

The Great Value of Reformed, Christian Education (3)

YEAR:

1999

VOLUME/YEAR:

75/1999

SERIES:

The Great Value of Reformed Christian Education

Series:

The Great Value of Reformed Christian Education

AUTHOR:

Dykstra Russell J

ISSUE:

Issue: 9, 2/1/1999

ARTICLE TYPE:

That They May Teach Them to Their Children

Prof. Dykstra is professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

Solid, Reformed, Christian education is of inestimable value.

Believing parents and grandparents, and spiritually minded students give thanks to God for the Christian instruction given in a Reformed school. Yet it is also true that parents and children and the church as a whole are not always so conscious of the specific blessings of the Christian school. It is good for teachers, parents, and students alike to be reminded.

First of all, the Christian school is a tremendous gift from God to assist believing parents in fulfilling their obligations. These obligations are summed up in the baptismal vow. Believing parents "promise and intend to see [their] children ... instructed and brought up in the aforesaid [Reformed] doctrine, or help or cause them to be instructed therein, to the utmost of [their] power."

The Christian school is only a help to parents. Schools must not try to do the whole job. The parents can better instruct in many important aspects of the covenant child's training, as for example, teaching children to pray, instruction on matters of sexuality, and training in everyday practical living skills. On the other hand, parents are not to think they have fulfilled their obligations by sending their children to a Christian school. The school is a help to the parent, not a replacement of the parent.

When teachers are truly in loco parentis, are rearing children, instructing in the light of the Bible, and giving Christian nurture, the school is a vital aid to the parents in the monumental calling to

instruct their children "to the utmost of their power."

Secondly, Christian education is so valuable because it provides the covenant child with a firm foundation on which to stand. The foundation is the Reformed truth, it is the Bible itself. The foundation is well established for the covenant child because he is taught the same things in home, school, and church. Ecclesiastes 4:12 speaks of a threefold cord — "And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken." For the covenant child, the united, harmonious teaching of the home, school, and church is a threefold cord. By God's grace, the strength of that instruction will last throughout his entire life.

Thirdly, Christian education prepares the covenant child to live in this world as a friend-servant of God. He has received the necessary training to function in the world. He can earn a living—for the cause of the kingdom of God. He can live and work as a believer, properly representing God's cause. That because the child knows God; he knows what God requires; he is equipped to seek God in all that he does.

Fourthly, Christian education is of great value because it gives the child a Reformed world and life view. A child so trained can think biblically, that is, in a Reformed way. He has the right view of the world. He correctly sees the world as a spiritual desert, as a battlefield, as a world set against God— not as a playground; not as a basically good or harmless or friendly place. He has the right view of history as the unfolding of the counsel of God. He has the knowledge of the principles needed to make right decisions.

Fifthly, much of the value of Christian education derives from the fact that it is communal rather than individualistic. Home schooling misses this communal aspect. The intent of this article is not to assail home schooling. We are well aware that some parents home school their children out of necessity. However, the purpose of the article is to demonstrate the benefits of the Christian school. We ought to note that there are advantages to the Christian school over home schooling, and this is one of them.

That Christian education is communal means that covenant children have the opportunity to interact with each other. This has great value socially, particularly in the sphere of the church. These children are a part of the church. They must deal with fellow saints all their lives— the good and pleasant interaction with people, as well as the unpleasant confrontations and even sins of their fellow saints. School is preparation for living in the church. In fact, life in school is part of the communion of saints for the youth of the church.

This communal aspect of education has value academically because the classroom gives the students the opportunity to learn from each other. Students who help other students with the material currently taught in class come to know the material far better themselves. Class discussions make the facts and figures of the book or lecture to come alive, and thus to be remembered. Besides, students' questions open exciting areas of learning and discussion that profit the whole class.

In addition, communal education develops the thinking processes because there will be interaction in the classroom. In the classroom, students have the opportunity to formulate and express their views. They hear and evaluate the expressed thoughts of others, beyond those of their own family. Sometimes their own views are challenged by other students. This helps students think through issues. In such an atmosphere, their reasoning powers can develop, while they avoid a narrow view on all issues.

The benefit of the school is that interaction can take place in a controlled arena. Boundaries, as to the content and nature of the discussion, are determined by the Bible and the confessions. A trained leader and guide—the Christian school teacher—can and must direct the discussion and put it into the proper biblical perspective.

And, we might add, this communal aspect of the Christian school is good preparation for life in the kingdom, for God deals with His people covenantally, not individualistically. For the child this means not only living as a member of a covenant family, but also being part of the broader body of the church. In a school, the students are part of the whole, and learn to live and work together with other youthful saints for God's glory. Here the covenant children learn corporate responsibility as well.

Finally, and most importantly, Reformed, Christian education obtains the goal of 2 Timothy 3:17— "That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." This text summarizes the goal of Christian education.

What does this text mean?

To be perfect means to be complete or mature. In all areas of life, the covenant child receives Reformed, Christian instruction. The Reformed doctrines that he learns in catechism and through the preaching are applied to all areas of life in the Christian school. He is nurtured in that instruction. No aspect of his rearing has been neglected. By God's grace, the covenant child matures physically, mentally, and spiritually under such instruction.

He knows God and he knows God's will. He is equipped to serve God. He is thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

Such a believer is not set on building a kingdom of God on earth. Rather his desire is to serve God in whatever station and calling God gives—as a husband and father, or as a wife and mother. He is equipped to serve God wherever God calls him to labor—on the farm, in the office, or on the scaffolding. She is supremely equipped to be a mother in Israel, rearing covenant children; he to serve as an officebearer in the church. All are prepared to glorify God in all their lives.

This is the goal of Christian education: Equip the covenant child to praise God—now in this life, but also in eternity. The baptism form reminds us of that preparation for eternity. The concluding prayer asks that God bless these covenant children "to the end that they may eternally praise and magnify thee... the one only true God."

This is the chief end of man, to glorify God forever. This is the supreme value of Reformed, Christian education. What a difference this makes in the view one has of the child's education! Christian education is not self-centered as in, "What do I get out of Christian education?" Nor is it focused on this world as in, "How will Christian education help my child succeed?"

Rather, the greatest value of Christian education is recognized and demanded as in, "How are covenant children being equipped to serve and glorify God?"

This is the great value of Reformed, Christian education.

It is our calling, our solemn duty, to provide such instruction for our covenant children. It is not an option. God commands it. May the believers (both parents and teachers) be encouraged to persevere as they recognize the great value of their labors.

Source URL: <http://standardbearer.rfpa.org/articles/great-value-reformed-christian-education-3>