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1

Kenneth O. Gangel

What Christian Education Is

DEFINING BIBLICAL CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

- **Recognizes the family-centeredness of Christian nurture throughout Scripture**
- **Reaffirms the centrality of biblical revelation in the educative process**
- **Reviews the example of Jesus as teacher, mentor, and leader**
- **Rekindles the dynamic role of the Holy Spirit in the teaching-learning process**
- **Responds to the Great Commission by balancing evangelism and edification ministry**
- **Refocuses on education for spiritual growth—producing mature disciples**

Thomas Talbott once ruminated over the idea that God may have called him to be a teacher in order to show him how biblical revelation had been formed. Talbott suggests that the way teachers struggle and study to communicate truth to their classes offers a microscopic metaphor of how God revealed His truth throughout the centuries. His appropriate title simply affirms "What Teaching Can Teach Us About Scripture."

1. Thomas Talbott, "What Teaching Can Teach Us About Scripture," *Reformed Journal* 36:9 (September 1986): 11.

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In this chapter we will strive to reverse Talbott's idea and—indeed—his title. Our concern at the beginning of this important book is to ask “What can Scripture teach us about teaching?” Or more broadly, “What can Scripture teach us about the nature and role of Christian education among evangelicals?”

Christian education has been diversely defined over the past half century. In 1963 Randolph Crump Miller commended a simple definition by Adelaide Case: “Christian education is the effort to make available for our generation—children, young people, and adults—the accumulated treasures of Christian life and thought, in such a way that God in Christ may carry on his redemptive work in each human soul and in the common life of man.”²

More recently, Mark Lamport observed that the primary difference between secular education and Christian education is the adjectival descriptor *Christian*. “To be *Christian*, Christian education must: have God's esteem for the human being, sense the task to be a whole-life experience of growth and maturity, and give opportunity for service through experiential action.”³

What seems obvious from both of the above definitions (and from numerous other contributions by evangelical educators) is the absolute link between Christian education and theology. In this respect we refer to *Christian* education rather than *religious* education. The distinction falls not between New Covenant and Old Covenant truth, for evangelicals affirm the Old Testament base for Christian education. But the difference comes in articulating an education distinctly based upon theological propositions derived from the text of Scripture rather than education developed to perpetuate and propagate the tenets of a designated religious system.

To be sure, Christian education owes a great debt to the social sciences—and in the framework of a secular university, that would be its normal home. But a secular university cannot provide the natural habitat for Christian education; its absolute link to Scripture pushes the social sciences to step-child status.

Perhaps one of the best recent discussions of this linkage was prepared by Jim Wilhoit in *Christian Education and the Search for Meaning*.

Theology is crucial to Christian education. Often Christian education has been accused of drifting far from orthodox theological teaching, particularly in regard to the Christian view of human nature and spiritual growth. This drifting is unfortunate, for Christian education is lost unless grounded in biblically based teaching. No matter how much zeal a Christian educator may have, it is of little use without an awareness of the essential theological underpinning of the faith.⁴

2. Randolph Crump Miller, *Education for Christian Living*, 2d ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), pp. 53-54.
3. Mark A. Lamport, “‘The Hand-Me-Down’ Philosophy: A Challenge to Uniqueness in Christian Education,” *Christian Education Journal* 8:2 (Winter 1988): 39.
4. Jim Wilhoit, *Christian Education and the Search for Meaning* (Grand Rapids: Baker 1986), pp. 59-60.

EDUCATION IN THE PENTATEUCH

In a brilliant article published in 1987, Timothy Thomas pleads for a greater respect of the Old Testament among Christian educators, asking us to abandon our "folk canon."

The "folk canon," which often does not include some sections of the New Testament, is content to leave out most of the Old Testament. The Old Testament "folk canon" is often comprised of Genesis, narrative materials up to the end of Esther, Psalms, the occasional Proverb, the "Christmas" sections of the prophets (courtesy of Handel), and, for those of an eschatological bent, additional sections from the prophets. Little attempt is made to see a holistic picture. Context is of low priority. Further, an undue literal emphasis on the words themselves removes from the reader and interpreter the responsibility of hearing God's Spirit speaking through the whole.⁵

In addition, Thomas suggests that "folk canon" may often be augmented by denominational publications and popularist writings. But his main complaint stems from the minimal accord afforded the Old Testament among educators.

CENTRICITY OF JEHOVAH

Education for the early Hebrews focused on learning about God. The Bible's opening statement leaves no room for flexibility regarding its main topic (Gen. 1:1). God controlled the events in the lives of His people; He initiated the covenants and law; He raised up leaders to instruct His people regarding personal and corporate righteousness. And when a generation failed to follow God's truth, turmoil inevitably followed (Ex. 1; Judg. 2:10-15).

William Barclay's classic work *Educational Ideals in the Ancient World* spells it out clearly:

It has always to be remembered that Jewish education was entirely religious education. There was no text-book except the Scriptures; all primary education was preparation for reading the Law; and all higher education was the reading and the study of it. . . . Josephus says of Moses: "He commanded to instruct children in elements of knowledge (grammata), to teach them to walk according to the laws, and to know the deeds of their forefathers."⁶

ABSOLUTE TRUTH

Long before written portions of the Scripture were circulated, God's people viewed His Word through His anointed servants as absolute. Noah proclaimed the coming Flood, and his family entered the ark (Gen. 6-7). Abraham announced his

5. Timothy L. Thomas, "The Old Testament 'Folk Canon' and Christian Education," *The Asbury Theological Journal* 42:2 (1987): 47.
6. William Barclay, *Educational Ideals in the Ancient World* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974), pp. 13-14.

vision from the Lord, and a nation came into being (Gen. 12-24). Moses thundered down from Mount Sinai and the law was given (Ex. 19-20). The Pentateuch allows no room for discussions of interpretation, no flexibility for different viewpoints. When God speaks, His people respond.

Evangelical education retains its commitment to absolute truth—namely, that truth throughout Holy Scripture is not subject to change. In a world that almost universally considers truth relative (subject to change and revision), Christian educators affirm the centrality of absolute truth.

FOCUSING ON THE FAMILY

Respected Christian educators understand the significance of the family in teaching, but rarely do we see covenant continuity more dramatically displayed than in the early books of the Old Testament. A treatment of Deuteronomy 6 will come later, but here note the dramatic text of Deuteronomy 29:29: “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.” Earlier in the chapter Moses stands before all the Israelites and reminds them one final time that the covenant of God is with the nation, but the nation is represented by its families (Deut. 29:9-15; Ps. 78:1-8; Prov. 4:3-4, 10, 20-22).

Again Barclay is helpful in emphasizing that in addition to focus on God, the center of education among the Jews was the home, “and the responsibility of teaching the child is something that the parent cannot evade, if he is to satisfy the law of God.”⁷

THE TEACHING TASK

The Hebrew word for teach (*lāmad*) is translated in the Septuagint by the word *didasko*, which occurs about one hundred times. We find it most commonly in the Psalms, Deuteronomy, and Jeremiah. Old Testament usage does not primarily denote the communication of knowledge and skills but rather centers on how one’s life ought to be lived (Deut. 11:19; 20:18). Deuteronomy 6:1-9 introduces a portion of Scripture dear to the hearts of many Christian educators. Moses reminded his people that “God directed me to teach you” and showed again how teaching takes place in the matrix of the family.

SERVANTHOOD

Though developed to a much greater extent in the New Covenant, the germinal idea of serving God begins early in the text of Scripture. Adam and Eve serve God by caring for His creation. The heroes of the Pentateuch are shown at their best as the servants of Jehovah. Wilhoit sees in this a call to a special kind of Christian education:

7. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

The focus of God's concern was on action. Later in Scripture an emphasis on affections and intentions appears, but in the final analysis God requires properly motivated action, not just good intentions or a warm heart. For this reason Christian education must teach not just knowledge or skills but service of God through responsible action.⁸

EDUCATION IN THE HISTORICAL BOOKS

In the historical books little new truth surfaces regarding the teaching-learning processes of God's people. All the elements developed in the Pentateuch are retained to a greater or lesser extent, but now different kinds of teachers appear. Judges rule and prophets proclaim. Eli teaches Samuel, who in turn teaches Israel's first two kings.

Old Testament patterns begun in the Pentateuch and carried into the historical books are summarized nicely in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*:

How then does the education of the young proceed in Israel? God commands that they obey their parents as next to him in importance. The father acts like a priest to the family. He hands on the tradition to the family; he does so in answer to the question of his children (Ex. 12:26 f.), and his answer is a confession of God's saving activity toward Israel. The children are told of this not only in words, but also by means of impressive signs in the form of monumental stones (Josh. 4:6 f., 21 ff.).⁹

By the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, scribal emphasis on education had developed to an extensive degree. We learn the secret of Ezra's success in one poignant verse: "For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel" (Ezra 7:10). Some scholars suggest that Ezra's ministry may have been a turning point in the whole pattern of Jewish education.

EDUCATION IN WISDOM LITERATURE

In the wisdom literature the moralizing and humanizing trend in education not only continues but expands. The focus changes, and a prevailing lifestyle emerges. This change is seen devotionally in Psalms and practically in Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon.

WISDOM

Educational ideals have now been developed in Israel, but the point of reference

8. Wilhoit, p. 21.

9. K. Wegenast, in "Teach, Instruct, Tradition, Education and Discipline," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 3:797.

continues to be God and His revelation. Appropriately, three-fifths of the references to wisdom appear in the wisdom literature. The Greek word *sophia*, though it may denote skill in art or craft, economic shrewdness, or governmental ability, most commonly reflects the godly behavior that enables one to master life (Prov. 8:32-36). Wisdom takes on a personal connotation as the mediator of revelation (Prov. 8:1-21) who calls people to learn (Prov. 1:20; 8:32; 9:1).

INSTRUCTION

We look in vain for widespread Septuagint usage of *didaskalia* in the wisdom literature, for it appears only in Proverbs 2:17 in reference to the law considered as the will of God. *Katechesis* and *paradidōmi*, New Testament Greek words used for instruction, are not in the Old Testament. However, the Hebrew word *mūsār* rises to great importance since it appears thirty times in the book of Proverbs, usually emphasizing discipline but most commonly translated as “instruction,” synonymous with wisdom throughout this portion of the Old Testament.

PHYSICAL DISCIPLINE

Of great concern to Christian educators is the role of discipline in preparing disciples. The New Testament makes a clear distinction between discipline and punishment (Heb. 12:4-13), but that distinction is less clearly defined in the Old Testament. The book of Proverbs introduces the dimension of physical correction, not earlier seen as a part of the Old Testament instructional process (Prov. 13:24; 17:10; 22:15; 29:15, 17).

EDUCATION IN THE PROPHETS

As the book of Isaiah opens, the Bible reader experiences something of a déjà vu or a first-time experience with the earlier historical books. A nation that had been taught by God and given His truth for its individual and corporate life now faced national judgment and temporary oblivion because it had rejected God’s teaching. Isaiah moans, “The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner’s manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand” (Isa. 1:3). Prophets served as the teachers in Israel both before, during, and after the Exile.

In Jeremiah 8:8 we learn of the role of the scribes, the professional class of teachers in Israel whose task it was to preserve the written and oral traditions of the nation. They became copyists, editors, and interpreters of God’s truth (and man’s fallible interpretation thereof). We have already noted the impact of Ezra. A. Elwood Sanner suggests that the scribes provide us with ancient historical background for varied methodology in teaching.

The teaching methods of the scribes included public discussion, questions and answers, memorization, the exact verbal reproduction of the teacher’s words, sto-

ries, oral laws, precepts, proverbs, epigrams, parables, beatitudes, and allegories.¹⁰

After the darkness of Exile and the strange "silence" of the intertestamental period, the stage was set for the dramatic entry of Jesus Christ into human history. God selected earth to be "the visited planet," and genuinely Christian education, as we attempt to understand and practice it today, was initiated at the coming of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son. What Isaiah prophesied concerning Zebulun and Naphtali can be said of all those who saw His arrival: "The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned" (Matt. 4:16).

EDUCATION IN THE GOSPELS

The fact that Christian education must be biblical is precisely what makes it Christian. And to be entirely biblical, it must center in Christ. Students who wish to grasp firmly the theological and philosophical foundations of Christian education must master various passages in the New Testament that develop those concepts.

THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS

The presence and power of the Son of God dominate the first four books of the New Testament. Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection are essential, of course, but His modeling/mentoring role as Master Teacher has provided Christian educators a poignant demonstration for almost two thousand years. Forty-five times the gospels call Jesus "teacher," and fourteen times they refer to Him as "rabbi." Howard Hendricks wants his readers to grasp the significance of Christ's method as well:

No one could ever accuse Jesus of a truncated educational philosophy. He understood that all learning involves a process. He not only knew what He was to teach, but He also knew how to teach. Learning was more than listening; teaching more than telling. How did Jesus become so effective without bells and schedules, a fixed classroom, and an overhead projector or flannelgraph?¹¹

THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS

How important is Matthew's brief notation at the end of his record of the Sermon on the Mount: "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law" (Matt. 7:28-29).

10. A. Elwood Sanner, ed., *Exploring Christian Education* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), pp. 41-42.

11. Kenneth O. Gangel and Howard Hendricks, eds., *The Christian Educator's Handbook on Teaching* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1988), p. 25.

Christians argue about the significance of Matthew 16:19 and the curious phrase “keys of the kingdom.” But Jews have commonly referred this to the office of teacher. Jesus called His followers to a higher righteousness and to carry through His calling as a teacher.

TEACHING OF THE DISCIPLES

In Matthew 28:20 and Mark 6:30 we see the disciples commissioned to teach; and in Luke 12:12 we learn that the Holy Spirit will be their teacher. Indeed, discipling becomes the centerpiece of teaching in the gospels, providing the link between teaching and learning. Eleanor Daniel emphasizes the significance of maturity in the discipling process:

The purpose of Bible teaching is to bring change into the life of the learner until he has reached maturity in Christ—a life long task. This maturity is achieved when a person has a knowledge of God's Word, with understanding, that results in changed behavior: bearing fruit, growing in knowledge, becoming stronger in endurance and patience, and being thankful.¹²

The noun *disciple* (*mathētēs*) comes from the verb *manthano* meaning “to learn.” Jesus’ disciples followed Him nearly everywhere (Mark 6:1), and since they were learners, they stumbled and struggled as we often do (Mark 5:31; 10:24; Luke 8:9). The noun occurs 264 times in the New Testament, exclusively in the gospels and Acts. These learners epitomized the growing, developing student in the Christian education process who strives ultimately to “be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40).

ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT: JOHN 16:12-15

Although we find explicit references to the Holy Spirit in the synoptic gospels, it was left to John the evangelist to detail how the third Person of the Trinity assists the teaching-learning process. Christian teachers must be intensely interested in truth, as so must their students. John promises us the Holy Spirit will guide us into truth (16:13), probably a reference to the truth about Christ, His person, and His work in the world.

Perhaps we should not limit this promise only to the immediate hearers or the first century of the Christian era. It rings true for teachers today who need the power of God's Spirit to help them comprehend spiritual truth, to allow the Spirit to glorify Christ in their lives (John 16:12-15).

Remember, too, that the Holy Spirit affects not only the teacher and the learner, but also the subject matter and the environment. His power permeates truth wherever it is found.

12. Eleanor Daniel et al., *Introduction to Christian Education* (Cincinnati: Standard, 1980) p. 93.

THE GREAT COMMISSION: MATTHEW 28:16-20

The last paragraph of Matthew offers New Testament readers a commissioning narrative much like those found in Genesis 12, Exodus 3, and Isaiah 6. Matthew alone records this mountain meeting and notes two references to it by the Lord (26:32; 28:10) and one by the resurrection angel (28:7). Mainline orthodoxy, particularly as evidenced by the twentieth-century evangelical movement, holds a traditional and somewhat normative interpretation of these five dramatic verses, namely, that this paragraph lays the foundation stone for the modern missionary movement. Yet we often fail to notice two crucial dimensions of the passage:

1. The Commission mandates both evangelism and teaching, with the latter being at least equal and quite possibly greater in emphasis.

2. The Commission has been given not only for apostles, or for missionaries alone, but to the church. The entire universal Body of Christ stands under the requirements of this great teaching commission. Jesus emphasizes here His complete lordship and authority over the church. *In its simplest and purest form, Christian education is communicating God's truth in order to make disciples*; and that process goes on in dozens of ways, structured and unstructured, throughout the life of any church that seriously heeds the commands of the New Testament.

The heart of the Commission (vv. 19-20a) contains three participles (going, baptizing, teaching) but only one command: "make disciples." Welcoming curious inquirers to the gate of the Temple at Jerusalem may have been the Old Covenant way of putting them in touch with God. But now things were to be done differently. The New Covenant has been activated by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the One in charge assumes His followers will be going where the needs are. Going, baptizing, and teaching are not the means of discipling, but they characterize it. The New Testament cannot conceive of a disciple who has not been baptized and instructed.

Center stage in the Commission stands the imperative—"make disciples." *How we understand the meaning of that command determines what we do with Christian education in the local church.* Many have taken it to mean sharing the gospel and thereby limit the Great Commission to evangelism at home and abroad. But genuine biblical disciples hear, understand, and obey Jesus' teaching—and that does not happen by raising a hand or coming forward in a meeting. *Jesus emphasized life change, not content transmission. He highlighted multiplication of the Body in the world, not addition of members to the roll.*

EDUCATION IN ACTS

The book of Acts opens with Christ's ascension but moves quickly to the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the launching of the New Covenant church. Throughout its pages Luke demonstrates the dependability of Barnabas, the availability of Philip, the loyalty of Dorcas, and the consistency of Silas. To be sure, Paul dominates most of the book, but the lay leaders God gathered around him to

carry out the ministry of the church played a crucial role.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND THE CHURCH: ACTS 2:42-47

What is a church? The word itself (Greek *ekklesia*) is used in the New Testament to describe a political assembly of free citizens, a Jewish assembly (as in the Old Testament), and the Body of Christ. In the third usage we see both the universal church and the local church. The universal church contains only true believers, whereas the local church may include professing Christians who have not experienced regeneration. Let us save formal definitions for the theologians and notice that in one brief paragraph at the end of Acts 2 we see the church as a devoted, sharing, and worshiping people (Acts 2:42-47).

Doctrine, fellowship, communion, and prayer occupied their days and their devotion. They spent time together and shared common goods to meet each other's needs. Verse 46 uses the word *homothumadon*, which appears eleven times in the New Testament, ten of which occur in the book of Acts. It is the key word *together* (lit., "with one mind or purpose") and describes the attitude of those early believers.

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF LEARNING: ACTS 11

Acts 11 provides no treatise on learning theory, but it does demonstrate how the early church seriously committed itself to educational ministry. When Barnabas arrived at Antioch, he exercised his own spiritual gift of exhortation (encouragement), stabilizing the new believers and leading even more people to the Lord (Acts 11:19-24). But then he discovered that more was required; these new converts needed serious biblical instruction. So he went out to find the man he considered most qualified to carry out the task, and Saul of Tarsus became the first "minister of education" in a local church, assisting senior pastor Barnabas for a whole year as they "met with the church and taught great numbers of people" (vv. 25-26).

When we relate Acts 11 to chapters 2 and 4, we see a tremendous progression in the development of truth and the process of teaching in the church. But one thing does not change—*content translates to action when energized by the Spirit of God*. Without the benefit of modern learning theory those early Christians practiced what we now call "wholistic learning," which encompasses the total person—cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions.

GLOBAL TEACHING: ACTS 13

Trekking through Asia Minor for a few months was hardly "global" in terms of today's understanding, but Barnabas, Paul, and their companions set world missions in motion as they started out for Seleucia, Cyprus, and points west (Acts 13:1-5). The first missionary journey demonstrates what it really means to teach the

message of Christ to other cultures. True, Paul dealt exclusively with Greek or Aramaic speaking peoples, and where possible he stayed in a synagogue setting. But the missionary business soon expanded, and on the second and third trips he began to visualize much wider boundaries for his ministry. Finally, God sent him to Rome, and there his teaching continued as “from morning till evening he explained and declared to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets” (Acts 28:23).

ROLE OF TEACHING ELDERS: ACTS 20

Of enormous importance in understanding what church leaders do is the brief discussion with the Ephesian elders recorded in Acts 20. Here we learn that “elders” and “overseers” are used as synonymous terms (compare verses 17 and 28). Furthermore, we see that elders/overseers must function as shepherds (vv. 28-29). In Paul’s own testimony he describes his ministry as preaching and teaching, testifying and proclaiming (the Greek noun *episkopē* appears in Luke 19:44; Acts 1:20; 1 Tim. 3:1; and 1 Pet. 2:12).

Though the Acts 20 passage does not specifically describe the teaching ministry of these elders, we shall see from our explorations in the pastoral epistles how much of a role Christian education plays in elder responsibility. Furthermore, the thirteen verb-form usages of *episkopos* (*episkeptomai* and *episkopeo*) show us a ministry we have come to identify with “ruling” and “ordering.” The Bible describes it as a sharing, caring ministry in which elders serve God’s people. Consider the texts of importance: Matthew 25:36, 43; Luke 1:68, 78; 7:16; Acts 6:3; 7:23; 15:14, 36; Hebrews 2:6; 12:15; James 1:27; 1 Peter 5:2.

EDUCATION IN THE PAULINE EPISTLES

As a premier educator, the apostle Paul offers solid emphasis for the church’s instructional ministry. He seems to harmonize perfectly the roles of evangelism and edification, a balance we find difficult to maintain in the late twentieth-century church. Several specific dimensions of biblical Christian education surface, though we have opportunity to explore only a few exemplary passages.

THE ROLE OF THE BIBLE

For evangelicals the issue of biblical inerrancy and authority is foundational. Romans and Galatians develop the doctrine of salvation (among other doctrines) squarely based on the authoritative message of God’s Word (Rom. 10:8-11).

Multiple quotations could be cited from current educators identifying the role of the Bible as “containing” the record of the Christian message from which the church interprets its doctrine. Evangelicals speak much more plainly about the role of Scripture in Christian education. As Gaebelein puts it,

Is there, then, a watershed, a continental divide, as it were, that separates a consistent Christian philosophy of education from all forms of eclecticism? The answer is a clear affirmative. The great divide is nothing less than the authority of the Bible and its acceptance as normative. . . . a thoroughly Christian view of education must not only be based upon Scripture; it must also stand under it.¹³

PRIMACY OF TEACHING: 1 CORINTHIANS

The letters to the troubled church at Corinth were hardly designed to identify a theology of education, but great truths about teaching flow therefrom. Paul uses *didaskō* fifteen times in his letters, two of which appear in 1 Corinthians (4:17; 11:14). Romans 2:21 uses the word in the traditional sense of teaching others; Romans 12:7 deals with the teaching office (gift) in the church; and Galatians 1:12 refers to handing on a tradition. In 1 Corinthians 4:17 Paul promises to send Timothy to remind the Corinthians of what he teaches everywhere "in every church." In the latter part of chapter 12 where Paul identifies spiritual gifts, he places teachers just behind apostles and prophets (v. 28). In chapter 14, the key idea of the entire section deals with the edification of God's people in the church (cf., 1 Cor. 11:14; Eph. 4:21; Col. 1:28; 2:7; 3:16; 2 Thess. 2:15; 1 Tim. 2:12; 4:11; 6:2; 2 Tim. 2:2; Titus 1:11).

Three of Paul's uses of *paradidōmi* (Greek "instruction") occur in 1 Corinthians (11:2, 23; 15:3). His clear intent is to describe Christian doctrine or instruction delivered at an earlier time. The Lord initiated these instructions, and Paul not only quotes existing tradition but interprets it in light of revelation he received. How different this was from the rabbis, who determined that tradition must be passed on unchanged. In other words, Paul's teaching focused on making truth applicable to people in their present needs.

EDUCATION FOR MATURITY: EPHESIANS, PHILIPPIANS, COLOSSIANS

These epistles were written to build up healthy, properly-functioning churches. Practical exhortations such as "let us live up to what we have already attained" (Phil. 3:16) and the brilliant eighth verse of the fourth chapter—"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things"—show us how crucial it is to develop a maturing ministry for the preparation of disciples. Modeling methodology immediately follows in verse 9: "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you."

The rich Christology at the beginning of Colossians culminates in verse 28: "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so

13. Quoted in *Introduction to Biblical Christian Education*, ed. Werner Graendorf (Chicago: Moody, 1981), p. 15, and also cited in J. E. Hakes, ed., *An Introduction to Evangelical Christian Education* (Chicago: Moody, 1964), p. 41.

that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me" (Col. 1:28-29). This marvelous model of Christian education describes what we do (warning, teaching), how we do it (personalization, thoroughness), and even why we do it (to render our students mature [complete] in Christ). Sara Little observes:

When Christian education actually becomes the process of helping truth to be experienced and interpreted, it demonstrates the true relevance of the Christian revelation and overcomes many false dichotomies of the past in its recognition of the "organic relations" between doctrine and experience, between content and method, between truth and life.¹⁴

In Ephesians we find something of a high-water mark in terms of the edificational role of the church. Consider carefully one entire passage:

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Eph. 4:11-16)

There you have it. *Gifted leaders minister to serving people to produce a unified congregation with biblical alertness and spiritual growth.* Christian educators equip, enrich, and encourage God's servants so that "the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."

MINISTRY MODELING: 1 AND 2 THESSALONIANS

Just a quick glance at the Thessalonian epistles shows us that the church at Thessalonica profited and prospered most from the example of its educators. After describing the kind of behavior he avoided (1 Thess. 2:1-6), Paul explained his leadership style as "gentle," "caring," "loving," "sharing," "encouraging," "comforting," and "fatherly." He told them, "You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed" (v. 10). In his first letter he admonishes them to "make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told

14. Sara Little, *The Role of the Bible in Contemporary Christian Education*, rev. ed. (Richmond, Va: John Knox, 1962), p. 74.

you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody" (4:11-12).

The Thessalonian Christians acted upon Paul's teaching sufficiently that he could write in his second epistle, "Your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring" (1:3-4).

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP: 1 AND 2 TIMOTHY, TITUS

Finally we come to the pastoral epistles. Here we find Timothy and Titus being instructed by the apostle Paul regarding the spiritual quality of their lives and the extent of their educational ministries in Ephesus and Crete. Without minimizing the significance of the gospel, we now see that a body of doctrine must be communicated to the people of God. The word *didaskalia*, used only six times in the New Testament up to this point (Matt. 15:9; Mark 7:7; Rom. 12:7; 15:4; Eph. 4:14; Col. 2:22), occurs no fewer than fifteen times in the pastorals. Believers had developed a fixed doctrinal tradition, a corpus of truth to be perpetuated in the church. In 2 Timothy 3:16 we discover that God's inspired Scripture (lit., "God-breathed")—presumably the Old Testament—is profitable for teaching.

Words for "teaching" and "instruction" appear more than ten times in 1 Timothy alone, and one gets the impression early on that Paul purposes to instruct Timothy how to educate the believers at Ephesus. Titus 2 represents a vertical model of adult education. Eight times some form of the word *teach* appears, and we can add to those Paul's use of "train," "encourage," and "rebuke." Five educational groupings surface in the chapter: older men, older women, younger women, younger men, and slaves. Anyone who believes that Christian education is just for children needs to spend a few hours in Titus 2.

EDUCATION IN THE GENERAL EPISTLES AND REVELATION

The general epistles and Revelation continue the emphasis on teaching and the commitment to a received body of doctrine that we have found throughout the Pauline epistles, and especially in the pastorals. Peter, for example, though he does not use *didaskalia* or *paideia* ("discipline"), gives over entire paragraphs to the development of maturity in the people of God and the importance of their remembering knowledge germane to the proper practice of Christian living. In modern parlance, of course, this is nothing more nor less than Christian education (cf., 1 Pet. 1:3-9, 13-14, 22-25; 2:1-3, 11-20; 3:13-17; 4:7-19; 2 Pet. 1:5-11; 3:1-2, 14-18).

DISCIPLINE: HEBREWS

If one single word can identify the educational thrust of the book of Hebrews, it would be the word *discipline* (Greek, *paideia* [noun], *paideuō* [verb], which

occurs seven times in chap. 12). A dramatic passage in Hebrews 12 emphasizes that educational process depends upon the orderliness of discipline and the requirement of punishment. The immediate context obviously deals with the heavenly Father and His earthly children; but one can quickly see a principle easily adapted to Christian parents and even classroom teachers: “No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (v. 11).

The other passage of great educational consequence in Hebrews emphasizes maturity, another strategic concept in Christian education (5:11-6:3). Here the author scolds his readers, observing that they should have been teachers, but instead they need to be taught again—and not only taught, but taught the most elementary things of God’s truth. In this context the word *didasko* appears in a context that reinforces its biblical emphasis—spiritual teaching aims to produce godliness and Christlike maturity.

PRACTICALITY: JAMES

What are we to say about the book of James—other than that all instructional activity by Christian teachers needs to produce some obvious behavioral effect in the lives of students. A word for “teach” (*didaskaloi*) appears only in the third chapter (3:1), which speaks to teachers without hesitation or vagueness. Here we learn that the spiritual maturity God expects in His teachers is best measured by the tongue. James issues a warning that must echo in the minds of all who adopt the mantle of instruction: “Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly” (3:1).

TEACHING AS EXHORTATION: 1 AND 2 PETER

The first epistle of Peter offers practical exhortation and comfort for believers’ daily needs. Peter seems determined to link doctrine with practice. Spiritual growth through the study of God’s truth appears early (2:1-3). He deals often with service and suffering (3:8-4:19), and in the last chapter of the first epistle he reminds the elders of their responsibility for modeling godly behavior before the flock.

In his second epistle Peter shows himself as both a concerned pastor and a champion of theological orthodoxy. He lists the credentials of true teachers to help his readers become discerning students of God’s Word (1:12-21). False teachers are exposed, and the Lord’s return is reviewed. The last verse of the Petrine epistles waves a flag commonly flown by Christian educators: “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen” (3:18).

ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT TEACHING: 1, 2, 3 JOHN, JUDE, REVELATION

All three Johannine epistles offer exhortation important to us in the late twen-

tieth century. In his gospel, John presents the way of salvation, challenging readers to believe. Now in the epistles he emphasizes the results of salvation in those who have already believed. The approach is personal; John avoids quotations or other scholarly distinctives. He encourages Christians to walk in the light. False doctrine can be avoided because Christians have spiritual knowledge. John claims, "I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth" (2:21). Biblical Christian education should exhibit the characteristics of the main themes in the Johannine epistles: light, life, love, and knowledge.

The last two books of the New Testament do not add much to our understanding of educational ministry. Jude's emphasis suggests that only those who have been built up in the spiritual instruction that we have seen described in the New Testament can stand against the severe test of temptation and false teaching all around them (vv. 20-21).

The book of Revelation emphasizes again the significance of God's written revelation and its impact on local churches. Forms of the word *teach* are used only negatively (e.g., "teaching of Balaam," 2:14; "teaching of the Nicolaitans," 2:15).

So we come full circle to emphasizing the centrality of the Bible in any instructional activity that can be properly called "Christian education." Once again Sanner aids our thinking.

The Bible is the Word of God; it is the Foundation and the final Authority for the goals and content of Christian education. In it the Christian finds his heritage from the past and his hope for the future. He discovers that he is a part of a great teaching tradition. The Hebrews used instruction effectively to perpetuate their faith and their way of life—they taught through the parents, the priest, the wise men, the prophets, the Temple and the synagogue. Jesus Himself was the Master Teacher, His disciples spread the Good News through preaching and teaching.

God honors such teaching with His grace. Biblical principles of education challenge us to perform our teaching tasks with total commitment. We cannot rest content until all men come to know Jesus Christ whom to know is life eternal. To love Him, to be like Him, to serve Him, is the fulfillment of Christian education.¹⁵

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15. Sanner, p. 49.

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