

## **Affecting the Culture for Christ!**

Next to parents, teachers are the most powerful ‘agents of change’ in the life of a child, a community, or a nation! Yet, how many Christian teachers today believe they can make a difference in their culture? God is known for taking the ordinary and making it extraordinary. Throughout history, God has used ordinary men and women to affect His kingdom in extraordinary ways. This is one of the dynamic themes that runs throughout the Bible.

God’s cultural mandate for mankind is to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it<sup>1</sup> in accordance with His purposes and for His glory.<sup>2</sup> The Old Testament record repeatedly indicates that the success of the Hebrew community and the continuity of its culture were in knowing the living God and obeying His revealed will.<sup>3</sup> Israel’s mandate from the Living God was one of education! Jesus’ great commission to his followers to “go make disciples of all nations teaching them to observe all that He commanded”<sup>4</sup> is also an educational and cultural mandate.

Education is defined by the Apostle Paul as “teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”<sup>5</sup> Education is a religious activity, the function of which is to instruct and train the next generation in the ultimate values and principles of a culture. The foundation of every educational system (whether Christian or secular) is rooted in religion, and the curriculum taught expresses the religious standards and the cultural expectations of that system. Education is never neutral with regard to the type of character it forms or the influence it has on the culture, both of which ultimately determine the health of the nation! Teaching and learning – the heart-to-heart and mind-to-mind relationship between teacher and student – touch eternity!<sup>6</sup> The influence, either positive or negative, that one teacher has to affect the culture and health of families and nations is astonishing and touches multiplied future generations!

Culture is the by-product of a nation’s educational system, the transmission of one generation’s beliefs, values, morés, and skills to the next. How one generation instructs and trains the next will determine the philosophy of government (what god are we serving?) and the welfare (spiritual well-being, productivity, and peace) of the citizenry. “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.”<sup>7</sup>

The value a nation places upon education in righteousness will determine her place in history. Education in righteousness is rooted in the principles of the living Word of God.<sup>8</sup> Teaching children how to think, reason, and apply God’s Word to decision making and problem solving will affect all spheres of God-ordained government (family, church, and civil) and every societal institution. One of the great chapters in the Bible is Joshua, chapter one. We find God giving Joshua the key to leading the Israelites into the promised land and ultimately affecting the culture of Canaan:

“Be strong and very courageous and be careful to do according to all the law. . . . This book shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous and have success. Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go!”

Joshua embraced the “God-sized challenge” to lead his nation’s children into the promised land among the brutal pagan Canaanites. The individual who shapes the culture is not the one paralyzed

by the challenge, but courageously makes change happen knowing that “greater is He that’s within, than he that is in the world.”<sup>9</sup>

History, when studied through the lens of a Christian world view, teaches us that the course of a nation can be altered by one individual led by the Hand of God.<sup>10</sup> God is the author of His Story and He launches events through individuals whom He providentially calls and prepares. One disciple educated with the Word of God, who can think and reason with God’s principles of education and government, can, by God’s grace, rebuild a nation’s educational system.

The Bible is rich with examples of educators who impacted their culture. Dedicated by his mother to education in the temple under the nurture of Israel’s high priest, young Samuel “ministered unto the Lord before Eli, when the word of the Lord was scarce and there was no open vision.”<sup>11</sup> Samuel knew first hand the tragedy of the omission of Godly education in a nation. As a judge, priest, and prophet, he witnessed the effect in the moral degradation of his people and their national character, as well as in the decay of the Hebrew culture.

Early trained to love the glorious national traditions of the past, Samuel grieved at the decline of Israel’s biblical world view and the moral degeneracy of his nation’s leaders. The sanctuary, destitute of the ark and tended by a demoralized priesthood, had also fallen into utter disregard. In these troublesome days, the Hebrew culture (music, art, and poetry) and God’s Hand in their history were unknown. Samuel’s solution was to gather disciples, or “sons of the prophets,” into small schools in six locations throughout Israel to restore both religious and cultural literacy. This free education,<sup>12</sup> which highlighted composition, the study of sacred history and law, and hymnology, was open to all, the herdsman, the potter, the merchant, the farmer. It restored the knowledge of God in all subjects – the fine arts, natural sciences, literature, history, law, and government. When fully trained, the disciple returned to his village an educated man in “first principles.” Imagine the impact of just one graduate, trained to reason with God’s Law, returning home to teach others! In only twenty years, Samuel’s restoration of biblical education turned his nation back to God and established her character and identity as a God-chosen people – a nation who slowly rose to a new independent position among pagan nations.

In the New Testament, Peter’s words of encouragement to those first century believers, who were dispersed and faithfully living as salt and light in hostile, pagan societies, are a rally cry for us today: “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”<sup>13</sup> God has always meant for His people to be holy as He is holy,<sup>14</sup> to be set apart from pagan influences and the world’s system, to look and act differently, to set the standard of morality and shape the culture through principles of truth and beauty. Being set apart means “being in the world, not of it,” refusing to conform to the moral standard and tastes of the world, instructing children in righteousness and holiness, while training their aesthetic tastes and sensibilities to effect language and literature; communication and the media; the fine arts, drama, and architectural design; laws, government, and public policy; economics, business, and industry; invention and enterprise; and *education* – the culture!

Peter was a Jew, educated as all young Jewish children were in the first century. Every child was sent to school for formal instruction and training at the age of five or six. Compulsory education existed and in Jerusalem, at the time of Herod, it was deemed unlawful to live in an area where there was no school! From the book of Leviticus – God’s instruction book in ‘holiness’ – came the first lessons for every Jewish child! (Imagine your five-year-old memorizing lessons from the book

of Leviticus today!) The Jews understood the importance of instructing their youth in the character of God's holiness, because the living God had always placed a high value on education focused on His Word. His covenant children had to be able to read, lest they forget His commandments and fall into personal sin and national decay.

The book of Nehemiah provides the keys for educational leadership that we need today if we expect to impact the culture for Christ. It begins with one man (in servitude to a pagan king) answering the call of God! One man willing to fast, pray, and seek God's plan for the "city of his forefathers' tombs." Nehemiah placed family units on the decayed wall of Jerusalem with a sword in one hand (symbolic of the Word of God) and a building tool (symbolic of a Word-based curriculum and biblical methods of teaching and learning) in the other.<sup>16</sup> They used the rubble and burned bricks of the old wall to reconstruct a new defense. At the completion of the wall in just fifty-two days, governor Nehemiah asked Ezra, the high priest and educational reformer, to read the Word of the Lord in the center of the city. When the people heard God's Word for the first time in nearly one hundred years, they wept and repented of their sins. As they obediently applied His divine principles to every sphere of government and institution, God breathed life into their city, revived their Hebrew culture, and prepared to bring forth the Messiah from their midst!

The New Testament clearly reveals that the ability of the body of Christ to be salt and light (agents of change) in a dark culture is directly related to an educational system that teaches sound doctrine from His Word:

*And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, . . . Be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.<sup>17</sup>*

Teachers, arm yourselves with the Word of God and reclaim your culture for Christ!

#### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 1:28

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 5:19; Luke 4:43; Romans 8:28; Ephesians 1:9-10; Hebrews 6:17

<sup>3</sup> Deuteronomy 6:1-9; Joshua 1:6-8

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 28:19-20

<sup>5</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16-17

<sup>6</sup> Ecclesiastes 3:11; Job 32:8

<sup>7</sup> Proverbs 4:24

<sup>8</sup> Hebrews 4:12

<sup>9</sup> 1 John 4:4

<sup>10</sup> Judges 5:14; Ezra 8:22; Nehemiah 2:8; Isaiah 42: 6-9; Jeremiah 25:15; 2 Timothy 1:9-10

<sup>11</sup> 1 Samuel 3:1

<sup>12</sup> Ellicott, C. J. (1887). (Ed.) *An Old Testament commentary*. London, England: Cassel and Co., Ltd., Vol. II, p. 290.

<sup>13</sup> 1 Peter 2:9

<sup>14</sup> Leviticus 11:45

<sup>16</sup> Nehemiah 4:13-17

<sup>17</sup> Ephesians 4:11-15, 23-24

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