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Mark's Perspective—Concerning light in dark days

It isn't hard to see that we live in dark times. Take a look at the newspaper or the evening news. I used to long for past days when America was a so-called "Christian nation" and most people seemed to be good, moral citizens. (Things were so much easier for the Christian then.) I now believe such nostalgia can be a subtle form of rebellion. If the Lord has seen fit to let me live in this place and time, that's His business. This is the context in which I am to glorify Him, not some other.

I also now question whether things would have been easier for a Christian living in some other time. A Christian's job is to be salt and light. Salt is a preservative that saves meat from corruption. To be effective, it must be different from the material it salts. When everyone around was honest, hard-working, faithful to his mate, and at least occasionally church-going, it might have been harder for a Christian to show he was different from the world. Today, in a sense, it's "easier," because even a small amount of real devotion to Jesus makes you stick out like a sore thumb. Teaching one's children at home may seem like simple common sense to the thinking Christian, but to the world it seems radical. Well and good. To be radically different is necessary if we would follow Jesus.

Light pierces darkness. When my father fought in Korea, the men had to sleep on the hillside, sometimes in bitter cold. No fire was allowed, however, because it would plainly reveal their position to the enemy. Just as a single match-flame can be seen at a distance when it's pitch-dark, even a tiny flame of obedience to our Lord stands out these days. How much more if we give our whole bodies as living sacrifices to God and (rather than being conformed to the world) are thoroughly transformed by the renewing of our minds? "A city set on a hill cannot be hid. . . . Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven."ⁱ

Though we live in a dark time and a dark place, I like what Winston Churchill said to a group of schoolboys during some very grim days in 1941: "Do not let us speak of darker days; let us rather speak of sterner days. These are not dark days: these are great days. . . and we must thank God that we have been allowed, each according to our stations, to play a part. . . ."ⁱⁱ Today is the day God has ordained for you and me to be alive. This is the time, the place, the society, the historical situation in which we must be salt to the rotting world and light to pierce its infernal darkness. Away with nostalgia, complaining and depression. "Lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees."ⁱⁱⁱ "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the author and finisher of our faith Consider Him who endured such contradiction from sinners against himself lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds."^{iv}

(Mark Wade has worked in our office since July. He has a heart for the Lord, for the things of the Lord, and for His people. He and his wife are home educating two boys ages 10 & 12. They also have a 4-year-old.)

Life at the Stablein House—Russell, Elliot, and Jeffrey (ages 14, 12, and 10) got firsthand experience at roofing after we moved to a new house about five months

ago. Everything is now unpacked and things are getting back to normal. Hannah (age 7) has learned the basics of phonics. Since she is an auditory learner, this was a slow process. She is now reading to me from the Gospel of John. When she began, she slowly sounded out each syl-la-ble, with much instruction along the way. Now in chapter four, she is reading several verses at a sitting and her skills are rapidly improving. Berakkah (Age 6) is more of a visual learner and is just about to read without any instruction (except being around when her sister was learning). My wife, Linda, reads biographies to Hannah and several of the others like to listen in. We listen to audio tapes about contemporary issues and about historical figures. One morning, after putting on an audio tape of *Pilgrim's Progress, Part 2: Christiana*, I paused the tape to go out of the room. When I returned, I found the tape restarted and realized that several sets of ears had been attentively listening. (Such a classic should not be neglected for lack of time.) Even though the older children are independent readers and read a great variety of books, we still read to them from time to time. We read and discuss eyewitness accounts of volcano eruptions and meteor showers, editorials about current affairs, essays on politics, and writings of church fathers. The boys anxiously await each issue of *Popular Science* magazine, which they discuss with each other and with us. We discuss scientific principles in everyday life (for example, how a yo-yo works) and do science experiments (like collapsing an aluminum can with air pressure). Educational games like Boggle, Clue, and Chess are a part of life as usual at our house.

Jessica (Age 16) has taken piano lessons for about three years and plays delightfully. Jessica, Jeffrey, and Hannah are splitting an hour of weekly piano lessons. Elliot, without ever going to a lesson, is learning nearly everything from his younger siblings. Even Hosanna (Age 2) sits at the piano, play a few notes, turns the music page, and plays a few more notes. It is amazing what children learn by example. Jessica now has her drivers permit (though she has no social security number) and I am apprenticing her at driving. As a part of home economics, Jessica is fixing supper for our family every night this month. We have also made her steward of the monthly grocery budget for our family. She is doing all the grocery shopping and has an enthusiasm about coupons, percent discounts, etc. At the end of the month she gets to keep any surplus. Interest and motivation do wonders.

From the Heart—What now?

Now that it's about halfway through the school year, remember that your mission as a Christian home-educator is radically different from that of the world. Home education is all about parental control over what should be learned and how it should be learned. God's wisdom provides parents a one-generation head start in life. Your experience in life teaches you what your children need to know. Your experience has shown you the usefulness (or lack thereof) of what you learned in school. Education must be flexible, adjusting to the needs of the day and the expectation of the future. This does not mean progressivism, which considers every new idea wonderful just because it's new. The latest fashion in education is often confusion dressed in a new wardrobe. It is just the same-old-stuff all mixed up in a brand new way.

The overall educational plan determines, "How shall our children then live?" The all-too-common answer is for 7th-grade students to be taught 7th-grade curriculum by parents doing their best as 7th-grade teachers and, whenever possible, socializing them with a group of other 7th-grade children. The grade-level approach is education for the *status quo*, "covering" everything without significant context in order to keep up with the public schools. Why do Christian schools and curriculum try to "cover" in a year the same things as public schools? Should Christians look over their shoulder to see whether they are meeting the objectives of the world and its public schools? Is it possible that the world and its schools are going the wrong direction?

Too often, in leaving the state school, the Christian educator has carried the state's humanism with him. . . . A curriculum is not neutral: it is either a course in humanism, or a training in a God-centered faith and life. The liberal arts curriculum means literally that course which trains students in the arts of freedom. This raises the key question: is freedom in and of man, or is it of Christ? The Christian art of freedom, that is, the Christian liberal arts curriculum, is emphatically not the same as the humanistic one. It is urgently necessary for Christian educators to rethink the meaning and nature of the curriculum.^v

By its nature, the yearly "cover-everything" approach cannot be synchronized with the alternatives. You are going against the current in this world if your primary emphasis in education is godliness and faith in Christ Jesus. As Christians, our objectives are diametrically opposed to those of the world. Should we to compare our progress with theirs? Is there a right way to teach an overwhelming amount of unrelated facts?

Many home educators are so absorbed in all the particulars of traditional grade-level schooling that they do not have the time or energy to consider priorities or ponder the real issues of life. Because Christian home educators are conscientious, they are not content just to scratch the surface; most seek mastery as their goal. But the sheer mass of information makes it a weighty burden to attempt to master in a year all the things included in a traditional curriculum. Without useful application or significant context, mastery of terms, definitions, dates, places, grammatical laws, and mathematical proofs is a hollow, temporary victory.

Christian education must be more than a few Bible verses added on to typical curriculum. More important than just "covering" the natural or physical things of a traditional curriculum is understanding their significance. Christianity focuses on the inner man. Jesus said to Nicodemus, "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?"^{vi} The earthly things mentioned were spiritual lessons from natural or physical things. Christian education is knowing the truth about God and about people; about ideas and about principles; about character, attitudes, and motives. But knowing *about* these things is not the same as understanding. Knowledge must be built on the right foundation and from the right perspective. "Knowledge of the holy is understanding."^{vii} Without this foundation, mountains of knowledge produce only well-schooled fools.

Because they do not really know God—knowing Him only by natural law and not by right of sonship—knowing Him from afar and not at close quarters—they are necessarily ignorant as to how He bids or forbids the things of his creation to be used. They are also unaware of the rival powers that confront God for the abuse of what divine creation has given for use. For where your knowledge of God is defective, you can neither know his mind nor his adversary. We have not then merely to consider by whom all things were created but also by whom they are perverted. . . . There is a great difference between the corrupted and the uncorrupted because there is a great difference between the Creator and the perverter.^{viii}

Do you want your children to have a heart for God's wisdom? Wisdom teaches that faith is more important than knowledge. Our Lord has told us to "be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."^{ix} This requires time to ponder the meaning of things and to consider the consequences of actions. The usual memorize-only mind-set is hollow. It omits the background, neglects the connections, and ignores the implications. Wisdom teaches cause-and-effect; it teaches that the world is orderly and makes sense. For the Christian, "[r]elevancy is more than subjects: it is also a faith which makes connections, establishes relationships, and grows by its ability to bring things into meaningful and useful relationships."^x Teaching is more effective when the subject matter is practical, real, and relevant. One way that does not attempt to "cover" everything is the nutshell approach. It is content to demonstrate one key concept clearly. Then, pertinent application in a variety of contexts will reinforce the understanding. Education is solid when new things are solidly related to things already well-understood by the student. Simple ideas can be combined for understanding of complex things. "It is useful to have knowledge about things, but it is still more useful to know how that knowledge has been gained and how it may grow."^{xi} "In the absence of continuity and context. . . bits of information cannot be integrated into an intelligent and consistent whole."^{xii}

Do you want your children to accept everything at face value? Knowledge without understanding is bankrupt. "All understanding begins with our *not* accepting the world as it *appears*. Language. . . is the medium we use to challenge, dispute, and cross-examine what comes into view, what is on the surface."^{xiii} Pictures can show only what is on the surface, but words are the means to understanding. Learning involves asking the right questions. Sometimes the most important things are the things not said and the crucial things those not seen.

Do you want your children to be wise? Wisdom evaluates the past, discerns the present, and anticipates the future. "Cicero remarked that the purpose of education is to free the student from the tyranny of the present, which cannot be pleasurable for those, like the young, who are struggling hard to do the opposite—that is, accommodate themselves to the present."^{xiv} Foolishness ignores the past, clings to the appearance of the present, and disregards the future. What

would society be like if foolish children possessed all the information known to mankind? Some knowledge should be kept from children. Parents should limit certain knowledge to those who have the wisdom to use it properly.

Education seeks to control the incredible power of children. Many a curriculum is designed to provide a generous amount of busywork to occupy a child's time and keep him from getting into trouble. But this approach also keeps him from having time to accomplish anything productive. It is better to train your children, especially that their hearts be turned toward their father. To train children is to make of them what they are not. Consider Michael Faraday. "He was a man of excitable and fiery nature; but through high self-discipline he had converted the fire into a central glow and motive power of life, instead of permitting it to waste itself in useless passion."^{xv} What will become of children who are raised without limits and restraints? How you train your children to govern themselves in the personal realm will determine how they will be governed in the civil realm. Anarchy in the personal realm invites tyranny in the realm of civil government. Such personal anarchy is fostered when children are allowed to listen to music of any sort, to dress however they please, and to associate with anyone they please. Bad company corrupts good character.

Do you want your children to be like all the other children? Catering to children leads them to believe the world revolves around them. It is especially difficult to incorporate such children into the real world when socialization by a bunch of other kids has reinforced their misguided mind-set. This governs in public schools, is normal in Christian schools, and not uncommon in church youth groups. Much of what is called socialization of children is really institutionalized immaturity. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed"^{xvi}

Do you want your children to know what is really important in life? Timely truths are best learned in a relevant context. Children would do well to learn from previous generations. Jessica (age 16) and I were visiting with an older lady who recounted some profound words of her recently deceased father, "When you get a little older, you'll realize that getting old isn't for sissies." Lessons of this sort have little or no place in grade-level curriculum and are not easily received by children trained up in an age-segregated environment. Education involves teaching children that life is much bigger than themselves.

The first priority is a right heart. Do you love the Lord? Do you love the truth? Do your children love the truth? Scripture exhorts us to "study to show thyself approved." How do you do this? The Lord's purpose is that you would be his workman and believe what he says about everything. The LORD uses home education to train two generations. You will not succeed in godly education unless you are willing to let the Lord make of you what you are not, and may not want to become. If you submit to the only wise God because He knows what is best for you and your children, you will reap the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

One voice piercing the darkness,

Greg Stablein

- iMatthew 5:14b, 16
- iiWinston Churchill, Harrow School, October 29, 1941
- iiiHebrews 12:12
- ivHebrews 12:1b-2a, 3
- v*Philosophy of the Christian Curriculum*, by Rousas J. Rushdoony, 1981
- viJohn 3:12
- viiProverbs 9:10
- viii*De Spectaculus*, by Tertullian
- ixRomans 12:2
- x*Philosophy of the Christian Curriculum*, by Rousas J. Rushdoony, 1981
- xi*The Chemical History of a Candle*, by Michael Faraday, 1985 (originally published 1861)
- xii*Amusing Ourselves to Death*, by Neil Postman, 1985
- xiii*Amusing Ourselves to Death*, by Neil Postman, 1985
- xiv*Amusing Ourselves to Death*, by Neil Postman, 1985
- xv*The Chemical History of a Candle*, by Michael Faraday, 1985
- xviProverbs 13:20