

**THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR**

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Dear Radio Friends,

School is in the air. Stores are having their big “Back-to-School” sales. Teachers and staff are gearing up. Some children are tired of summer vacation and eager for a new year. And many parents are eager for a new school year. It is an exciting and a busy time of year.

Maybe your family has a little one starting for the very first time. Or, perhaps, God has blessed you with many children and you have been sending your children off to school for years and years.

What kind of a school are they going to? The choice of school is important. Everybody says that. It is *very* important. It is an important decision for a parent, perhaps one of the most important choices a parent makes. Therefore it is a decision that needs to be made with much prayer over an open Bible.

Children of God ought to feel very strongly about the schools that their children attend. And the school that your child attends ought to be a very important thing in your life. Are you looking into a

school for the very first time? Are your children enrolled in a school you have used for many years? What kind of a school is it? Why do you use the school that you do?

Christian parents look for good Christian schools. So important is a good Christian school to believing parents that they are willing to pay large tuition bills rather than accept free public education. So important is Christian education to Christian parents that fathers are willing to work two or three jobs and to live in a place where there is such a good Christian school. Not only are Christian parents willing to pay the cost involved, but the commitment runs even deeper. They prize their Christian school as an extension of their own home and as an invaluable tool in aiding them in their calling, that is, in the parents’ calling to train their children in the way of the Lord.

But what is a good Christian school? Is the essence of a Christian school the fact that there is a Bible class included in the curriculum? Is that what makes it a good Christian school? Is the essence of

a Christian school the fact that students are allowed to pray there, or that it has a dress code, or that morals and manners are taught and insisted upon? Does a Christian school relieve parents of their responsibility? Is it simply a place where they can send their kids off to for a while? Is creation presented in such a school, as an explanation of origins, as well as evolution? What is a good Christian school, one that is truly Christian?

A good Christian school is a covenant school. A good Christian education is a covenant education. That is, it is one that is based upon the biblical teaching (I was just about to say “a biblical teaching,” but, no, based upon *the* biblical teaching) of God’s covenant with believing parents and their children. And the heart of understanding Christian education is to be found in an understanding within your soul of the truth of God’s glorious covenant of grace with believers and their children.

Now this will take some explaining. So, buckle your seatbelts—that is, follow very carefully, or, better, in the words of Scripture: gird up the loins of your mind.

Our Christian faith is built upon knowledge. Faith-knowledge for sure, heart-knowledge for sure, but, nevertheless, a

knowledge taken from Holy Scripture and that involves the use of your mind seeking to absorb biblical truth and principles.

I said, a good Christian education is a covenantal education. Covenant is the truth that is found in the Holy Scriptures from cover to cover. I will offer this definition: Covenant is the teaching of the Holy Scripture that it is the will of the glorious God to embrace His people in Jesus Christ within arms of perfect love and everlasting faithfulness. The Bible uses many expressions to convey it. God says, “I will dwell with you and be among you; I will abide with you; I will live within you; I will be your God and ye shall be My people.” God speaks to us of a relationship that He makes with His people, chosen in Jesus Christ and through Jesus Christ. But He speaks of that relationship in the Bible in terms of fellowship, communion, endearment—in terms of covenant.

Covenant is a living bond of love and fellowship between God and us. As a father lives with his children in love, as a husband knows and loves his wife, so God, in the Scriptures, says to us: “I will be a covenant God to you. You shall enjoy the blessing of My covenant.” God wills, through

Jesus Christ, to love us, to live with us, to keep us, to bless us, to dwell within us, and to sanctify us through Jesus Christ entirely of His grace. Covenant: the truth that God graciously takes wicked, rebellious, sin-laden men and women and washes them in the blood of His own Son. He renews them by the Holy Spirit within their hearts and He draws them to Himself in an irresistible, saving love. And we come to know, cherish, love the living God.

Then God lives within us and lives with us and holds us and instructs us, comforting, correcting, preserving, forgiving, and at last perfecting us in the splendor of heaven. The covenant!

God makes this covenant, according to Scripture, with believers and their children. And right there lies the basis for Christian education. Christian schools are born out of the truth that God establishes His covenant with believers and their children.

The Bible teaches that God takes His children out of the children of believers. Or you could put it this way, that God casts the lines of His eternal, unconditional, gracious election in the generations of believers. Or you could put it this way (this is what we are saying), when God saves a man

and a woman by grace, He promises to them that He will begin to keep covenant with them—not only with them personally, but also to work within their children, calling these parents now to love and to nurture their children in the Holy Scriptures. When God saves a man and a woman, He begins covenant, that is, He promises that He will work within their offspring His saving love and truth. And so God would say to Abraham (Gen. 17:7): “I will be a God to you, Abraham, and to your children after you.” So also the apostle Peter could say to repentant believers on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:39): “For the promise is unto you and to your children, that is, to repentant sinners who have been brought, by grace, to confess and repent in Christ and to possess forgiveness in Christ. The promise of God is to you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.”

So God sends forth His Word. And that Word calls sinners to Him. In the book of Acts: Lydia, Cornelius, the Philippian jailer, the house of Crispus. And then God, bringing these adults to Himself in saving faith, began a work within their household, within their children. The children, born to believers, are covenant

children. God forms His people from among them. And these children—growing up and serving the Lord, marrying in the Lord—God works within *their* children from generation to generation, leaving believing parents with a blessed calling and task: teach your sons and your daughters what you have seen and what you have learned of Me.

That is the basis of Christian education: God saying to a believing parent, on the basis of His covenant, “Teach your son and your daughter what you have known and seen and learned of Me.”

Listen to good king Hezekiah say it in Isaiah 38:19. In this context, Hezekiah had been sick, nigh unto death. The Lord had restored him and given him the promise that he would have a son to sit upon the throne. And Hezekiah responds in a psalm, a psalm of his great distress when he was sick, but also of his great praise to God when he was recovered. He says this in verse 19: “The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth.” Hezekiah, as I said, had experienced in a profound and personal way the wondrous grace of God. He had been brought exceedingly low and had been

brought to see the unshakable promises of God. Now those promises and the grace of God live within His breast. They lived! “The living, the living shall make known Thy truth. The living shall praise Thee.” A child of God who knows the glorious truth of God’s grace to him shall praise God. And out of that same impulse, out of that holy impulse, he will make known God’s truth to his children.

The covenant, then, is this, that when God sheds forth His light upon you in Jesus Christ and gives you to taste and to see that He is gracious, you will want your children to know this wonder with you. As you love God and you love your children, you will desire for your children the greatest possible good, which is to know the grace of God that you know.

So we read in Psalm 34: “Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the LORD.” Or, throughout the book of Proverbs: “My son, give me thy heart.” As a believing father, we are not just concerned that our children become electricians or cabinet-makers or executives—a chip off the old block. But we are concerned that the children know better than we the wonderful grace of God, that they

may taste and see that the Lord is gracious.

So believing parents of one faith bind together in a holy purpose to begin a Christian school. Understanding my calling as a father, which is given to me as a parent, I seek out other like-minded Christians. We pool our abilities and our resources, elect a board, hire teachers who share our faith, and we begin a school in which the children of the covenant may be taught even as God has taught us.

This includes the covenant community as we care for our children born within the sphere of that community. Our commitment in the instruction of our children is not just for the children of our own flesh. This commitment would be ours if we had no children, or if our children are now beyond the age of schooling. We possess a love for the children born in the sphere of the covenant. If a brother or sister becomes unable, laid low, we will help with their children. Should a brother become neglectful or disobedient, God willing, we will yet seek to do all that we can to aid and help in the instruction of their children. Because of covenant, because of the living desire

that the children born within that sphere of God's gracious truth might come to know that truth and embrace it with all their hearts.

Out of the womb of the covenant, Christian schools

*Out of the womb  
of the truth  
of the covenant,  
Christian schools  
are born.*

are born. These Christian schools, of course, will then have very distinctive features.

The most distinctive is the covenant itself, that is, in how the children are going to be viewed and approached. They will not be viewed as being outside of the grace and work of the Holy Spirit. But they will be viewed as those who are to be nurtured, taught, brought up in the truth of Jesus Christ, their Savior and their Lord.

Such schools will have some clear features. Let me mention a few of them. There will be a clear commitment to truth: biblical, creedal, confessional truth. Families seeking to have their children enrolled in this school will be told up front that there is a clear commitment here to a statement of faith and truth in the Holy Scriptures. The statement of the faith will be

seen throughout the school. If a family is looking for simply good academics with just a little religious topping over it, they will soon discover that this is not the school for them. The school will be committed to teaching students the clear truth of God, in order that the student might become fully devoted as a follower of Jesus Christ.

What we are saying here is that Christian education is not neutral. It is not a school that is trying to be neutral over issues of the truth and neutral over issues of Jesus. A Christian school does not downplay what they stand for in the name of academic freedom or in the hope of increasing enrollment. But love for God's glorious truth revealed in the Scriptures and stated in biblical, Reformed creeds will be expressed in clear and open commitment.

This will keep the school from becoming aimless, purposeless, a clone of the secular school, where nothing is believed with certainty. A Christian school states up-front what it believes.

Another way of saying this is that covenant Christian schools bow before the infallible and inspired Scriptures. They believe the absolute truth of the Bible, from cover to cover. It is God's Word writ-

ten. In such a school the truth of the Bible will shape the teaching of every subject and will provide understanding unto every aspect of life. In such a school the Bible will be held supreme. In schools where the Bible is not the basis of truth, students are offered plenty of information and opinions but they are not given a solid foundation on which to build their thinking and to ground their entire life. Students in a good Christian school will learn what the Bible says, learn sound doctrines, learn church history, learn every subject (literature, history, math, science, music, art) in the light of the Holy Scriptures.

A Christian school, further, has this feature, that it is God-centered. You see, Christian education is not simply a reaction to prayerlessness and godlessness in the public schools. But believing the truth of the Bible, a Christian school is devoted to a God-centered approach in life and learning. The Bible says that all things were created for God's glory. The unifying principle of knowledge is to know God and His Son Jesus Christ, which is eternal life. The Christian school seeks to humble the mind. It seeks to bring the soul into reverence before the great and the glorious God of salvation. The

physical sciences in such a school will seek to investigate the physical universe as fashioned by God's power and a demonstration of His glory. The life sciences within such a school will study the wonderful diversity, construction, and function of all of God's creatures. The social sciences and languages will examine how God calls us to communicate with each other, to build each other up, and to express our thoughts in love. The arts and the music within such a school will provide opportunities to respond to the beauty and to the design God has placed in the creation. All will be aimed at bringing the student and the teacher to stand in awe of God and to say, "My God, how wonderful Thou art!"

A Christian school, then, is not a place where the Bible class teaches that the universe is governed by God's will, while the science class teaches that the universe is controlled by natural law. It is not a school in which the children in choir will be singing "Beautiful Savior, King of creation," and then in the chemistry class will be taught to deny the Creator by being taught a form of evolution. A Christian school tells students why they should live, for whom they should live, what it means to live: God, and God alone!

There will be more features. Let me mention some of them only in passing. Such a covenant Christian school will not be mediocre. It will call students to use and to develop the abilities and talents that they have. The school will not simply "dumb things down" to make the student feel better about himself, but each child will be met at his level of ability and be aided to be thankful for what God has given him and to use what God has given to him. Another way of saying this is that each child shall be taught the joy of faithful stewardship of his own abilities and talents.

Further, it will be a school that will be very friendly to families. Parents will be welcome. And parents will be seen as the primary educators of the children. The teacher will not see himself or herself as a replacement but as the parents' tool, and the parent will be involved in constructive, mature, and helpful ways, making the school the very best that it can be. It will be covenantal. It will be fellowship. It will be humble, respectful fellowship with each other, with administrator, teachers, parents, and students. Parents will talk with teachers. They will work together. They will go on field trips together with the class.

They will know what is going on with their child.

The Christian school, further, is one that has a great passion for holiness—holiness of life, devoted Christian life for their students and teachers. The education that they provide is not simply a building, not simply in books. But it is how the student will live, how the student will live with fellow classmates. A Christian school is the place where character is molded, where teachers understand that they will have a profound impact upon the life of their students. And the students, covenant students, will act as friends of God with each other. Having received of God a gracious friendship in Jesus Christ, they will be taught and encouraged to live as friends with each other. They will be respectful, thoughtful, compassionate, kind one with another. It will show. You will feel it. You will sense it within the school. You will see that everybody in this school is concerned about godly character, that their lives be shaped to the honor and the glory of God. That is a good Christian school.

These are some of the features, then, of a covenant Christian school: Clear commitment to the truth of Holy Scripture, God-centered teaching, a striving after excellence,

parental involvement, personal godliness and holiness.

Yes, even the best Christian schools, reaching unto these truths, fall short. Now, remember, if you and I join such a school, by our joining it, that Christian school cannot be perfect. All we need to do is to look at ourselves. But they are a blessing. They are worth all the sacrifice. They are a great good. By God's grace God gives such schools, which are great treasures, to us. Let us pray for them. Let us encourage those who are laboring in them to establish such a Christian school. May God prosper us with such schools and families in establishing them. And may God unite our hearts as parents in the thrill and in the joy of teaching our children to know and to trust in God.

Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee for Thy Word to us. As we begin another year of schooling, we ask for Thy blessing. Remind us as parents that this is our calling, our privilege, and our responsibility from God. May our hearts feel a great burden, as those who have been made alive in Christ, to teach our children the glorious truths of Thee. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.