

# THE GREAT VISION OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: TEN FOUNDATIONAL TRUTHS

*by Justin Taylor, The Gospel Coalition*

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When we hear about “Christian education,” we often think first about schooling that seeks to operate according to biblical principles. Perhaps we think of Christian private schools or homeschooling or Sunday school. We think of desks and homework and assignments and teachers.

These are important forms of Christian education, but these institutional forms are only the tip of the iceberg. Have you ever considered, for example, that Jesus’s Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20) is a charter for Christian education?

Precisely because Jesus has been invested with “all authority in heaven and on earth,” he can command his followers to “go and make *disciples* of all nations.” We do this, Jesus tells us, by doing two things: (1) after they repent of their sins and trust in him, we *baptize* them in the name of the Trinity, and then (2) we teach them to observe all that he commanded us. We can do this with confidence because Christ himself will be with us always, even to the end of the age.

Christian education is as big as God and his revelation. It goes beyond parenting and teachers and classroom instruction to infuse every aspect of the



Christian life. It involves not merely donning gospel-centered glasses when we study “spiritual” subjects, but being filled by the very presence of almighty God as we seek by his Spirit to interpret all of reality in light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

If we are to practice an education that is truly Christian—in both word and deed—there are at least ten foundational presuppositions and principles that should shape our approach.

1. True Christian education involves loving and edifying instruction, grounded in God’s gracious revelation, mediated through the work of Christ, and applied through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, that labors to honor and glorify the triune God.

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2. Christian education begins with the reality of God. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—one God in three persons—create and sustain all things (Genesis 1:1–2; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:3). It is from, through, and to the one true God that all things exist and have their being (Acts 17:28). The glorification of God’s name in Christ is the goal of the universe (Colossians 3:17; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Isaiah 43:7; 48:11).
3. Christian education seeks to rightly interpret and correctly convey all aspects of God’s revelation, both his self-disclosure through the created world (called “general revelation”) and his self-disclosure through the spoken and written word (“special revelation”; Romans 1:20; Hebrews 1:1–2).
4. Christian education, building on the Creator-creature distinction, recognizes the fundamental difference between God’s perfect knowledge of himself (called “archetypal theology”) and the limited, though sufficient, knowledge we can have of God through his revelation (“ectypal theology”; Romans 11:34; 1 Corinthians 2:16).
5. Christian education recognizes that the recipients of our instruction—whether believers or unbelievers—are created in the image of God, designed to resemble, reflect, and represent their Creator (through ruling over creation and relating to one another; Genesis 1:26–27).
6. Christian education reckons with the sobering reality of the Fall—that because of Adam’s rebellion as our covenantal head, all of us have inherited a rebellious sin nature and are legally regarded as guilty (Romans 3:10, 23; Romans 5:12, 15, 17–19), and that the creation itself is fallen and in need of liberation (Romans 8:19–22). Our disordered desires and the broken world around us affect every aspect of our thoughts, feelings, and actions, such that even after regeneration, we must still battle indwelling sin (Galatians 5:17).
7. Christian education is built upon the work of Christ—including, but not limited to, his substitutionary atonement and triumphant resurrection victory over sin and death—as the central hinge of history (Galatians 4:4–5; 1 Corinthians 2:2; 15:1–5). All of our instruction is founded upon this great event that makes it possible for sinners to stand by faith in the presence of a holy and righteous God through union with our prophet, priest, and king.
8. Christian education recognizes that to reflect the mind of Christ and to take every thought captive (2 Corinthians 10:5), we must be born again (John 3:3), putting off our old man (in Adam) and putting on the new man (in Christ), renewed in knowledge after the image of God (Colossians 3:10).
9. Christian education insists on the indispensable work of the Holy Spirit, who himself is a teacher (John 14:26; 1 Corinthians 2:13), who searches everything (including the depths of God) and alone comprehends the thoughts of God (1 Corinthians 2:10–11). He helps us in our weakness, intercedes for us (Romans 8:26–27), and causes us to bear good fruit (Galatians 5:22–23).
10. Finally, Christian education recognizes the insufficiency of merely receiving, retaining, and relaying notional knowledge (1 Corinthians 8:1; Matthew 7:21–23), but insists that our knowledge must be relational and covenantal (1 Corinthians 13:12), such that our study results in delight (Psalm 37:4; 111:2), practice (Ezra 7:10), obedience (Romans 1:5), and the further discipling and teaching of others (Matthew 9:19–20; 2 Timothy 2:2).

Christian education no longer involves physically sitting at the feet of Jesus and walking with him down the dusty roads of Galilee. But Jesus himself tells us that it is to our advantage that he goes away, so that the Helper—the Holy Spirit—can come to be with us (John 16:7).

And now, as lifelong learners in Christ, we can truly say, “Though [we] have not seen him, [we] love him. Though [we] do not now see him, [we] believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory” (1 Peter 1:8). *That* is a truly Christian education.