

Pastoring The Home...

We also engage to maintain family and secret devotions; to religiously educate our children; to seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintances; to walk circumspectly in the world; to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our deportment; to avoid all tattling, backbiting, and excessive anger; to abstain from the sale and use of intoxicating drinks as a beverage, and to be zealous in our efforts to advance the kingdom of our Savior. (The First Baptist Church of Waterville's Covenant)

“...to religiously educate our children;”

One of the things I've overheard local school teachers lamenting is the lack of parenting skills and how this deficiency affects their classroom. Parenting is reflected in the social behavior that produces sharing, active listening, empathy, making eye contact, respecting personal space, cooperation, following directions, positive attitude, conflict resolution, and using manners. These social skills are important to develop early in children and their practice is important not only to the classroom but also to our society. Basic social skills are necessary to the health of the classroom and to the learning environment created in the classroom and among students.

I've also noticed that in many of our churches, children are absent. Where have all our children gone? If your church hasn't asked this question, perhaps you should put it on the top of the list. It should also ask, where are children getting their faith training?

Baptists stood at the forefront of societal change. Baptists were concerned about the future of their communities and so invested in the education of children. According to Wikipedia: *“The Sunday School Society by Baptist Deacon, William Fox, on September 7, 1785 in Prescott Street Baptist Church of London. The latter had been touched by articles of Raikes, on the problems of youth crime. Pastor Thomas Stock and Raikes have thus registered a hundred children from six to fourteen years old. The society has published its textbooks and brought together nearly 4,000 Sunday schools.*

In 1785, 250,000 English children were attending Sunday school. There were 5,000 in Manchester alone. By 1835, the Sunday School Society had distributed 91,915 spelling books, 24,232 New Testaments and 5,360 Bibles. The Sunday school movement was cross-denominational. Financed through subscription, large buildings were constructed that could host public lectures as well as provide classrooms. Adults would attend the same classes as the infants, as each was instructed in basic reading. These schools were the precursors to a national system of education.

The educational role of the Sunday Schools ended with the Education Act of 1870, which provided universal elementary education. In the 1920s they also promoted sports and ran Sunday school leagues. They became social centers hosting amateur dramatics and concert parties. By the 1960s, the term Sunday School could refer to the building and rarely to the activities inside. By the 1970s even the largest Sunday School

had been demolished. The locution today chiefly refers to educational classes for children and adults that occur before the start of a church service.”

While the Educational Act of 1870 made elementary education mandatory it also led to the downfall of the Sunday School movement. Today, our society is in desperate need of an education that once again provides the basic social skills that are taught at home and out of the Scriptures.

Baptists have always known that there is no substitute for early education of children. Aristotle was right when he said: “Give me a child until he is seven and I will show you the man.” It is time again to invest in the education of children before they get into the public school system. This is the educational role of parents and grandparents.

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.” Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Early education is about teaching children that God loves them, and they are to love Him with all their heart, soul, and strength. It is the role of parenting to impress this foundational truth in their homes by their actions and attitudes. The fundamental way in which this is accomplished is by teaching children how to love and to be loved. It is fundamental to the health of our children to know the deep and abiding love of God which begins with a deep and abiding love of parents for their children and grandchildren, so that when the child’s hand slips from your grasp, their hand rests firmly in the grasp of a God who loves them unconditionally.

Baptists have understood that in every aspect of educating children is to model, implement and impress upon them the deep and abiding understanding of a God who so loves them that He promises to never leave or forsake them. If what is taking place in our schools is a lack of parenting, then what is also true is that children today will have no deep convictions about God’s love which we know by our own experience provides the means to face the deepest challenges, the most trying circumstances, and the harshest environments.

We need to give children the conviction that God loves them and so the ability to “*stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.*” (I Corinthians 15:58).

Can we, as Baptists, again pick up the challenge of pastoring again the home, teaching children to love the Lord with all?