

Why Reformed, Christian Schools?

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That They May Teach Them to Their Children

Scripture References

Book:

Deuteronomy

Chapter:

6

Verse:

7

Book:

Ephesians

Chapter:

6

Verse:

4

Book:

Proverbs

Chapter:

4

Verse:

1

Book:

Jude

Chapter:

2

Verse:

10

Book:

I Samuel

Chapter:

2

Book:

I Kings

Chapter:

2

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The title expresses a question faced by believers in various situations. Sometimes it is asked by a neighbor or fellow worker who, having sent his children to the public schools, wonders why a Christian would spend "all that money" to educate his children when it is available free. At times a student faces the question from a coworker who attends a public school. Our own sinful flesh may raise the question in order to undermine our enthusiasm for Christian education, hoping our time and money can be diverted to the pleasures of this world.

So, why do believers expend "all that" time, effort, and money for Reformed, Christian education? The answer must be, in a word, God's covenant of grace.

To put it another way, the basis of Reformed, Christian education is God's covenant of grace with His people. Christian education is covenantal education. Everyone involved in education—parents, teachers, students, school boards, and supporters, must understand and embrace this truth, and make it the touchstone of all their labors. If they do not, the Christian school will go awry, and will either eventually collapse, or offer something other than Reformed, Christian education.

The basis of Reformed, Christian education is not world-flight, i.e., the desire to separate our children from the evils of society, the godless and immoral lives, the blasphemous language, the drugs, etc. This is a proper and understandable desire, and increasingly so due to the vile iniquity and the anti-Christian instruction in the state schools; but it is not the foundation of the Christian school.

Neither is it proper to view Christian education as a mission work, either for children of believers or for children of unbelievers. Some church members see their children as unconverted, and hope the school will bring them to faith. No doubt, sound Reformed instruction should strengthen and nourish the faith of the children. This is a blessed benefit of Christian education, but not its foundation.

Similarly, some in the Christian school movement wish to use the school as a means to gain unbelievers to Christ. They attract children outside the covenant, children of unbelievers, into the school. Even though every Christian ought to have a zeal for evangelism and mission work, this is not the purpose of the Christian school.

Additionally, the goal of Christian education is not parochial, that is, to be a teaching arm of the church and to inculcate the doctrines of the church in the students. Assuredly this is a benefit of the faithful Reformed, Christian school, namely, that children learn the same truth in school that they learn in home and church. Nonetheless, Christian schools are not parochial.

Finally, notice that the purpose for the Christian school is not social, that is, to mold students into socially active workers. In such schools the emphasis is placed on "service," that is, that students must go out and improve society. This is increasingly the motive today in Christian schools. This motive is driven by three influences, and it varies from school to school as to which dominates. First, it is driven by common grace, when this theory includes the postulate that Christians may fellowship with the ungodly. Soon this turns into a need to join hands with unbelievers to improve our world. This is essentially the social gospel preached in so many churches.

The second influence toward a service-oriented instruction is all forms of post-millennialism. Since this imagines a glorious kingdom of God here below before Christ returns, Christians are told to get busy in this world, building the kingdom.

The final influence is the view that the Christian must be busy christianizing the world by reforming all areas of life, as, for example, business, art, law, labor, etc. This is the fruit of the AACCS (Association for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship), formed so many years ago in Toronto, Canada, and now having its headquarters in the Institute for Christian Studies. This theory emphasizes training the student for "Christian service." This is not the proper goal or the basis for Christian schools.

Christian schools are rather covenantal—in basis, principle, instruction, and practice. Historically this was true of Reformed, Christian education, even if this has been lost (replaced) in many a school. Protestant Reformed schools are emphatically covenantal.

To understand this, we do well to review the main elements of the doctrine of the covenant.* The covenant of grace is a relationship of friendship and fellowship that God sovereignly establishes with His people in Christ. The covenant is not a contract or a promise, nor an agreement based on conditions fulfilled, but a relationship.

The nature of the covenant is determined by God Himself. This is based on the truth that God's ultimate purpose is to glorify Himself, and that, by revealing Himself to the creature. Further, God would reveal Himself in all His glory as the triune God, causing the creature to know the glory of the life in the Trinity. Amazing to consider, God determined to cause man to know this life by enfolding man in His own covenant life of love and fellowship!

This glorious covenant God realizes in Jesus Christ, the divinely appointed Mediator of the covenant. God establishes His covenant. He determines everything about this covenant, its character, realization, and members.

The covenant people are thus chosen by God. The elect are eternally chosen in Christ and given Him by the Father. These favored ones are given to know God through Jesus Christ. They come to know, from experience, God's grace that delivers from sin, His mercy that forgives, and His love that draws them into His fellowship. They come to know that they are adopted children of God and have the right to communion with God and to His inheritance.

Of particular importance for us in this context of Christian education is the fact that God

establishes His covenant with believers and their seed in the line of continued generations. Genesis 17:7 teaches this in so many words, when God promises Abraham, "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee."

The Scriptures emphasize this in the history of the church. Genesis includes the record of the line of continued generations all the way from Adam to Abraham, and beyond! Israel knew the importance of this covenant. Not having any children was an unspeakable grief for believers because it meant that God was cutting them off in their generations.

Since God established His covenant with believers and their seed, this means that children are in God's covenant. The Reformed believer confesses with the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 27 that infants, "as well as the adult, are included in the covenant and church of God."

In this context, then, the question must be faced, how is the covenant the basis of Christian education? The answer: the very nature of the covenant as a relationship of friendship and fellowship demands it. Friendship is based on knowledge. Virtually no fellowship is possible with a total stranger. Fellowship is based on mutual knowledge as well as on elements of life or character that the persons have in common. This is why the fellowship within the Trinity is so glorious—the three persons of the Trinity are one essence! They have not only perfect unity and harmony, but also perfect knowledge of each other.

When God establishes His covenant with His people, He reveals Himself to them. This revelation is through Christ, who as the Word and the Mediator of the covenant speaks even today through the preaching. God expects that His people will seek to grow in the knowledge of Him.

Since God establishes His covenant with children of believers, these children also must know God. God, in His perfect wisdom, has determined to gather His church in the line of continued generations so that covenant children can learn about God from their infancy. To that end, God commands parents to teach their children His words—"And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deut. 6:7). Fathers are admonished to "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). Children are admonished to "hear... the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding" (Prov. 4:1).

Failure of the Israelites to instruct their children in the days of the judges led to the horrible situation that "there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel" (Jud. 2:10). The same neglect resulted in the cutting off of Eli's priestly line (1 Sam. 2, 1 Kings 2).

Believing parents take this covenant obligation most seriously. They vow before God at baptism to give faithful instruction to their children. They are thrilled by the knowledge that in the way of faithfulness God is pleased to gather His church from their family. Take note of that. God gathers His church from the families of believers, not because of the faithful efforts of parents, yet in the way of faithful obedience.

Believing parents carry this out to the best of their ability—faithfully instructing their children in the home, and in and through catechism and the preaching. They are mindful of God's command to instruct these children constantly—"when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deut. 6:7). But they face two

problems in this regard. The first is that most fathers cannot be home any longer to give this constant instruction. Their work carries them away from the home for much of the day, leaving the whole burden on the mother. These mothers are well equipped to teach their daughters the needed skills for running a home. However, mothers are less qualified to equip their sons for a life of laboring in the world to support a family.

The second problem is that a certain level of knowledge is needed to live as covenant people in the midst of this world. The people of God, though called to be not of this world, must nonetheless live in this world. Christians are called to press into the service of God everything they can legitimately use of the knowledge gained and the technology developed by man. The body of knowledge, as well as the technical level, has been continually increasing through the centuries. The result is that many believing parents find themselves unqualified to teach in all the areas of knowledge that their children should have.

At the same time, believing parents cannot in good conscience simply send their children to the state schools for this more technical knowledge. On the one hand, this runs contrary to the command of Deuteronomy 6 that parents must be teaching their children God's words constantly. On the other hand, parents realize that all instruction is either for Christ or against Christ. Public education legally may not be, and in reality is not, for Christ. It is therefore anti-Christian instruction.

The desire to be faithful to their covenant obligations leads believing parents to band together to form schools—parental schools—where their children can be taught all the subjects in the light of God's Word. They ask the teachers to do the work in the place of the parent. They bring their children to school with the demand, "Teach our covenant children as we, the parents, would, if we could. Rear them in the fear of the Lord. Teach them history, reading, mathematics, biology, literature, and all the rest, in the light of the Bible. But above all, and in all, teach them to love God and to keep His commandments. Teach them to live as God's friend-servants in the midst of a hostile world."

The covenant of God with believers and their demands this kind of instruction.

** It is not the time or the place for an extensive development of the doctrine of the covenant. Interested readers are encouraged to consult Prof. H. Hanko's God's Everlasting Covenant of Grace, Rev. H. Hoeksema's Believers and their Seed, or a pamphlet by Prof. D. Engelsma entitled "The Covenant of God and the Children of Believers."*

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