

The Biblical Basis and Goal of Christian Education (2)

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Book:

Proverbs

Chapter:

1

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7

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111

Verse:

2

Book:

Psalm

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Deuteronomy

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6

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Rev. Key is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hull, Iowa. The substance of this article was the keynote address given at the Officebearers' Conference of Classis West in Randolph, Wisconsin, on August 1, 1904. The speech has been adapted by the author for publication in the Standard Bearer. Previous article in this series: November 1, 2005, p. 57.

Having considered together in our last article the basis for Christian education, we now turn our attention to the goal and fruit of such dedicated instruction of the church's children.

The Goal

In the instruction of our children we strive toward the goal of a well-rounded and God-glorifying education.

Education is the imparting or acquiring of knowledge.

Now I would call your attention to [Proverbs 1:7](#) ^[1]. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction."

That text tells us that the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge. You notice, it does not define that knowledge. Rather, it assumes that there is but *one* knowledge. It is important that we understand that.

God counts but one knowledge.

When you boil all things down, when you take every subject of study known to man, and take it right back to its root, you will find that there is really only one knowledge, one reality behind all things and from which all things flow.

For that reason there is also but one knowledge that every Christian teacher must find absolutely necessary to impart to his or her students.

That knowledge is a knowledge of three things and the proper relationship between those three things. The contents of all knowledge must be God, the world, and myself; and those three in their proper relationship one to another. Take every area of study, and every aspect of life, and that is the essence of what you must know. Because therein lies the reality of all things.

If you have knowledge, you can answer these questions: Who is God? What is He like? What

does He do? What is His relationship to all things? How does He stand in relationship to the heavens and the earth, to the creation, to the happenings of this present time and historically? What is His relationship to me?

Moreover, if you have knowledge, you can answer the questions: What is the world? Where did it come from? Where is it going? What is its relationship to God?

And then we turn to our own place, and we face the questions: Who am I? Who are you? Where did we come from? What am I doing here? Where am I going? What is my relationship to the other creatures? What is my relationship to God?

Knowledge, all knowledge, stands before those questions concerning God, the creation, and self, and the relationship among them. To give the correct answers to such questions is to be the purpose of all instruction.

With respect to the realm of education, we can measure the process by placing it up against its approach and its methodology in teaching exactly this knowledge.

Some of our young people aspire to the teaching profession. It is critically important that they understand this very point. They aren't going to be taught this perspective in college, any college. But if our teachers do not have this biblical perspective, and if they do not labor to take *this* approach in their teaching, they fail.

Let us also notice that the purpose of that knowledge, according to the parallelism presented in our text, is to impart wisdom.

Wisdom is a spiritual virtue.

We must not confuse wisdom with "common sense." Many unregenerated men and women have common sense. Some regenerated people seem to have very little in the way of common sense. But no unregenerated person has wisdom.

Wisdom belongs only to those who stand in a living relationship with Jesus Christ—because wisdom is fundamentally a matter of the heart.

Knowledge, as we have said, is an understanding of the reality of things—God, creation, man or self, and the relationship among the three.

Wisdom, on the other hand, is a question of the attitude that we take concerning that which is truth. The one who is wise bows before that which God reveals in His Word and applies that knowledge to every aspect of life. In contrast, the fool rejects the reality.

Wisdom sees the application of biblical truth to a particular aspect of life and walks accordingly. That is a fruit of knowledge—not automatically. One may know, and still walk foolishly. But when God works His grace in the hearts of His people and gives them wisdom, He does so as a fruit of knowledge. A man who is devoid of knowledge can never be wise. He who does not know reality cannot assume the right attitude over against that reality.

Wisdom presupposes knowledge. But Christian education has its purpose not only in the imparting of knowledge, but in the imparting of *wisdom*. Knowledge is not an end in itself.

Knowledge must have this purpose, that we apply the truth in all our life.

You can readily understand how important this is to our children.

Our children need wisdom in order to put into practice their Christian faith. We need wisdom in order to pray. We need wisdom in order to make the important decisions in our youth. Wisdom is above all things necessary for our youth to establish proper Christian relationships. Wisdom must govern their decisions concerning dating and marriage. Wisdom must govern their job selection, and the obedience to the callings that God has given them. It requires wisdom to walk in obedience to God as a young woman, as a young man. Wisdom is required in the decisions that we must make from day to day all our lives long.

Again, such wisdom is the fruit of that knowledge of which we spoke earlier, knowledge that stands before the reality of all things. Our goal in teaching our children is to impart to them knowledge and wisdom, with all our instruction being bathed in prayer, as it were, recognizing that we are only instruments in God's hands.

There is much more that we could glean from [Proverbs 1:7](#) ^[1], but to stay within the constraints placed upon me, I would direct your attention once again to [Psalm 78](#) ^[2], and particularly verse 4.

[Psalm 78](#) ^[2] emphasizes that all that instruction finds its focus in God.

We notice that the instruction we are to give the church's children is instruction in all the works of God, all of which show "the praises of Jehovah, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done."

All the education that we give our children must be God-centered. They must see the God whose name is Jehovah, who has established His everlasting bond of fellowship, His covenant, with the people of His good pleasure. He saves His people for His own name's sake, that they should walk as His people in all their life, to the praise of the glory of His grace.

They must see His praises. That is what we mean when we talk about emphasizing the glory of God in education. To see His praises, to glorify Him, is to ascribe to Him the full weight of all His attributes, and to recognize Him in all His works.

In much of education today, even Christian education, God doesn't even receive mention. Man is given all the credit and is the focal point in the textbooks and instruction and study. God's Word and work is ignored. That must be absolutely unacceptable to us! For us as a Protestant Reformed people and for our children, God must be seen—and I speak with awe—as the heavyweight that He is. That is, all His works and all His claims are weighty, and serve His weighty purposes.

"The works of the LORD are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein. His work is honorable and glorious: and his righteousness endureth for ever" ([Ps. 111:2-3](#) ^[3]). All the works of the Lord call for praise—all of them.

If in the days of the psalmist such instruction was important and the calling urgent, how much more so today. Life is so much more complex. Wickedness is dressed so much more brilliantly and in such beautiful words and colors. Our children come into contact with a world thousands of times larger than the little Hebrew boys and girls saw. Radio, television, books, magazines, cars,

and planes bring the world much closer to us and bring us much closer to the world. And the only way, the God-ordained way, for our children's survival and spiritual growth is the way of showing them His praises and the wonder works of grace He has done. That must be the better part of the well-rounded instruction we are called to give.

Such a God-centered focus in education also impresses upon our children a calling. Knowing God as God, the Creator, the Lord of all, and *their* Lord for Jesus' sake, they learn to recognize God's sovereignty and to live in the consciousness of His covenant with us.

In the third volume of the *Standard Bearer* you will find reprinted a sermon on [Deuteronomy 6:7](#) [4] that Rev. Herman Hoeksema preached in Fourteenth St. Christian Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan, in 1916. In that sermon, the theme of which is "Christian Education," he pointed out that the basis for Christian education is that we are a covenant people who serve a covenant God. And God's covenant embraces all of life. He is Lord over every sphere of life. Hoeksema said,

His precepts cannot be excluded from any sphere. Therefore, Israel had to educate His children only in His precepts. Not in one part of life the precepts of the Lord, and in another part these precepts excluded, but in all life, these precepts acknowledged. And thus also with our preparation for that life. Not the precepts of the Lord in one part of the education and another part nothing to do with this law of God. But all our education permeated with the precepts of the Lord."

I am unashamed of the truth as taught in our Protestant Reformed Churches. By God's grace I am convicted of that doctrine. I want it to govern my life. I also want that truth to govern the lives of our children.

For our children to receive an education in isolation from the doctrinal truths that we profess to hold dear is detrimental to their spiritual health and welfare. For what does such education do? It makes the heart and core of the Christian faith an abstraction to every day life! The truth of the covenant, not applied to our daily life and education, becomes an *abstraction!* That we must not have!

Let us teach with our eyes on the goal—a well-rounded, God-centered education of covenant children, and therefore an education that embraces the truth of the covenant.

The Fruit

So there will be seen (and, by God's grace, in no little degree *is* seen) in our Protestant Reformed Schools and instruction an inevitable and blessed fruit.

It is obvious that such instruction is not primarily for the sake of getting ahead in the sense that this world speaks of getting ahead.

But this instruction *serves* the children of God. Where this is the instruction given to the church's children, we shall see solid church members, godly husbands and wives, parents who themselves have a heart for teaching *their* children the wondrous works of God. Those who are

single will show themselves as those whose primary calling in life is to serve God and His church in all things.

Such well-rounded instruction will serve our children, that they may be good citizens of the nation under whose government they are ruled, paying their taxes for God's sake, and showing proper respect for those who govern, also obeying the laws of the land.

With such well-rounded instruction our sons will serve well their employers, laboring as before God's face. And those who in God's providence become employers will give unto their employees that which is just and equal, knowing that they also have a Master in heaven. And so we could go on demonstrating the fruits of this education in our daily lives.

So this covenant instruction, passed on from generation to generation, is the means whereby each succeeding generation learns to set its hope in God and to keep His commandments.

God has ordained that He will save His people in the line of generations, and that the means whereby this salvation will be preserved in the line of generations is instruction in the mighty works of God and in His Word—also as His Word sheds light upon every aspect of our existence. When God enjoins us so to teach our children, we have the sure Word of God that such instruction will bring to manifestation God's wonder work of grace in the generations of His people.

You understand that we also have here a solemn warning. If we fail to instruct our children in the law of God and all His works and praises, we can never expect the covenant to continue in our generations either. Asaph mourns this only too obvious fact when he looks at Ephraim, who, according to verse 10, "kept not the covenant of God and refused to walk in his law." Verse 11 is set forth as the reason for their departure. They "forgot his works, and his wonders that he had shewed them." In other words, they did not instruct the church's children in their midst.

When we think of what God gave for us, even His own Son, shall we not give of ourselves and of our possessions for the church's children, our generations and those to come?

May God take from us all self-centeredness that detracts from the godly instruction of these children and from the praises of our God! May He fill us with the consciousness of the gospel, that our hearts may overflow with thankful adoration. Then, though we labor with weakness and sorrow, and though we see our failures with respect to this awesome calling, even so we may be confident that God will surely realize His covenant in this generation and in that which is to come. That is His promise, even until the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, whose Word stands sure and in whose name we preach and teach.

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Links:

[1] <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?version=9&search=Proverbs+1:7>

[2] <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?version=9&search=Psalm+78>

[3] <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?version=9&search=Ps.+111:2-3>

[4] <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?version=9&search=Deuteronomy+6:7>