

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study has focused on two of the most powerful forces of influence in the world—education and the church. First, education in general has the power to change individual people and society at large, but Christian education, armed with the truth, has even greater power. Second, no institution is more powerful and more capable of changing the world than the church—an institution that God created and that will survive until Christ's return. The ministry of Christian school education combines these two powerful forces. Excellent Christian education sponsored by a local church holds tremendous promise for raising up leaders who think and act like Christ and who can influence the next generation in America and the world.

In this paper, I have researched the scripture and examined the church's history of Christian education. I have also examined the hurdles that churches face when birthing and growing a Christian school ministry. Now it is time to take a moment to review the research, restate the critical findings and make recommendations for the future.

### **Research Summary**

The first task of this thesis was to research biblical and theological insights offered on the topic of Christian school education. It was important to determine if God's plan for his children includes or at least allows for an organized, church-sanctioned educational effort like that of a Christian school ministry. In order to determine this, I examined the nature of Christian ministry within the body of Christ and the purposes God prescribed for the church. I also examined what the Old Testament and New Testament communities actually practiced in order to promote education within the believing community.

The next task was to investigate how the Christian church implemented the mandate of Christian education throughout history. The examination of church history started with the New Testament church and continued through the Reformation and into twentieth-century America. This study provided the context for understanding contemporary efforts toward Christian education. Then, I investigated how the modern American church in general and Southern Baptists in particular are seeking to carry out the biblical mandate for education today. That study was followed by a more detailed look at the attitudes Southern Baptists have about Christian education and the efforts they are making to provide support for churches and their Christian school ministries.

Lastly, I summarized the problems that churches and schools encounter on a practical level and began to evaluate these problems based on the theological and historical data. Many of the problems commonly encountered are solved when churches look back to the philosophical and theological foundations of the Christian education movement. Other problems are solved by learning from the experience of others.

### **Conclusions / Findings**

From the research noted above came several key findings. First, a Christian school ministry is a valid ministry of the local church. This conclusion finds its basis in the fact that the Christian school ministry assists parents in their God-given responsibility of educating their children, and likewise it assists the church with its God-given responsibility of educating its members. There are a variety of ways that parents and churches can fulfill these responsibilities, but the Christian school ministry is definitely a valid option. With the obligation of Christian education in mind, pastors and other church leaders need to search seriously for methods of accomplishing this mission. Sunday schools have been relied on by Southern Baptists as the place for spiritual education, but one hour a week of biblical instruction even if reinforced in the home is not likely to achieve the desired results in America's post-Christian culture.

A second finding was that in her best days, the church has heartily pursued the education of its leadership and laity. The early church continued the Jewish practices of spiritual education. Unfortunately, the church later abandoned its initial educational efforts. From the time of Constantine to the era of the Reformation, the church reserved education only for the clergy and thus stifled the advancement of Christian thinking for centuries to come. The Reformers, however, following the voices of a few faithful predecessors, resurrected education for the masses and led the church to return to its biblical roots.

Colonial America continued the good work of the Reformers regarding Christian education, but as the public school movement took hold in America, Baptists in the South generally chose to rely on public education for their children and to invest their church resources into building a network of colleges and local church Sunday schools. With a few exceptions, it was not until the social and political changes of the 1950s and 1960s that some Southern Baptists pursued the Christian school option. Therefore, the historical analysis found that Southern Baptists are charting new territory for themselves in the world of Christian education. Other denominations and religious groups have already found their way in this arena, but Southern Baptists have lessons to learn and obstacles to overcome.

### **Recommendations**

The primary purpose of this paper is to help Southern Baptist churches build and maintain healthy relationships with their Christian school ministries. To that end, one major recommendation is offered: use this thesis as a guide to identify critical issues

applicable to your particular setting and make decisions in advance to head off potential conflict. Church leaders would be wise to start this process with a serious examination of their philosophy of education, followed by an evaluation of other issues raised in this paper, in order to reach their own conclusions and to enact customized policies. Church and school leaders then need to put their decisions in writing and communicate them to the appropriate groups. Not every decision needs to be set in stone, but a philosophical and operational paradigm needs to be put in place and followed until a conscious decision is made to make a change.

Churches that are starting a Christian school ministry will benefit greatly from this process. In order to maximize their benefit, they need to make sure they understand their current church governance structure. Then they can create a governance structure for the school and a method of policy-making that is in harmony with the current church structure and the way decisions are made for other church ministries. These churches will also want to seek advice from other churches and consultants while recognizing that what works for one church may not be the best for every church. Southern Baptist churches differ greatly in how they are governed and how decisions are made. Hopefully, many churches will find this paper to be a starting point for advanced planning and wiser decision-making.

Though the first recommendation was directed at the local church, the following three recommendations are directed at Southern Baptists as a whole. First, Southern Baptists need to rethink their philosophy of Christian education. To this point in history, most Southern Baptists have been content to rely on the public school for their children's education. Conversations rejecting the public school option are not very welcome in convention circles. But pastors, laypeople and convention leaders need to raise the issue for the sake of our children and our future. The problem is that the discussion at this point is too divisive. Some in the debate want to force people to cast their vote completely for the public school or to cast their vote against the public school as hopeless and basically evil. I propose a discussion that encourages believers to support the improvement of the public school while recognizing that a distinctively Christian education is uniquely effective at disciple-making.

A second recommendation for Southern Baptists is that we create a guide for our Christian school ministries that outlines a strategy for organizing and operating a Christian school ministry. The guide should include advice on the church-school relationship like those discussed in this paper along with many other topics that Christian schools need to consider as they operate their school ministry. The last such guide was produced by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board (now titled, LifeWay) in 1978, called the *Christian Day School Administrative Guide*. This guide is now out-of-date and no longer in print, but a new guide could help pastors and church leaders with basic decision-making from a Southern Baptist perspective. Southern Baptist Christian school leaders have continued to learn from school leaders of other denominations, and such help is valuable, but we need to chart our own course since in many respects Southern

Baptist churches do not operate in the same way as other churches that have Christian school ministries.

Finally, Southern Baptists need to train their own Christian school administrators. Many administrators of Southern Baptist schools were trained in non-Southern Baptist colleges and seminaries. While these administrators are to be commended for their excellent work, there is a need for Southern Baptists to provide customized training that helps administrators function in a Southern Baptist church setting. In the absence of such training, churches typically hire an administrator from a different church tradition. These administrators are not unqualified or incapable by any means, but their different background can create friction when pastors and administrators hold differing opinions in areas of Christian school philosophy, governance, school discipline, dress codes, and more. Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary is the only seminary currently offering a Masters in Christian School Administration, but the coursework requirements imposed by the seminary are much more extensive than a typical Masters of Education degree at a secular or Christian college, making it less attractive for the typical administrator. Furthermore, Masters of Education degrees at Baptist colleges prepare students for more of a public school career than a Christian school career. Southern Baptist leaders and churches with Christian school ministries should persuade Baptist colleges and seminaries to provide specific training for Christian school faculty and administrators.

For the past thirteen years I have served in two of the few Southern Baptist churches that have Christian school ministries. I have personally seen the positive impact a Christian worldview education has on a child, and I believe that in the days to come more Southern Baptist churches will discover the value of Christian school education. My hope is that this paper will help those churches extend their kingdom influence by starting and growing healthy Christian school ministries.