

TO LEGISLATE OR TO EDUCATE?

Are we to educate young people so they will know how to relate to God and their fellow man or do we legislate how they are to relate to God and their fellow man? It is far easier to legislate than it is to educate, isn't it? When we see an individual, or a group of individuals, doing something we don't like and want them to stop doing it, what is the most common way of dealing with it? Isn't it to make a law or rule that makes the actions unlawful, illegal, and unacceptable? Isn't that what we are seeing in governments and institutions in the world all around us today? Legislators are working overtime in our governments putting together new laws or revising old laws to make them cover new problems. Union workers go on strike and are legislated back to work. If that doesn't work, they threaten them with job loss or heavy fines and penalties. Does it work? Sometimes, but do they go back to work willingly? More and more, the threats aren't working. What is the problem? It's obvious that when we try to get someone's cooperation who doesn't want to cooperate, by threatening them with something unpleasant, they may appear to comply when we are present but, when they are fairly confident they can get away with it, they do. Right? We hear about it all the time. In fact, at least, 90% of the news is about this very thing.

When driving down the road, how many people stay within the speed limit? One of the biggest problems with making laws and rules is enforcing them. Let's look at speed limits as an example. There simply aren't enough law enforcement officers out there to make sure people don't speed. You would have to have one every few miles on every road in the country to accomplish this. So how do you get people to stop speeding? Raise the fines when you catch them? Take away their driver's license if they are caught too many times. All of these things have been tried to no avail. People still speed. People who want to speed will also find ways to keep themselves from being caught, as well.

You may say, but we need rules to maintain the standards. Are standards maintained by a multiplicity of rules? The Jews believed this and created hundreds of rules just for Sabbath keeping. Did they keep the Sabbath? Maybe outwardly, but what about their hearts? Remember, "man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart." There is nothing that dries up positive feelings toward man and God more than rules and regulations. "The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of obligation merely--because he is required to do so--will never enter into the joy of obedience. He does not obey." COL 98. Outwardly keeping rules doesn't mean anything. Just as there shouldn't be rules set up that force you to enjoy your favorite dessert, there shouldn't be man's rules that make you enjoy God and your fellow man. When God fills you with His supernatural love, you don't need man's rules to tell you to do what pleases Him—you want to do what pleases Him. If an individual has a real relationship with God, where he is allowing God to be in control of his life, he will be keeping all the laws and rules and hardly be aware of it. So what can be done?

To Educate

Education must begin from birth. When an individual is educated in the right way, very few rules are needed. In fact, in God's kingdom, He has only Ten Laws and when these are made the moral code in an individual's life, that is really all that is needed.

But what about speed limits? We need to have speed limits. If we don't, people will go too fast, and that isn't covered in the Ten Commandments. What does the 6th commandment say? "Thou shalt not kill." Everyone knows that going at an unsafe speed can kill. Jesus also said in Matthew 22:37-40 "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, *Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself*. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." So, if we love our neighbor as we love ourselves, will we go faster than is safe? So, do we need speed limits? But you say, what about those who refuse to follow God's laws? We have to make laws for them, don't we? If they refuse to follow God's laws, do you think they will follow yours? Not likely. So it comes back to education. It is only when we educate individuals as to their responsibilities to God and their fellow man that we will have a safe, happy, law-abiding society.

But, before anyone can truly keep the law, God's law, He needs to get to know the Law Giver and learn from Him how to keep those laws.

"The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of obligation merely--because he is required to do so will never enter into the joy of obedience. He does not obey. When the requirements of God are accounted a burden because they cut across human inclination, we may know that the life is not a Christian life. True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. The essence of all righteousness is loyalty to our Redeemer. This will lead us to do right because it is right--because right doing is pleasing to God." Christ's Object Lessons p. 97

What has caused all our problems and when should education begin, and how should it be done?

"Sin is the evil thing which has brought such misery upon our race. The young should be taught to hate sin, to avoid it, not merely from fear of punishment, but from a sense of its inherent baseness. They should learn to do right because it is right. Every youth should be impressed with the fact that he is not his own; that his strength, his time, his talents, belong to God. It should be his chief purpose in life to glorify God and to do good to his fellow-men. The Bible teaches him that he is a branch, on which

fruit must be found; a steward, whose capital will increase as it is wisely improved; a light, whose bright beams are to illuminate the moral darkness that enshrouds the earth. Every man, every child, has work to do for God's glory, and for the salvation of souls that are ready to perish.

The greatest want of this age is the want of men,—men who will not be bought or sold; men who are true and honest in their inmost souls; men who will not fear to call sin by its right name, and to condemn it, in themselves or in others; men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole; men who will stand for the right, though the heavens fall.

To form such a character in the young, there is needed a different system of education from that generally adopted. Moral and religious training must receive more attention. We are educating our children for time and for eternity. Let us enter upon our work as though we realized its importance.” Signs of the Times 1882-05-04

May I tell you about my senior year in high school? I went to Far Eastern Academy in Singapore. It was our first day at school and during Chapel, our principal, Garth Thompson, told us that at FEA we have very few rules. “We know that you know what is right and wrong, that’s what God gave you a conscience for . . . and if we see or find you doing something wrong we will be calling you into the office where we will talk about it.”

We were told Church attendance wasn’t required. Neither were Friday night or Saturday night Vespers. We were supposed to attend morning and evening worship and girls and guys could only be together in designated areas. That was about the extent of the rules. I felt that this was very reasonable. But I was baffled. I had never heard of anything like this before. In fact, one of my classmates who was also a new student there, went to the Principal afterwards to complain. He told the Principal he didn’t know if he could live without knowing what he could and could not do. He had been brought up in a very controlling home and had never learned how to make choices for himself. He had only done what he was told to do and at FEA he was like a fish out of water. Later, he left the church and has never come back.

For me, it was the turning point in my life. For the first time, I had the right to decide for myself what I would do. At first, I chose not to go to any Vespers meetings and even considered not going to Church. At that time, I was turned off to religion because of the inconsistencies and control I had seen. No one seemed to care that I wasn’t attending Vespers. I reveled in my new freedom. Within a month or so I noticed that virtually everyone was going to Vespers and I began to wonder what on earth they were going for, as so many Vespers I had attended in the past had been boring! So, out of curiosity I decided to go and find out what was so interesting. Was I ever surprised!

A fellow student was playing hymns on the piano and the students were sitting quietly and meditating. You could have heard a pin drop if the piano hadn’t been playing. In fact, when kids came in they stopped talking long before they even entered the room. I could not believe it. Previous to this we kids had done as much as possible to disrupt the reverence in meetings. When the time came to begin, the principal, who almost always took charge, got up and asked for favorites, which everyone sang with feeling and reverence. You could literally feel the Holy Spirit’s presence there. Remember, everyone was there by choice. He would then read or tell us something that was very moving and have closing prayer and we would all quietly leave. There was no laughing and joking or talking. Often after Friday night Vespers, totally unsupervised, most of the kids would wander down to the playing field and gather around in a circle and while holding hands sing some songs and then disperse to their respective dorm rooms.

This was the beginning of a totally new relationship for me with God. I had had my first taste of being free in God and being responsible to Him and not controlled by others. I was learning how to make moral choices and my experience there has led me to the understanding I now have and want to share.

During that school year (1969 - 1970 - during the Peace Movement) I got a peace sign on a necklace and began to wear it to classes and around the school, but I refrained from wearing it to Church. I had already worn it for a number of weeks when our school Principal called me into his office. I had no idea what he wanted. He proceeded to ask me how things were going and we chit-chatted for a while. Then he complimented me on the nice peace sign I was wearing. It was nice. He then complimented me for not wearing it on Sabbath. He then asked me if I felt that it was alright for a Christian to wear it at all. What could I say? What could I do? He hadn’t condemned me and wasn’t trying to control me. I knew that wearing it wasn’t right. How could I try to excuse it? I took it off right there and then and never wore it again. I had no feelings of resentment or rebellion. In fact, I felt more at peace than I had ever felt before. I had made a right choice because I had chosen to do so, not because I had been coerced into it.

This, I believe, is the way we as Christians should treat each other and run our schools. Controlling others ultimately is impossible, so why even try? Yes, educating takes longer, it is harder, but the results are eternal, while controlling is only effective as long as you are present to enforce the rules, and no longer. Sadly, we have lost the majority of our youth today because there has been too much emphasis on outward behavior, while the experience in the heart has been overlooked.

“The training of children must be conducted on a different principle from that which governs the training of irrational animals. The brute has only to be accustomed to submit to its master, but the child must be taught to control himself. The will must be trained to obey the dictates of reason and conscience. A child may be so disciplined as to have, like the beast, no will of its own, his individuality being lost in that of his teacher. Such training is unwise, and its effect disastrous. Children thus educated will be deficient in firmness and decision. They are not taught to act from principle; the reasoning powers are not strengthened by exercise. So far as possible, every child should be trained to self-reliance. By calling into exercise the various faculties, he will

learn where he is strongest, and in what he is deficient. A wise instructor will give special attention to the development of the weaker traits, that the child may form a well-balanced, harmonious character.” Child Guidance 39

“God never designed that one human mind should be under the complete control of another human mind. And those who make efforts to have the individuality of their pupils submerged in themselves, and they be mind, will, and conscience for their pupils, assume fearful responsibilities. These scholars may, upon certain occasions, appear like well-drilled soldiers. But when the restraint is removed, there will be seen a want of independent action from firm principle, existing in them. But those who make it their object so to educate their pupils that they may see and feel that the power lies in themselves to make men and women of firm principle, qualified for any position in life, are the most useful and permanently successful teachers. Their work may not show to the very best advantage to careless observers, and their labors may not be valued as highly as the teacher who holds the will and mind of his scholars by absolute authority, but the future lives of the pupils will show the fruits of the better plan of education.” Christian Education 7

Galatians 5 says we’ve been set free! Does that mean freedom to do all those exciting things the world does? No way! It means something far different and far greater than that. It means that because of the work Christ did upon the cross, we’re actually now free to live a life pleasing to God. Before we knew Christ we were enslaved to our human passions, but as Christians, we are now at liberty to represent the very likeness of Christ through the way we live. We’ve been set free from man-made rules. We’re now able to freely choose to bear the fruit of “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). Our entire life as Christians needs to be a reflection of this wondrous truth.

A few years ago my wife got a book called “Reaching The Heart of Your Teen.” It is authored by Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo. I have been blessed and affirmed by reading their material and I’d like to share some of what they say on this topic.

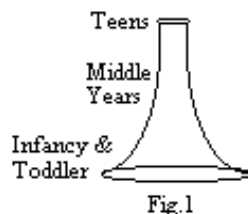
Three Parenting Strategies

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It is interesting to listen to parenting perspectives. The permissive parent looks at the authoritarian parent and says: “I do not want to be like that mother or father. They’re too strict” The authoritarian parent looks at the permissive household and say, “I do not want children acting like that. They’re out of control!” Unfortunately, parents do tend to move to these extremes. The permissive parent who controls too little and the authoritarian parent who controls too much both deprive their children of basic skills necessary for healthy adolescence. Too often these kids hit the teen years either under-directed or under-motivated. We can demonstrate the weakness of both approaches by using the following ‘funnel’ analogies.

The Child-Centered Funnel

Child-centered parenting can produce a bitter end – no doubt about it. Figure 1 represents an upside-down funnel. The wide portion at the bottom is characteristic of the early years of child-centered parenting, where too many freedoms are given prior to the establishment of age-appropriate self-control. The result is a self-oriented, self-loving, self-satisfying adolescent whose self-orientation now battles parental dictates. As the child grows into the teen years (top of funnel), his parents respond by exerting more control, pulling in the boundaries – thereby creating a climate of conflict.



When the child was young his parents led by their influence, (as depicted by the bottom wide portion of the funnel), but now that the child is a teen, they attempt to lead by a controlling authority. This is exactly the opposite of how the parent-child relationship should develop.

The permissive-child-centered parent makes a one-hundred-eighty-degree turn to the control approach for just one reason: He or she is doing their best to cope with a rebellious teenager. It is natural to try to control something that is out of control.

The Authoritarian Funnel

Teen-parent problems are not caused exclusively by permissive/child-centered parenting. The parent at the opposite end of the spectrum, the authoritarian-control parent, generates problems, too. The term *authoritarian* implies rule by authority. Our second funnel demonstrates the authoritarian model. Please note that the narrow stem gives way to a broader but restrictive top. (see Figure 2.)

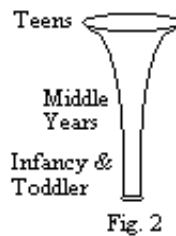


Fig. 2

With this model, the potential for problems during a child's teen years is caused, not by the presence of authority, but by excessive and wrongful use of authority. The authoritarian parent assumes that since children are born imperfect (and they are, of course), the job of parents is to help them work toward perfection. In this case, teen relationships fail when parental authority, and not relational influence, becomes the "control factor."

The exercise of parental authority is absolutely necessary for family government and harmony, especially in the early years. Without the reinforcement of parental authority supporting parental resolve, children cannot be brought to moral conformity. Without moral conformity there is a limited sense of otherness – a prerequisite for healthy family relationships. It isn't possible to both have naughty children and a wonderful relationship with them.

Imposing limits, rules, and punishments upon young children, then is necessary. But when the same methods are applied during the teen years without taking the child's age, growth and maturity into consideration, it sets the stage for exasperated rebellion. Instead of refashioning their leadership from the power of authority to the power of influence, the authoritarian parent attempts to control his teen by house rules. Restraining rules become a substitute for relationships. The problem, of course, is that children don't internalize rules, they internalize principles.

From a social and development standpoint, when a teen possesses more self-control than freedoms granted him, exasperation is soon to follow. And an exasperated teen is a walking time bomb. Parents often comment to us, "But he was so good when he was young." He may have been. And he may have withheld his hostility in part due to the fact that he simply didn't know how to put his feelings into words when he was younger.

Progressive Growth Funnel

Long before development theorists arrived on the scene, the Prophet Isaiah gave God's prescription for ordered growth and learning. When speaking to Ephraim and Judah, the prophet declared that they had rejected the teaching that came "precept upon precept and line upon line" (Isaiah 28:10). What does precept upon precept and line upon line mean? Simply that a child learns by being taught, and taught in a sequential and repetitious way. New thoughts build upon old thoughts; so early instruction best be the right instruction.

Please note our third funnel. (See figure 3.) The long stem depicts the early stages of parenting; the wider portion represents growth, maturity, and gradually increasing freedoms. As the child grows through the ever-widening stem, freedoms are earned to the extent that responsible behavior is demonstrated.

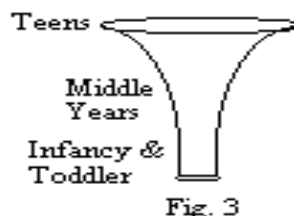


Fig. 3

All this leads to developmental harmony. Harmony! What a beautiful word for a teen's world. The word *harmony* means putting the parts into a pleasing and orderly whole. That is exactly what parents should strive for and realize when their children approach the teen years.

The early years of parenting reflect the exercise of parental authority, while the teen years reflect leadership by influence. Ah, there is the key: parents leading by influence – relational influence. Two things are required of parents before

teens will willingly follow their lead: Mom and dad must be believable and trustworthy. These matters are topics of discussion in Chapters Five and Six.

Where Should We Be?

Have you ever wondered what kind of relationship you will have with your child a few years down the road, after he is grown? I'm sure you have. There is a course of action parents can follow to secure their child's friendship – a worthy goal. This course is contrary to the wisdom of our day, yet those who follow it are assured of success, the plan having originated with Jesus Himself. "No longer do I call you servants (disciples), for the servant does not know what his master is doing, but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard of my Father, I have made known to you" (John 15:15).

From the earliest days of His ministry, when Jesus was beginning to assemble His group of disciples, and right on up to the day of the Last Supper, our Lord continually passed wisdom on to his disciples. As their shepherd, He brought conformity into their thinking by creating a like-mindedness and common direction in life. In John 15, the Lord brought the discipling of His men to completion and entered into a new relationship with them, one he called friendship.

As stewards of God's special gifts, Christ calls us to a discipling relationship with our children – in which we teach them how to leave their naïve and foolish ways behind and move toward maturity and wisdom (Proverbs 4:1-7). There will be plenty of time for friendship later; and when parents disciple their children wisely, there will be plenty of reason for friendship, too. But friendship with our children is not the starting point of our parenting – it is the relational goal. We don't start out training our children as their pals or peers, but as their parents.

Only when we have brought our children to a common understanding of who we are in Christ as a family (Philippians 2:1-5), will we be in a position to enjoy our children and give them a reason to enjoy us. Just as it was with the Lord and his disciples, it should also be with you and your children: A discipleship relationship that should culminate in friendship. Before the friendship phase arrives, parents must first pass through three building-block periods with their children. The success of each phase depends on the success of the preceding phase.

Phase One: Discipline

This phase covers the period from birth to five years of age. Your primary goal as a parent during this time is to establish your right to lead their little lives. The leadership you demonstrate will not be oppressive, but it will be authoritative. This is a phase of tight boundaries and limited freedoms – but the boundaries will give way to more freedoms as the child demonstrates responsible behavior. Your task is to gain control of the child so you can effectively train him. If you cannot control your child, you can't train him to his full potential; nor will anyone else be able to do so.

Phase Two: Training

The training phase of parenting takes place from age six through twelve. I'd like to slip into a sports analogy for a few moments. A trainer works with an athlete each day in different settings, going through drills and exercises. He can and will stop the player at any time and make immediate corrections when needed, explaining why he's doing so and showing him what to do and how to do it. During training, our children are not yet in the real game of life – these are only "practice sessions."

Phase Three: Coaching

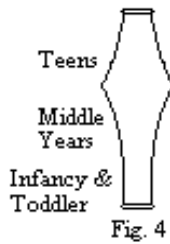
The third phase, spanning ages thirteen to nineteen, is the coaching phase. By this time our children are in the game of life for themselves. We can send plays in from the sidelines and huddle with them during time-outs, but we can no longer stop the game for extended periods of time and show them how it should be played. They now call the plays themselves and move forward on their own. How well you coach your children determines how well they run through the plays of life. What kind of trainer you are determines how they respond to your coaching. The type of disciplinarian you are determines your ability to train your children. How well you have established your right to rule determines what type of disciplinarian you are. Do you see how a parent's success in one phase of parenting impacts the later phases?

Phase Four: Friendship

As we stated earlier, the relational goal of our parenting is friendship with our children. Although the parent-child relationship does not end, both parent and child enter into a new season of life during the friendship phase – which begins about when a child leaves his teens and continues from that point forward. Just as it was with the Lord and His disciples, your relationship with your children should be one of discipleship culminating in friendship. The process begins with tight boundaries, which give way upon evidence of responsible behavior, leading to freedom.

End of excerpt

What do you think happens to a young person (Fig. 4) who has been taught the right way and then is sent to an institution where man-made rules are enforced to control behavior? What do adults do in the same situation? Yes, we are far better off educating than legislating, in the long-run. God also knows this and runs his kingdom on the basis of free choice, not control.



There are also other problems that arise when implementing rules. For every rule that is made, a corresponding penalty must be imposed for breaking the rule. When someone breaks a rule, is it always broken in the same way? When an individual is caught speeding, are they always intentionally speeding? No. But the penalty for speeding is always the same regardless of the intent of the speeder. No matter how defiant or penitent the individual is, the penalty is the same. Is this the way God works? Yes and no. Yes, the penalty for sin is death and the penalty will be carried out. But God is able to look at the heart and He does everything he can to encourage penitence. He takes everything into consideration and then does what seems best. When Jesus dealt with Mary Magdalene He dealt with her in a totally different way than He dealt with the scribes and Pharisees. It is much easier to go by God's Word and the principles found in it and let go of a host of rules and the corresponding penalty in breaking them. When we see or hear of an individual doing something wrong, we need to go to the individual and discover why he did it and what his attitude is before dealing with the problem. If we did this in a Christian way, I believe we would find that most people would be sorry and repent and would be far less inclined to do something wrong again. Jesus tells us how to deal with sin in Matthew 18:15 "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother."

Ellen White had something to say on this subject as well. She wrote: "The severe training of youth, without properly directing them to think and act for themselves as their own capacity and turn of mind will allow, that by this means they may have growth of thought, feelings of self-respect, and confidence in their own ability to perform, will ever produce a class who are weak in mental and moral power. And when they stand in the world to act for themselves they will reveal the fact that they were trained like the animals, and not educated. Their wills, instead of being guided, were forced into subjection by the harsh discipline of parents and teachers." Testimonies Volume 3 p. 133

She also said: "There are many families of children who appear to be well trained while under the training discipline; but when the system which has held them to set rules is broken up, they seem to be incapable of thinking, acting, or deciding for themselves. These children have been so long under iron rule, not allowed to think and act for themselves in those things in which it was highly proper that they should, that they have no confidence in themselves to move out upon their own judgment, having an opinion of their own. And when they go out from their parents to act for themselves, they are easily led by others' judgment in the wrong direction. They have not stability of character. They have not been thrown upon their own judgment as fast and as far as practicable, and therefore their minds have not been properly developed and strengthened. They have so long been absolutely controlled by their parents that they rely wholly upon them; their parents are mind and judgment for them." Testimonies Volume 3 p. 132

She said "Every human being, created in the image of God, is endowed with a power akin to that of the Creator-- individuality, power to think and to do. . . . It is the work of true education to develop this power, to train the youth to be thinkers, and not mere reflectors of other men's thought. . . . Instead of educated weaklings, institutions of learning may send forth men strong to think and to act, men who are masters and not slaves of circumstances, men who possess breadth of mind, clearness of thought, and the courage of their convictions." Education p. 17

"Exercise of Will Expands and Strengthens Mind.-- A child may be so trained as to have . . . no will of his own. Even his individuality may be merged in the one who superintends his training; his will, to all intents and purposes, is subject to the will of the teacher. Children who are thus educated will ever be deficient in moral energy and individual responsibility. They have not been taught to move from reason and principle; their wills have been controlled by another, and the mind has not been called out, that it might expand and strengthen by exercise. They have not been directed and disciplined with respect to their peculiar constitutions and capabilities of mind, to put forth their strongest powers when required." Child Guidance 210

I believe the major reason why our young people leave our church is because we want to have power over them and control them, insisting that they act the way we think they should act, rather than teaching them how to receive power from God to obey His laws. We have a religion that "has a form of godliness, but denies the power thereof:" When are we going to turn our young

people, and ourselves, to the true source of power, God, instead of taking the power to ourselves and trying to control them ourselves? We can't do it anyway, history has proven it.

Who should be in control? Who is in control of your life?

“The soul that is yielded to Christ becomes His own fortress, which He holds in a revolted world, and He intends that no authority shall be known in it but His own. A soul thus kept in possession by the heavenly agencies is impregnable to the assaults of Satan. But unless we do yield ourselves to the control of Christ, we shall be dominated by the wicked one. We must inevitably be under the control of the one or the other of the two great powers that are contending for the supremacy of the world. It is not necessary for us deliberately to choose the service of the kingdom of darkness in order to come under its dominion. We have only to neglect to ally ourselves with the kingdom of light. If we do not co-operate with the heavenly agencies, Satan will take possession of the heart, and will make it his abiding place. The only defense against evil is the indwelling of Christ in the heart through faith in His righteousness. Unless we become vitally connected with God, we can never resist the unhallowed effects of self-love, self-indulgence, and temptation to sin. We may leave off many bad habits, for the time we may part company with Satan; but without a vital connection with God, through the surrender of ourselves to Him moment by moment, we shall be overcome. Without a personal acquaintance with Christ, and a continual communion, we are at the mercy of the enemy, and shall do his bidding in the end.” Desire of Ages p. 324

“He who fully purposes in his heart to do the will of God, at whatever self-denial or self-sacrifice, will certainly know the truth through his own experience. Those who will obey God's commandments, and not deviate from the precepts of Heaven, will enter into life. To will to do the will of God, is to yield the whole mind and affections to the control of God. Such a one will know of the doctrine, not be in questioning and doubt, not be halting between two opinions; for he will be willing to submit all to God, realizing that he has purchased all. It is when we give ourselves to Christ, to do his will, that we realize the truth of the saying of David, "The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple." It is then that reason and conscience are fully in harmony with the will of God, and there is no collision between the truth of God and the soul.” Review & Herald July 7, 1896

We must let Christ merge His life with ours and let Him have complete control. All the other things will then fall into place and there will be no need to legislate. After all, this is God's way and there is no better one.

God bless