

# PHILOSOPHY OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

## The Purpose and Scope of Christian Education

Education, as defined by American scholar and biblical thinker Noah Webster, “comprehends all that series of instruction and discipline which is intended to enlighten the understanding, correct the temper, form the manners and habits of youth, and fit them for usefulness in their future stations.” Webster’s definition is itself a demonstration of the chief aim of Christian education—a biblical world view. The Apostle Paul, in his treatise on the value and authenticity of Scripture, explains that “All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for correction, for reproof, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” (II Timothy 3:16-17)

This scripture and definition reveal the very heart of education and form the foundation for the philosophy of education at Dayspring Christian Academy. The major tenets of this philosophy:

### **1. The Development of a Biblical World View is the Goal of Christian Education**

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and perfect and acceptable.”

Romans 12:2

The Bible is the primary source for all learning. It provides, through principles of truth, the foundation from which the learner can reason to every subject and area of life. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. (Proverbs ) The Bible does not provide the necessary fact base required to gain knowledge of most subjects. However, knowledge of Biblical principles is absolutely essential to develop understanding and wisdom—the high orders of learning and application—in any given subject.

### **2. Christian Character Development is Primary in the Education Process**

Education works from the internal to the external. First, the heart of man must be regenerated then his mind must be renewed, and finally, he will “walk in a manner worthy of his calling.” Christ opens the doorway into the Kingdom of God for the individual. The sanctification process that ensues occurs in the character realm first and foremost, and is a lifelong progression. Lasting external change and growth comes only by way of internal character growth.

“And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope...”

Romans 5:3-4

### **3. Academic Excellence is an Expression of Worship of Almighty God**

“Great are the works of the Lord;  
They are studied by all who delight in them.”

Psalms 111:2

As the foundation in Christian character is being laid, the academic capacity of the student is addressed and developed. Each child is an expression of God’s Principle of Individuality. He is seen as an individual created in God’s image, unique and possessing certain gifts and qualities that set him apart from all others. As his strengths and weaknesses are identified, the education process both affirms and stretches him, calling him up to excellence in every area of life so that he may effectively exert Christian influence in his life spheres.

### **4. Christian Education Requires a Christian Philosophy, Curriculum, and Methodology**

Education is comprised of three basic components: **philosophy, curriculum, and methodology**. Likewise, each and every subject that is studied has a unique philosophy (presuppositional truths), curriculum (content) and methodology (application). Philosophy gives rise to both the curriculum and the methods used in studying (teaching and learning). It is the relationship of these three components that provide both the means and the ends for mastering a given subject or topic.

## PHILOSOPHY

**Philosophy is the governor of our thoughts and actions.** Philosophy gets to the heart of who we are, what we believe and why we believe it. It is closely allied with “world view.” Our philosophy of life is affected by our world view and at the same time affects it. There are many philosophies in the world today. Most are insidious in the way they captivate the mind and produce outcomes that would otherwise be shunned. Scripture clearly warns believers to beware of “vain philosophies” that are patterned after the rudiments of the world rather than of Christ. A Christian philosophy of life is also termed a **biblical world view**.

**A philosophy of education is a philosophy of government.** It determines the character and the skill of the rising generation. Whether a Christian civilization will endure depends largely on the philosophy of education that prepares those who will lead. The importance of building a Christian philosophy of education cannot be overstated for parents, teachers, and students alike. From the earliest years, parents and teachers begin to train the philosophy of life that a child will take into adulthood. Often, a person’s actions expose an underlying philosophy more readily than his discourse.

## CURRICULUM

The curriculum is the course of study embarked upon by a student. A curriculum has an underlying philosophy, which is exposed by the subjects studied, and the facts or concepts to be mastered. The goal of any curriculum should be to discover truth. A Christian curriculum searches all things for the knowledge and wisdom of God. *“Great are the works of the Lord; they are studied by all who delight in them.” Psalm 111:2*

- A curriculum should be **lively and appropriate** to the needs of the learner, as well as to the needs of the community as a whole.
- Care should be taken to develop a Christian curriculum based upon the **research and reasoning** of the teacher who has mastered the subject from a biblical perspective.
- A curriculum must be **academically sound** and based **upon truth**, not on prejudiced or biased points of view.
- The **scope** of the curriculum is the breadth and depth of the content to be studied. The scope should always be **age/ability-appropriate**, while providing the challenge needed to stretch the able mind.
- The **sequence** of the curriculum should build from rudimentary knowledge and understanding to more advanced concepts and applications in a **logical progression**. Prerequisite skills and concepts must be in place before introducing new material.
- The **scope and the sequence** of any subject are established both within each grade level, as well as **between** all the grade levels in the school. The validity of each must be verified.
- The goal of every curriculum is to attain **mastery of the subject** within the context of a **biblical world view**.

## METHODOLOGY

A Christian philosophy of education that is not evidenced in both a Christian curriculum and a Christian method of teaching will fall short of its objective to build a biblical world view into the learner. One’s view of God, humanity, the heart and mind, and the child has everything to do with how one practices the art and science of teaching. Teachers can negate the effect of a Christian philosophy and curriculum by following secular humanistic practices in the classroom that are steeped in behaviorism and the theory of evolution.

- **Teaching is a relationship** first and foremost. The teacher-pupil relationship is based in Christian **love** and is crowned with mutual **respect**. *“But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” 1 Timothy 1:5*
- The teacher is seen as a **living curriculum** before her students. *“A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher.” Luke 5:40*
- **Discipline and order** play major roles in the efficiency and effectiveness of the teaching-learning cycle.
- Teachers must stay current with **teaching-learning theories** while maintaining a biblical filter through which to qualify them. *“All truth is God’s truth.”*
- The **Christian Idea of the Child** recognizes the inherent value of each individual as well as his uniqueness. Teachers recognize these **personality and learning style differences** and adapt their teaching methods so that every student has the opportunity to grow to his full potential.

## 5. The Principle Approach Provides an Excellent Biblical and Historical Model of Christian Education

Nearly four centuries ago, a group of Pilgrims landed on the shores of North America “for the glory of God and advancement of the Christian faith.” It was through their highly developed sense of Christian character and their commitment to excellence in every area of life that the foundation of a civil government based upon biblical principles was laid. During the two hundred years that followed, a republic was formed that grew into the greatest nation the world has ever known. Primary among reasons for this success was the prevailing method of education at the time: The Principle Approach. The success of this Christian classical method can be seen in the fact that by the time of the Declaration of Independence, the literacy rate ranged from 70% to virtually 100% across a large segment of the population - something the world had never seen before. If this nation, or any other nation, desires to continue to grow and prosper, much will depend on the character of its people and the values they hold dear and on how well both are passed on to succeeding generations.

The Principle Approach is a modern appellation for the American colonial model of education. It is a systematic, Christian approach to education that builds upon a classical curriculum and is thoroughly biblical in its philosophy and application.

### Key Word

**PRIN'CIPLE**, n. [L. principium, beginning.]

1. In a general sense, the cause, source or origin of any thing; that from which a thing proceeds; as the principle of motion; the principles of action.

2. Element; constituent part; primordial substance.

Modern philosophers suppose matter to be one simple principle, or solid extension diversified by its various shapes.

3. Being that produces any thing; operative cause.

The soul of man is an active principle.

4. In science, a truth admitted either without proof, or considered as having been before proved. In the former sense, it is synonymous with axiom; in the latter, with the phrase, established principle.

5. Ground; foundation; that which supports an assertion, an action, or a series of actions or of reasoning.

On what principle can this be affirmed or denied? He justifies his proceedings on the principle of expedience or necessity. He reasons on sound principles.

6. A general truth; a law comprehending many subordinate truths; as the principles of morality, of law, of government, &c.

The Principle Approach begins with the premise that all things (truth, knowledge, matter, the universe itself) are held together by biblical principles, i.e., the Word of God. (John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:16-17.) These principles (laws) govern every subject, determining how each operates and should be used by man to fulfill God’s mandate to subdue the earth. Principles are seen as seeds that contain all the rudimentary information needed in a given subject to solve any problem or answer any question. Biblical principles do not provide content material in a given subject, but function as governing forces that guide the learner along a path of biblical reasoning that results in godly wisdom.

### Key Word

**CLASSICAL**, a.

1. Relating to ancient Greek and Roman authors of the first rank or estimation, which, in modern times, have been and still are studied as the best models of fine writing. Thus, Aristotle, Plato, Demosthenes, Thucydides, &c., among the Greeks, and Cicero, Virgil, Livy, Sallust, Cesar, and Tacitus, among the Latins, are classical authors. Hence,

2. Pertaining to writers of the first rank among the moderns; being of the first order; constituting the best model or authority as an author; as, Addison and Johnson are English classical writers. Hence classical denotes pure, chaste, correct, refined; as a classical taste; a classical style.

Webster’s final sentence in definition 2 of the word classical is of paramount importance when applying the idea of the classics to Christian education. While the classical curriculum draws frequently from ancient Greek and Roman reservoirs, they are not the only sources. In his definition of the noun **classic**, Webster notes that “**the word is applied to writers of a like character in any nation.**” Hence, in the classically oriented paradigm, the educator searches for and verifies the best works (curricula and methodologies) from many nations and cultures.

The Principle Approach is not American, nor is it just for Americans. America's history and government—especially during the colonial and founding periods—*do* provide the clearest representation and outcomes of applying biblical principles to the civil realm. These same principles that helped forge our nation's founding documents and institutions will renovate any nation at any time period when wisely and systematically applied.

It must be pointed out that because something is identified as a classic, does not mean that it is Christian or biblical in nature. The Christian school educator must carefully discern what material is to be selected to study, clearly define the purpose for studying it, and decide how its inconsistencies with a biblical world view will be treated. This process involves *thinking governmentally* – reasoning from the internal (source, cause) to the external (application, effect). Thinking governmentally determines who or what is in control in a given situation.

In the classically oriented Christian school attention is given to avoid making educational decisions based upon faddish concerns and political correctness. Contemporary issues and theories are not to be ignored, but are scrutinized within the greater context of a historical and biblical perspective.

*The Principle Approach*, revived in the 1960s through the Foundation for American Christian Education, draws from the classical Christian tradition by providing formal instruction in **logic, rhetoric, Latin, New Testament Greek and Biblical Hebrew**. **Classical literature** at every grade level provides for an enriched and highly developed vocabulary, as well as a broader perspective on the human condition.

#### **PHILOSOPHICAL DISTINCTIVES OF THE PRINCIPLE APPROACH**

- The **Word of God** is recognized as the “alpha and omega” of Truth and becomes the plumbline against which all ideas, concepts, and facts are measured for veracity. The level of **scholarship, biblical reasoning, and Christian character** evidenced in America's colonial and founding generations is being restored as a means to support and maintain our Christian republic.
- The foundational principles of the Bible provide a bond that **unites** each subject from within and relates all subjects together from without
- God is the Source of all things. **God's Principle of Individuality**, as demonstrated by His holiness and the infinite expression of His creativity is the framework for understanding all of life and learning. The uniqueness of each individual within the diversity of the human race is a reflection of God's own character and nature.
- The **individuality of each subject** is expressed by examining its biblical origin and purpose, its rudimentary concepts, its particular vocabulary, and its historical development. This study provides a deeper understanding of **God's character and nature** and clarifies **man's duty** to use this knowledge responsibly to fulfill the first and second great commissions (Genesis 1:28; Matthew 28:19-20).
- The teacher, the parents, and student enter a covenant relationship, while, at the same time, the individuality of each is respected and preserved. (Ephesians 6:1-2; Luke 6:40)
- The learning process is **reflective**, promoting sound, **logical reasoning** and **intuitive thinking** on the part of the learner from a biblical Christian perspective. (Isaiah 1:18; Isaiah 28:9-10)
- Teachers and students **produce ideas and works** that express creativity, value and meaning, contribute to the general good, and are pleasing to God, rather than simply consume materials and/or absorb the ideas of others. (II Timothy 2:20-21; II Timothy 3:16-17)

#### 6. Educational Objectives Address the Whole Child (Romans 12:1-2; Ephesians 4:11-16)

- A. Spiritually, in that the child is provided instruction, opportunity, and modeling in:
  - loving God,
  - loving his neighbor
  - developing a prayer life
  - rightly dividing the Word of God
  - reasoning from the principles of God's Word to all of life
  - owning and articulating a biblical Christian world view
  - embracing the Great Commission
  - walking in purity of thought and action
  - identifying with a local church

- B. Academically, in that the child is provided instruction, opportunity, and modeling so as to:
  - be equipped with a well rounded, liberal arts education
  - attain excellence in scholarship in the various subject areas
  - think critically, from cause to effect
  - study effectively
  - be fit for usefulness in his future station, whether at college or in a vocation
  - be able to articulate thoughts and persuade others
  - understand world cultures
  - exhibit technological savvy
  
- C. Socially, in that each child is provided instruction, opportunity and modeling so as to promote:
  - The Fruit of the Spirit
  - Modesty
  - Diplomacy in dealing with others
  - Civility and good manners
  - A giving heart
  - Respectfulness, compassion, and helpfulness toward others
  - Honoring of father and mother and others in authority
  - The biblical standard of heterosexuality; the biblical injunction against homosexuality
  - The biblical view that marriage is between one man and one woman and is sacred
  - Global awareness in view of the world
  - Sensitivity to cultural and ethnic diversity
  - Active support of the school as an alumnus
  - Patriotism and good citizenship
  
- D. Physically, in that each child is provided instruction, opportunities and modeling so as to:
  - Maintain a healthy and fit body
  - Treat his body as the temple of the Holy Spirit
  - Be well groomed and modest in presentation
  - Disciplined in healthy life-habits
  - Remain sexually pure according to biblical standards

In summary, Christian education has the unique capacity to assist parents in their God-given mandate to “raise their children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” (Ephesians 6:4) This education takes place in the context of a biblical philosophy and a Christ-centered curriculum by loving and mature Christian teachers who minister to the whole child using Christ-honoring and effective methods.