

Thinking...Covenantally

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“For as (a man) thinketh in his heart, so is he,” the Bible says in Proverbs 23:7.

Our thinking is important. *How we think makes a difference.*

So how do we think about education? Or, more specifically, do we think *covenantally*?

We all know what God’s covenant is. It is the bond of love, fellowship, and friendship that God establishes with His people in Christ. But did you ever notice what the Bible says about the covenant? To Israel, God said over and over again in establishing His covenant, “I will be your God and ye shall be my *people*.” (Jer. 7:23). Notice, not person, but *people*. To Abraham He said, “I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee” (Gen. 17:7). And lest we think that seed was just Abraham’s family, we read in Psalm 105:8 that the covenant made to Abraham was established “*to a thousand generations.*” In the New Testament, the apostle Paul refers to those in the covenant as a body (1 Cor. 12:12-26). Notice again, the covenant is not with the individual parts, but with all the parts as a whole. God’s covenant is made collectively, with His people, His Church—cutting across denomination, ethnic, and national lines.

To put it in simple terms, God’s people are saved as a body—the body of Christ. “I am not my own,” we confess with the Heidelberg Catechism; I, with my fellow believers, *together as a body* “belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.”

Do we truly understand and believe that truth of what is called the *organic covenant*? If we do, it shapes and influences our thinking and practice in education and in all our lives. So the question is, do we think covenantally? Do we teach our children to think that way? And do we live that way?

“I Promise...With You...”

The parents stand in front of the church at the baptismal font. They have just

promised to raise that child they hold in the fear of the Lord “to the utmost of their power.” But not only did the new dad and mom promise that. *So did you and I.* When we think covenantally, we realize that *all together* we promise to work to raise that child in God’s fear.

We promise *together* at baptism! The apostle Paul says, we are many members, but by ONE Spirit are baptized into ONE body (1 Cor. 12:12-13). So my vows and yours become...*ours!* And because we are one body, “the members should have the same care one for another” (1 Cor. 12:25-26), suffering together, rejoicing together, and, naturally, raising our children together.

It is that covenantal thinking concerning our baptism vows that causes parents to establish Christian schools. Parents band together, elect a school board, and hire teachers of like beliefs to help them fulfill that promise they made at baptism to teach their children the fear of the Lord. And, it is that covenantal thinking that will KEEP our schools faithful, too.

It is that covenantal thinking concerning our baptism vows that produces a mutual “care one for another.” That’s not just a feeling—it’s a responsibility we all share for each other and our children. And it extends beyond the school walls. Practically, it means this: when parents are told of wrongdoing by their children, they don’t say, “Who do you think YOU are? Mind your own business!” No—because parents understand that our children’s godly walk IS the business and responsibility of everyone in the body. When we understand and think covenantally, the response is: “Thank you! *Thank you for working together with me to help me fulfill my baptism vows!*”

It has been said that it takes a village to raise a child. It doesn’t. But it does take parents and fellow believers—including teachers—promising together and working together, as parts of a body, for the same purpose and goal.

“That the generation to come might know...”

What do you want to do more than anything else before you die? Many politicians would say, “I want to establish a legacy. I want to be remembered in the history books.” Sports stars might say, “Before I die, I want to be a champion!” Others might want to travel, find love, or do some adrenaline-rush activity.

But what about us? What do we want to do more than anything else before we die? In Psalm 71:18, David summarizes the desire of all covenant parents and teachers:

“Now also when I am old and gray headed, O God, forsake me not; until I have

showed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come.”

Before he died, David wanted—with a passionate desire—to teach the younger generations about God.

Covenantal thinking produces this concern for the younger generations. We are not only concerned with ourselves and our family’s spiritual welfare. We want our children and our children’s children—and all the children in the body—to know the fear of the Lord! Before I die, parents, grandparents, and fellow believers pray, may I see the blessings of God’s covenant in my children and grandchildren with the hope for the generations to come!

We need to think of our school in that way: as a means given to us by God for the truth to be preserved and passed down to the generations. And it is here we need to check our thinking a bit.

There is a tendency, sometimes, when we see low enrollment numbers and struggles with finances, to respond: “Well, let’s just try to make it through this year, and about next year, well, we’ll see...we don’t really know...” We should never speak or think like that. Imagine, someone gives you a valuable gift and you say, “Well, that’s nice, but I don’t know...I might lose it or break it.” What kind of gratitude would that show? How much more for a gift as precious as the school God has given us! Instead, we need to think and speak this way: “*What a blessing our school is! By God’s grace, it will be a means to teach the children’s children the fear of the Lord! May we never scorn or minimize God’s great gift! May we be faithful to work with all our being, never losing sight of the awesome responsibility we have to teach the generations the fear of the Lord!*” That is covenantal thinking. That is rejoicing in God’s good gifts.

We also need to check our thinking concerning involvement in the school. Who should do the work? Is the responsibility ONLY for those parents who have children in the school? Thinking covenantally, we think differently. Grandfathers and other men—young and old—have every right to serve on the society or school board.

Grandmothers and other ladies—young and old—have every right to be on the Ladies Aid or serve in other ways. Sometimes, young men don’t join the Society until they have children in school; then, when the children are all graduated, they leave the society. The same is sometimes true of the Ladies Aid. It shouldn’t be that way. We all, whether young or old, share a common interest in the children and the school! We all share a concern for the generations to come!

This concern for the generations can be seen in our school in many ways. I see grandmothers helping with school dinners. I see grandfathers helping to clean the school grounds. I see it at school programs. Grandparents cut their vacations short to attend programs. “I wouldn’t miss it for the world,” they say, with tears in their eyes. They see the children of the body of Christ singing of their love for the Lord and, to them, there is nothing more beautiful or more wonderful. The generations! Oh, that God’s covenant might live in the generations!

Many store up wealth to be passed down in their generations. They save and invest; they pass the inheritance to children and grandchildren. But it is far more important that we pass a *different* kind of wealth to our generations. Thinking covenantally, the wealth we pass down *is the treasure of God’s Holy Word*.

“It’s not all about me”

I am offended; someone hurt my feelings. No, it’s not so much that a great sin was committed against me. But I was wronged. I was treated unfairly! What do I do? Do I sulk and show everyone my unhappy face, mulling day after day over the injustice done to me? Or maybe I separate myself from everyone or go off and try to find others to share my hurt feelings with? Maybe I even seek revenge on those who hurt me! Is that what I do?

What did Jesus say? Did someone mistreat me? *Jesus says: “Turn the other cheek”* (Matt. 5:39-41). Did someone take advantage of me? *Jesus says: “Let him have thy coat and thy cloak also.”* Did someone inconvenience me? *Jesus says, “Go the extra mile.”* Did someone in the body of Christ even cheat me out of some money? *Let yourself be defrauded, the Apostle Paul says* (1 Cor. 6:7). Covenantal thinking strips away our own self-interest for the good of the body.

You see, covenantal thinking realizes it’s not all about ME. *What matters is the body of Christ!* Do we teach our children that? When they complain about some injustice (whether only imagined or real, it makes no difference), do we immediately conduct an investigation of the matter? Do we quickly run to the phone, and in anger call the teacher or another parent? Do we tell our child, “Well next time, you do this to him!” If we truly understand and think covenantally, we say, “I’m sorry that happened. But I’m most concerned about YOU and YOUR response. Did you respond in love? Did you respond as Jesus would have? Do you pray for those who wronged you?” What a valuable lesson our children learn!

But the best way to teach this is by our example. And that example can be so clearly seen in our school! Think for a moment. Why do so many mothers and

fathers give of their time and energy to voluntarily serve in the school? These men and women have very busy lives and there's no payment for this work. To the world it makes no sense! *But thinking covenantally it makes perfect sense.* These board members and Ladies Aid members, the school secretary and the librarian, the kindergarten helpers and janitors, committee members and others—all serve and sacrifice and give of themselves because they understand their responsibility to the body of Christ *which they love.* What a testimony of unselfishness these parents give to us and our children! What a powerful witness in our “me-centered” world of today!

It was talk show star Oprah Winfrey who said that the main problem in the world today is low self-esteem. Oprah, you could not be more wrong. The problem today is TOO MUCH esteem for self and TOO LITTLE esteem for each other (and for Christ). “It’s not all about me.” I wonder how many problems in home, church, and school would be solved if we could understand (and practice) that truth.

We need each other!

We need each other! In all the debate between supporters of Christian schools and those who advocate home schooling, this to me is the crux of the issue: *we need each other!* We need each other’s talents and abilities. We need each other’s hard work and sweat in the common everyday tasks. Thinking covenantally, we realize that *together* we stand—or fall.

We need each other—to strengthen and encourage one another in the Lord. We need each other—to share the load, to bear the burden. We need each other—to rejoice in the Lord together! And in the Christian school we have a wonderful opportunity to show to each other and our children what it means to be a body—a body of believers, united, standing as one, covenantally strong in the Lord.

Covenant Christian. What a beautiful name we have for our school here in Lynden, Washington! But may it be to us more than just a name on a sign. May it also be a way of thinking...and a way of living.

A Brief History of Christian Education (1)

Rev. Nathan Langerak

“For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him” (Gen. 18:19).

“Whether you promise and intend to see these children, when come to years of discretion...instructed and brought up in the aforesaid doctrine, or help or cause them to be instructed therein, to the utmost of your power?”¹

“The consistories shall see to it that there are good Christian schools in which the parents have their children instructed according to the demands of the covenant.”²

Introduction

Over the entrance of the Winchester cathedral school in England this terse hexameter greeted the arriving students: “*Aut disce, Aut discede; Manet sors tertia caedi.* Learn or depart. A third alternative is to be flogged.”³

Perhaps many a teacher would like to put this verse over the door of his classroom to spur on the lazy student. Yet, apart from bringing a smile to our faces at the thought of those hapless students who endured the rigors of the Winchester headmaster, this little saying is instructive for the history of Christian education. It shows that even in medieval England there was education in schools and that

1 The third question to the parents in the *Form for the Administration of Baptism*, in *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America), 260.

2 Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches, Art. 21, in *Ibid*, 387.

3 Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, vol. 4 (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1950), 915.