

Our Children's Education: (6) The Spiritual Blessings of a Covenant Education

Rev. Ronald Hanko properly defines Christian education:

Christian education is education that is completely and consistently Christian. It is education that is Christ-centered and Bible-based. It is education that is controlled not by the civil government but by Christian parents (Christian Education, article).

Because covenant parents have the high calling to raise up children for the Lord, they must desire the highest quality of covenant education. They may not be satisfied simply with a Christian education. They must insist on a uniquely Reformed education, one that imparts to them the powerful truths of Scripture as the basis for all knowledge. It must be an education that is according to the distinctive “aforesaid doctrine” of the church, as the Baptism Form puts it. An education of this nature must rely on the church’s confessions.

Again Prof. Engelsma writes:

...we insist that the creeds must be retained as authoritative for Christian education. To let them go would be to lose Reformed, covenant education. The confessions are not an authority alongside Scripture, but they are the authoritative interpretation of Scripture for the Reformed faith...they are the truth for the redeemed, Reformed believer’s entire life (pg. 30, *Reformed Education*).

We cannot begin to list all the benefits of a covenant education, but they may be broadly categorized into these few headings. Scripture demonstrates numerous of these blessings to us. It is important to note that the blessings are always spiritual in nature. We are not pursuing material blessings in covenant education.

1. The Vanity of this Life

Contrary to public education which sinfully promotes the pleasures of this life, a covenant education strives to teach covenant children the vanity of this life. We teach them that a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth (Luke 12:15). We teach them that all of life is vanity without God (Eccl. 2:11). We teach them that riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death (Prov. 11:4). We teach them to count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord (Phil. 3:8). For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? (Matt. 16:26).

Knowing this, covenant children confess, Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am (Ps. 39:4).

Because all of life is vain without God, we rear covenant seed so that they find their hope and strength in God (Ex. 15:2). Like the psalmist who knew the Lord from his youth, our covenant children declare, For thou art my hope, O Lord GOD: thou art my trust from my youth (Ps. 71:5). The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? (Ps 27:1).

2. Preparation for the End Times

What makes public education so spiritually dangerous for covenant children is that it sinfully disregards the day of final judgment where the world shall come to an end. While the world promotes a life of merry-making and sinful pleasures, Jehovah's children must be taught that the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night (2 Pet. 3:10), where he will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or evil (Eccl. 12:14).

For this reason we must teach our children to be sober, to watch and pray for the Lord's return where persecution will increase. Covenant education must prepare our children to "suffer persecution for the cross of Christ" (Gal. 6:12). They are not in this world to enjoy its pleasures, but to deny themselves, take up the cross, and follow after Christ (Mark 8:34). They must learn to walk the narrow way where very few will tread (Matt. 7:14). They must learn that they will be hated of all men for the sake of Christ; but he that endureth to the end shall be saved (Matt. 10:22).

Covenant education functions like a camp that trains young soldiers to fight their spiritual warfare in life. Covenant parents know only too well that the spiritual battles in this life are fierce and unending. They are wrestling "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12). Hence they must equip their covenant young to the best of their ability with the spiritual armory necessary to fight this intense spiritual warfare.

With an adequate spiritual preparation, our covenant young will not be caught unaware when persecution comes upon them as the day of the Lord draws nearer. They will stand up unashamedly for Christ according to all that they have been taught and trained for. Even if death should threaten them, they will resist the mark of the beast, for they fear God rather than men (Acts 5:29).

3. Preparation for Eternity

Because the church is the only institution on earth that will abide for eternity, we must educate our children to love this eternal institution. God and his church must be central in their lives. God's people must be their closest companions in this life, for it is they with whom our children will spend eternity with. Our children must say, I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts (Ps. 119:63).

We teach our children, in the beautiful words of the puritan Matthew Henry, "that a holy heavenly life spent in the service of God, and in communion with him, is, without doubt, the most pleasant and comfortable life any man can live in this world" (The Pleasantness of a Religious Life).

In covenant education our children will learn to look forward to the day of our Lord's coming with "a most ardent desire," as our Belgic Confession puts it (Art. 37). Their suffering in this life will not be in vain. Their choice to suffer afflictions rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin will be vindicated. The Lord will wipe away their tears when he returns (Rev. 21:4). He will give them a crown of righteousness because they love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:8). Then they shall reign with him forevermore in the new heavens and new earth.

In view of all these blessings, we trust that we and our covenant seed will be counted amongst those to whom the Lord shall say, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world (Matt. 25:34).

VII. The Church's Responsibility

Our church fathers wisely understood that the church had an important role to play in the education our children receive. Article 21 of the Church Order of Dordrecht reads,

The consistories shall see to it that there are good Christian schools in which the parents have their children instructed according to the demands of the covenant.

In explaining the fourth commandment to keep the Lord's Day holy, the writers of the catechism instructed that the "schools be maintained" (LD 38, Q&A103).

Although CERC does not have a Christian school presently, there is much that the church can do. Office-bearers, to whom Christ entrusted the welfare of his flock, can and must point out the sinfulness of public education to covenant parents. They must demonstrate precisely from Scripture the sinful and spiritually devastating consequences public education has for covenant seed. Scripture is not silent about the subject. Because they are his children, God has much to speak about the rearing of covenant seed in his Word.

When the church establishes a clear and distinctive spiritual vision for covenant education, God's people will not perish. Covenant parents will be convicted of their high calling to rear covenant seed. They will see the need for a solid covenant education that has God's Word as its central focus. Any knowledge gained apart from Scripture is meaningless. They will understand that covenant children must be raised covenantally.

While the establishment of a Reformed school may only be a long-term goal for now, CERC can give much needed support to her parents by offering its premises for this cause. Is it not better for our covenant seed to study, interact and fellowship with each other rather than with wicked, ungodly peers whose influence will destroy their covenant identity?

The present and growing number of parents in CERC who home-school their children ought not to be alone in their cause. The church can give much needed support, direction and instruction to them. The church is our spiritual mother that showers us with care and love.

The church that truly loves the Reformed faith will do all in her power to give her children a covenant education.