

The Purpose of Christian Education

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Book:

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1

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28

Book:

Job

Chapter:

28

Verse:

28

Book:

Matthew

Chapter:

24

I have been invited here tonight to speak about education, about school, a topic which, I am sure, is very dear to your hearts. I say this of course with tongue in cheek. From my experience with many of you, I know that if you are going to complain about something, one of those "somethings" will inevitably be school. I do believe, however, that in spite of your grumblings and complainings there are here tonight many people who are concerned about their education, concerned enough to seek guidance and direction with respect to it. This ought to be the case. You should not shun the guidance of your parents, ministers, and teachers but rather should

want it and seek it. You should also want to be educated. You ought to want to know. There is perhaps among us today a move in the opposite direction, a move toward anti-intellectualism. A move precipitated, I believe, not only from the bottom up from the student but also from the top down. We fear learning, especially higher education, because we have seen what it can do to unfounded people. We ignore learning because it cannot give social or financial status. Learning, however, ought to have a high value among us and, as we hope to point out, not because it is necessarily so practical and pragmatic but basically because God has commanded us to know. If there is one thought that I wish to leave with you tonight it is this: education, Christian education, *your Protestant Reformed Christian education* is serious business. It ought not be taken lightly nor matter-of-factly, neither should it be feared. Rather, shown in its proper perspective, your education ought to be considered by you to be one of the most loved and prized possessions that you will ever acquire.

It will be my purpose tonight, then, to show you just exactly why this is so. Why is it so important that we go to school, and not just to any school, and not just to any Christian school which happens to be convenient, but why is it so important that you attend a Protestant Reformed Christian school? What's your purpose there? What is the purpose of the school?

It must be seen from the outset that the purpose of education can be no different from the purpose of anything else. Man, according to Calvin's Genevan Catechism, has but one chief purpose: "to know God and enjoy him forever." We must know God, we must know Him in the spiritual sense of the word. We must believe that He is, that He is Creator, that He is Redeemer, and in thus believing, we must acknowledge that God is sovereign over all areas of life. We must know about Him, Who He is, what He does. We must seek out his ways and his works. God alone gives meaning to things. Life without God is futile and meaningless. So, too, in education. Also here we must seek to know God, we must seek His wisdom. Education, too, without God is meaningless and pointless.

As soon as we talk about God, however, we are talking about the infinite, incomprehensible One, the One "whose ways are past finding out." Man of himself cannot know Him, not even intellectually or intuitionally. If we are going to talk about God, we must immediately speak of revelation. God tells us Who He is, and what He has done. He has done this in two ways, through His Word and through His creation.

It was man, then, who was placed in this creation and instructed to know about God. In [Genesis 1:28](#) ^[1] we read that Adam, and thus all men through him, was instructed not only to replenish and multiply but also to subdue the earth. He was king. He had to use his intellect and reason to govern the creation and, above all, he had to view the creation as mighty work of the Creator. He had to bow before the mighty speech of God, he had to acknowledge God in all things and use all things to worship his Father-Creator. Man today is given the very same command: "subdue the earth," use all things for God's sake, use all things to worship your Father-Creator. Know God, know him with all your faculties, seek his fellowship and his knowledge in all areas of life. This, then, is the purpose of all of man's life. Where, then, does education fit in?

If we review for a moment the relationship between the church, the home, and the school, we must be willing to recognize from the outset that it is the church which has been given the responsibility of working with this revelation, especially now the revelation through the Word. It is the duty of the preacher to explain and interpret what God says to us. It is the church which lays the foundations, the spiritual principles which must guide our lives, This was certainly true in the Old Testament: the prophet always spake, "Thus saith the Lord." The Lord told the prophet how

He would have his people behave. The same is true today. The minister must also say, "Thus saith the Lord." This is indeed how the Lord would have you behave. This is His will, His commandment to you. The church sets the standards, standards dictated by the Word of God. The individual believer, however, if he is a responsible Christian, takes these principles and applies them to his life and, of course, to the revelation which surrounds him in creation. He must be able to see in the light of the Word that creation also speaks loudly of God as Creator and Redeemer. I say, now, that he must be *able* to do this. It is precisely here that the Christian school has arisen. The situation in the home is such that the parents are not able to adequately apply these principles, they simply do not have the time and some do not have the ability. The school, then, is set up to enable the parent to fulfill this responsibility. The school is designed to perform this very task: the application of scriptural principles to life, and especially to the revelation in creation. Broadly conceived we might state the purpose of the school as follows: It is the purpose of the school to elucidate the revelation of God in the creation, to give that creation meaning, to interpret that creation, to see to it that the student also understands that God is "out there." Do not forget, however, our original purpose, our chief and only purpose. We do not go to school to see how many facts we can accumulate, neither do we go to school simply to gain skills which will be requirements for an occupation. I am not trying to minimize this aspect of education, for it certainly is a necessary part of education. The point I wish to make, however, is that these are only means, only tools, which enable us to reach a specific end. We learn to read and write and spell and compute for one ultimate and primary reason, so that we may be better equipped to serve God, so that we may be better equipped to delve into the mysteries which His revelation contains. The purpose of school, then, is not to prepare one for his life's occupation nor is it to see how high we can score on a National Merit test; it goes much deeper than that. We go to school to gain understanding, to gain wisdom, to learn how to properly apply those spiritual principles to all areas of learning, to gain the proper perspective from which to view that wondrous creation which we face every day.

We must emphasize, however, that man, you as student and I as teacher, cannot do this without help. This takes grace, this takes faith. Only the man of faith will attempt to do this in education today and only the student who has faith will subject himself to such an education, for he clearly sees that without faith, without regenerating grace there will be no meaning whatsoever to what we do. Without grace we cannot see God at all. School without the foundation of the Word and the church is utter nonsense. Education, too, begins and ends with God. Listen to the words of Job in this regard: "Where is wisdom?" ask Job. It cannot be bought, it does not lie in riches nor material goods. The world does not have it. Only God knows "And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding." ([Job 28:28](#) ^[2]) St. Augustine had this very clearly in mind when he wrote *credo ut intelligan*, I believe in order that I may understand. Faith, faith in the Word of God precedes all of the activities of reason. Reason never searches unattended and in isolation. Only in the light of the Word of God and only from its perspective can we obtain any meaning at all from the creation of God. Faith seeking understanding, this is the purpose of the school, this is the only valid reason for its existence.

The school and church, then, must be pictured as being intimately related, the one is the foundation for the other. This is why I stated earlier that it is so important *where* you go to school. The principles of the church are necessarily reflected in the teaching of the school. We must not segregate education from the rest of life; rather we must view it as being a very necessary part of life. Education, your life at school, must not be used as an excuse for experimentation with far-out ideas. The same church which gives the people of God principles for their lives also gives the guiding principles for our schools. There are not two sets of principles, one set distinctly Protestant Reformed and the other set some vague general principles. Our view of all of life and

of all that that life contains is determined by the Word of God and that Word as it is preached to you on Sunday.

In addition, however, to this purpose of the school we must also see that it is not only the purpose of the school to provide the student with principles with which he himself can attack the creation but the school must also enable the student to make proper value judgments about the subject material which is presented to him.

As we stated before, God reveals Himself through His Word and His creation. Man, then, when he is placed in the creation, comes face to face with this revelation of God. And, seeing God, he cannot help responding. It lies in the very nature of the case. Man works with creation, he digs in it, he dissects it, he analyzes it with his telescopes and microscopes, he builds, he constructs; he writes, he paints, in a word he produces a culture. It is these cultural productions which are the subject material of your curriculum. The important thing that we have to see in this respect is that we have to learn how to properly handle this culture. We must be able to evaluate it, analyze it, and by all means criticize it. We must ask ourselves what does that culture say and why does it say what it does. Never must we fall into the idea that somehow this culture is neutral, that the Christian can take it or leave it, or, at best, all he has to do is to somehow miraculously transform it. Never must we accept it at face value. We have to make judgments, value judgments, spiritual-ethical judgments, judgments as to whether it is good or bad.

That this is the case lies in the very nature of culture itself. Culture cannot be neutral, but it is necessarily colored by the particular viewpoint of its progenitor. Let us now take a close look at this culture to determine just why this is so.

The term culture is derived from the Latin word which literally means to till or to cultivate. It was first used to denote exactly that, the cultivation and tilling of the soil. The first culture was agriculture. Throughout the process of history, however, many other "cultures" have been developed and the term has now come to include all of the activity of man as he belabors the earth in his attempt to advance himself and the universe. It shows man as fulfilling the command of God in [Genesis 1:28](#) ^[1], as fulfilling the command to subdue the earth.

It must be noted further that man is not laboring with a chaotic heap out of which he is trying to create form and order. In doing culture, man is busy with God's creation. Man is working with a cosmos, an ordered universe. Man is not a creator but merely a discoverer. As man works, then, he comes into contact with the revelation of God.

Adam, of course, in his perfect state saw this very clearly. Created in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, as the friend-servant of God, Adam perfectly obeyed God's commandment. He subdued all things to himself but with the purpose of using all these things in the service and praise of his Creator.

Adam fell, however, and with the fall sin-comes into the world, and, with sin, comes the antithesis. The creation was changed; man was changed. Sin had an effect upon culture. The creation is cursed; man is darkened. God's speech is lost to him; being spiritually blind, he cannot see God. But man, though fallen and darkened, still remains man, he does not become beast or devil. He is still a rational-moral being. Sin, rather, changes man's spiritual-ethical nature. His light becomes darkness, obedience becomes disobedience, truth becomes the lie. He is no longer an office-bearer of God but a servant of sin. Sin posits the antithesis, the antithesis between it and grace. After the fall, we have two types of men, the elect and the reprobate, the

believer and the unbeliever. Two types of men, both, however, still engaged in producing a culture but now with an entirely different purpose. By grace, and by grace alone, the regenerate can again obey the command to "subdue the earth." He has been called from his darkness into light. He works, he dissects, but not for self but in praise and worship of his Creator. The unregenerate, however, is left in his sin. He, too, works, but he is working to erect his Babels and Babylons and New Deals and Great Societies. He labors for himself, he attempts to subserve all things for his own glory and benefit.

Such is the distinction in all spheres of life, none excepted. Two types of men, similar in all respects except the redeeming grace of God. The one is spiritual, the other carnal. The one has meaning in life, the other is hopelessly caught up in a vicious circle trying to make things relevant.

I think you can see now what I meant when I said that culture cannot be neutral. All of life, all of culture and every cultural product either speaks for God or against Him. It is the purpose of the school to show you just exactly that fundamental truth. The antithesis is absolute, either-or, for or against.

The school, then, must equip you to meet and evaluate that culture, to aid you in making critical judgments with respect to it. I do not care whom you read, Plato, Hemingway, Shakespeare, Barth, or Tillich, all of them must be read and studied from this point of view. All of them are going to say something about God and His creation, all of them are either going to serve Him or blaspheme Him. Again we remind you of Augustine. Faith seeking understanding, that is the key to your education.

We must understand further tonight that this a very urgent calling and duty which is given to you. This is something that you must learn when you are young, especially now in our own situation. This is something which you must learn before you are out of high school, for this is where, for most of you, your Protestant Reformed education stops. Now is the time to prepare yourself. Christ's parable in [Matthew 24](#) ^[3] is very applicable here. There are two types of servants, there are those who are always making excuses, those who are always procrastinating, those who are saying, "Give me time, let me mature, death and the end of the world are years and years away." Do not be fooled, says Jesus, blessed is he whom the Lord findeth busy working, busy preparing himself for His coming, busy in subduing all things in His service.

Necessary it certainly is that you work today, right now. Do not deceive yourselves. It does not take a genius to determine what the world and the devil are up to. Friederich Nietzsche spoke prophetically one hundred years ago when he wrote:

Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place, and cried incessantly, "I seek God! I seek God!" As many of those who do not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. . . .

"Whither is God?" he cried. "I shall tell you. We have killed him—you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how have we done this? How were we able to drink up the sea? who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What did we do when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Do we not hear anything yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we not smell anything yet of God's decomposition? Gods too decompose. God is dead Is not the greatness of this

deed too great for us? Must not we ourselves become gods simply to seem worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed; and whoever will be born after us—for the sake of this deed he will be part of a higher history than all history hitherto."

It has been related further that on that same day the madman entered divers churches and there sang his requiem aeternam deo. Led out and called to account, he is said to have replied each time, "What are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchers of God?"

This is what the world is about today, they are burying God. That old-fashioned concept of a God who is the sovereign ruler of all things has bitten the dust. The church has moved outdoors. Nietzsche was absolutely right and Nietzsche shouts a loud "Amen! Good work! The deeper the grave the better." Man has become of age, he no longer needs the benevolent, protecting hand of God. Gone forever are the days of the church-centered, Christ-centered society. Man has been liberated from the hands of an angry God. This is the spirit today. Can you read it? Can you answer it? It is this philosophy and this type of thinking which is thrown at you from all sides today. Get rid of traditional Reformed theology, put the church on the street, sepulchers indeed are these stodgy Reformed churches. God is just a concept, a big woozy idea, action's the thing. Can you cope with this in education, especially now those of you who hope to continue your education? Are you prepared to fight it?

In conclusion, let me impress upon you the fact that you have placed upon you a tremendous responsibility. If you are going to make those critical judgments—which are required of you, it means that you are going to have to be firmly fixed in your faith, you are going to have to know what the Word of God says and how to apply it. You don't go to school forever, you know. Put on the armor of God while you have this opportunity, prepare yourself for the battle. You, too, are called to fight. Learn while you have the opportunity. Alexander Pope was right when he penned the words:

A little learning is a dangerous thing,

Drink deep or taste not the Pierian spring

Yes, blessed indeed is that servant whom the Lord shall find busy preparing himself for His coming.

J. Huisken

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[1] <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?version=9&search=Genesis+1:28>

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