

## **Blind Guides**

**By David Feddes**

The mother was amazed and horrified. She and her husband and children had just moved to a new area. When the children started going to their new school, they were troubled to find out that some Christian activities were openly occurring in that public school district. Each day students recited prayers over the public address system. Bible classes were taught by instructors who were paid by local churches. There were classroom prayers before lunch. What a shock! Didn't the people in the school district know that God doesn't belong in public schools?

The mother took the matter to court. Needless to say, she won. Every judge knows that public schools aren't allowed to teach children to pray or read the Bible. If public schools and teachers try to slip in some teaching about God and his ways, they can get away with it only as long as no higher authorities find out about it and no parents challenge them in court.

Every year billions of taxpayer dollars pour into public schools, and every fall millions of students pour into public schools. Politicians make public education a major focus of their agenda, and parents eagerly support more government spending to improve government schools. But in all this eagerness to improve education, we need to stop and ask what happens in schools where the official creed is godlessness. What are students learning? What sort of people are they becoming?

Just hearing me ask the question may upset you. I sometimes hear from non-Christians who think it's bad to question public education, and I also hear from some Christians who tell me, "Stick with the Bible, and stay out of politics!"

That's a revealing comment. Apparently such people think the Bible has nothing to do with education. They think education is a political issue, not a spiritual one. They want preachers to stay away from the subject and leave it to politicians. They assume that the teaching of children is the job of government and that God has nothing to do with it. In fact, that's one triumph of the public system education system. Those who have been trained in the system—even Christians!—are brainwashed into thinking that the Bible isn't relevant to education.

But is that really true? The fact of the matter is that the Bible speaks very forcefully about education. One of the most important statements comes from Jesus himself. He says, "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:39-40).

What is Jesus saying? He's saying that you'd better have the right teacher. Where your teacher goes, you will go. What your teacher is like, you will be like. If your teacher knows God and looks at all of life in light of God's Word and is walking the road to heaven, then so will you. But if your teacher is blind to God, he's headed for disaster, and he's leading you to disaster.

The average person spends 15,000 hours in school from kindergarten to grade twelve. If students turn out to be like their teachers, then shouldn't we ask who is doing the teaching and what is being taught during those 15,000 hours of official godlessness? Face it: public schools are not designed to make people more like Jesus Christ or bring them to heaven. Most of these schools are designed to make atheists feel at home.

So although I don't want to offend anyone needlessly, I have to talk about education. I have to talk about it because Jesus talked about it and because the entire Bible talks about it. I have to talk about it because parents need to think hard about who is teaching your children. And

I have to talk about it because many of you reading this are yourselves products of schooling that excluded God, and you don't realize how it has shaped your thinking and behavior.

We'd all rather avoid controversies over education, but when children are falling into a pit, we'd better ask some hard questions about who is leading them there. I'm not saying the public school system is the whole problem, but it's part of the problem. Children learn from teachers who are silent about God, and they learn from classmates who are obsessed with movies, clothes, sex, and almost anything but walking with God.

### **Pioneers of Public Education**

We need a God-given vision that springs from Bible-based, Christ-centered teaching, but is that found in public schools? No, these schools exclude God. And this is no accident. It is exactly what some of the main architects of government-controlled schools envisioned from the very beginning. Don't take my word for it. Just listen to some pioneers of public education.

One of the most prominent was Horace Mann. He said, "What the church has been for medieval man the public school must become for democratic and rational man. God will be replaced by the concept of the public good.... The common schools ... shall create a more far-seeing intelligence and a pure morality than has ever existed among communities of men." The first part of Horace Mann's wish has come true: public schools have replaced God with something else. As for his prophecy that these schools would dramatically improve intelligence and morality? Well, let's just say that Horace Mann was better at comedy than prophecy.

Or consider John Dewey, another great shaper of public education. Dewey said: "Faith in the prayer-hearing God is an unproved and outmoded faith. There is no God and there is no soul. Hence, there are no needs for the props of traditional religion. With dogma and creed excluded, the immutable truth is also dead and buried. There is no room for fixed, natural law or moral absolutes." Thus spake John Dewey, the teacher of teachers, the shaper of schools, the blind leader of the blind.

It took awhile for Dewey's vision to take over the elite schools that train teachers and shape education theory. It took awhile for the courts to find legal excuses to force government-run, taxpayer-funded schools to shake off Christian influence. But now, many decades after Dewey, there can be no doubt that Dewey's wishes have come true. We have schools with no God, no soul, no religion, no unchanging truth, no moral absolutes.

John Dewey and Horace Mann were anti-Christian, but they were idealists. And as with all who are idealists without the God of the Bible, their ideal was their idol. They worshipped progress and trusted in salvation through public education. Francis Wayland Parker, whom John Dewey called "the father of the progressive education movement," once said, "We must know that we can save every child. The citizen should say in his heart: I await the regeneration of the world from the teaching of the common schools."

But is that what has happened? Have the public schools brought about the regeneration of the world? No, they are hastening its degeneration. These schools are conditioning more and more people to think that God is irrelevant to their life. They are producing students who are less moral, more violent, more inclined to use drugs, and more suicidal than ever before.

And on top of all that, many of them aren't even doing a good job of teaching basic skills and subject material. Granted, some schools do a fine job of teaching basics, but the overall picture gets bleaker every year. More than two thirds of American high school seniors don't know when the Civil War occurred, and more than three-fourths can't say within twenty years when Abraham Lincoln was president.

58% of seventeen-year-olds can't read well enough to understand a twelfth grade textbook or analyze articles in news magazines. Some schools have become so bad that you might see a bumper sticker which says, "If you can read this ... you didn't go to the public school."

And as for math, a major survey found that only 16 percent of grade twelve students reach a "competent" level. Why are so few students competent? Well, a Carnegie Commission study found that more than 80 percent of math *instructors* are deficient in math. "A student is not above his teacher"—in morals or in math!

Still, though the public schools are failing at many things, they've been successful in one area: undermining Christian faith and morals. Paul Blanshard, writing in *The Humanist* magazine, said, "I think that the most important factor moving us toward a secular society has been the educational factor. Our schools may not teach Johnny to read properly, but the fact that Johnny is in school until he is sixteen tends to lead toward the elimination of religious superstition. The average American child now acquires a high school education and this militates against Adam and Eve and other myths of alleged history." In other words, the schools do a lousy job academically, but it's worth it if they can at least get children to give up Christian beliefs.

Blanshard says, "I wrote an editorial [years ago] explaining that golf and intelligence were the two primary reasons why men did not attend church, perhaps I would now say golf and a high school diploma." This isn't some angry religious zealot I'm quoting. This is a humanist, celebrating the way that a public school diploma often destroys faith and worship.

All this, and much more, has been compiled and documented by Christopher Klicka, a Christian attorney and author, in his thought-provoking book *The Right Choice*. I don't bring these things to your attention because I enjoy bashing public schools. Quite a number of people who are dear to me send their children to public schools. Some people I respect highly are public school educators, and I appreciate their desire to make a positive impact.

Still, despite some teachers who do their best within the system, and despite some students who manage to hang on to their faith and learn some things along the way, the dominant reality of public education is godlessness, and this godlessness is no accident. It's what some pioneers of mandatory, government-controlled education wanted all along. They were anti-God from the start. People like Horace Mann and John Dewey knew they had clout in many of the teacher's colleges, and they knew that once government took over education, the laws against government establishment of religion would eventually kick in. It would just be a matter of time till school districts in even the most religious areas would have to be silent about God and the Bible.

### **Falling into a Pit**

More than four centuries ago, Martin Luther said: "I am afraid that the schools will prove the very gates of hell, unless they diligently labor in explaining the Holy Scriptures and engraving them in the hearts of the youth." The gates of hell—was Luther exaggerating when he said that? No, he was simply saying what Jesus said: that when the blind lead the blind, both fall into a pit. Godless education is the pits!

If Satan himself were designing a philosophy of education, what would be his number one goal? To keep kids away from Christ. Satan would want schools that teach children and young people to think about every area of life without Christ. Isn't that exactly the philosophy of education in public schools?

The largest and most powerful union for public school teachers, the National Education Association, officially declares that “public education is the cornerstone of our social, economic, and political structure and is of utmost significance in the development of our moral, ethical, spiritual, and cultural values.” At the same time, the National Education Association is committed to the view that public schools must not promote faith in Christ or urge students to live by the Bible. Now, if public schools won’t talk about Christ and yet see themselves as the “cornerstone of our social, economic, and political structure” and as shapers of “moral, ethical, spiritual, and culture values,” then they are teaching social studies without Christ, economics without Christ, politics without Christ, morality without Christ, ethics without Christ, spirituality without Christ, and culture without Christ. Somewhere Satan must be smiling. Students are following blind guides and falling into the pit of ignoring Jesus Christ in every part of life.

Jesus said that students will be like their teachers. He also said that a tree is known by its fruit. We’re seeing the fruit of the mainstream approach to child rearing and education these days, and much of that fruit is bad. Ignorance, unbelief and immorality are proof that most children in our society are not being taught by God. They’re not learning to follow Jesus.

Oh, some of them go to Sunday school. They spend perhaps half an hour or an hour each week singing a song and coloring a picture and hearing a Bible story or a polite moral lesson. But is that hour of Sunday school supposed to counteract *30 hours* each week in a school that excludes God? The amazing thing isn’t that so many people walk away from God but that there are any who still follow him in spite of such an upbringing.

The public school isn’t the only problem, but it’s part of the problem. It all comes down to the question, Who is teaching the children? John Gatto, a winner of the New York City Teacher of the Year award has said: “Two institutions at present control our children’s lives: television and schooling, in that order.”

Where is the church? Where are parents? If children go to church at all, they spend at most an hour or two per week there, compared to more than 30 hours in school. And as for parents, researchers say that parents spend an average of seven minutes a day in face-to-face contact with their children. Seven minutes a day! Less than one hour a week—compared to hour after hour of television and music. So, then, it’s TV and school that occupy most children’s waking hours and shape their minds.

I could say plenty about TV, but right now we’re focusing on school. And when we talk about school, it’s more than just the teachers and the official curriculum. As the *Harvard Educational Review* puts it: “Whatever their values, most parents seem to realize that a good deal of child rearing will take place at school and a great many basic values will be foisted on children there. The school is a social environment in which a child may learn more than that which is in the formal curriculum.” Or, to put it another way, children aren’t just learning a few subjects; they are learning how to live. Kids aren’t just being taught by their paid instructors; they are being raised by other kids.

“A student is not above his teacher.” If Jesus was right about that, and a child’s teacher is a combination of public school instruction, public school friends, and whatever they happen to see on television, should we be shocked when kids go downhill intellectually, morally, and spiritually? Should we be surprised if love for Christ grows cold? Should we wonder why so few people know what’s in the Bible and even fewer live by it? We’ve got the wrong teachers. The blind are leading the blind. If a student follows a teacher who is blind to Jesus Christ, both student and teacher will fall into a pit. The final pit is the bottomless pit: hell.

## **Out of This World**

I know that to some of you, what I'm saying sounds crazy. It sounds like it comes from another planet. But maybe it's time you listened to teaching from somewhere besides this planet. Maybe you need to consider education that is truly out of this world! Maybe it's time you started listening to the Teacher who came from heaven to earth to bring a kingdom that is not of this world. Jesus is the teacher you need, and parents devoted to Jesus are the teachers every child needs.

God doesn't entrust the care of children's souls to a government bureaucracy or to a bunch of classmates or to a TV executive. God entrusts the care of children to their parents. What does God think when parents use the TV as a babysitter, or when moms and dads sigh with relief when they can send their kids off to school and get them off their hands? The biblical teaching of covenant emphasizes that God calls parents to teach the next generation the works of God and the way to eternal life.

Many Christian parents are trying to respond to God's call. Some can't see any alternative to public school, but they take their responsibility for their children very seriously. Unlike the average parents who spends seven minutes a day talking with their children, these committed parents are helping their children to deal with their schooling and helping them to sort the good from the bad. They work to be the major influence in their children's lives, making sure their children spend time at home and not just with friends, and making sure the TV is off most of the time—if they have a TV at all. They also try to influence their local public school for the better. God has blessed the efforts of many parents who have done this and has used them to bring their children to salvation in Jesus and to guide the children in how to be more Christ-like in many different areas of life.

But more and more parents are catching a vision that takes them a step further in their God-given responsibilities. They don't send their children to public schools at all.

Some simply keep their children at home. Home schooling is a growing phenomenon. Many home schooling parents give their children spiritual and moral and intellectual training that far surpasses what their children could get in public schools.

Other Christian parents have banded together to establish schools that are run by parents, not by the government. These Christian schools provide a setting where learning is Bible-based, the teachers are committed Christians and role models, and peer relationships are healthier for the most part than in the secular environment of the public school.

In Christian schools and in Christian home education, the supreme authority is not the Supreme Court but the Supreme Being. The main responsibility for the child belongs not to government employees but to godly, Christ-like parents.

Maybe you think I've overstated the case against schools that exclude God. But let me ask you: Have you ever looked at the question from the Bible's point of view? Or do you just take godless schools for granted? If you're a parent, do you dare to take responsibility for your children? Do you know God well enough and follow Christ faithfully enough that you would want your children to be like you? Have you ever considered Christian schools or home schooling as an alternative to public education? If not, then I urge you to give it careful consideration.

Maybe you haven't had much chance in the past to think differently. You've been trained in a godless way. Your parents didn't teach you much about God, and they mostly left you to your teachers and your friends and your TV. You've had the wrong guides and maybe you've

already fallen into more than one pit along the way. But things can be different! You can still turn to the greatest Teacher of all, Jesus Christ, and learn what it means to be saved and guided by him. You can read the Bible. You can go to church and seek out relationships with mature Christians and learn from a godly pastor. And as you are taught by Christ in these ways, you can become the kind of person and the kind of parent who can lead others to Christ.

Whether or not you agree with all the things I've said here, at least think hard about what Jesus himself says: "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher."