

The Great Value of Reformed, Christian Education (1)*

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That They May Teach Them to Their Children

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The great value of Reformed, Christian education is a topic that deserves attention.

There is little appreciation in the society at large for Reformed, Christian education. There may be, here and there, a desire to have something generally Christian—a school that opens with prayer, teaches morals, has somewhat biblically based discipline. But Reformed, Christian education is not desired.

Secondly, there is little knowledge of what Reformed, Christian education is! What makes Christian education to be Reformed? Even less understanding exists of the basis of this education and the motives for providing it.

Thirdly, the large and growing home-schooling movement poses a threat to the Christian school in locations where the school, due to its small size, struggles to maintain itself.

Finally, there is always the nagging voice of the flesh whispering, "This is not worth it." The pressure of finances may give it voice. As tuition costs rise or income dips, the flesh wonders, "Is it worth all this money?" When hours upon hours are poured into the Christian education: the arduous labor of establishing and maintaining the schools and the work of teaching day after day, long hours; when troubles brew and long meetings become the rule; when tension arises among very friends—the flesh cries out, "This is not worth the grief!"

In the face of all this, it is good for us to be reminded of the great value of Reformed, Christian education.

What is Reformed, Christian education? Please note that the terms Reformed education and Christian education will be used interchangeably.

The term Reformed, historically, takes us into the camp of Luther and the great sixteenth century Reformation when God reformed His church by calling a remnant out of the apostate Roman Catholic Church and reestablishing His church on the basis of the Bible. Reformed brings to mind Geneva and John Calvin, the man used by God to complete the Reformation. It takes us into the Netherlands where Calvinism flourished and developed in a unique way with a particular emphasis on the covenant.

Reformed doctrine is set forth in the three creeds: the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dordrecht.

Reformed is always biblical because to be Reformed is to be always reforming, that is, always going back to God's Word in confession and walk. Since it is inherently biblical, Reformed education is also Christian education.

The term Christian has to do with Christ. Christian education has Christ at its center. Christ is the core of its instruction. He is the focal point of all Christian instruction. All Christian instruction somehow points to Him who is the Word, the revelation of God.

Christian education is, first of all, the work of teaching, of giving knowledge about God and His creation. Proper Christian education is more than that. It is rearing the covenant child. It is the work of molding character, developing attitudes, establishing biblical thinking patterns, right goals, and godly living in the hearts, minds, and lives of covenant children. And one thing more education is, namely, the passing down of knowledge from believing parents to their children.

By definition, then, Reformed, Christian education is covenantal. To understand this we need to distinguish it from other forms of education. First, we distinguish it from home schooling, where a mother or father or both seek to teach their children. It is not my intent to set up the Christian school against home schooling. Nor am I suggesting that home schooling cannot be Reformed. In a covenant home, such instruction obviously has a covenantal aspect to it. Still, a Christian school is something different because it involves many children from many covenant homes. Reformed, Christian education has historically been concerned, not merely with the children of one covenant home, but with the children of all the covenant homes in a given locale.

We must differentiate between Reformed, Christian education and state or public education. The government establishes schools to serve the state. These schools are agents for accomplishing the state's goals, to inculcate the state's thinking and morals and to give the prescribed knowledge approved by the state. This in spite of the fact that the Bible demands that parents, not the government, train their children.

There was a day when parents to a large degree ran the public schools. Teachers were accountable to parents and local school boards who represented the parents. But this is emphatically no longer the case. In loco parentis, the teacher standing in the place of the parents, is dead in the public school system. Christian schools are not state schools, and state schools are not Christian.

We must distinguish Reformed, Christian education from parochial schools. Parochial schools are church-run. Such schools are established and governed by a church and funded by the church budget (not free-will offerings). Their purpose is to indoctrinate the children with the particular doctrines of the church. The Roman Catholic schools are the most notable example of parochial schools.

Christian schools are not parochial. In fact, Christian education is not the calling of the church as church. Christ commanded His church to be occupied with three things in particular: preaching the Word, administering the sacraments, and exercising Christian discipline. Christian schools must be parental, not parochial.

Finally, we distinguish Christian schools from private schools. Christian schools are not private academies established for one or another reason—perhaps to avoid the vices found in the public schools, or to get a "better" education. Christian schools are parental, not private.

A Christian school is a covenantal school, a parental school. It is set up by believing parents to fulfill the demands of the covenant, vows made at baptism. Its purpose is broader and deeper than merely imparting knowledge. It is the rearing of the child that concerns Christian education. Christian education is rearing the covenant child in the fear of the Lord, in order to bring him to maturity and equip him to serve God, and enable him to live as a friend-servant of God in the midst of the earth.

Thus: Reformed, Christian education must consciously be based on the covenant.

The covenant is the relationship of friendship that God sovereignly establishes with His people in Christ. God establishes this covenant with believers and their seed in the line of continued generations (Gen. 17:7). Within the sphere of the covenant, God ordinarily regenerates His elect as children. Thus parents are able to give instruction to their children, and that instruction does not fall on dead, stony hearts, but on regenerated hearts changed by the Spirit.

How do believing parents deal with their children? Because of the promise of God to establish His covenant with believers and their seed, believing parents deal with their children as covenant children. Though the parents know and believe that the lines of election and reprobation cut through families of believers, they view their children organically. In the same way, Paul addressed the church of Philippi: "To all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi." Again, as he wrote to the church in Ephesus: "To the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 1:1). Paul knew that not everyone in the churches of Ephesus and Philippi were believers. Why then address them thus? He did so because he viewed the group organically, as one, as the church of Jesus Christ.

In the same way parents view their children as covenant children, even though it may well be that God has not established His covenant with every child.

Parents have an obligation to raise their children as covenant children. They must teach their children about God and His works. Parents are to teach their children to love God, to fear and obey Him. Children must learn to live as covenant friends of the living God in the world.

Scripture is plain in this regard. The believing parent is commanded, Teach the words of God "diligently unto thy children, and...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 their children "up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). Children are exhorted, "Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding" (Prov. 4:1).

Most parents find themselves unable adequately to carry out their calling. There are several reasons for this. First, father is gone, not home with the children on the farm as in days gone by. That means the whole burden of instructing the children falls on the mother. If she is to be faithful to her calling, she cannot do all her labors and give all the instruction to the children. Perhaps she can "make do" just as a mother who works outside the home can "make do" taking care of the material needs of the family. However, the great danger is that spiritual nurturing will suffer because the mother does not have the time to do the work of a wife, mother, and teacher and prepare herself spiritually for this high and arduous calling. Thus the father must share in this work if children are home schooled, and that not merely after he returns from his work.

Secondly, the technical nature of the knowledge has advanced to the point that most parents find themselves unequal to the task. Children must be able to use the knowledge gained by man and the technology developed. They must both be taught the facts and have all the knowledge put into a biblical perspective. This kind of teaching takes training and study, hours upon hours of preparation. Few parents have this opportunity.

These factors have led Christian parents to establish Christian schools to fulfill their covenantal obligations.

The Christian school is, therefore, an extension of the Christian home. It is not the arm of the church. The church uses catechism and preaching to teach the lambs of the flock. By these means the children are taught the doctrines of the Reformed faith.

Nor may the school be merely an arm of the state, to make them literate, able to function as citizens or merely productive members of society.

The Christian school is an extension of the home because parents band together to form school societies. Societies elect boards. School boards set the policies of the school and hire teachers. Teachers then stand in the place of the parent (*in loco parentis*). They are to teach the children as the parents would if they could.

What a beautiful gift the Christian school is to covenant parents! It is a means given to parents to help them fulfill their covenant obligations to bring up their children in the fear of the Lord. The school is not an adversary to the home, nor the home to the school. Rather, the school helps the parents.

What is the nature of the instruction in the Christian school that properly rears covenant children? To this we turn our attention next time by examining the distinctive characteristics of the instruction in the Reformed, Christian school.

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