

Shema and Christian Religious Education in the Family in Deuteronomy 6:4–9: The Bible and the Quest for the Development of Children's Character

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Submit: 9 November 2023 | Accepted: 2 November 2024 | Published: 30 November 2024



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Abstract: Christian religious education within the family plays a crucial role in shaping the spiritual, moral, and ethical character of children. One of the fundamental principles in Christian family education is the Shema, found in Deuteronomy 6:4–9, which emphasizes loving God with all one's heart, soul, and strength. The Shema not only provides a foundation for a personal relationship with God but also shapes the moral character of children through the application of biblical principles in everyday life. This study aims to examine how the teachings of Shema can be applied in Christian family education and its impact on the development of children's character in an increasingly complex social and global context. It also identifies challenges in implementing Shema and offers practical solutions for Christian families to help children face these challenges with faith and biblical values.

Contribution: This study significantly contributes to understanding the application of Shema in Christian religious education within the family. By focusing on how Shema shapes the character of children, this research not only fills a gap in the literature on Christian family education but also provides practical insights for parents on how to integrate biblical principles into daily life. Additionally, it offers guidance for churches and communities to support families in nurturing children who are equipped to face the challenges of the world with faith and Christian values. Furthermore, this study enriches the discourse on how family education can contribute to the formation of a society based on strong character and moral integrity.

Keywords: Christian religious education; Shema; character formation; Christian family; social character development

INTRODUCTION

Christian religious education within the family plays a pivotal role in the spiritual, moral, and emotional development of children. It provides a foundational framework for children to understand their relationship with God, themselves, and others. At the heart of Christian family education is the biblical principle of Shema, a declaration of faith found

in Deuteronomy 6:4–9. Shema, meaning "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Deut. 6:4), is a declaration of God's oneness and a call for love and devotion to God. This passage emphasizes the role of parents in imparting God's commandments to their children, making Shema a central tenet of family education. The essence of Shema lies in its ability to shape the hearts and minds of children by establishing the foundation for Christian character development. Through daily practices such as prayer, Bible reading, and living according to God's commandments, parents actively participate in the spiritual formation of their children. This focus on love for God and moral integrity provides children with the necessary tools to navigate life with biblical guidance.¹

Despite the central role of Shema in Christian family education, much of the scholarly research has primarily focused on its significance in Jewish traditions, with less emphasis on its application in Christian families. Previous studies, such as those by Mensah² discuss Shema's role in Ghanaian education and its social implications in the broader context of biblical education. However, these studies do not extensively explore how the Shema influences the daily practices of Christian families, especially in the context of character development in children. Further research is needed to bridge this gap, specifically to understand how Shema as an educational principle can shape the spiritual and moral development of children in Christian households, particularly in globalized and secular societies where competing worldviews are prevalent.

Moreover, while there is significant literature on religious education in schools and the role of the church in nurturing faith, there remains a lack of comprehensive research on Christian family dynamics and their direct impact on character formation through biblical teachings like Shema. This article seeks to fill this research gap by analyzing how the Shema influences Christian families' educational practices and its effect on the development of children's character through biblical principles.³

The primary aim of this article is to explore how the teaching of Shema in Deuteronomy 6:4–9 influences Christian religious education within the family context and contributes to the development of children's character according to biblical principles. By examining the theological foundations of Shema, the article will illustrate

¹ H. Austel. "Shema," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, edited by R.L. Harris, G.L. Archer, et al., 1980, 89.

² Michael Kodzo Mensah. "Shema as Paradigm (Dt. 6:4–9)," *Scriptura: Journal for Biblical, Theological and Contextual Hermeneutics* 122, no. 1 (2023): 6.

³ Sue L. Harris. "Deuteronomy 6:4–9," *Interpretation* 70, no. 3 (2016): 330.

how its teachings can be applied in daily family life to nurture a Christ-centered character in children. This research will not only highlight the significance of Shema in Christian education but also provide practical insights for Christian parents on how to effectively incorporate these teachings into their children's upbringing, ensuring the transmission of moral values that reflect the love of God and obedience to His commandments. Ultimately, the goal is to provide an understanding of how Shema can serve as a cornerstone in shaping the spiritual, moral, and ethical character of future generations within the Christian faith.⁴

RESEARCH METHODS

The research method used in this study is a descriptive qualitative approach, aimed at understanding the application of the Shema teachings in Christian religious education within the family and its impact on the development of children's character. This study relies on an in-depth literature review, analyzing biblical texts, especially Deuteronomy 6:4-9, and referring to previous research relevant to Christian family education and the influence of the Shema teachings on children's moral and spiritual development.⁵ Through this literature review, the study seeks to explore how the Shema teachings are applied in the daily life of Christian families as part of character development for children.

Additionally, this study also uses document analysis related to Christian family education, including books, scholarly articles, and other relevant publications. These documents are analyzed to identify the teaching practices employed by Christian parents in educating their children based on the principles of the Shema. Through thematic analysis of the available literature, this research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by Christian families in applying the Shema teachings and how it influences character development in children within an increasingly complex social and global context.⁶

⁴ Mark Allan P owell. *The Bible and the Family: A Christian Perspective on Family Life*, 88.

⁵ Michael Kodzo Mensah. "Shema as Paradigm (Dt. 6:4-9)," *Scriptura: Journal for Biblical, Theological and Contextual Hermeneutics*: 6; Sue L. Harris. "Deuteronomy 6:4-9": 328-331.

⁶ Olusayo Bosun Oladejo. "Shema in Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:13-21 and Its Implication for the Christian Family in Nigeria." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 5 (2016): 1-9.

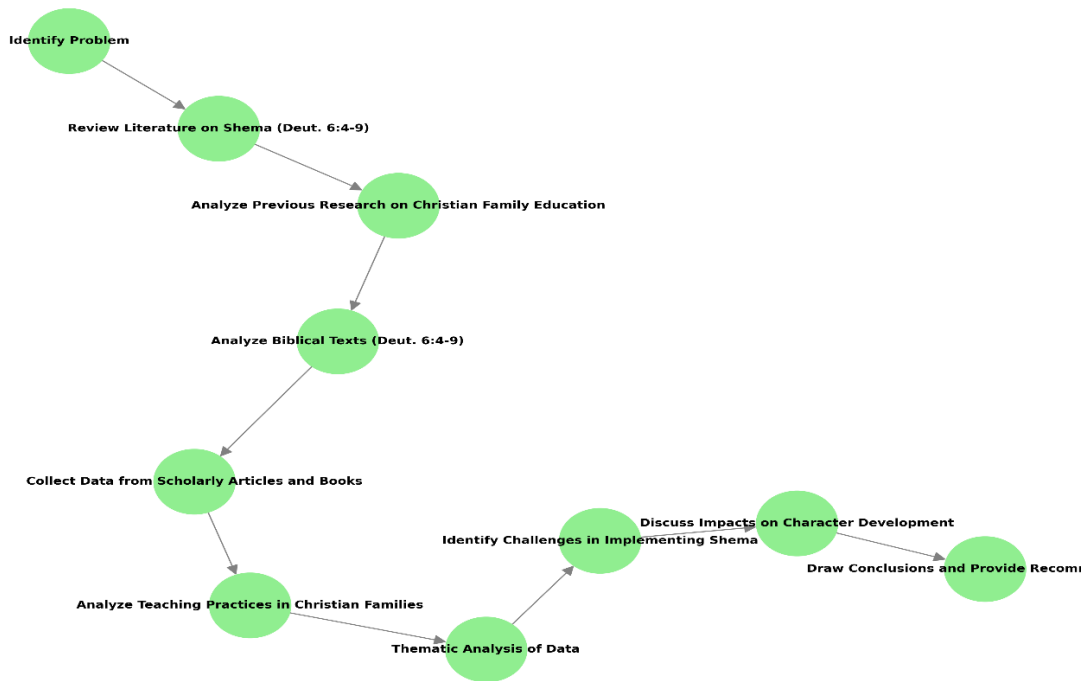


Figure 1. Research Flowchart

RESULTS

Shema in Deuteronomy 6:4–9: Theology and Education

The Shema (Deut. 6:4–9) is one of the most significant texts in both Jewish and Christian traditions. It begins with the declaration, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Deut. 6:4), which underscores the foundational theological principle of monotheism—the belief in one, sovereign God. This verse calls all believers to recognize God's uniqueness, setting Him apart from any other deity. The Shema emphasizes the oneness of God and serves as a declaration of His absolute sovereignty and authority over all creation. In the context of Christian faith, this passage plays a crucial role as a guide for Christians to understand and uphold the fundamental truth of God's unity and sovereignty, framing their relationship with God and each other. The importance of Shema lies not only in the intellectual recognition of God's oneness but in internalizing this truth, allowing it to shape one's actions, thoughts, and behavior in alignment with His will.⁷

Beyond the theological implications, Shema instructs the believer to love the Lord with all their heart, soul, and strength (Deut. 6:5). This commandment calls for an all-encompassing love for God, one that involves the emotions (heart), the soul (the

⁷ H. Austel, "Shema", 89.

innermost being), and strength (one's will and actions). The Shema moves beyond a mere intellectual understanding of God's oneness; it requires a commitment of the entire being to God's service. For Christians, this passage serves as a foundational teaching in understanding how to prioritize God above all else in life, setting the tone for discipleship and obedience. The love for God expressed in Shema becomes the driving force for Christian living, where every part of life—whether at work, in relationships, or in worship—is informed by this primary command to love God wholeheartedly.⁸

Shema as a Paradigm for Christian Education in the Family

In the context of Christian family education, Shema provides a crucial framework for how parents should approach the spiritual formation of their children. Deuteronomy 6:7 commands parents to "impress them on your children," emphasizing that the responsibility for teaching the faith lies primarily with the parents. This command is not just about teaching children the facts of the faith; it is about making the principles of faith part of everyday life. The Shema is a paradigm for daily Christian living, urging parents to incorporate their faith into all family interactions—whether at the dinner table, during playtime, or in moments of daily teaching. The command to "talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up" (Deut. 6:7) emphasizes the importance of continuous spiritual dialogue in every aspect of life. For Christian families, Shema calls for a constant, intentional integration of faith into daily routines, making faith not a compartmentalized part of life, but rather the very lens through which everything is viewed.⁹

This constant integration is essential for children to internalize faith as a natural part of their existence. It is through these everyday interactions that faith becomes real and applicable to children's lives. Parents are not only responsible for teaching Bible stories or leading family devotions but also for modeling the Christian faith in their words and actions. For example, when parents face challenges or difficulties, they demonstrate for their children how to respond with faith, trust in God, and moral integrity. These lessons, learned from practical examples, shape the children's spiritual worldview, helping them to develop a biblical understanding of the world. The Shema makes it clear

⁸ Harris, Sue L. "Deuteronomy 6:4-9", 330.

⁹ David L. Baker. *Mari Mengenal Perjanjian Lama*, 92.

that the home is the primary place for this education to occur, and parents are the first and most important spiritual educators in the lives of their children.¹⁰

Shema serves not only as a guideline for Christian education but also as a model for how Christian parents should prioritize their faith in the way they raise their children. This passage teaches that spiritual education should not be seen as a separate or occasional activity but as an integral part of daily life. Christian parents are encouraged to make the love of God the foundation of their household, ensuring that children are consistently exposed to the principles of faith through both words and deeds. The message of Shema is clear: parents are to be diligent in passing on their faith through regular, meaningful interaction, both in formal teaching times and in spontaneous, informal moments. This approach to family-based Christian education strengthens the faith foundation of children, ensuring that they develop a deep and abiding love for God that influences every area of their lives.¹¹

The Importance of Parental Responsibility in Shema

A key aspect of Shema is the responsibility it places on parents to be the primary spiritual educators of their children. Deuteronomy 6:7 gives explicit instruction: "impress them on your children." The passage does not suggest that parents should delegate this responsibility to others but places the burden of faith formation squarely on the parents' shoulders. In the context of Christian education, this is a profound responsibility, requiring intentionality and commitment. Parents are not merely instructed to teach their children doctrines but to make the love of God a fundamental part of their family's lifestyle. This means that Christian education in the home should be holistic, affecting every aspect of family life, from mealtime conversations to how conflicts are resolved, how sacrificial love is modeled, and how faith is reflected in everyday actions.¹²

Moreover, parents are encouraged to model this love for God themselves, ensuring that their personal faith is an example to follow. Children are naturally inclined to imitate their parents, so it is essential that parents live out the values of the faith in their own lives. This modeling of the faith is a natural extension of the teaching of Shema, as it provides children with tangible examples of what it means to live a life fully devoted to

¹⁰ Jerry Long. *The Family: A Biblical Theology of Marriage, Parenting, and Community*, 102.

¹¹ Mark Allan Powell. *The Bible and the Family: A Christian Perspective on Family Life*, 88.

¹² Sinclair B. Ferguson. *The Christian Life: A Doctrinal Introduction*, 147.

God. Parental integrity in spiritual matters is essential for passing on the faith in a meaningful and lasting way. Children are more likely to embrace the principles of the Shema when they see their parents living out those principles in their own lives. The Shema's command to teach children is not only about verbal instruction but also about embodying the faith in practical, observable ways.¹³

Shema and Family Identity

Incorporating Shema into daily family life also shapes the identity of the family as a Christian household. When parents actively teach their children to love God with all their heart, soul, and strength, they are not just transmitting religious knowledge but are helping to form a Christian family identity. This identity is one that centers on devotion to God and obedience to His commandments, which in turn influences how the family relates to the world around them. The Shema calls parents to be intentional in fostering a family identity rooted in the love of God, and this identity is something that children internalize as they grow. In this way, the Shema becomes not just a theological principle but a guiding force that shapes the entire family's way of life and interactions.¹⁴

By applying Shema as a guiding principle, Christian families are able to build a culture of faith that transcends formal religious activities and becomes integrated into every part of family life. The daily discussions, prayers, and worship that stem from Shema help to shape children's understanding of their Christian identity and provide them with a strong moral and spiritual foundation. This, in turn, influences how children view their role in the world as they grow, shaping them into adults who prioritize God's commandments and live their lives with integrity, compassion, and purpose. As they internalize the love of God expressed in Shema, children begin to see themselves as part of a larger Christian story, one that spans generations and shapes their values and actions moving forward.¹⁵

The Bible as the Foundation for Character Development in Children

Christian education within the family is rooted in the Bible, which provides essential guidelines for shaping children's character. Biblical teachings emphasize values like love,

¹³ Michael Kodzo Mensah. "Shema as Paradigm (Dt. 6:4-9)," *Scriptura* 122, no. 1 (2023): 6.

¹⁴ Paulus Lilik Kristianto. *Prinsip dan Praktik PAK*, 45.

¹⁵ Robert B. Coote. *Kuasa Politik dan Proses Pembuatan Alkitab*, 34.

forgiveness, perseverance, and integrity, which are foundational in Christian character development.¹⁶ Through these principles, parents are equipped to guide their children in understanding what it means to live according to God's will. The Bible's moral and ethical instructions serve not only to inform children about right and wrong but also to instill deeper virtues such as compassion and humility. As children learn these values, they are empowered to navigate the challenges of life, guided by the biblical worldview of righteousness and compassion.¹⁷

One of the central themes in the Bible is the importance of loving God and others, as expressed in passages like Deuteronomy 6:4–9. This call to love God with all one's heart, soul, and strength becomes a cornerstone for character formation.¹⁸ Children are taught to internalize this love, which shapes their relationships with others and influences their behavior. The commandment to love others, as seen in the teachings of Jesus, reflects the moral integrity that children are expected to develop. As they embrace this love, they are more likely to practice kindness, empathy, and respect, thus fostering an environment of unity and peace within families and communities.¹⁹

Forgiveness is another key value that the Bible emphasizes in character formation. Biblical narratives, such as the story of Joseph forgiving his brothers (Genesis 50:15–21), highlight the transformative power of forgiveness.²⁰ By understanding that forgiveness is not just an act but a lifestyle, children learn to let go of bitterness and resentment, promoting emotional healing and relational harmony. Furthermore, the Bible underscores the significance of personal responsibility and accountability, teaching children the importance of owning up to their actions and their consequences. The moral framework provided by biblical teachings helps children develop a sense of justice and empathy, encouraging them to be not only righteous but also compassionate in their dealings with others.²¹

The Bible's teachings on perseverance are crucial in developing resilience in children. Passages such as James 1:2–4 encourage believers to view trials as

¹⁶ Mark Allan Powell. *The Bible and the Family: A Christian Perspective on Family Life*, 72.

¹⁷ Juli Santoso, Juan Ananta Tan, & Widjaja Sugiri. "Peranan Orang Tua Dalam Pembentukan Karakter Di Masa Pandemi Covid-19: Perspektif Pendidikan Kristen": 64.

¹⁸ Sue L. Harris, "Deuteronomy 6:4–9": 330.

¹⁹ Jerry Long, *The Family: A Biblical Theology of Marriage, Parenting, and Community*, 120.

²⁰ J. Blommendaal, *Pengantar kepada Perjanjian Lama 1*, 1993, 152.

²¹ Singgih D. Gunarsa, *Dasar dan Teori Perkembangan Anak*, 79.

opportunities for growth, fostering perseverance in the face of adversity.²² Christian education within the home emphasizes the importance of enduring hardships with faith and trust in God. Through stories like that of Job, children learn that perseverance does not mean the absence of suffering, but the strength to endure it with a steadfast spirit.²³ As parents model this perseverance, they teach their children how to handle life's challenges with dignity, patience, and a reliance on God's promises.

Moreover, biblical principles on humility and meekness are fundamental in the formation of Christian character. Jesus' example of humility, especially as seen in Philippians 2:5–8, teaches children the value of putting others first and approaching life with a servant's heart.²⁴ Humility in children leads to the development of an other-centered perspective, where they are less likely to be self-centered or arrogant. By instilling humility, parents help their children cultivate a character that is gentle, kind, and considerate of the needs of others. This humility, combined with the biblical virtues of patience and forgiveness, nurtures a well-rounded character that can positively impact society and foster healthier relationships.²⁵

The Bible also stresses the importance of moral integrity, which forms the foundation of a child's character. Integrity, as defined in Proverbs 10:9, involves walking in righteousness without deceit.²⁶ By teaching children to uphold truthfulness, honor, and fairness, parents help them develop a solid foundation of integrity that will guide their decisions throughout life. Integrity is not merely about outward actions but reflects an inward commitment to living in accordance with God's will. As children internalize biblical teachings on integrity, they grow into individuals who act in ways that honor both God and others, creating a life of consistency between belief and behavior.²⁷

²² Richard J. Mouw, *When the Kings Come Marching In: Isaiah and the New Jerusalem*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 85.

²³ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Christian Life: A Doctrinal Introduction*. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 139.

²⁴ N.T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 112.

²⁵ Ralph Earle, *The Word of God: A Biblical Approach to Christian Education*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), 101.

²⁶ David L. Baker, *Mari Mengenal Perjanjian Lama*. Cornelius Kuswanto (Ed.) (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1994), 54.

²⁷ Yohana Penina Zefanya Ribka, and Novida Dwici Yuanri Manik. "Pendidikan Agama Kristen Dalam Pembentukan Karakter Anak Di Keluarga Berantakan": 137.

DISCUSSION

Implementing and Challenges: Shema in Christian Religious Education in the Family

Implementing Shema within Christian religious education in the family requires parents to intentionally integrate faith into daily life. This is not merely about teaching biblical truths but about modeling them through everyday practices and interactions.²⁸ Deuteronomy 6:7 emphasizes that faith should be “impressed” on children in various settings, including at home and while traveling. By weaving faith into conversations during mundane tasks, Christian parents create an environment where the love of God is natural and continuously demonstrated. In this way, Shema serves as a guide for families, urging them to maintain a constant, daily rhythm of faith-based living.²⁹ However, this task is not without challenges, especially in a modern, secularized world where competing worldviews often overshadow biblical teachings. Parents must actively work to keep faith central in the home, ensuring that their children grow up surrounded by biblical values.

One significant challenge in implementing Shema is the modern family's struggle with time management. With busy schedules, many parents find it difficult to prioritize spiritual activities like family prayers or Bible readings.³⁰ In a world that constantly demands more attention to work, school, and social engagements, carving out time for spiritual practices can feel like an overwhelming burden. Yet, Shema calls for consistent dialogue about God's commandments at all times. Families must intentionally set aside time to engage with the scriptures, whether through evening devotions, prayer before meals, or during shared family activities.³¹ As a solution, Christian educators emphasize the need to establish routines that integrate spiritual education into everyday life, such as teaching children Bible verses during breakfast or discussing moral lessons in the car on the way to school.³²

Moreover, another challenge arises when parents face a lack of theological knowledge or confidence in their ability to teach their children effectively. Many parents feel ill-equipped to lead their children in biblical studies, particularly when the children

²⁸ Mark Allan Powell. *The Bible and the Family: A Christian Perspective on Family Life*, 72.

²⁹ Jerry Long. *The Family: A Biblical Theology of Marriage, Parenting, and Community*, 120.

³⁰ Ralph Earle, *The Word of God: A Biblical Approach to Christian Education*, 78.

³¹ Singgih D. Gunarsa, *Dasar dan Teori Perkembangan Anak*, 145.

³² Richard J. Mouw, *When the Kings Come Marching In: Isaiah and the New Jerusalem*, 135.

are of a certain age and begin asking difficult theological questions.³³ In these instances, it is essential that parents actively engage with spiritual resources such as Christian books, church programs, or seek guidance from faith leaders. Resources like devotional guides or child-friendly Bible stories can support parents in this mission. Furthermore, the church community can play a vital role in supporting families, offering educational programs and activities that reinforce the teachings of Shema.³⁴ Parents are encouraged to seek collaborative support from church leaders or mentors, ensuring that they have the necessary tools to nurture their children's faith effectively.³⁵

The challenge of secularization also presents itself in the influence of external factors like peer pressure and media consumption. As children grow, they are exposed to diverse perspectives that often conflict with biblical teachings, such as values promoted by secular society or media that glorify materialism and individualism.³⁶ The Shema principle counters this by instructing families to make faith central in all aspects of life. Parents must help their children understand how to discern the influence of these external factors and hold fast to biblical principles.³⁷ By openly discussing cultural issues, offering a biblical perspective, and leading by example, parents can help their children navigate secular challenges while remaining rooted in their faith.³⁸ Additionally, the consistent reinforcement of Shema's values, especially within a supportive community, offers children a solid foundation against the temptations of modern society.

One of the underlying challenges in applying Shema is the inconsistency that can arise from the parents' own spiritual life. Children are highly impressionable and often model their behavior based on what they observe from their parents. When parents do not live in accordance with the biblical principles they teach, it undermines the effectiveness of their religious education efforts.³⁹ The Shema's call to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength" is a reminder that Christian education must begin with the parents themselves, as their personal relationship with God serves as the foundation for their children's faith.⁴⁰ Thus, Christian parents must actively nurture their

³³ Erastus Sabdono, *Menyelamatkan Hari Esok Anak-Anak Kita*, 101.

³⁴ Paulus Lilik Kristianto. *Prinsip dan Praktik PAK*, 85.

³⁵ Juli Santoso, Juan Ananta Tan, and Widjaja Sugiri. "Peranan Orang Tua Dalam Pembentukan Karakter Di Masa Pandemi Covid-19: Perspektif Pendidikan Kristen": 64.

³⁶ N.T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is*, 122.

³⁷ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Christian Life: A Doctrinal Introduction*, 87.

³⁸ J. Blommendaal, *Pengantar kepada Perjanjian Lama 1*, 219.

³⁹ Sue L. Harris, "Deuteronomy 6:4-9.": 331.

⁴⁰ Erastus Sabdono, *Menyelamatkan Hari Esok Anak-Anak Kita*, 88.

own spiritual lives through prayer, scripture reading, and participation in church activities to serve as authentic role models for their children.⁴¹

Another challenge in implementing Shema is the diversity within modern Christian families. In families where parents come from different denominational backgrounds or where there are differences in theological understanding, there can be conflicting approaches to religious education. This lack of unity may confuse children about the consistency of Christian teachings and their application in the home.⁴² To overcome this, parents must engage in open dialogue with each other and seek to align their practices with core biblical truths, such as those found in the Shema. It is essential to create a unified front when it comes to raising children in the faith, agreeing on shared values and practices that reflect biblical principles.⁴³ By doing so, families can ensure that their children receive a consistent message that aligns with the teachings of the Bible.⁴⁴

As the family becomes more involved in the educational process, the role of the church becomes crucial in reinforcing the Shema's teachings. Churches can offer programs that support and equip parents in their role as primary spiritual educators. Church-based activities like Sunday school, youth groups, and family Bible study sessions provide environments where children can learn about God's commandments and the importance of loving Him with all their heart, soul, and strength.⁴⁵ These programs also allow parents to deepen their understanding of biblical teachings and how to effectively communicate them to their children. When churches collaborate with families, they create a robust support system for spiritual formation that extends beyond the home and into the larger faith community.⁴⁶

Lastly, it is essential to address the challenge of complacency in Christian family education. Over time, the excitement of teaching children about God's word may fade, leading to neglect in spiritual practices. This is often due to the pressures of daily life or a lack of sustained commitment.⁴⁷ Parents must recognize that teaching Shema is a

⁴¹ B.J. Van der Walt, *The Role of the Family in Christian Education: An Exegetical Study*. (Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers, 1995), 115.

⁴² Handry David Rumimpunu, Sutrisno Sutrisno, and Marthin Steven Lumingkewas. "Mutualitas Keluarga Kristen Menurut Kolose 3:18-21": 151.

⁴³ Stott, John. *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 58; David L. Baker, *Mari Mengenal Perjanjian Lama*, 73.

⁴⁴ Paulus Lilik Kristianto, *Prinsip dan Praktik PAK*, 45.

⁴⁵ Mark Allan Powell, *The Bible and the Family: A Christian Perspective on Family Life*, 124.

⁴⁶ Robert B. Coote *Kuasa Politik dan Proses Pembuatan Alkitab*, 130.

⁴⁷ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Christian Life: A Doctrinal Introduction*, 91.

lifelong process that requires consistent effort and renewal. To prevent complacency, it is important to regularly revisit the importance of Shema and reinvest in the spiritual life of the family. Families can incorporate creative ways to make spiritual practices engaging and relevant for children, ensuring that the values of Shema remain a priority in their daily lives.⁴⁸

The Role of Christian Religious Education in Character Development in a Global Context

Christian religious education in the family plays a vital role in the moral and character development of children, especially in a globalized world that presents numerous challenges. The teachings of the Bible, including the foundational principles outlined in Shema, equip children to face not only personal challenges but also societal issues in a global context. The emphasis on love for God and others, as seen in Deuteronomy 6:4–9, helps children develop a strong moral compass that transcends cultural boundaries and fosters empathy for others. Through the intentional teaching of Christian values, parents are able to nurture children who are not only spiritually grounded but also socially responsible, compassionate, and aware of the global community's needs. Christian religious education encourages children to apply biblical principles of integrity, kindness, and justice in both local and international contexts, preparing them to engage with the world in a meaningful way.⁴⁹

The Shema provides a framework for character education by focusing on the total devotion of heart, soul, and strength toward God, which forms the foundation for a child's moral decision-making.⁵⁰ In a world increasingly influenced by secular ideologies and individualism, Christian families must ensure that their children are not only aware of these external pressures but are also equipped to navigate them with faith and wisdom. The consistent teaching of biblical truths helps children develop a character that is anchored in their identity as followers of Christ, thus strengthening their ability to make decisions that reflect God's will, regardless of societal trends. Moreover, the family, as the primary locus for Christian education, becomes the first place where children are taught

⁴⁸ B.J. Van der Walt, *The Role of the Family in Christian Education: An Exegetical Study*, 122; Putri Maria Magdalena Siagian & Christiani Hutabarat. "Tanggung Jawab Anggota Keluarga Ditinjau Dari Kolose 3:18-21": 147.

⁴⁹ Mark Allan Powell, *The Bible and the Family: A Christian Perspective on Family Life*, 102.

⁵⁰ Sue L. Harris, "Deuteronomy 6:4–9": 330.

the value of commitment, community, and selflessness, all of which are critical in addressing the complex social and ethical issues of the modern world.⁵¹

Incorporating Shema into Christian religious education fosters resilience and moral courage in children, enabling them to stand firm in their faith in the face of challenges. As children are taught to love God with all their heart, soul, and strength, they are also encouraged to develop a deep love for humanity, reflected in their actions toward others. This holistic education helps children navigate the complexities of life by providing them with the tools to respond to injustice, inequality, and societal problems with compassion and integrity. Shema, therefore, is not only a call to spiritual devotion but also an invitation to practice Christian love and justice in the wider world. This character development leads to the formation of individuals who are equipped to positively impact their communities and, by extension, contribute to a more just and compassionate global society.⁵²

Christian religious education, underpinned by biblical teachings like Shema, is particularly relevant in a global context where children are exposed to diverse cultures, values, and belief systems. In such an environment, the Christian family's role becomes even more crucial in helping children form their worldview based on Christian principles of love, humility, and respect for others. By teaching their children how to engage with different cultures and perspectives while maintaining their Christian identity, parents equip them to become ambassadors of Christ in a pluralistic world. The Shema's emphasis on love and unity serves as a guiding principle for developing respect and understanding between different ethnic, cultural, and religious groups. Christian families that prioritize these teachings are helping to create a generation of children who can foster peace and mutual understanding in an increasingly interconnected world.⁵³

In a globalized world, the family also faces the challenge of competing ideologies that promote relativism and materialism. The teachings of Shema offer an antidote to these challenges by providing a consistent biblical framework for understanding right and wrong. As children learn to see the world through the lens of God's commandments, they develop a moral clarity that enables them to reject cultural values that are in conflict

⁵¹ Jerry Long, *The Family: A Biblical Theology of Marriage, Parenting, and Community*, 112.

⁵² Michael Kodzo Mensah, "Shema as Paradigm (Dt. 6:4-9). The Bible, Education, and the Quest for Development in Contemporary Ghana": 6.

⁵³ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Christian Life: A Doctrinal Introduction*, 124.

with Christian beliefs. Furthermore, the Shema teaches the importance of living out one's faith in every aspect of life, which empowers children to make ethical decisions even when societal pressures may suggest otherwise. In this way, Christian religious education helps children build a strong moral foundation that remains steadfast in the face of external influences, allowing them to live out their faith authentically in the global context.⁵⁴

The Shema's role in character development extends beyond individual morality to the broader impact on society. As families nurture children who are deeply rooted in the love of God and others, they contribute to the creation of a character-based society where justice, compassion, and integrity are prioritized. These children, as they grow into adulthood, become leaders who advocate for positive social change, inspired by the teachings of Jesus Christ. A society built on the values of Shema is one where individuals are encouraged to care for the marginalized, uphold righteousness, and work toward reconciliation and peace. Thus, Christian religious education in the family not only shapes individuals but also has the potential to transform communities and, ultimately, global society.⁵⁵

Shema's impact on building a character-based society is not limited to individual families but also extends to communities of faith. The church, in partnership with families, plays a significant role in reinforcing the teachings of Shema through communal worship, fellowship, and outreach. As children are taught to live out the principles of Shema within their families, they are also encouraged to engage in service to others, both locally and globally. The church provides opportunities for children to put their faith into action through mission trips, social justice initiatives, and charitable works, helping them to see the practical application of Shema in real-world settings. This partnership between family and church strengthens the impact of Shema, helping to create a society that reflects the character of Christ.⁵⁶

The teachings of Shema, when applied in Christian religious education, empower children to become agents of change in a global context.⁵⁷ They are taught that their

⁵⁴ Paulus Lilik Kristianto, *Prinsip dan Praktik PAK*, 92.

⁵⁵ Richard J. Mouw, *When the Kings Come Marching In: Isaiah and the New Jerusalem*, 160.

⁵⁶ Olusayo Bosun Oladejo. "Shema in Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:13-21 and Its Implication for the Christian Family in Nigeria": 7.

⁵⁷ N.K. Atmadja Hadinoto, *Keluarga Kristen Dalam Masyarakat Indonesia*. 4th ed. (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2000), 95.

actions, grounded in the love of God, have the potential to influence the world around them. By equipping children with a Christian worldview rooted in biblical principles, parents and churches help foster a generation of individuals who are committed to living out their faith in ways that bring positive change. The Shema's call to love God fully and to love others provides the moral framework necessary to address global issues such as poverty, conflict, and environmental degradation.⁵⁸ Christian religious education, rooted in these principles, equips children to navigate the complexities of a global world with wisdom, love, and a commitment to justice.

CONCLUSION

The teachings of Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4–9) are essential for Christian religious education within the family, shaping the spiritual and moral development of children. By teaching children to love God with all their heart, soul, and strength, Christian parents help instill values like love for others, integrity, and resilience in a world influenced by secularism and materialism. Shema encourages families to integrate faith into daily life, not only nurturing children's relationship with God but also fostering virtues that guide them to make righteous decisions in a complex, globalized world. Through this holistic approach, Christian families equip their children with a strong moral foundation, preparing them to navigate challenges with faith and purpose.

Shema contributes to building a character-based society by encouraging children to practice Christian values of justice, compassion, and integrity. As Christian families embrace these teachings, they not only transform their homes but also positively influence their communities. By raising children who embody the love of God and care for others, families play a crucial role in shaping a future generation committed to social responsibility and moral integrity. In this way, Shema remains a timeless principle, guiding parents in their mission to nurture children who will impact the world for good with faith, love, and compassion.

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⁵⁸ John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 45.

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