith. So many religious leaders (from the Catholic and Protestant world and, sadly, from the church as well) who should have been at the forefront in the war against secular philosophies have joined forces with those promoting these godless ideas.

We also need to give specific consideration to all of the potential **sources** of the messages of this world. This will help us not only in the questions we ask about what our children hear (and from whom), but it will also help us to see the magnitude and the pervasiveness of the battle. We need to be acutely aware of how our children may be influenced by each of the following entities:

- Teachers (even those with a generally “Christian” perspective, including those in private schools)
- Textbooks (all of them, not just those pertaining to science or history)
- Television (even many made-for-children programs), radio, recorded music, movies (especially “kid movies,” including Disney movies)
- Books and magazines
- Computers (via educational software, games, the Internet)
- Friends
- Families of friends
- Relatives
- Enemies
- Ourselves

Our work is definitely cut out for us, requiring constant vigilance and a strong, consistent, counteractive influence. Our children need to be taught, from a very early age, to recognize the messages of the world and to evaluate them critically in light of God's perfect, revealed will. Do our children know where we stand on these matters and why? Do we talk (with our children) about them "when we sit in our houses, when we walk by the way, when we lie down, and when we rise up?" Do we "write them upon the posts of our houses, and on our gates"? Perhaps a prerequisite to these questions would be, "Do we know where **we** stand on these matters and why?" Have we given them the level of care, thought, and study that they deserve? Are we ready "always to give an answer to every man [or child] who asks us a reason for our hope" (1 Pet. 3:15)? Does our hope truly rest on the promises of God, rather than on the promises of the world?

[**Note:** This MS was written by Andy McClish for and published in the September 2002 issue of *The Gospel Journal*, Dub McClish, Editor.]

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