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**From the Heart**—The Year in Review.

The end of the 'school year' is a good time to reflect on your children's progress, to consider in retrospect, and to use 20/20 hindsight to evaluate the past year. Many parents think the end of the 'school year' is a good time for an achievement test. But is this the standard by which achievement should be measured?

Achievement tests are designed to evaluate the effect of curriculum changes on *statistically large* groups of students rather than to judge the performance of individual students. For example, achievement testing could show the effect of changing the curriculum of an entire school from Steck-Vaughn to McGraw-Hill. Individual variations can be statistically overlooked when a large group is considered. However, use of achievement testing to evaluate an individual student is inappropriate. Some children routinely score poorly on standardized tests. Some do not follow their normal problem solving approach when presented with the distraction of several answers. Illness or stress can hinder a child from thinking clearly. Apathy toward the test material can invalidate the results. By their nature, these tests approach a student's frustration level in order to find the upper limits of his skills and knowledge. Because of these and other factors, achievement tests are never to be used to decide whether a student passes or fails.

Because of our philosophy concerning education, we have decided to discontinue our group program of Stanford achievement testing. We believe that for us to continue to offer such tests gives a mixed message about the way children should be taught. The standard encouraged by achievement testing is the convoluted method of the textbook/classroom. (In fact, achievement tests are marketed by textbook publishers.) Achievement tests tend to put a particular burden on diligent parent-teachers to try to measure up to the standard arbitrarily established by textbook publishers. They encourage the traditional "spiral curriculum," making parents feel the need to "cover" all the material hastily covered in a classroom in a year. If test results show little Johnny below 'grade level,' diligent parents can feel it their duty to "catch him up" (even though he may need to go at a slower pace). It is impossible to mass produce and mass market a test designed for a unique individual. There is no *absolute* academic standard of education. It is audacity for any man to try to contrive a standard according to which all children are to be measured. Traditional achievement tests evaluate students on a bureaucratic one-size-fits-all standard in comparison with a bunch of other students, whereas the Scripture declares that those "measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves are not wise."<sup>1</sup> "We don't seek to maintain quality control through some bureaucratic standard of measurement but rather through biblical *wisdom*. High standards in education are always *high* but they are not always

interchangeable, the way GM parts have to be. Two individuals may receive the same instruction, and yet, because of differences in gifts, personality, aptitude, and intelligence, the instruction may result in great differences in the student."<sup>iii</sup> Historically, some have excelled in the sciences, others in math, others as writers, and others in the arts. The proper high standard for each child can be determined by loving parents who want their children to excel. Standards for excellence do not need to be based on a common denominator of all students.

Some have said that a church-related school should give achievement tests to hold parents accountable. But a principle from Scripture says, "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth."<sup>iiii</sup> Who is the master over children to whom parents are accountable? Parents are to train up a child in the way he should go; they are the final authority concerning the education and training of their children. As the final authority parents are accountable to God. To subject parents to any organization's bureaucratic one-size-fits-all standard of education usurps parental authority. Instead of 'accountability' the more biblical concept is self-government. Parents accept responsibility for their children and hold them accountable, gradually transferring this responsibility to the young until they are self-governed. Those who are mature, who govern themselves from the inside, do not need a police state to govern them from the outside. I know that you would like to do well in teaching your children and that good achievement test results are like a pat on the back (not to mention the pride in showing the in-laws.) How many of you send out for standardized testing of your laundry to make sure it meets someone else's standard of clean? Some children should never be expected to try to keep up with the herd; others should not be satisfied with staying back with the herd. (Not to mention that the herd is probably going the wrong direction.) Notice that Jesus did NOT say, Let your achievement test results so shine before men, that they may see your good works. . .

Often, parents, seeing no marked improvements in the mind and heart of their children, side with the adversary who labels them a failure. A parent-teacher may be disappointed because their child did not become a calculating prodigy, did not master spelling of the English language, and did not become an eloquent writer. Yet, consider how much learning is like growing. When was the last time you noticed how much your child had grown the previous day or even the previous month. Likewise, learning requires seasons. "To accomplish great results by imperceptible means—such is the law of God."<sup>iv</sup> This statement describes how the grass of the field grows, how a mighty oak grows from an acorn, how the seasons change, and most importantly how a child grows up physically and mentally. Just as the oak tree is a product of the goodness of God and his faithfulness in providing sunshine and rain, a well-trained, well-educated child is the result of that reflected goodness and faithfulness. For parents, "the task is the education of your children, which is not a hobby but a *vocation*. The word *vocation* comes from the Latin verb *voco* which means 'I call.'

A person's vocation is his calling; a parent's vocation is to learn in order to teach."<sup>v</sup>

A parent can recognize and accept this call but become discouraged and frustrated from trying to become a schoolteacher or by trying to implement ineffective teaching methods. There is an alternative. Let me try to sketch the chasm between the force-feed mentality and the appetite mentality of education. One approach has lessons which are dull, tedious, filled with unnecessary terms, boring, incessantly repetitious, unrelated to real life, confusing, and so lifeless that a teacher must coerce students to do assignments and study; the lessons of the other are practical, real, relevant, enlightening, and interesting. One results in continual dependency on the teacher; the other cultivates a self-motivated, independent student. One puts the learner in a passive role; the other creates an active learner, a disciple. One is a burden for the teacher; the other brings joy and fulfillment to the teacher. One is much like the legalism taught by the Pharisees, with endless "assignments;" the other says, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."<sup>vi</sup> When little children came to Jesus, I am sure that he taught them, but certainly in a way they enjoyed—they probably didn't even know they were being taught. Is this how education works at your house?

"The textbook interstate that we so often feel like we must walk upon, or drive upon, or ride upon, or whatever . . . really leaves out the true education—you get a superficial understanding, but it doesn't change your life, it doesn't change your heart."<sup>vii</sup> What does it take to change the heart? Things like truth, love, mercy, wisdom, understanding. "The average man wastes more time in fruitless reading and indifferent talk, than would be used in acquiring a good working knowledge . . . that, in turn, would impart to his teaching that quality of independence and reliability which so greatly enhances one's power as a teacher."<sup>viii</sup> Without this, one will be a slave of another's curriculum; but with your own knowledge and love of a subject, with knowledge of the value of a subject, with the enthusiasm and zeal that comes from knowing the truth, you should have no trouble teaching your children "when you sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."<sup>ix</sup>

For an educational craftsman to exchange his skills for the ways of mass production would require him to be blindfolded and ignore both the tremendous individual potential and inherent limitations of the raw materials. I watched a spoonmaker carve a wooden spoon from a piece of cherry. He described how he adjusted his plans as the natural grain of the wood was revealed, to produce a spoon with optimum strength, symmetry, balance, and smooth finish. I'm sure a machine could mass produce spoons which would lack the individuality, which would fail to take advantage of the natural potential to make something greater

than a spoon. The machine would inevitably produce some defective spoons (with a crack in the bowl or a knot in the handle) to be discarded by "quality control." How much better to control the quality in the production process.

Imagine what today's one-size-fits-all school curriculum would do with Isaac Newton, Albert Einstein, Benjamin Franklin, or Michael Faraday. They might have to be drugged to tolerate it. (Ritalin might have kept Thomas Edison in the dark.) Are 'learning disabilities' a sign of the times? The Scripture describes some men as "ever learning, and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth."<sup>x</sup> Why? Because the purpose of learning is to know the truth—the truth about the world, about yourself, and most importantly, about God. The world system avoids or even covers up the truth, instead of teaching, feeding, encouraging, rewarding, and protecting godliness. In the words of Blaise Pascal, "We come to know the truth not only by reason, but still more through our hearts."<sup>xi</sup> "What a vast difference there is between knowing God and loving him . . . Human things must be known to be loved: but divine things must be loved to be known."<sup>xii</sup> This is why one must be a doer of the Word. He will then have an appreciation of the One who is master of both the universe and the soul.

In this great undertaking, the Words of Jesus are so comforting, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, βαπτίζοντες [literally immersing] them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."<sup>xiii</sup>

Are you the prisoner of your own upbringing and your own education. Who or what is holding you there? What is hindering you from doing things differently. "You have no curriculum bureaucracy to battle except yourself."<sup>xiv</sup>

In the Name of The Master,

Greg Stablein

i I Corinthians 10:12

ii *Classical Education & the Home School*, by Douglas Wilson, Wesley Callihan and Douglas Jones, 1995

iii Romans 14:14

iv *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*, by J.H. Merle d'Aubigne, 1846

v *Classical Education & the Home School*, by Douglas Wilson, Wesley Callihan and Douglas Jones, 1995

vi Matthew 11:28-30

vii *History via the Scenic Route: Getting off the Textbook Interstate*, audio tape set by Diana Waring, 1995

viii *Interlinear Hebrew-English Old Testament*, by George Ricker Berry,

ix Deuteronomy 6:7

xII Timothy 3:7

xi "Glimpses of people, events, life and faith from the Church Across the Ages", No. 2 [quotation by Blaise Pascal (1623-62) (*Pensées*, 1670)]

xii "Glimpses of people, events, life and faith from the Church Across the Ages", No. 2 [quotation by Blaise Pascal (1623-62) (*Pensées*, 1670)]

xiii Matthew 28:18-20

xiv *The Language Wars*, by Ruth Beechick, 1995