

THE BIBLICAL EDUCATOR

"To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding" Proverbs 1:2

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WHAT MOST PEOPLE DON'T UNDERSTAND ABOUT CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

by Terrill I. Elniff

The secular mind, confronting the Christian school, tends to evaluate what it sees in terms that it can understand. Thus the prevailing view of Christian education is that Christian parents put their children in Christian schools because they are fed up with the problems of the public schools: sex, drugs, immorality, lowered standards, incompetent teachers, secularism, disorder, and violence. But to reason in this way is to overlook a very important aspect of the Christian school movement.

When I began teaching in a Christian school some eighteen years ago, I remember our headmaster emphasizing from time to time that the Christian education movement is not an "anti-public-school movement." Why not? I always asked. I thought public schools should be sold to the highest bidder at public auction. His point was that Christian education must exist for its own reasons, not as an escape from something else. To enter a Christian school as an escape from the modern, secular, world was essentially to betray the unique reason for Christian education, which was to study the world from a biblical point of view.

Now, eighteen years later, I appreciate the wisdom of his insight. I still think that public schools should be sold at public auction (that's a little more direct than tuition vouchers, but it accomplishes the same thing by putting education into the private marketplace), but making education private rather than public has nothing to do with Christian education. Private education is not necessarily Christian education. Religious education is not necessarily Christian education either. These categories are all wrong. The real alternatives are man-centered education over against God-centered education.

If education is humanistic in its perspective, all the trappings of religion won't make it Christian. Baptized humanism is still humanism. Education may be moral, religious, conservative, and competent, and still be humanistic. Schools may have values, standards, rules, and even prayers, and still teach a man-centered curriculum. The one distinguishing mark of a Christian school relates to that one unique reason for Christian education: to gain a knowledge of the world from God's point of view (rather than man's) through the application of biblical presuppositions in every area of the curriculum and school activity.

That is the kernel of Christian education. Everything else is peripheral. Everything else can be duplicated or imitated. Christian education will not cease to be needed just because the public schools clean up their act, as some commentators seem to believe. Scott Thompson, executive director of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, has been quoted (WSJ, 6-30-81, p. 30) as saying that "What the Christian schools

movement is saying...is that public schools have two to three years to do a better job. If public school teachers are moral...and don't hide behind one or another legal curtain in dealing with values, then most Christian parents will be happy and they'll go back to teaching Christianity elsewhere as they have done in the past."

Now, I don't know how to measure "most" Christian parents, but I'm pretty sure there are a lot of Christian parents in the Christian schools movement who are simply refugees from the public schools. They are the ones Thompson can expect to receive back into the public schools once the public schools come to grips with their problems. Such Christian parents will go back to public schools because their commitment to Christian education is not positive, but negative, an escape from the modern, secular, world.

But there is also an immense number of Christian parents in the movement who don't intend to go back to the public schools even if they get squeaky clean. They are the ones with a positive commitment to the purposes of Christian education. Their children are in Christian schools because they believe that life must be related to God and learning must be related to truth. For them, secular and humanistic education is not an option.

The future of Christian education, then, does not depend on the reforms made in the public school systems. It depends, rather, on the relative number of Christian parents who understand the purpose of Christian education. The determination to apply biblical presuppositions to every area of life and learning is what most people don't understand about Christian education. The failure of the secular mind to comprehend this determination indicates that it also does not understand the revolutionary nature of the Christian school movement and the impact it will have on the future of education in this country.

PLAY IN CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

By James B. Jordan

In the October 1979 issue of *The Biblical Educator* (vol. 1, no. 1), I had an essay entitled "Some Observations on Physical Education." The gist of that essay was that the physical education programs in the Christian school should concentrate on the development of useful skills in the areas of work and self-defense. I came down rather hard on school sports, because of the tremendous over-emphasis on them in modern American schooling.

Upon further reflection, prompted by a reading of Johan Huizinga's classic *Homo Ludens* (Beacon Press paperback), I'd like to make a few more positive statements on play. (Huizinga's perspective is pagan; I do not recommend the book to anyone

not thoroughly grounded in Van Tillian presuppositionalism.)

Modern man, paradoxically finds it difficult either to get serious or to play. Apart from God, he can find no real meaning in life, and so he cannot really get serious. He cannot face the reality of death and judgment, so he avoids the really serious issues of life. On the other hand, apart from God, he can find no true joy. Play, which is natural to the child of God, becomes work for him, and he frantically seeks new and more exotic forms of play.

Perversely, modern pagan man becomes most serious about his games. He cannot play at games at all. That is because *the pagan does not play for fun; he plays for glory and honor*. Periodically people are injured by mobs at sporting events. In recent years, two nations in Central America put their armed forces on stand-by after a particularly intense soccer match; fortunately, war was averted. Fistfights break out in bars during football games and boxing matches. International politics is inextricably tied to the sport of the Olympics. Famous athletes command incredible salaries.

Glory and honor are peculiar things, or perhaps it would be better to say they are a peculiar thing. Glory is social in character. People who have never even held a football share in the glory when their team wins. Glory is like clothing, and a person feels naked and embarrassed when his glory is removed. He feels shame, the opposite of glory.

When they lost their covering of glory in the Garden, Adam and Eve labored hard to recover themselves. (Note that word: recover.) When God exposed their nakedness, they turned to a form of violence, passing *blame* (abuse) to those around them. This is the lifestyle of all pagans. They labor hard to achieve glory and honor in the eyes of others. They become upset and even violent when their honor is shattered and their nakedness exposed. We cannot understand the place of sports in the modern world apart from this.

For the Christian, on the other hand, both play and seriousness arise from the sovereignty of God. God's sovereignty in Law means that all will be called to account, so that in His presence is fear. But God's sovereignty in control means that we can relax and enjoy life; in His presence is sabbath rest, joy, and play. These two things are put together expressly in Eccl. 11:9,10.

Moreover, Christians get their glory and honor from Christ; thus their engagement in play is *never for the purpose of acquiring glory. Christians play for fun, not for blood*. Because they are clothed in Christ's glory, Christians are free in both their work and their play. They both play more and are more serious than the pagans. One of the most noticeable things about a Christian community is the amount of playing and horsing around that goes on; non-Christians almost always remark on this.

The Bible gives its philosophy of play in Proverbs 8:30,31, which literally reads, "Then I was beside Him, a master workman; and I was daily His delight, playing always before Him, playing in the world, His earth, and having my delight in the sons of men." This is Wisdom, the pre-incarnate Christ, speaking. Notice how work and play are placed together before the throne of God. The same word for play is used of Samson's sporting in Judges 16:25 and of David's dance before the Ark in 2 Sam. 6:14. It is used of the play of Leviathan in the sea in Ps. 104:26, and of the play of children in Zech. 8:5. Thus, the play of Christians is an analogical replica of the play of the Son of God. It is

sheer fun and delight in the creation.

Indeed, at the annual Feast of Tabernacles, each family was directed to bring branches and build a shelter in which to live for seven days (Lev. 23:40-43). Try doing that with your children without having fun! God intended His people to relax and play in His presence.

Play was removed from the church after the Christian Middle Ages came to an end. Because the Church of Rome was using art as propaganda, the Protestants came to fear art and play. The influence of stoicism and neoplatonism worked further to destroy true play among the Protestant churches, though the Puritans were generally a joyous people. Luther's *Table Talk* is one of the last good examples of down-to-earth Christian fun and play.

Just as the subject of art in general needs to be rethought in our day, so does the subject of play. Christian schools should not encourage play in an agonistic or competitive spirit, for glory and honor. On the other hand, intramural play for fun probably needs to be rehabilitated in our circles.

AN EDUCATIONAL COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLE

By Rodney N. Kirby

No. 18: "Covenant and Education" (Genesis 15:1-21)

Christian schools are *covenant* schools. The children we educate are *covenant* children. This emphasis is very strong, especially in Reformed circles, in Christian education today. What does it mean? What are the implications? All too often, these terms are tossed about with little understanding, as if merely calling education *covenant* education somehow sanctified it.

This passage tells us a good deal about the nature of a covenant in the Bible. God made a promise to Abram concerning his descendants (vs. 5), and concerning the possession of the land of Canaan (vs. 7). We know that God cannot lie, and that He most certainly will perform whatever He has said. However, to impress upon Abram's mind the certainty of His promise, God told Abram to cut some animals in half and lay them on the ground, with space between the two halves (vs. 9-10). Then, God Himself walked between the two halves of the slain animals and repeated His promise (vs. 13-21).

This section would have been well understood by Abram and by readers in the time of Moses. It followed the pattern of most ancient Near Eastern covenant ratifications. The parties to the covenant walked between the two halves of slain animals, symbolically saying, "May I be slain and cut in pieces just like these animals, if I do not uphold the terms of this covenant." This is what God is telling Abram. As if God's Word were not sure enough, God swears, in effect, "May I be slain if I do not give your descendants all this land."

We gain insight into the true nature of a covenant here. There are basically three elements to a covenant. *First* are the stipulations, terms, or laws. This is seen here in verses 13-16 and 18-21. God says, "Here is what I am bound to do by this covenant." *Second* are promised blessings for obedience. This element is

not explicit here, although we will see it elsewhere. *Third* are promised curses for disobedience. This is shown symbolically here by the slain animals. If God were to violate this covenant, He would be slain as these animals were.

We can see these three elements elsewhere in Scripture. In Exodus 20 (which has many parallels with the ancient Near Eastern covenants) we have a listing of the stipulations—the 10 commandments. Also included are promised blessings for obedience (vs. 6,12), and promised curses for disobedience (vs. 5,7). In Deuteronomy 28, the stipulations are referred to (vs. 1), the blessings are listed (vs. 1-14), and then follow the curses (vs. 15-68). In the New Testament, we see Jesus (as He re-establishes the one covenant) listing blessings and curses, based upon obedience to certain stipulations (Luke 6:20-26).

The essential nature of a covenant (Biblically speaking) is *responsibility*. Those who are members of the Covenant have a greater responsibility than do others. God has spelled out very clearly what is required of them and has even given incentives (blessings and curses) to encourage obedience. Covenant membership does not imply *blessing*, but responsibility. A covenant member may come under either the blessings or the curse, and still be a member of the covenant.

Unfortunately, many Christian schools do not see this. They act as if covenant membership meant *blessing*. In doing so, they fall into the same trap as did the Jews throughout Scripture. They felt that, since they were in covenant with God, they were automatically heirs of the blessing. The prophets and apostles continually had to fight this attitude (see Rom. 2:13).

For example, some of the Bible material published by Christian Schools International (their "Revelation-Response" series) falls into this trap. (This basically good series has other problems as well. In one of the volumes, in a study of some post-Biblical saints, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther King are included "for their attempts to bring the renewal effects of Jesus upon society.") Several times in their lower elementary curriculum, workbook exercises are done which have the child write his name in the blank—"_____ loves God. _____ is God's child. Jesus died for _____." Underlying this kind of work is the notion that, since we have a covenant school, with covenant children, then we assume all the children are saved. This is a misunderstanding of the nature of the covenant, and so we must not assure all the children indiscriminately that they are God's children.

Many administrators of Christian schools feel that, since they have a covenant school for covenant children, they should restrict enrollment to children from Christian homes, or at least severely limit the number of children from unbelieving homes. However, based on the above understanding of "covenant," we may say that covenant children may be just as ungodly (if not more so) as non-covenant children. What we must see is that for a school to be a *covenant* school means it is under God's covenant requirements. It then seeks to impose God's covenant requirements on the student body. Anybody who is willing to obey these requirements may be admitted. Notice Ex. 12:48-49, and Numbers 9:14; the alien could place himself under the terms of the covenant.

In our school, all parents are required to sign a statement saying they will allow their children to be educated according to a Statement of Faith we send out (and that they will allow us to

spank their child). We do not ask that the parents agree with the Statement personally—just that they agree for their child to be taught that way. We have some parents (from the Apostolic church—one of our most enthusiastic supporters) who disagree with our Trinitarian view of God (they are Modalists). However, they agree for us to teach their children the Trinitarian faith.

Content

What are the implications of this for our curriculum? First, we must teach the Bible as covenant book. It is not an inspiring collection of stories (the way it is often presented in the lower grades). It is God's covenant book—giving (by explicit precept, by historical example, by parable, etc.) God's stipulations, blessing, and curses. Thus, as we read the historical books of the Bible, we do so keeping in mind, *first*, what are God's commands in this situation? *second*, what did the men do? and *third*, how did God respond to their actions?

Also, we must see all nations as being under the terms of the covenant. God made the covenant with Adam (as representative of all men), and reiterated it to Noah. *All* men are thus responsible to fulfill the covenant. This was true in the Old Testament as well as in the New. David, in Ps. 2, calls for the *kings* to worship and serve the Son. Since he was the king of Israel, David could only be calling on all nations of the earth to serve God. Paul in Rom. 13:4 and 6 calls the magistrate (outside of Israel) a minister (literally, a *deacon*) of God. As such, he is responsible to carry out God's covenant commands.

Thus, if any nation obeys God's law, it will be blessed. Conversely, God's curses will surely fall on any nation disobeying the covenant. America has been blessed by God in the past, and will surely be cursed in the future. All nations of the world show evidence of being the recipients of either God's blessings or His curses. This must be brought out in our classes.

Methods

When God makes a covenant with man, He makes everything clear ahead of time. God spells out what the requirements are, what the rewards will be, and what the punishments for disobedience will be. God does not operate *ex post facto*.

In the same way, the teacher must spell out her requirements and expectations. She must let the students know ahead of time what is expected of them—quality of work, quantity of work, etc. She also must let them know what will happen if they do or do not meet these requirements. "Poor handwriting or spelling will drop your grade a letter." "Extra credit for a good Christian analysis of this poem." The students must know what is expected of them.

God, being the absolute, sovereign Lord, does not bargain or negotiate with man over the terms of the covenant. Since the teacher is placed in authority by God over the students, she need not do so either. However, since she also is a fallible human being, she may use what is known as the "contract method" of arriving at course requirements. As modern educators use this, it has been corrupted. The students are given a free hand at drawing up their requirements, and the teacher goes along with anything. After all, if the students are naturally good, they will impose fair requirements on themselves. However, the Biblical teaching of depravity results in students getting by with doing next to nothing.

In a Christian school, the teacher must be the final arbiter as to course requirements. However, she could, say, draw up a list of options for the class to choose from. In a history class, the students could either read and report on several books, *or* do a research paper. They could do a research paper, incorporating in the content of the class lectures, *or* take the final exam. This would allow students with differing abilities to do that in which they excelled. One student may be able to read and digest several books, but not be too good at doing original research, while another may be just the opposite. Let them do what they do best, under the teacher's supervision. All too often, because it is easier on the teacher, we try to squeeze all students into the same mold, rather than encouraging them to branch out and grow. We must challenge and motivate them to be creative in the use of their God-given abilities.

Discipline

Remember what was said above (under "Methods"). Make sure rules and punishments are spelled out clearly ahead of time. Do not punish the students for something they did not know was wrong. (However, they will often know when they are doing wrong, even if it has not been spelled out ahead of time.)

Remember, too, that covenant children are still sinners, and in need of punishment. The fact that they are *covenant* children gives added leverage in carrying out punishment. "Johnny, you have not only disobeyed *me*, but you have disobeyed your *Lord*. God has chosen you to be in His covenant; how can you act this way toward Him?" I have had two children in Kindergarten who were hyperactive, and thus tended to get in trouble frequently. One came from a non-Christian home. She would get as many as two spankings a day, and still not change. The other came from a Christian (Pentecostal) home. She responded to such verbal admonition as mentioned above, and the one spanking she has gotten has made a world of difference in her behavior. Covenant children do have an advantage.

Also keep in mind that not all covenant children are *saved* children. They will need evangelism just like any other children. This is one of the most fundamental stipulations of the Covenant—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." We must not neglect to bring this home to our students, any more than we may neglect any other of God's commands. We want our covenant children to be *covenant-keeping* children. Let us constantly work and pray toward that end.

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