

## The Value of Christian Education by Paul Madsen

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A Christ-centred education makes connections that no other type of education has the foundation to make. These connections are the key, not only for student success, but for real success in life!

What is Christian Education and why is it important? From much study and experience it seems that the real difference is the focus on character, the heart of the person, not just the brain or the thought processes. Character formation is integral to learning because a person of character is one that is prepared for life and finds real purpose in both learning and in serving others. As we prepare for life we need to see the big picture of what life is and how we fit in. We know that we have been created by God to be 'image bearers' (Genesis 1:26-27), this means we reflect the character of God; but sometimes we are able to reflect it more clearly than at other times.

Rick Warren says:

God wants you to develop the kind of character described in the beatitudes of Jesus (Matthew 5:1-12), the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), Paul's great chapter on love (1 Corinthians 13), and Peter's list of the characteristics of an effective and productive life (2 Peter 1:5-8).

But how can I develop this kind of character which is a real reflection of who God is and who He wants me to be? This is the essence of the Christian life and what God is constantly working toward through my walk with Him, through my relationships, through my family, through my church, through my daily circumstances, trials and learning experiences. This is preparing for life and living out my purpose! So the calling of the Christian school is to support both the family and the church in this process of understanding and applying Truth from a God-centred perspective!

Now, why doesn't public education develop this character in our children? First of all, this character is not the stated goal of public education. Character is simply outside the scope of an academic approach to life where people "learn to earn", although there are schools that attempt to address character without a biblical foundation. But more importantly, there are several conflicting issues in modern society which directly impact the public education environment: a disparity between religious belief and popular belief, a secular vs. sacred concept of life, relativistic morality, and the false assumption that some people have more value than others. These concepts can be summarized in the differences between a God-centred worldview and a self-centred worldview.

In the self-centred worldview, I am my own purpose. I exist as a product of the chance fusion of genes from my parents. My character is formed by my circumstances and how I react to those circumstances based on my predisposition and my attitude. My choices are determined by what I think is best for me. Doing the right thing means doing what is right for me or maybe benefiting someone else (usually someone I value). If I am religious, I may make some choices based on how God may or may not punish me as a result, but the focus is still on my own well-being.

In a God-centred worldview, I exist for God's purposes. I exist because God has planned for me to be born with certain genes in a certain place at a certain time. My character is formed because of the people that God puts in my life to teach and train me and I learn to recognize His hand in this process. Often my attitudes and actions do not reflect the character He desires, but I am learning to do this through the difficult things He brings my way. My choices are determined by what God says is best for me as I learn Truth from His Word and by His Spirit living in me. When I don't make correct choices, I need to deal with the natural consequences and trust Him to use everything for His glory.

So the Christian school, ideally, has an approach to life and learning which results in beautiful and purposeful connections in the following areas:

1. God-centred education connects faith to life (God's law is central to all learning and to all decisions because I know He desires what is best in the long term.)
2. God-centred education connects work to service and ministry (Work is a process of using what God has given me to bless and serve others, to care for His creation and to communicate a knowledge of Him.)
3. God-centred education connects morality to absolutes (Right and wrong is not determined by the limited scope of what is right for me or my community but because God is Holy and God is Good.)
4. God-centred education connects people to purpose (My life has purpose because I am part of His big plan. But, just as important, each individual around me has purpose too and our interactions need to communicate their God-given value!)

We can take a look at these connections in more detail later, because they are unique to the Christian school. But remember that we as parents and as teachers are an integral part of highlighting these connections in how we live and in how we teach. What a joy and privilege God has given us!