

Yes, He Can: Helping Parents Cultivate a Commitment to Excellence

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Parents have many expectations, opinions, and concerns about their child's school experiences. Their expectations are influenced by their own childhood experiences, by their peers, and by the prevailing attitudes of the culture in which they live. Teachers also have many different ideas about how to best educate their students. When parents and teachers partner together in a Christian school, there is often an underlying assumption that all involved share the same educational goals. However, as teachers and parents interact, they are often surprised to find that their perspectives are not the same. These differences can create conflicts that inhibit the cooperation and effectiveness of teachers and parents.

Christian school teachers and the parents with whom they partner need a common foundation to guide their thinking. "Cultural thinking" does not provide that foundation because it changes with each new generation of parents. Only the Bible can provide authoritative, unchanging truth to guide our thinking. There are two biblical truths in particular that we need to embrace. The first truth answers the question, who is in charge here? The second truth answers the question, who do I work for?

The first question we need to answer is, who is in charge here? The Bible makes it clear that God is our Creator, and we are His creatures (Col. 1:16, 17;

Psalm 46:10; Phil. 2:9–11). He has every right to demand our submission. Yet, in His divine wisdom, God allows us to choose whether we will submit to His authority or live autonomously. In Luke 6:46–49, Jesus made it clear that the choice we make, either to live a submissive life or an autonomous life, leads to two very different outcomes. He said, "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say? Whoever comes to Me and hears my sayings and does them, I will show you what he is like; He is like a man building a house who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock . . . But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on earth without a foundation . . . And the ruin of that house was great." Jesus taught that submission to God's authority and adherence to His commands result in a stable, blessed life, but living autonomously results in a ruined life. There are also other passages in the Bible that promote the wisdom of submission (Prov. 1:7) and the foolishness of rebellion (Romans 1:20–32). So, though we have the freedom to choose whether to submit to God's authority or not, submission is clearly the best choice for us.

God has given parents the responsibility to teach their children the wisdom of submission (Eph. 6:4; Prov. 22:5, 6; Joshua 24:15; Deut. 6:6–9). This is not a lesson that most children are eager to learn. They are all born with a propensity to want their

own way and be their own boss (Isaiah 53:6). Yet, a parent who respects God's authority and wants what is best for his child will be willing to do what pleases God rather than to give in to what pleases the child. Parental discipline prepares children to live under the authority of their heavenly Father for the rest of their lives. Hebrews 12:9 states, "Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us, and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live!" When parents consistently administer rewards for obedience and consequences for disobedience, they are helping their children understand how to live a life of submission to their heavenly Father. A teacher's classroom rules have the same function as household rules: they train a child to live a submissive life rather than an autonomous one. God is in authority over all of us. He has delegated authority to parents; parents have delegated authority to teachers; wise children will submit to authority and thereby build a solid foundation for life.

The second question we need to answer is "Who do I work for?" School is a child's first workplace outside the home. It is the place where he acquires the work skills he will use for the rest of his life. However, it is also the place where his attitude toward work is shaped. When schoolwork becomes difficult, and a child wants to accept mediocrity, he needs to know why he should pursue excellence. He needs a biblical view of work.

The Bible teaches that God created people to be workers. His first command to Adam and Eve

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was to be fruitful and multiply and to rule and subdue His creation (Gen.1:28; Gen. 2:15). Work was never part of the curse; facing difficulty in work was the curse (Gen. 3:17–19). God does not make a distinction between “secular” work and “sacred” work. Colossians 3:23, 24 states, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord, not for men . . . It is

the Lord Christ you are serving.” All work is a form of worship (Eph. 6:5–8; Rom.12:1, 2). God has uniquely gifted everyone (Eph. 2:10) and given them everything they need to do the work He wants them to do (2 Peter 1:3–8; Exodus 31:1–6; 1 Chron. 28:20–21). God rewards diligence and punishes laziness (Matt. 25:14–30; Prov. 12:24; Prov. 15:19). Faithfulness is more important to Him than achievement (Luke 16:10; Gal. 6:9). So, when a student questions, who do I work for? he needs to hear that he should not be working to please himself. He should be working to please a God who has created him and gifted him and given him everything he needs to achieve His standard of excellence.

There will be times throughout the year when these biblical truths are not penetrating the hearts and minds of the students. A teacher may need to request a parent-teacher conference in order to discuss a child’s attitude or behavior. Teachers and parents should be careful not to see the conference as a problem-solving session in the sense that the objective becomes attaining a “quick fix” for a problem. This “cultural thinking” will lead to

failed expectations. Instead, the parent-teacher conference should be seen as an opportunity to partner together with the parents to train the child in godly wisdom (Proverbs 22:6). Scripture should be your guide

Sharon and Melba’s 2010 conference workshop is a great resource for teachers preparing for parent conferences. Order the recording from the ACCS website. See Conferences > 2010 Conference Recordings.

in these areas. In 2 Timothy 3:16 we read, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.” This is an ongoing process and should be viewed in such a way. Results may not be seen for weeks, months, or even years.

When a teacher expresses a concern about a student’s attitude toward school work, parents may respond with comments such as, “Your handwriting expectations are unreasonable” or “I tell my child it’s just fine to get an ‘N’ because I don’t want to hurt her self-esteem.” When this “cultural thinking” becomes evident, teachers should view this as an opportunity to remind parents that the student’s job is to honor God with his best work (Colossians 3:23). It is in Christ that we get our meaning and worth, and He is worthy to receive our very best effort. He is pleased when we demonstrate diligence and faithfulness. Encourage parents to stand firm against their child’s tendency to be lazy or to give up because success has not come quickly. God has promised to give that student everything he needs to accomplish a goal through God’s

grace and hard work (2 Peter 1:3–8).

When a teacher expresses concerns about a child’s behavior, parents may respond with comments such as, “God has made my child this way,” “The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree,” or “This school is too strict.” When this “cultural thinking” becomes evident, teachers should view this as an opportunity to remind parents of the purpose of rules. Not only are

God’s rules for our good and our protection, but they also reveal our heart’s attitude toward authority. He wants our autonomous spirit replaced with a submissive spirit. Training children to submit to earthly authorities prepares them to submit to God’s authority (Hebrews 13:17). The Bible teaches that parents who love their children discipline them (Proverbs 3:11, 12; Proverbs 13:24). If teachers keep God’s Word in the forefront of their minds, and if they encourage parents to keep the standards high for their children, God will be glorified in the work He has called both to do. This is the commitment to excellence!