

## **Christian Education for Generations**

### **Psalm 78:1-8**

#### **Introduction**

This year, our church celebrates its thirtieth anniversary. One of the distinctives of this local body of believers since very early on has been the necessity of Christian education for our children. Education is inherently religious because all education comes down to two fundamental questions – Why? and, Who says? Who says this is the way the world works? All education appeals in the end to some ultimate standard. So, any education that does not declare that Jesus Christ is Lord of all is idolatrous. Other forms of education can get some things right and we can learn some things from false systems of education. But in order to plunder the Egyptians, you need to leave Egypt. This is something that our church has embraced—building, encouraging, and providing for explicitly Christian education among our people in many different ways. Our challenge now is to continue to trust God and not in ourselves, to remember what God has done for us, and to press on further up and further in as we seek to obey God in this work (Ps. 78:7).

#### **Paraphrase of the Text**

Psalm 78 is a psalm recounting God's acts for Israel from the time of Moses to the reign of David. Verses 1-8 are part of the introduction and apologetic for the psalm in which the psalmist notes the necessity of teaching coming generations (he mentions four) about the Lord. The psalmist begins with a prophetic summons, calling the people to give heed to his words (v. 1). He says he will tell them things of old, passed on by their fathers, to meditate on and carefully consider ("parable" and "dark sayings") (vs. 2-3, cf. Matt. 13:35). The generation the psalmist addresses should together pass on to the descendants of their fathers these praises of the Lord and the accounts of His wonderful works (v. 4) as God had commanded (v. 5, Deut. 6:7, 20-25). The purpose for this commandment is so that the children would know God and His works and continue to pass them on to yet another generation (v. 6). Then, they in turn would trust God, not forget what He has done, and keep His commandments (v. 7). Trust is followed by remembrance which gives strength for obedience. In this way, they will keep faith and not fall away like previous generations who were rebellious (v. 8). The psalmist emphasizes that the purpose of instructing the next generation is to guide them in faithfulness to the one true God and keep them from falling away. The three pieces of that faithfulness identified in v. 7 are worth considering in our pursuit of Christian education.

#### **Trust God**

Everything we do in this pursuit must be done by faith. In all our hurry and worry and desire to give our children the best, we must remember that whatever is not from faith is sin (Rom. 14:23). We should pursue and discuss and debate over the best method, the best curriculum, the best model, but this pursuit presents at least two dangers. First, it is tempting to think that getting the right model, etc., will save our children (or ourselves). To embrace this (even subconsciously) is idolatrous. Second, it is tempting in the pursuit of the best to forget the unity we have in Christ. If Christ is the center, then we can have different and varying models or curricula. We should celebrate the variety of opportunities available to us, while also being willing to discuss the benefits and shortcomings of each.

But Christ must be the center of our teaching and our doing. The best curriculum or schooling method done without faith simply equips a faithless generation. If we have recognized that handing our children over to Rome turns them into Romans, then we should not settle for turning them into Romans ourselves. We are to train them in the nurture and admonition *of the Lord* (Eph. 6:4), and nothing short of that. The teaching generation must teach in faith for the purpose of fostering faith in the receiving generation.

### **Do Not Forget**

Just before Joshua led the Israelites into the promised land, Moses warned them not to forget their Lord and what He had done (Deut. 6:10-12). Man becomes faithless when he forgets God's faithfulness. We should regularly remember and tell what God has done, for us as individuals and as communities. We need to tell stories of God's deliverance, of saving grace, of provision through trial and lack, of unexpected success, of sustenance through failure, and more. We should regularly and outspokenly celebrate and give thanks for what God has done. Those stories of God's faithfulness need to be passed on because they are great fuel for faithfulness for present and future generations. Roughly speaking, my generation is like the generation that inherited the land of Canaan. We were not in Egypt (the government schools), but our parents and grandparents were. They were delivered out by God's mercy and grace, and we have inherited the blessing of a Christ-centered education. With this blessing comes temptations to be presumptuous or overly critical. We can be tempted to think that our education and Christian upbringing was normal or deserved. And we can be tempted to harp on the imperfection of our Christian education. We fight both temptations by giving thanks for the education and remembering from where God has brought us (through previous generations). And the same is true for the children in the current wave of Christian education. If we do this, we are positioned well to improve on it over many generations. What will destroy the Christian education movement? Neglecting to give thanks for the abundant inheritance given to us (Deut. 28).

### **Keep His Commandments**

Again, part of the goal of teaching the next generation is so that they will, by faith, keep God's commandments themselves. All that needs to happen for a generation to fall away from following God is nothing. Instead, we should not grow weary in our obedience by teaching the next generation to obey (Deut. 6:7). This work is hard and it feels endless. In fact, humanly speaking, it is endless. So our task is to model for the children we teach what it looks like to obey when obedience seems hard, because they will one day need to take up the torch. When faced with the endless work, we need to *remember* that God's grace is endless, and that is the grace which we are training our children to see.

### **Conclusion**

As a community, we are roughly one generation into this project of reviving and giving a distinctly Christ-centered education for our children. Jesus told His church to disciple the nations, and this is one key piece of it. In the midst of the hard work and trials before us, let us not forget what God has already done. Let us also not forget to pray for the faithfulness of our children and children's children, and for God's faithfulness to them, to a thousand generations (Deut. 7:9).