

# The Role of Language in Building a Christian Nation

## The Power of a Biblical Vocabulary

“Whoever controls the language, controls the culture.” (Dennis Peacocke)

“So great is my veneration for the Bible that the earlier my children begin to read it, the more confident will be my hope that they will prove useful citizens of their country.” (John Q. Adams, 6<sup>th</sup> U.S. President)

“I believe no man was ever early instructed in the truths of the Bible without having been made wiser or better by the early operation of these impressions upon his mind.” (Benjamin Rush, “*Defence of the Use of the Bible in Schools*,” 1791, Signer of the Declaration of Independence, Physician and Scientist)

The Bible teaches us that words are spirit. Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, said, “My words are spirit and they are life” (John 6:63). Words are the very substance or building blocks of ideas, and ideas have consequences! Word meanings inspire ideas that direct the pathway of our thinking and reasoning which lead to choices and consequences! Mastering and communicating with a biblical vocabulary is a high priority for Christian leaders, teachers, and parents. Satan has used the strategy of de-Christianizing America’s education by removing the knowledge of the living God and His Word from the heart of education. He has revised history to erase the remembrance of God’s Hand in the lives of men and nations. He has eradicated Godly standards and the biblical vocabulary, imagery, and ideals from our language. Because most of us have been educated in the world’s system through the philosophy of humanism, we are blind to these facts and need to be renewed.

## The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Battle:

The battle in the twenty-first century is a spiritual and cultural battle for the hearts and minds of the next generation waged in the classroom and in the media with words! It is a war of ideas and requires spiritual weapons with which to wage it! Understanding the strategy used by Satan to de-Christianize education by removing the knowledge of the living God and His Word from the heart of education, by revising history to erase the remembrance of God’s Hand in the lives of men and nations, and by eradicating Godly standards and the biblical vocabulary, imagery, and ideals from language and communication will help Christian leaders, teachers and parents to be alert and take action to be armed with effective weapons of warfare. Most of us have been educated in the world’s system through the philosophy of humanism and are blind to these facts.

It is a grievous fact that even many theological seminaries and Bible colleges teach from a secular philosophy of education. There may be pockets within the curriculum that are biblical, however, the worldview of most instructors, certainly the textbooks that they use, and the methods they employ to teach are progressive and humanistic. Students do not graduate with a renewed mind or supernatural faith.

By and large, our colleges and universities worldwide espouse humanism, as well. Professors seek acceptance by other scholars based on common-ground presuppositions. These presuppositions are always humanistic, for they assert the existence of authoritative standards apart from God and a confession of supernatural faith. This is a declaration of the existence of an independent truth higher than that of the Bible. Therefore, most Christians have a dualistic mindset. They separate their secular life from their spiritual life. Sunday is God’s day and Monday through Saturday they spend thinking the world’s way, solving problems the world’s way, doing business the world’s way, and teaching and learning the world’s way.

The Bible has profound things to teach us, but many believers have no idea about what is said in Scripture as it relates to academia. Western civilization has a history of having taught the revelation of the Bible and having taught students how to reason with the revelation of God’s Word. This affected thought, vocabulary usage, and literature. This has been lost today in Christian education. Few are able to think Christianly, articulate and

defend a Christian worldview in the marketplace or persuade others to believe it! While many pursue materialistic goals in education, the enemy has subtly stolen our Christian educational heritage. Our vocabulary has been stripped of biblical imagery and ideals. We have lost the ideals of truth and beauty in our thought life and speech, and our reasoning has become secular. Allan Bloom's book (1988), *The Closing of the American Mind*, began with this disturbing statement: "There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative." With the truth and beauty of God's Word removed from the heart of our educational system, Americans are losing the war!

### **The Emphasis on the Visual Image rather than the Written Word in Our Culture:**

Today the enemy has lured our children away from enjoying the written word through the overuse of the visual image. Think of the hours a day that we Americans and our children sit passively watching visual images in movies, television programs, cartoons, videos, computers, the internet, video games, and computer courses. The written word has been abandoned for the visual image. Scientists now find that the brain is developing differently physiologically! How has the emphasis on the visual image rather than the written word impacted the ability of this generation to clothe ideas with words and effectively articulate thoughts? God obviously values the written and the spoken word. He spoke the creation of the universe into being, *In the beginning, God said . . .* (Genesis 1). God revealed Himself through the written Word and the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ! *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God (John 1:1).*

### **A Lesson from Plato's "Simile of the Cave":**

In E. Christian Kopff's *The Devil Knows Latin* (1999), he wrote about Book VII in Plato's *Republic* which began with the great "Simile of the Cave":

According to Plato, the Athenians of his day resembled men sitting in a dark cave, staring at a wall onto which other men, by holding up images in front of a fire, project shadows. The people sitting in the cave think that the reflections on the wall are reality. But one day a man gets up from his seat and turns around. He sees that the reflections are the creations of the people holding up the images. He goes outside and sees the real world and the sun, the source of both life and of knowledge. That is what Plato thought his contemporaries were like. And this is what we have become. We sit in a dark room, watching screens on which play reflections of images manipulated by people we do not see, and we take those reflections for reality. I remember as a teenager, when a local store caught on fire. A large crowd gathered to watch. Then about 11:00 p.m. the crowd disappeared. I found out later that they had gone home to watch the fire on television. That, not their own experience, was reality for them. I was surprised. (Frankly I was shocked!) Plato would not have been. (pp. 311-12)

The lesson we can derive as Christians from Plato's "Simile of the Cave" is that God's Word is the source of light needed at the heart of teaching and learning, not the visual image, not the secular humanist's perception of reality! Reality is found in relationship with Jesus Christ and His Word, the Bible. Kopff notes that "the decision to move from the easy delivery of the visual image to the written word involves effort and perhaps pain, because the sunlight will be too bright for our minds. We will also not receive much encouragement from the others sitting in the cave. Getting into the sun does not bring you money or position in life. It does bring you, however, a quality of life you can't find elsewhere!"

*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path (Psalm 119:105).*

*The unfolding of Thy word gives light. It gives understanding to the simple (Psalm 119:130).*

*For the commandment is a lamp, and the teaching is light . . . (Proverbs 6:23).*

## **Whoever Controls the Language Controls the Culture:**

“No single book has so profoundly affected universal expression as has the English Bible.” (*The Bible in English Literature*, Edgar Whitaker Work, 1917.)

Language did not evolve! Man did not crawl on all fours grunting like an animal for millions of years before he could speak in fluent sentences! God created man in His image and gave him the “gift of language” with which to communicate with Him! God then commissioned Adam to name and give identity to all living creatures: “*Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, . . .*” (Genesis 2:19-20).

Today in America, language has been “dumbed down.” The media controls our language. Our newspapers are written at a fourth grade reading level. The New International Version (NIV) of the Bible is written at a fifth grade reading level.

Definition of language (n.) [L. lingua, the tongue, and speech.] 1. Human speech; the expression of ideas by words or significant articulate sounds, for the communication of thoughts. Language consists in the oral utterance of sounds, which usage has made the representatives of ideas. 2. Words duly arranged in sentences, written, printed or engraved, and exhibited to the eye. 3. The speech or expression of ideas peculiar to a particular nation. Men had originally one and the same language, but the tribes or families of men, since their dispersion, have distinct languages. (Webster’s 1828 Dictionary of the English Language)

Language is both impressive and expressive. The impressive mode of language is listening, reading, thinking, and reasoning. The expressive mode is speaking and writing, communicating our thoughts, convictions, and ideas. (*The Noah Plan English Language Guide*)

“Whoever controls the language controls the culture. Words have incredible power because they set the agendas of whole nations! The words we use to describe a situation or problem frame the way we approach it. It’s not bullets that ultimately win wars, it’s words. A bullet won’t make you die for someone, but the right word lodged within you will make you fearless. Making words mean what you want them to mean is the first step in controlling the minds of men and from there, their actions. Words have incredible power in the hands of a propagandist. . . . The real warriors on either side of the issues wage war with words. If you divide a people’s language, you can divide their will. . . . Unify their language and you have unified their power!” (Dennis Peacocke)

## **Words Inspire Ideas. Ideas Have Consequences!**

The Bible teaches us that words are spirit. Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, said, “My words are spirit and they are life” (John 6:63). Words are the very substance or building blocks of ideas. Words form mental images in the mind. We cannot think without words. Therefore, is it surprising that the enemy would target language to dumb it down and rob and pillage us of a biblical vocabulary? Language reveals the character and love of God to us as He communicates with us and makes it possible for us to enjoy meaningful communication with our fellow man.

Words communicate ideas. Words are the substance of thoughts, the foundation of our world view or the filter through which we channel experiences and ideas, rule or judge their efficacy, formulate thoughts and clothe them with words for communicating with others. Ideas begin in the mind, the seat of liberty or bondage, the battleground for our future welfare! The Apostle Paul, biblical scholar of the New Testament, clearly understood the spiritual and procreative power of words, thoughts, and ideas and wrote the following to the church at Corinth:

*Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teaches,*

*but which the Holy Spirit teaches; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2: 12-16).*

Ideas have consequences! (Richard M. Weaver) Word meanings inspire ideas that direct the pathway of our thinking and reasoning, that ultimately lead to the choices we make and their eventual consequences! When words are defined biblically, they help us think and reason *with* the revelation of God's Word, freeing us from secularism. This enables us to "take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" and appropriate "the mind of Christ" in teaching and learning.

Words have great power for creating or destroying. God's Word is both an offensive and a defensive weapon:

*For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Hebrews 4:12).*

*The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life (John 6:33).*

*Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit (Proverbs 18:21).*

*A man will be satisfied with good by the fruit of his words . . . (Proverbs 12:14).*

*So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it (Isaiah 55:11).*

*For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned (Matthew 12:37).*

*The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever (Isaiah 40:8).*

*"As for Me, this is My covenant with them," says the Lord: "My Spirit which is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your offspring, nor from the mouth of your offspring's offspring, says the Lord, from now and forever" (Isaiah 59:21).*

*The Word of the Lord endures forever. This is the word which was preached to you (1 Peter 1:25).*

### **Words Contain a Philosophy of Government:**

*"When I use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, 'It means just what I choose it to mean, neither more nor less.'" (Through the Looking Glass, Lewis Carroll)*

One of the distinctives of an effective communicator or a great teacher is his or her ability to inspire listeners or students with the use of a noble vocabulary in communicating ideas. This is achieved through clothing ideas with precise word usage. Britain's famous conservative prime minister Benjamin Disraeli (1804-81) said, "If you would converse with me define your terms." A communicator never assumes that his audience fully understands the meanings of key words in his speech or lecture. A good communicator will always define his terms in order to establish his presuppositions or world view in the subject he is addressing. To avoid miscommunication and confusion, a good communicator will always define his terms because words contain a philosophy of government:

Noah Webster's original *American Dictionary of the English Language (1828)*, for which he spent twenty years researching the root meanings of English words as well as their biblical meanings, defines 'educate':

“**educate**, verb, to bring up, as a child; to instruct; to inform and enlighten the understanding; to instill into the mind principles of arts, science, morals, religion and behavior. To educate children well is one of the most important duties of parents and guardians.”

Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary (1987), written 159 years later, defines ‘educate’:

“**educate**, verb, to provide schooling for. To train by formal instruction and supervised practice, especially in a skill, trade, or profession. To develop mentally, morally, or aesthetically especially by instruction. To persuade or condition to feel, believe, or act in a desired way or to accept something as desirable. To educate a person or a thing.” (Yes, this is in the dictionary!)

You can easily discern the philosophy of government in these two definitions: the first definition contains a biblical view of education and the second definition a progressive view of education. We are called to equip the next generation with a biblical, Christian worldview! This is the starting block—clothing ideas with a biblical vocabulary!

Noah Webster’s original 1828 Dictionary of the English Language is published by the Foundation for American Christian Education (<http://www.face.net>) and can be found for free usage on the internet site: <http://www.christiantech.com>. Take time to check into this site and use it for your teaching and writing.

### **The Word of God consecrates the mind:**

It is the divine Word that consecrates and inspires the mind and builds intellectual virtue. The Bible contains the highest literary form of language. It requires its readers to be literate! Everywhere the Gospel is preached, Christian education follows closely behind. It is imperative that the believer be able to read the Word of God in his language. Everywhere the Bible is taught, scholarship rises, literacy increases, and language is enhanced. The standard of language spoken and written, has always been set by the church. In the history of Christian education, monasteries were the repositories of learning, churchmen the schoolmasters, and the Bible the fount of ennobled language and literacy.

The great Geneva Bible of Calvin and Knox became for the European reformers their primary reader, their first book of instruction, and their political textbook. It was the one book that sailed west to the New World with every family. Just as the Old Testament Jews came to be known as “people of the Word,” so were the thousands and thousands of reformers known as “people of the Word.” Modern day Christians need to reclaim this heritage using the Bible as their first book of instruction. Is it possible that we could be known in this century as the “people of the Word?”

*I have put My words in your mouth and have covered you with the shadow of My hand, to establish the heavens, to found the earth, and to say . . . You are My people (Isaiah 51:16).*

The historic record of America’s founding and constitutional eras reveals that parents took seriously their role to educate their children in the admonition and nurture of the Lord, teaching them to read from the Bible when they were very young. Early trained to reflect upon and reason with God’s Word, these young colonial children “read and recited, quoted and consulted, early committed to memory and constantly searched it for meaning. It remained throughout the century the single most important cultural influence in the lives of Anglo-Americans.” (Cremin, *American Education, the Colonial Experience*, 1970, p. 40)

The emphasis on the Bible as the “first book of instruction” produced individuals of ennobled Christian character and scholarship, who cherished individual liberty with Law and birthed the first Christian constitutional republic in the world. A people whose “textbook of liberty” is the Bible, who know how to reason with the revelation of God’s Word in every area of life, are not easily deceived or subverted.

Dr. Benjamin Rush (1745-1813), distinguished pioneering physician, one of the youngest signers of the Declaration of Independence, and founder of a Bible Society, wrote *A Defence of the Use of the Bible in Schools*

to support his idea that the Bible should be the primary textbook in the schools of the new United States of America. You will be very inspired by his defense which can be found on line.

### **Conclusion:**

God meant for His Word to be at the heart of teaching and learning! The Bible should be at the center of all Christian curricula, it's light illuminating all subjects, all programs, and all methods. A study of the tools of restoration from the book of Nehemiah bears this out. Once the walls of Jerusalem had been reconstructed in Israel's post-exilic era, the first thing governor Nehemiah did was to place Ezra, the high priest and educator, in the center of Jerusalem's marketplace so that he could read the Law day and night to the spiritually famished Jews. There had been an absence of God's Word in their education for nearly one hundred years. As Ezra and the Levites instructed the remnant from God's Word, they often stopped to make clear the meaning of the words so the people could understand what was being read (Nehemiah 8:1-8). Hearing and understanding God's Word sparked a spirit of corporate repentance and reformation. Ezra then taught them their providential history by recounting God's wondrous miracles and His mighty Hand of providence in their history. (Nehemiah 9) When their minds and hearts were illumined with truth, the Jews renewed their covenant with God and pledged allegiance to follow the Laws of God. (Nehemiah 10:28-30)

If we are to raise a generation of youth who are spiritually and academically equipped in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we have need to arm ourselves with the spiritual weapons of warfare to bring down the centuries-old strongholds in the education of youth. We have need to acquire a biblical vocabulary with which to communicate spiritual concepts, principles, and ideals to our children in our parental training, courses of study, and in our relationships. We have need for an educational system that restores God's Word to the heart of education and return to being "people of the Word."