

## Bottled Water and Christian Education

Is Christian education just like public education? I would answer that question with a decisive “no.” For this issue of *Christian School Comment* I’ve invited Mike Allen, lead administrator of Evansville Christian School (Indiana), to share some compelling reasons why Christian education is decidedly different from public education.

My wife, being a healthy person, chooses water as her beverage 99 percent of the time. And when she goes to the store, she’ll even purchase bottled water for our home—our home that has a perfectly good water faucet. We often talk about studies of bottled water that have shown that bottled water is not really that different at all from “regular” water.

While the great water debate rages on, it is not too far removed from another great debate. Many people see Christian schooling the same way they view bottled water: water is water, and education is education.

We have a seven-year-old (Isaac) and a five-year-old (Ezra). Isaac is currently in first grade, and Ezra is in prekindergarten. I will never forget the experience that proved to me that Christian education is not like bottled water. Isaac was only two weeks into kindergarten. I was reading to him in his room before bed, and he recognized a verse. He said, “Dad, I know that verse! It’s our memory verse for the week!” I said, “What’s the verse?” And he said with great confidence, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.” Psalm 119:11. I was amazed. I was humbled. I was thankful that my son’s relationship with his Creator was being nurtured not only by my wife and me but also by his teachers, the people he spends eight hours a day with throughout the school year.

Ezra, even in prekindergarten, is learning to hide God’s Word in his heart. Watching his older brother memorize Scripture has given him excitement to share his own memory verses. When Ezra is in need of correction, we call to his attention his memory verses. “Ezra, what does the Bible say about being dishonest? ‘Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from telling lies.’ Psalm 34:13.”

That, to me, is distinctive. That’s no bottled water. Our view of the world is something that should be run through the filter of the gospel. This world and our faith are not two separate things. My parents grew up in a time when they would say that their faith was very private. It was theirs and not for anyone else to know. Is that biblical? Did Jesus say to keep everything to ourselves? Just do what is least invasive? He actually said the opposite: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).

The distinction of a Christian education is that we seek to frame everything through the lens of the gospel. Where a secular education

says that God is your opinion, Christian education says that God is your Creator. Where a secular education says that Jesus is part of a religion unit in the third quarter, Christian education says that Jesus is the foundation of every unit. As the song says, “You can have all this world, but give me Jesus” (“Give Me Jesus”).

So what do you, as a parent with a child who is receiving a Christian education, do with this? Or what do you, as a person *considering* a Christian education for your child, do with this? The first thing I would recommend is to write a family mission statement. What is your family going to stand for? What is your expressed mission for your family? Knowing this will help you know whether you see Christian education as missional or optional. There are many great young men and women of faith who were not educated in a Christian school. But the point is, are you being missional in your choice? A feather blowing in the wind is headed in a very different direction from a feather with a fan pointing at it.

The second thing to understand is that in Christian education, you are not paying for protection. You are paying for partnership—intentional, personal partnership. In a world where everyone who has been wronged is seeking his or her own justice, the Bible says that we are all on the same team if we are in the Kingdom. That “team” includes the educators who are pursuing your children in their faith while creating opportunities for them to take risks, make choices, resolve conflict, and learn from mistakes. That does not mean that conflict doesn’t exist in Christian education. It absolutely does. But what it does mean is that we have a clear way to resolve it (through Matthew 18) so that we can get back to the ultimate goal of building up children in the Kingdom and leading them to confidently engage the culture of the world and have an impact on the world for Christ.

Water may be water, but education is not education. Recognizing what the Lord may have for your family is critical to children not being blown around like a feather in the wind. You, as a parent, must point the fan. Choosing your education is like choosing your spouse. You don’t choose your spouse because of convenience. You choose your spouse out of mission and purpose. My challenge to you is that your children’s education be no different.



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