

"So Built We the Wall"*

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AUTHOR:

Engelsma David

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** The text of the speech given on the occasion of the opening and dedication of Heritage Christian High School in South Holland, Illinois on August 22, 2001.*

"So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work."

[Nehemiah 4:6](#) ^[1]

Introduction

The cause that brings us together on this occasion is a great and good one. It is the cause of the Christian education of the young people of the church in schools that are sound and faithful according to the Word of God, Holy Scripture. This cause is the rearing of our own children. By God's election in the generations of believers, they are the children of the church. In the covenant mercy of God, they are God's own children, redeemed by Christ and regenerated by the Holy Spirit. The education of these children is a good cause.

And this is the cause and work that we celebrate and promote on this occasion. The new high school will instruct the children of the church concerning the glorious triune God, whom they know in His exalted Son Jesus Christ, as this God is made known in His creation. The purpose is that they may know, confess, and serve Him in all their earthly life.

Surely this is a great cause.

The opening of Heritage Christian High School is part of the larger cause of sound Reformed, Christian education, or what the Synod of Dordt called "good Christian schools" in Article 21 of the church order that it adopted. The high school is part of the larger movement of Protestant Reformed Christian schools. Dating from the actual establishment of the oldest of these schools, the movement goes back to the 1930s and 1940s. By this time there are nearly a dozen grade schools in North America, as well as one other high school, educating more than a thousand children and young people. These schools are thriving.

The cause of which this new high school is part is larger still. This is the cause of Reformed education: instruction of the children of believers that is based on, and permeated with, the distinctive doctrines of the Reformed faith as set forth in the Reformed confessions. This noble cause goes back to the Reformation itself and is worldwide.

Even this does not do justice to the cause that brings us together. In its broadest extent, it is the cause of good Christian education. And this goes back beyond the Reformation to the time of the early post-apostolic church.

We should have a lively sense of the greatness and goodness of the cause, especially since the actual work of a Protestant Reformed high school in the suburbs south of Chicago is new and small. A lively sense of the greatness and goodness of the cause was necessary for Judah rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem in the time of Nehemiah. There had been no wall around Jerusalem for some 150 years. The wall being constructed was much smaller and weaker than the original wall in the time of David and Solomon. The people of Judah had to be motivated by the ancient tradition of the wall of Jerusalem and by the worthy idea of the wall.

That history is instructive for the establishment of the new high school. Those who have worked to bring it into existence can say with Nehemiah and the people of Judah, "So built we the wall." Let us see how this is so.

A Necessary Work

The building of the wall of Jerusalem was necessary. God commanded it. He commanded it by His earlier direction of David and Solomon to build a high, thick, strong wall about Jerusalem. He commanded it by calling the Jews to return to Canaan from captivity in Babylon and to rebuild Jerusalem. He commanded it by choosing Jerusalem to be a strong, secure city on earth, in which His people might be safe. He commanded it by the desperate circumstances of Jerusalem and the Jews at the time of Nehemiah. These circumstances were described to Nehemiah by his brother when Nehemiah was still in Babylon: "The remnant that are left of the captivity there ... are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire" ([Neh. 1:3](#) ^[2]).

The necessity of building the wall was the security of Jerusalem and its people from their enemies and, thus, the power and glory of Jerusalem as the impregnable fortress of the kingdom of God in the world. Without the wall, Jerusalem lay helpless before the enemy; without the wall, Jerusalem was a reproach and shame. With the wall, Jerusalem afforded salvation to its inhabitants; with the wall, Jerusalem demanded respect. So sang the psalmist: "Walk about Zion

and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces" (Ps. 48:12, 13 ^[3]).

"So built we the wall," said Nehemiah, because we had to.

The good Christian education of our sons and daughters is likewise necessary. The Synod of Dordt called it "a demand of the covenant," referring specifically to the schools. God commands it. Since He establishes His covenant of grace with believers and their children, in the line of generations, He commands that the children be reared in the nurture and admonition of the Lord by being taught the truth of God (Eph. 6:4 ^[4]; Gen. 18:19 ^[5]).

This command extends to the instruction at school. It is not limited to catechism and Sunday School. The covenant command concerning the education of the children of believers is all-embracing, even as the life of the children is one and as the truth of God for all of life is one. It is unthinkable that God's command would allow an exception consisting of the education that the children receive five days a week, six or seven hours a day, nine months a year, for some thirteen or more years of their life, and those years the most formative. It is unthinkable that God's command would allow the children during this time to be educated in the lie that there is no God, that is, that man himself is god; that there is no Savior and Lord, that is, that man is his own savior and lord; and that human life need not be lived in obedience to the will of God and to His glory, that is, that humans are sovereign over their own life and may live as pleases them—which is the education of the schools of the state in our day.

But is it God's command that Reformed parents establish Reformed Christian schools alongside other Christian schools? More specifically still, is it God's command that Protestant Reformed people establish Reformed Christian schools that teach the children in accordance with distinctively Protestant Reformed beliefs?

Reformed parents must establish Reformed Christian schools. These are schools that are founded on the "Three Forms of Unity" and that teach in the light of, and in harmony with, the doctrines of the Christian faith as set down in those confessions. This is required of Reformed believers, for the Reformed faith is pure, sound Christianity. It differs radically from Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, Arminianism, and charismatic Christianity.

What Protestant Reformed people are determined to have in their Christian schools is simply education that is honestly based on, truly faithful to, and fully consistent with the Reformed confessions. We want education that honors the Bible as the inspired, authoritative Word of God as regards the origin of the universe in six real (historical) days of one evening and one morning; as regards the particular love of the triune God for Christ as head of the covenant and the elect church in history; and as regards the prohibition of sexual unchastity on the part of the unmarried, the prohibition of divorce and remarriage, and the prohibition of homosexuality—all in the interests of marriage and the family.

We want education that teaches the God who is sovereign in creation, in providence, in history, and in salvation.

We want education in which the risen Christ is central as Lord over all.

We want education, in the schools, that binds the law of God upon the elect, redeemed, and sanctified children as the rule of their life, for example, keeping the Sabbath Day holy and

honoring their parents.

We want education that presents the Christian life as spiritual separation from the ungodly world, rather than friendship with the world and its ways, for example, in the condemnation of dancing and movies, and that gives guidance to the Christian life as a pilgrimage through this world to the life and glory that will be ours at Christ's coming, rather than encouraging the children to lose themselves in earthly life.

These are reasons why schools established by Protestant Reformed people ought to be attractive to others who love the Reformed faith and life, that is, genuine Christianity.

Nor should it be forgotten, or minimized, in answer to the question "Why Protestant Reformed Christian schools alongside other, existing Christian schools?" that apostasy in the churches inevitably results in the same departure from the truth in the schools that are controlled and influenced by the churches. There, in the schools, the great guns of the lie are brought to bear directly upon the vulnerable children and young people.

We acknowledge that the command of God to have good Christian schools is qualified by circumstances. Especially is the command conditioned on the ability of a group of people to provide solid instruction to the students in the various subjects of a curriculum that will enable the children and young people to live and serve God in their society at the present time. This is why we are not trying to establish a soundly Reformed college in North America at present. This is a great need. There is no sound, Reformed college in North America, not one. Not one of the colleges that claim to be Reformed gives instruction that accords with the related truths of God's sovereign, particular grace and the antithesis that are the teaching of the Reformed confessions. The only grace the colleges know is common grace, which does not exist but the teaching of which produces world-conformity. None of the colleges has been able to resist the demonic movements of evolution and feminism. The public press reports that in some of the colleges administration and faculty actively promote homosexuality.

Lack of a Reformed college is hurtful to the Reformed churches, to the Reformed faith, and to Reformed young people. But the demands of a college are so great and the numbers of those who care about soundly Reformed instruction at the college level are so small that our establishing one is not commanded.

Good people may differ as to the possibility and advisability of starting a new Reformed high school in the area of South Holland and Lansing, Illinois. Therefore, supporters of this high school may not view those who in good conscience do not yet support it as Sanballats and Tobiahs opposing the building of the wall of Jerusalem.

On the other hand, those who cannot support it because they think that present circumstances do not warrant a new high school should be careful not to oppose it. The cause is a good one. Protestant Reformed people are committed to Protestant Reformed Christian education to the utmost of their ability.

As regards the possibility and advisability of a new high school south of Chicago, surely a strong case can be made for starting it now. Heritage Christian High School is the product of almost twenty years of preparatory work and planning by an association of Protestant Reformed Christians in the area. The charge that Sanballat made against the project of building the wall of Jerusalem, "Will they make an end in a day?" ([Neh. 4:2](#) ^[6]), that is, that the project was rash and

hasty, was not true about building the wall and does not hold against starting this school.

There are three supporting congregations. In these congregations are some 170 families. In these three churches and among these 170 families, there are almost 300 children and young people. This does not take into account those outside the Protestant Reformed churches who may be interested in the high school. In addition to numbers, what spiritual, intellectual, and financial powers there are in the churches in this area! I know whereof I speak.

Subject to circumstances that make possible an academically qualified high school, a soundly Reformed high school is commanded by God.

Good Reformed Christian education is also necessary because it safeguards the covenant, the church, and the name of God. In this respect, good Christian education is like the wall of Jerusalem that Nehemiah built. There is power in education, tremendous power, just as there was strength in the wall of Jerusalem. Instruction in the truth of God and His Christ, in the way that this is done in the school, is blessed by God, so that the young people love and embrace the truth. Thus, the young people are preserved in the churches as those who love the faith (and not always questioning and opposing it); the covenant is continued in our generations; and the name of God is magnified in our children and grandchildren.

In his explanation of the Heidelberg Catechism's exposition of the fourth commandment, Abraham Kuyper wrote that the schools mentioned by the Catechism ("that the ministry of the gospel and the schools be maintained") are primarily the seminaries. Nevertheless, Kuyper added, they are also the Christian day schools, for good Christian schools train the minds of the children to understand and receive the Reformed preaching that is taught in the seminaries.

On the other hand, to give our young people over to schools that actively undermine the Reformed faith and life is to risk losing our own children to the covenant and church of God, or to risk filling the churches with members who, first secretly and then boldly, criticize and seek to change the confession, worship, discipline, and life of the church.

"So built we the wall," because it was necessary.

(to be concluded)

— DJE

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

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[3] <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?version=9&search=Ps.+48:12,+13>

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