

Adventist Elementary Education: Our Father's Plan for "No Child Left Behind"

*Churches where schools are established may well tremble as they see themselves entrusted with moral responsibilities too great for words to express. Shall this work that has been nobly begun fail or languish for want of consecrated workers? Shall selfish projects and ambitions find room in this enterprise? Will the workers permit the love of gain, the love of ease, the lack of piety, to banish Christ from their hearts and exclude Him from the school? God forbid! The work is already far advanced. **In educational lines everything is arranged for an earnest reform, for a truer, more effective education.** Will our people accept this holy trust? Will they humble themselves at the cross of Calvary, ready for every sacrifice and every service? {6T 204.2}*

From 1895 – 1910, there was an explosion in the growth of Seventh-day Adventist church schools. This growth has been attributed to two significant events occurring in the Adventist Church at that time. First, came the understanding of Righteousness by Faith in Christ, followed by a global mission's emphasis to take the gospel to all the world.

With these two phenomena holding a central place in the local Adventist church, parents were anxious to enroll their children in Adventist education. The three primary objectives to which every Adventist church school ascribed included: 1) teaching the children about Christ, 2) preparing children to serve Christ through outreach and evangelism ministry, and, 3) sheltering children from the sinful influence of the world so prevalent in public education.

Consider the following gleanings from the writings of Ellen White to be representative of a vast amount of material she has recorded on the importance of Adventist elementary education:

To Teach the Children about Christ:

The eyes of our brethren and sisters should be anointed with the heavenly eyesalve, that they may discern the necessities of this time. The lambs of the flock must be fed, and the Lord of heaven is looking on to see who is doing the work He desires to have done for the children and youth. The church is asleep and does not realize the magnitude of this matter. "Why," says one, "what is the need of being so particular thoroughly to educate our youth? It seems to me that if a few who have decided to follow some literary calling, or some other calling that requires a certain discipline, receive special attention, this is all that is necessary. It is not necessary that all our young people should be so well trained. Will not the thorough education of a few answer every essential requirement?" {6T 196.3}

No, I answer, most decidedly not. What selection would we be able to make from our youth? How could we tell who would be the most promising, who would render the best service to God? In our human judgment we might do as did Samuel, who, when sent to find the anointed of the Lord, looked upon the outward appearance... Who can determine which one of a family will prove to be efficient in the work of God? **All the youth should be permitted to have the blessings and privileges of an education at our schools, that they may be inspired to become laborers together with God.** {6T 197.1}

Let these schools now be started under wise direction, that the children and youth may be educated in their own churches. **It is a grievous offense to God that there has been so great neglect in this line** when Providence has so abundantly supplied us with facilities with which to work. But though in the past we have come short of doing what we might have done for the youth and children, let us now repent and redeem the time. The Lord says: "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land." Isaiah 1:18, 19. {6T 199.3}

To Prepare the Children for Outreach and Evangelism Ministry:

Our church schools are ordained by God to prepare the children for this great work. Here children are to be instructed in the special truths for this time, and in practical missionary work. They are to enlist in the army of workers to help the sick and the suffering. Children can take part in the medical missionary work and by their jots and tittles can help to carry it forward. Their investments may be small, but every little helps, and by their efforts many souls will be won to the truth. By them God's message will be made known and His saving health to all nations. **Then let the church carry a burden for the lambs of the flock. Let the children be educated and trained to do service for God, for they are the Lord's heritage.**--Testimonies for the Church, vol. 6, pp. 193-203.

Wherever there are a few Sabbathkeepers, the parents should unite in providing a place for a day school where their children and youth can be instructed. **They should employ a Christian teacher who, as a consecrated missionary,** shall educate the children in such a way as to lead them to become missionaries. Let teachers be employed who will give a thorough education in the common branches, the Bible being made the foundation and the life of all study. **Parents should gird on the armor and by their own example teach their children to be missionaries.** They should work while it is day, for "the night cometh, when no man can work." John 9:4. If they will put forth unselfish efforts, perseveringly teaching their children to bear responsibilities, the Lord will work with them. {6T 198.2}

While we should put forth earnest efforts for the masses of the people around us, and push the work into foreign fields, **no amount of labor in this line can excuse us for neglecting the education of our children and youth. They are to be trained to become workers for God. Both parents and teachers, by precept and example, are so to instill the principles of truth and honesty into the minds and hearts of the young that they will become men and women who are true as steel to God and His cause.** {CT 165.3}

To Protect the Children from the World's Influence:

Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." 2 Corinthians 6:14-18. **Where are your children? Are you educating them to discern and to escape the corruptions that are in the world through lust? Are you seeking to save their souls, or are you by your neglect aiding in their destruction?** {6T 195.2}

The church has a special work to do in educating and training its children that they may not, in attending (public) school, or in any other association, be influenced by those of corrupt habits. The world is full of iniquity and disregard of the requirements of God. The cities have become as Sodom, and our children are daily being exposed to many evils. Those who attend the public schools often associate with others more neglected than they, those who, aside from the time spent in the schoolroom, are left to obtain a street education. **The hearts of the young are easily impressed; and unless their surroundings are of the right character, Satan will use these neglected children to influence those who are more carefully trained. Thus before Sabbathkeeping parents know what evil is being done, the lessons of depravity are learned, and the souls of their little ones are corrupted.** {6T 193.1}

This experience of the Israelites was written for the instruction of those who should live in the last days. Before the overflowing scourge shall come upon the dwellers of the earth, the Lord calls upon all who are Israelites indeed to prepare for that event. **To parents He sends the warning cry: Gather your children into your own houses; gather them away from those who are disregarding the commandments of God, who are teaching and practicing evil. Get out of the large cities as fast as possible. Establish church schools. Give your children the word of God as the foundation of all their education.** This is full of beautiful lessons, and if pupils make it their study in the primary grade below, they will be prepared for the higher grade above. {6T 195.1}

Conclusion:

The Lord would use the church school as an aid to the parents in educating and preparing their children for this time before us. Then let the church take hold of the school, work in earnest, and make it what the Lord desires it to be. {CT 167.1}

We are under solemn, sacred covenant to God to bring up our children, not for the world, not to put their hands into the hands of the world, but to love and fear God, and to keep His commandments. We are to instruct them to work intelligently in Christ's lines, to present a noble, elevated Christian character to those with whom they associate. **For this reason our schools have been established, that youth and children may be so educated as to exert an influence for God in the world.** {FE 289.2}

If ever we are to work in earnest, it is now. The enemy is pressing in on all sides, like a flood. Only the power of God can save our children from being swept away by the tide of evil. **The responsibility resting upon parents, teachers, and church members, to do their part in co-operation with God, is greater than words can express.** {CT 166.2}