

Heaven or Harvard?

After one of my recent speaking engagements, someone said, “So what you are saying is that you think it is more important to get your child into heaven than Harvard!”

I paused and thought about that comment for a moment, then responded, “Well yes, I do—with one important caveat. If it is God’s will for one of our Christian school graduates to attend Harvard, then the student should be so well prepared that he or she is able to compete academically at the highest levels.”

You see, as parents we should have both a 10-year view and a 10,000-year view for our children.

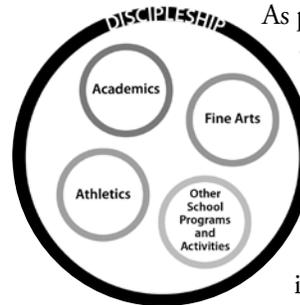
Our 10-year view is that our children be prepared in every way to be successful in this life—successful in college, in their careers, in leading their own families—ultimately, successful in God’s eyes (Joshua 1:8). And I would define success in this life as obediently living out the purpose for which they were created by God—as devoted followers of Jesus Christ. While it is not true that we can be whatever we want to be, it is true that we can be everything that God intends for us to be!

Eternity is a long, long time. Our 10,000-year view for those we love—including every member of our family—should be that we spend eternity together with God and enjoy Him forever. As a dad, my 10,000-year goal is simple. I want to walk down the golden streets of heaven one day and look over my shoulder to see my wife, Bonnie; my four children: Jared, Drew, Lindi, and Aubrey; and perhaps a whole bunch of grandkids! :-)

Christian schools are unique in that teachers in Christian schools care for the temporal and eternal well-being of those they teach and serve. They meet the developmental needs of the whole child—spiritual, social, emotional, and intellectual.

Many children accept Christ in ACSI Christian schools every year, for which we thank the Lord. While some Christian schools have open enrollment and others require that one or two parents express faith in Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior, both open enrollment and covenant schools have children who have not yet received Jesus Christ into their lives. Because discipleship to Jesus Christ begins with evangelism and personal salvation, all Christian schools should be committed to evangelism and discipleship to Jesus Christ as the context for all they do.

The diagram below illustrates the commitment that Christian schools embrace: that *everything* the school does should be within the context of *discipleship to Jesus Christ*:



As part of their annual commencement ceremonies, many ACSI Christian schools celebrate thousands and sometimes even millions of dollars in college scholarships received by graduating students for excellence in fine arts, athletics, and academics. So as a result of investments made via annual tuition payments year after year, many parents

experience an immediate return on investment (ROI) with college scholarships because of the preparation provided by these Christian schools.

But even more important than financial ROI is the blessing of graduates who love the Lord with all their hearts and minds and are committed to lives of loving service to God and to others. Christian schools are truly an investment in the lives of those we love.

In fact, “Heaven or Harvard?” is a misleading question that sets up a false dichotomy, as if parents need to trade an excellent education for an emphasis on spiritual formation when they decide to send their children to a Christian school.

There was a time not too long ago when one of the primary threats to evangelical Christianity was anti-intellectualism. In fact, to some extent this threat remains today. God gave us all minds, and His plan is for us to use our minds as we seek His truth in all areas of life and intellectual pursuit. On a continuum that has faith on one end and reason on the other, we followers of Jesus Christ must land in the middle in our pursuit of truth.



In other words, we must exercise both faith and reason. One will never learn calculus by studying the book of Proverbs. Principles to live by? Yes. Calculus? No.



CHRISTIAN *School* COMMENT

In all candor, it must be admitted that much education called Christian has failed to see that this comprehensive fact of all truth being God's truth breaks down, on the one hand, the division of knowledge between secular and religious; and brings, on the other hand, every area of life and thought "into captivity to the obedience of Christ," [2 Corinthians 10:5] to use the great Pauline phrase. To put it bluntly, we have been too prone to set up a false dichotomy in our thinking and thus in our education. We have rightly enthroned the Word of God as the ultimate criterion of truth; we have rightly given pre-eminence to the Lord Jesus Christ as the incarnation of the God of all truth. But at the same time we have fallen into the error of failing to see as clearly as we should that there are areas of truth not fully explicated in Scripture and that these, too, are part of God's truth. Thus we have made the misleading distinction between sacred and secular, forgetting that, as Cervantes said in one of those flashes of wisdom that punctuate the strange doings of Don Quixote, "Where the truth is, in so far as it is true, there God is." (Gaebelein 2005, 21-2)

The fact that there is truth outside of God's special revelation, the Bible, requires followers of Christ to exercise faith and reason in the pursuit of God's truth. As we study His natural revelation using reason, we think His thoughts after Him and glorify Him.

Consider Gaebelein on this point.

We need leadership that is both consecrated and intellectual, and that is integrated both in mind and spirit with the truth of God in Scripture, in nature, in science, literature, art, and in all of life. This is a main function of our Christian education. Christian teaching and scholarship go together. They are indispensable, if the evangelical faith is to reach the present generation. (2005, 107)

I couldn't agree more. The world needs what Christian schools have to offer: graduates who are academically prepared at the highest levels and who are devoted followers of Jesus Christ. So the better question is not "Are Christian schools more committed to preparing students for heaven or for Harvard?" but "Why are the best Christian schools committed to *both* heaven and Harvard?"



Brian S. Simmons, President ACSI

Reference

Gaebelein, Frank E. 2005. *The pattern of God's truth: Problems of integration in Christian education*. Colorado Springs, CO: Purposeful Design. (Orig. pub. 1954 by Oxford University Press.)