

Why Every American Christian Home Should Have the Noah Webster 1828 Dictionary

In Christian homes the Bible is central, forming the basis of living. It defines the marriage, guides the nurture and growth of the children, and educates every member of the family in the knowledge of God.

In homes that value education, the dictionary has an important role in the intellectual growth of the family. Does your dictionary reinforce and support Bible study for your family, or does it introduce a conflicting set of values and worldview? More than any other book in the home besides the Bible, the dictionary has a profound impact.

Importance of the Dictionary

The dictionary inculcates either a secular or a Christian *worldview* through definitions establishing the system of values by which the family will live. Consider the contrast of the definitions of the word *marriage* taken from a modern dictionary and from the 1828 Noah Webster Dictionary:

Marriage

MODERN DICTIONARY (2000)—The legal union of a man and a woman as husband and wife. The state of being married, wedlock. A common-law marriage. A union between two persons having the customary but usually not the legal force of marriage.

WEBSTER DICTIONARY (1828)—The act of uniting a man and a woman for life; wedlock; the legal union of a man and a woman for life. Marriage is a contract both civil and religious by which the parties engage to live together in mutual affection and fidelity, till death shall separate them. Marriage was instituted by God Himself for the purpose of preventing the promiscuous intercourse of sexes, for promoting domestic felicity, and for securing the maintenance and education of children. “Marriage is honorable in all and the bed undefiled.” Hebrews 13.

The dictionary imparts either a secular or a Christian *framework* that will form the attitudes and values concerning education. Consider the definitions of the word *education*:

Education

MODERN DICTIONARY (1980)—The action or process of educating or of being educated; a stage of such a process; the knowledge and development resulting from an educational process; the field of study that deals mainly with methods of teaching and learning in schools.

WEBSTER DICTIONARY (1828)—The bringing up, as of a child; instruction; formation of manners. Education comprehends all that series of instruction and discipline which is intended to enlighten the understanding, correct the temper, and form the manners and habits of youth, and fit them for usefulness in their future stations. To give children a good education in manners, arts and science, is important; to give them a religious education is indispensable; and an immense responsibility rests on parents and guardians who neglect these duties.

The dictionary defines the words that expound a *theology* and the vocabulary with which to describe the knowledge of God. Consider the definitions of the word *sin*:

Sin

MODERN DICTIONARY (1984)—The act of breaking a religious or moral law. An offense, error, or fault.

WEBSTER DICTIONARY (1828)—The voluntary departure of a moral agent from a known rule or rectitude or duty, prescribed by God; any voluntary transgression of the divine law, or violation of a divine command; a wicked act; iniquity. Sin is either a positive act in which a known divine law is violated, or it is the voluntary neglect to obey a positive divine command, or a rule of duty clearly implied in such command. Sin comprehends not actions only, but whatever is contrary to God's commands or law. I John 3; Matt. 15; James 4. (*The definition goes on for another column in the 1828 Dictionary.*)

The dictionary imparts a philosophy of *government* either secular or Christian that will form the basis for how individuals in the family will govern themselves and expect to be governed. Consider the definitions of *law*:

Law

MODERN DICTIONARY (1980)—A binding custom or practice of a community: a rule of conduct or action prescribed or formally recognized as binding or enforced by a controlling authority. (*This definition continues for two inches of one column.*)

WEBSTER DICTIONARY (1828)—A rule, particularly an established or permanent rule, prescribed by the supreme power of a state to its subjects, for regulating their actions, particularly their social actions. Laws are imperative or mandatory, commanding what shall be done; prohibitory, restraining from what is to be forborne; or permissive, declaring what may be done without incurring a penalty. The laws which enjoin the duties of piety and morality, are prescribed by God and found in the Scriptures. (*This definition continues for twenty-one inches of three columns.*)

Count the Cost: Presuppositions in Word Definitions

Consider the definitions given above. What difference will the definitions of law make to our student today? How will he learn law from the modern definition? What is the implication of “custom” in the first dictionary versus “rule” in the second one? What is the implication of law being defined as “prescribed” or “recognized” rather than “mandatory,” “commanding,” “prohibitory,” or “permissive?”

What will be his view of authority and enforcement based on the two definitions? What will be his sense of responsibility for law? Does the second definition establish a different source and authority for law? What philosophical position will be inculcated by it? What theology?

Presuppositional Impact: C. S. Lewis

C.S. Lewis believed that books written by Christians, with latent Biblical presuppositions, are more effective than directly apologetic works.

We must attack the enemy's line of communication. What we want is not more little books about Christianity, but more little books by Christians on other subjects—with their Christianity latent. You can see this most easily if you look at it the other way round. Our faith is not likely to be shaken by any book on Hinduism. But if whenever we read an elementary book on geology, botany, politics, or astronomy, we found that its implications were Hindu, that would shake us. **It is not the books written in direct defense of materialism that make the modern man a materialist; it is the materialistic assumptions in all the other books.** In the same way, it is not books on Christianity that will really trouble him. But he would be troubled if, whenever he wanted a cheap popular introduction to some science, the best work on the market was always by a Christian. The first step to the reconversion of a country is books produced by Christians.

God in the Dock, “Christian Apologetics,” by C. S. Lewis

If the underlying philosophical suppositions of any “little book” have that much power, how much more imperative is it to base education upon a big dictionary that identifies Biblical truth in the very vocabulary of the language and that can be used in every subject?

This is the reason the Noah Webster 1828 Dictionary is the most important reprint of our time, the essential tool of education for Christians. **When you look up such words as *education*, *marriage*, *spirit*, and *truth*, you may be amazed to discover the secularization of modern dictionaries!**

Home Education: Christian or Secular?

The dictionary shapes thinking and reasoning as words are given precise meanings, as new words are learned by growing children, and as studies are done in the Bible and in every other subject. The author of the dictionary determines the worldview that undergirds it. **There is one dictionary available today that defines every word both in the original language and from**

its Biblical usage—the original 1828 Noah Webster *American Dictionary of the English Language*. Every modern dictionary reflects the current cultural corruptions and erosion of vocabulary by godless philosophies. The 1828 Dictionary is the gold standard of language for the American Christian.

The 1828 Noah Webster Dictionary shows the Biblical worldview and vocabulary of the founding generation. This generation practiced Biblical reasoning by default, and prized Christian character and virtue above all else. Noah Webster was a Christian whose Biblical knowledge and research are seen in his definitions. He researched every word through his studies of twenty-six original languages to provide the root meanings. Both his scholarship and productivity are without equal in America, earning him the title, “Father of American Christian Education and Scholarship.”

Christian Scholarship

The home is the primary classroom for every child, and according to Noah Webster, “Education is useless without the Bible.” When working with young impressionable minds, it is essential for the parent or educator to establish the habit of beginning the search for principles, answers, and solutions in the Word of God! It is the divine Word that consecrates and inspires the mind and builds intellectual virtue. This is why Noah Webster, Father of American Christian Education, wrote the first American dictionary and established a system of rules to govern spelling, grammar, and reading. This master linguist understood the power of words, their definitions, and the need for precise word usage in communication to maintain a distinct national identity. Eager for Americans to be free from the bondage of old world ideas which were being disseminated through our young nation's educational system, Dr. Webster laid the foundation for a uniquely American education and the American usage of English words in his dictionary, which defined each word in light of its meanings and usage in the Bible and in the new Christian constitutional republic.

Each learner develops the habit of research by beginning with God's Word through the word study, the tool in which words are defined in light of how they are used in Scripture. This process gives pre-eminence to the Word of God by deducing the Biblical principles of the subject and clothes the learner's ideas with truth. This is the foundation upon which the pathway of logical thinking and just reasoning is established. It produces the acquired habits of Biblical scholarship, reasoning cause (internal) to effect (external), and the precise, lucid communication of ideas to others.

The Word Study: Defining a Biblical Worldview

The **Word Study** involves more than going to a dictionary and defining a word. It is the method of scholarship that puts the student on the pathway of developing the habits of reflective thinking and deductive reasoning from Scripture. The word study places the truths of God's Word at the center of all learning, which illuminates the understanding and consecrates the mind. Every home should have a Webster's 1828 Dictionary for student homework and adult Bible study.

Word Study:

1. Builds vocabulary
2. Increases reading comprehension and verbal scores
3. Establishes precise word usage in written and oral communication
4. Cultivates the habit of critical thinking
5. Produces deductive reasoning skills—cause (internal) to effect (external)
6. Sharpens discernment of truth from error
7. Inculcates lifetime habits of scholarship and aids in establishing a Biblical worldview

The word study reveals the Biblical meanings of words and God's principles of knowledge and wisdom for application in every aspect of life through the four steps of learning:

Research:

- The word is defined and recorded from Webster's 1828 Dictionary.
- Key words within the definition are underlined and defined.
- Each word is researched in a concordance of the Bible and the references relevant to the definition are written out.

Reason:

- A definition of the word is written by the student in his own words.
- Biblical principles are then deduced and recorded from the study.

Relate:

- The student writes out the application of the definition and deduced principles as they relate to the study purpose and to his own life.

Record:

- The student's written work, filed in his notebook, is a permanent record of learning and is easily appropriated for future study.

Resourcing the Noah Webster Legacy

Sample Word Study—Heritage

1. The word is defined and the student underlines the key words in the definition:
heritage, noun [Fr. from the root of heir.]
 - Inheritance; an estate that passes from an ancestor to an heir descent or course of law; that which is inherited.
 - In Scripture, the saints or people of God are called His heritage, as being claimed by Him, and the objects of His special care. (I Peter 5)
2. Key words within the definition are defined: **heir**, noun [L. hæres.]
 - The man who succeeds, or is to succeed another in the possession of lands, by descent.
 - One who inherits or takes from an ancestor.
 - One who succeeds to the estate of a former possessor. (Jeremiah 49; Micah 1)
 - One who is entitled to possess. In Scripture, saints are called heirs of the promise, heirs of righteousness, heirs of salvation, etc., by virtue of the death of Christ and of God's gracious promises.
3. Relevant Scriptures are recorded:
 - *The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.* (Psalm 16:5–6)
 - *Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: . . .* (Psalm 127:3)
 - *And [He] gave their land for an heritage, an heritage unto Israel His people.* (Psalms 135:12)
 - *Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart.* (Psalm 119:111)
 - *The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.* (Romans 8:16–17)
 - *That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.* (Titus 3:7)
4. Personal definitions written by the student require that the student “relate” the word to his life. For example, “A heritage is property that passes from an ancestor to an heir. God called Israel His inheritance or heritage. In the New Testament God's people are His heritage. We are called His children, thus His heirs, and joint-heirs with Christ.”
5. Biblical principles deduced from the study enable the student to “own” the word:
 - Eternal life through grace is my heritage as a Christian.
 - God's Word is also my heritage.
 - As a Christian, I am God's heir and a joint-heir with Christ and, therefore, should govern myself accordingly.
 - As an American Christian, I enjoy the heritage of Christian traditions and a system of law based upon the Bible as my inheritance from my earthly Christian ancestors that provides freedom to live as a child of God and exercise my God-given rights in my daily life.
 - I should guard and nurture my Christian heritage above all possessions.
 - I have a responsibility to share the Gospel, leading others to their eternal inheritance as a child of God.