

A BIBLICAL VIEW ON  
**HOMESCHOOLING**



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# HOMESCHOOLING



Three to four percent of American school-aged children are homeschooled. That's about 2.5 million students. The number of homeschoolers is increasing each year. The National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI) estimates that the homeschooling population has grown by two-to-eight percent annually in recent years.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Brian D. Ray, "Research Facts on Homeschooling," National Home Education Research Institute, March 23, 2020, <https://www.nheri.org/research-facts-on-homeschooling/>

While many associate homeschooling with the Christian right, the origins of the modern homeschooling movement are rooted in both secular liberal and religious conservative philosophies. Ideological, racial, and religious diversity among homeschoolers continues to increase.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, religious beliefs remain a significant factor in many modern families' decision to home educate.

## **History of the Modern Movement**

It wasn't until the states began passing compulsory school attendance laws, beginning with Massachusetts in 1852, that "homeschool first became the exception rather than the normal mode of education."<sup>3</sup>

Fast-forward about 120 years, and

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<sup>2</sup> Ray, "Research Facts on Homeschooling."

<sup>3</sup> Martha López Coleman, "Left, Right, and Online: A Historic View of Homeschooling," National Home Education Research Institute, July 10, 2014, <https://www.neri.org/homeschool-researcher-left-right-and-online-a-historic-view-of-homeschooling/>

the modern homeschooling movement blossomed with educator John Holt at the helm. Holt began championing “unschooling” in the 1970s. He believed children learn best when not “cut off from the rest of life,” and as such, the traditional classroom model was ineffective. His ideas appealed to the “counter-culture Left,”<sup>4</sup> among whom homeschooling took off. A short time later in the 1980s, Dr. Raymond Moore and his wife Dorothy Moore, who were Seventh-Day Adventists, started advocating homeschooling from a biblical perspective. The Moores emphasized the potential benefits of allowing children to delay formal education until around 4th grade.<sup>5</sup>

In the early 1980s, the Moores joined Dr. James Dobson’s Focus on the

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<sup>4</sup> Coleman, “Left, Right, and Online.”

<sup>5</sup> Scott W. Sommerville, “The Politics of Survival: Home Schoolers and the Law,” Institute of Education Sciences, April 2001, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED461177.pdf>

Family radio show. During that same time period, Dr. Moore also joined the late *Point of View* host Marlin Maddoux for multiple interviews about homeschooling. By appearing on such radio programs, Moore literally broadcast the idea of homeschooling to Christian parents everywhere. Mike Smith and Michael Farris, two lawyers who founded the influential Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) in the 1980s, credit Moore with their decision to homeschool their own families.<sup>6</sup> Over the years, *Point of View* played a crucial role in spreading the word about homeschooling, including inspiring tens of thousands of Americans to oppose federal legislation that threatened homeschool parents' rights in 1994.<sup>7</sup> In short, homeschooling quickly gained popularity among conservative Chris-

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<sup>6</sup> "The Passing of a Pioneer," Court Report Volume XXIII, Number 5 (2007): <https://nche.hslda.org/courtreport/V23N5/V23N503.asp>

<sup>7</sup> Sommerville, "The Politics of Survival."

tians, thanks to the Moores and influencers in evangelical circles amplifying their message. Because of this, homeschooling remains largely associated with that group, despite the modern movement's progressive beginnings, and the increasingly diverse make-up of homeschoolers.

Though Holt and the Moores were pioneering home education throughout the 1970s and '80s, homeschooling didn't become legal in every state until 1993. Prior to that time, homeschoolers were still so counter-cultural that many government actors didn't know what to do with them. Some homeschooling parents were even arrested on charges of truancy. Accordingly, homeschooling wasn't an endeavor taken lightly. It required a strong conviction that homeschooling was the best option for one's children. For many Christians, it was a calling.

## **A Biblical Basis for Home Education**

Religious faith is still a major part of some families' decision to homeschool.

The moral and academic education often provided to students at public schools gives cause for concern. The proper role of religion in public schools has been a controversy for decades, sometimes culminating in Supreme Court cases. Students and teachers have faced open hostility or discrimination because of their religious faith. Much public school curriculum promotes values and political worldviews problematic to millions of Americans.<sup>8</sup>

There are several verses in the Bible that discuss parents' responsibility to teach their children. A popular one for Christian homeschool families is Deuteronomy 6:6-7:

“And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your chil-

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<sup>8</sup> Ira C. Lupu, F. Elwood, Eleanor Davis, David Masci, Robert W. Tuttle, David R. and Sherry Kirschner Berz, “Religion in the Public Schools,” Pew Research Center, October 3, 2019, <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/03/religion-in-the-public-schools-2019-update/>

dren, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.”

This passage is clear that parents’ responsibility to impart God’s Word to their children is not limited to church, nor is it the duty of Sunday School teachers or other authority figures. It’s meant to be an integral part of daily family life.

Similarly, Proverbs 22:6 admonishes parents to “train up a child in the way he should go.” Ephesians 6:4 tells fathers specifically to “bring [children] up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

In Matthew 18:6, Jesus delivers a stark warning about children: “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.”

These verses indicate that parents’ first job is to disciple their children

spiritually. But it is also the duty of Christian parents to make sure their children are well equipped to effectively engage a secular world. This includes training them to be good stewards of their unique gifts and talents. It means preparing them to excel in all endeavors — academic, social, professional — where they will have opportunities to represent Christ. How can parents accomplish this? Practically, it requires giving children strong academic and social foundations, which many parents feel the American public school system is failing to do.

The picture may not be quite as bleak as some believe, however. The National Assessment of Educational Progress shows that American students' test scores "have been stagnant for the past decade."<sup>9</sup> It's true that the United

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<sup>9</sup> Diane Ravitch, "The Education Reform Movement Has Failed America. We Need Common Sense Solutions That Work," *Time*, February 1, 2020, <https://time.com/5775795/education-reform-failed-america/>

States' world academic performance rankings aren't impressive. But as some educators have pointed out, the comparisons are not entirely fair. The US student population is much larger and more economically diverse than many other nations. When data are controlled for poverty, American students rank high.<sup>10</sup>

School quality can vary drastically by district, and it's not surprising that children in affluent school districts tend to perform better academically. But money isn't the whole story. "A long line of studies have found that students from intact, married families do better in school than those from disrupted or unmarried families," writes research

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<sup>10</sup> Diane Ravitch, "Daniel Wydo Disaggregates PISA Scores by Income," Diane Ravitch's blog, December 5, 2013, <https://dianeravitch.net/2013/12/05/daniel-wydo-disaggregates-pisa-scores-by-income/>

psychologist Nicholas Zill.<sup>11</sup> Children from intact, married families “are more likely to get the attention, affection, and direction they need to thrive in school.” That could help explain why home-schoolers consistently outperform their public-schooled peers on standardized tests — including when data is controlled for family income.<sup>12</sup>

In short, regardless of where the schooling takes place, parental involvement is a not-so-secret ingredient for success. Thus, vast numbers of Christian parents conclude that the best way to provide both spiritual guidance and a solid academic foundation is to directly oversee their children’s education.

## **A Biblical Mandate to Homeschool?**

While many Christians believe

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<sup>11</sup> Nicholas Zill, “Family Still Matters for Key Indicators of Student Performance,” Institute for Family Studies, April 6, 2020, <https://ifstudies.org/blog/family-still-matters-for-key-indicators-of-student-performance>

<sup>12</sup> Ray, “Research Facts on Homeschooling.”

homeschooling offers the best path for following biblical mandates about raising children, the argument that there is a biblical mandate to homeschool is difficult to support.

The Bible places the responsibility for a child's upbringing on their parents' shoulders. But God's Word also highlights the benefits that others can have in a child's upbringing. Spiritual mentors play a large role in both the Old and New Testaments. We see God instructing his people to gather together in both the Old and New Testaments. In the New Testament, Christians are specifically instructed to operate as the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-27); to come together in corporate worship (Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 10:25); to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2); to instruct younger believers, and receive instruction from older ones (Titus 2:1-8).

Mentors certainly don't replace the specific and necessary role of parents in a child's life. But Christian homeschoolers should take care not to deprive

children of beneficial influence and instruction from other sources. Many homeschooling families would agree that a healthy home education is not about cutting children off from non-parental influence, but about having more control over who and what those influences are.

Still, the majority of American families do not homeschool, and that includes plenty of Christian families. Many exert influence over their children's education by placing them in private schools that promote their values. Others are satisfied to actively participate in the public school system. Homeschooling isn't a requirement for biblical parenting, and it simply isn't possible for a lot of parents. It's also important for Christian parents to remember that homeschooling, while rich in the potential to emphasize faith in education, isn't a guarantee of salvation.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Scarlett Clay, "Homeschool Will Not Save Them," *Desiring God*, March 7, 2018, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/homeschool-will->

Thankfully, when it comes to deciding where and how to educate one's own children, Christians have freedom (1 Corinthians 10:23-24; 31). The quality of local school districts, private school options, children's needs and learning styles, parents' vocations, and family callings are all factors to be considered in determining the right educational path for any student. The only non-negotiable requirements for Christian parents, judging by Scripture, are providing one's children with love, care, godly discipline, and spiritual guidance.

### **Homeschooling Today**

For a growing number of home-school families, homeschooling isn't a matter of mission as much as it is a matter of preference. Nowadays, thanks in large part to the HSLDA's work since the 1980s, parents don't have to worry about law enforcement knocking on their doors and demanding to know

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why their children aren't in school. Legal threats<sup>14</sup> to and hostility toward homeschooling<sup>15</sup> still crop up. But in general, homeschooling is becoming culturally mainstream.

All of this gives families the freedom to view homeschooling as merely one more educational option. The goal for some families is finding the best method of learning for each child. Some children thrive with competition. Others are self-starters who learn best through independent study. Still other children need intensive one-on-one instruction. Sometimes, a variety of learning styles appear within one family, with different

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<sup>14</sup> James R. Mason, "A Look back at the Great California Homeschool Case of 2008," HSLDA, May 5, 2020, <https://hsllda.org/post/a-look-back-at-the-great-california-homeschool-case-of-2008>

<sup>15</sup> J. Michael Smith, "Introducing new series: HSLDA's Response to Harvard Professor Bartholet," HSLDA, <https://hsllda.org/post/introducing-new-series-hsllda-s-response-to-harvard-professor-bartholet>

children attending different schools. Within the homeschooling “movement” itself, there are myriad methods and educational philosophies.

The option to homeschool — and the now abundant options for academic, social, and extracurricular enrichment within homeschooling — should be viewed as a blessing for American parents. For Christians surveying a social and political climate often hostile to biblical values, home education is understandably attractive, and a choice well worth considering.

## **Additional Resources**

Carter, Joe. "9 Things You Should Know About the History of the Homeschooling Movement," The Gospel Coalition, August 2, 2017, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/9-things-you-should-know-about-the-history-of-the-homeschooling-movement/>

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