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INSTRUCTION - EDUCATION - EQUIPPING

Introduction

"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." (2 Pet. 3:18) God's people have to grow in knowledge, in service, dedication and obedience. In this chapter we will pay attention to the instruction, education, and equipping of the members of the congregation for service in God's Kingdom. It involves the children as well as the adults, formal as well as informal instruction.

1. Scripture

God has revealed Himself to us and thus we can know Him. He has revealed His will in His Word. In studying this Word we grow in knowledge. This knowledge begins with fearing the LORD and shows in loving Him from the heart. To know God and His will is gift of grace and a great treasure.

Prov 1:7-9

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline. Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching. They will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck.

Prov.3:13-18

Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better return than gold. She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who embrace her; those who lay hold of her will be blessed.

This instruction comes from the LORD

Ps 25:12

Who, then, is the man that fears the LORD? He will instruct him in the way chosen for him.

The Lord uses parents to teach.

Deut. 6: 4 - 9

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD; and you shall love the LORD you God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you lie down, and when you rise. And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Prov 4:1

Listen, my sons, to a father's instruction; pay attention and gain understanding.

The Lord also used others, prophets and priests. Samuel was instructed by Eli (1 Sam.2). The prophets had students (2 Kings2; Isa.8:16)

Lev 10:11

and you must teach the Israelites all the decrees the LORD has given them through Moses."

Ps 32:8

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.

The purpose of this instruction is to grow in knowledge and service.

Deut 4:9

Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.

Prov 9:9-10

Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

Ignoring this instruction leads to disaster.

Prov 5:11-13

At the end of your life you will groan, when your flesh and body are spent. You will say, "How I hated discipline! How my heart spurned correction! I would not obey my teachers or listen to my instructors.

Hosea 4:6

my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. "Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God, I also will ignore your children.

Also the N.T. shows us the need to grow in knowledge.

Col 1:10

And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,

Heb 5:11-6:3

We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And God permitting, we will do so.

2 Pet 1:5-8

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Pet 3:18

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

This growing in knowledge involves teaching.

Acts 15:35

But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord.

1 Tim 4:11

Command and teach these things.

The textbook for this teaching is the Bible and its goal is the service of God.

2 Tim 3:16-17

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

To know God is to love Him. Deepening in knowledge strengthens this love as well. The opposite is true as well, when knowledge grows shallow there is the danger that the love declines. Paul's prayer for the congregation at Philippi is telling.

Phil 1:9-11

And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruits of righteousness which come through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

2. Confession, Church Order, Forms

2.1. Heidelberg Catechism

The Catechism has as aim to teach the youth of the church. Thus it comes as no surprise that it speaks several times about knowledge. We were created to know God.

Q/A 6

Did God, then, create man so wicked and perverse?

No, on the contrary, God created man good and in His image, that is, in true righteousness and holiness, so that he might rightly know God his Creator, heartily love Him, and live with Him in eternal blessedness to praise and glorify Him.

Knowledge is renewed by faith, and is part of faith. Thus the Lord calls His people in the First Commandment to know Him and to ask for this knowledge in the First Petition. (underline mine, DA)

Q/A 21.

What is true faith?

True faith is a sure knowledge whereby I accept as true all that God has revealed to us in His Word. At the same time it is a firm confidence that not only to others, but also to me, God has granted forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness, and salvation, out of mere grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits. This faith the Holy Spirit works in my heart by the gospel.

Q/A 94.

What does the LORD require in the first commandment?

That for the sake of my very salvation I avoid and flee all idolatry, witchcraft, superstition, and prayer to saints or to other creatures. Further, that I rightly come to know the only true God, trust in Him alone, submit to Him with all humility and patience, expect all good from Him only, and love, fear, and honour Him with all my heart. In short, that I forsake all creatures rather than do the least thing against His will.

Q/A 103.

What does God require in the fourth commandment?

First, That the ministry of the gospel and the schools be maintained and that, especially on the day of rest, I diligently attend the church of God to hear God's Word, to use the sacraments, to call publicly upon the LORD, and to give Christian offerings for the poor. Second, that all the days of my life I rest from my evil works, let the LORD work in me through His Holy Spirit, and so begin in this life the eternal sabbath.

Q/A 122.

What is the first petition?

Hallowed be Thy Name. That is: Grant us first of all that we may rightly know Thee, and sanctify, glorify, and praise Thee in all Thy works, in which shine forth Thy almighty power, wisdom, goodness, righteousness, mercy, and truth. Grant us also that we may so direct our whole life -- our thoughts, words, and actions -- that Thy Name is not blasphemed because of us but always honoured and praised.

2.2. Canons of Dort

The perseverance of God's elect includes the use of means. This involves the study of God's Word.

Chapter 5, Article 14 The Use Of Means In Perseverance

As it has pleased God to begin this work of grace in us by the preaching of the gospel, so He maintains, continues, and perfects it by the hearing and reading of His Word, by meditation upon it, by its exhortations, threatenings, and promises, and by the use of the sacraments.

2.3. Church Order

Art. 16. The Office of the Ministers of the Word

also to instruct the children of the Church in the doctrine of salvation

Art. 27. False Doctrine

To ward off false doctrines and errors which could enter the congregation and constitute a danger to the purity of its doctrine or conduct, the minister and elders shall use the means of instruction

Art. 58. Schools

The consistory shall ensure that the parents, to the best of their ability, have their children attend a school where the instruction given is in harmony with the Word of God as the Church has summarized it in her Confessions.

2.4. Forms

Form for Baptism

Questions to Parents

Third, do you promise as father and mother to instruct your child in this doctrine, as soon as he(he) is able to understand, and to have him (her) instructed therein to the utmost of your power?

Form for Ordination of Elders and Deacons

To do their work well as shepherds of God's flock, the overseers should train themselves in godliness and diligently search the Scriptures, which are profitable in every respect, that the man of God may be equipped for every good work.

2.5. Prayers

A Prayer after the Sermon

We thank Thee, merciful God and Father, that Thou hast brought us to the knowledge of Thee and of Thy Son by Thy Spirit and Word and hast caused Thy Word to be proclaimed to us. Grant that we, having received Christ Jesus the Lord, may live in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as we were taught, abounding in thanksgiving

A Prayer before the Explanation of the Catechism

Heavenly Father, Thy Word is perfect, reviving the soul; Thy testimony is sure, making wise the simple. Thy gospel is the power unto salvation to everyone who believes. We, however, are by nature blind and incapable of doing any good. We beseech Thee, therefore, that Thou wilt illumine our darkened minds by Thy Holy Spirit.

A Prayer after the Explanation of the Catechism

Thou gavest pastors and teachers to equip the saints for their service to Thee, so that the body of Christ may be built up. We beseech Thee that Thou wilt continue to work in the hearts of all children of the covenant, both old and young, in order that we may grow in the knowledge of thy grace in Christ until we reach complete

maturity in Him. May we, by Thy power, not be tossed to and fro and carried with every wind of doctrine. Bless our families and endow the parents by Thy Spirit with the wisdom which is from above, that they may bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. We pray Thee for all teaching which is based upon Thy holy Word, as we have summarized it in the Confessions of the Church. Be with all who labour in it and provide them with that knowledge and wisdom which is rooted in the fear of thy name.

3. Goal

The members of the congregation have to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. They have to grow in knowledge and godliness. This requires oversight and instruction by the overseers. The overseers have to be equipped for this as well.

4. Home-School-Church

The instruction of the congregation takes place in many ways. It takes place in a formal as well as an informal setting. In this paragraph we will look at some of these elements. Using a well known-division we will pay attention to the instruction which takes place in the home, in school, and in the church.

4.1. Home

The home is the primary place for instruction. The vow given at baptism clearly indicates that the parents have the first obligation in educating the children. The Old Testament gives many examples of this instruction. By means of stones, customs and festivals the LORD made sure that parents spoke with their children about the mighty deeds and the will of the LORD. Parents are called to instruct the children in the doctrine of salvation. This is much more than an abstract and theoretical knowledge, rather it is the wisdom as Proverbs speaks about it. Parents have to help their children to apply the doctrine of salvation to their daily lives. This teaching should not stay in generalities. Of course, in order to do this parents themselves have to grow in knowledge as well. In this connection we do well to keep in mind that knowing God and His will involves our whole life. We should not separate life into a material and spiritual part. The material aspect of life is ruled by the spiritual and vice versa, the spiritual aspect of life shows in how we deal with the material things of life. Parents have the task to teach their children to follow the Lord in all of life. The media that are part of our lives do not always help us in this task, since they often promote a goal that clashes with the will of the Lord. The home visit is a means to ask about these things and to find out whether and how this instruction takes place.

4.2. Schools

Organized in societies the parents operate day schools, kindergarten, elementary and secondary schools. The establishing of the schools flows out of the promise given at baptism. Our children belong to the Lord and this has implication for their instruction. At baptism parents make the promise that the instruction of their children will be done in the fear of the LORD and in agreement with the doctrine of salvation as taught in the church. All decisions further in life about the education of their children has to be in line with the promise made at baptism.

The Reformed churches have always stressed the importance of sound instruction. The close bond between what is taught at home and in church led to the establishment of Christian day schools. We want our children to be taught in a way that is consistent with the teaching at home and in church. Not only do we need to maintain our schools, we also have to take care that the curriculum and training of teachers will help our schools. Curriculum development and teachers training need to be promoted. We do not support our schools because the public system is so bad, but because we want to teach our children that Christ is Lord in all of life. One more reason for establishing our schools is the realization that our children are part of the communion of God's people, and that, if at all possible, the education should take place within this communion. It is noteworthy that the Catechism (L.D. 38) mentions the schools in connection with the commandment to keep the Day of the Lord holy, and the call to maintain the ministry of the gospel. The schools help our children to function in the church and the worship of God's Name.

These schools are a great blessing to the churches. At the same time we must not close our eyes for some problem areas. It can happen that parents lose sight of their primary task as instructors. The schools can only function well when it is supported by the instruction at home. There is also the danger that we take for-granted having our own schools. We need to constantly make the members aware of the need for these schools. It would be good to make the younger generation aware of the reasons why their grandparents worked hard to establish these schools. A third danger is that the school is supported mainly by the parents of school age children. We need to stimulate the thought that the whole community supports the education of the children. A fourth area of concern is that although we have our own schools and our children are privileged to receive this instruction, the knowledge and lifestyle of the children do not always reflect this. It is important that if there are concerns in this regard they be brought to the Board in the proper way.

The schools which we maintain are operated by the parents as organized in the respective societies and boards. Council does not run these schools. Yet there is a connection between the schools and the church. Lord's Day 38 of the Catechism connects the schools to the ministry of the gospel. Art. 58 of the C.O. stipulates that the consistory must ensure that the education which the children receive is indeed in harmony with the promise made at baptism. It is note-worthy that this article is found in the part of the Church Order that speaks about the functioning of the church as the gathering of believers. This part speaks about the worship services and the use of the sacraments. This shows that the function of the school can be seen also in terms of the worship service. The children learn skills that help them to function as living members in the church. Another connection between school and church is that the true and complete doctrine of salvation in which the children have to be taught, is the doctrine that is preached in this Christian church. As parents we want our children to be taught in the true faith. The teaching in the school is to be done in accordance with the Word of God. This Word is administered and confessed by the Church. A third connection is the financial one. The education is to be supported by all members. The financial burden should not only fall on the shoulders of the parents, but should also be carried by the younger and older generation.

Article 58 of the Church Order indicates that the elders have an obligation with regard to the way in which parents fulfil their task. Elders indeed have to ask questions and judge the answers of the parents. The overseers can become involved in the financial matters as well. When a member fails to pay the required membership fee, the Board, usually contacts the parents. If there is no improvement the School Board should inform the consistory of this. The elders bring a visit to determine whether these parents are unwilling or unable to pay. If there is unwillingness then admonitions follow. If they are unable then the Deacons will be involved. A covenant child should not be expelled from school for financial reasons.

The last ten years has seen the development of home schooling. Christian parents who were sending their children to the public school became increasingly alarmed about the teaching their children received and started to teach their children at home. This has grown into a much larger movement, which promotes the idea that only parents should teach their children. In the situation where there is no Canadian Reformed school home schooling would be an option. In situations where there is Canadian Reformed education it becomes more problematic. It can happen that times parents opt for home schooling because they have a problem with the Board or a teacher. However, home schooling should not become an easy way out if one doesn't get his way. Financial reasons should not be a reason for home schooling either. But more importantly, to home school while there is the possibility to send the child to a Canadian Reformed day school runs counter to the principle that as a church community we belong together. It is true that in Bible the parents are instructed to teach their children, but that did not exclude the use of teachers. We need one another, also in running a school and educating our children. It is very well possible that parents can do an excellent job in teaching their children, but they will miss out on something more important, namely, to learn to function within the communion of saints. Home schooling can result in promoting a community that runs separate from the communion which the Lord gives.

In a situation of home schooling the elders should visit to find out the reasons. The elders have to explain why they do not favour home schooling. If the reasons given are not sufficient, they should not be afraid to show the parents their wrong. In addition, they must see to it that the instruction which the parents provide is in line with the promise given at baptism. Most of the home school curriculums are not Reformed. As we are developing Reformed curriculums, it doesn't make sense to seek the help of non-reformed sources.

4.4. Church

When we look at the task of the church to instruct and equip the members for service we can mention in the first place the preaching of the gospel. The church has been entrusted with the gospel and the proclamation of it. This proclamation has to build up the congregation in the knowledge of the truth and train God's people in godliness. (See 1 - 5 Preaching) In addition to this, there are several other ways in which this training takes place such as: catechism, home-visits, study societies. These are all discussed in other parts of this Handbook.

The instruction of the congregation also involves reading books, periodicals. Since there are many books available that claim to be Christian, but which do not maintain the Reformed teachings, a good church library is important.

5. Office bearers

The need for training and equipping applies also to the office bearers. The Form for Ordination refers to this as well. In order to do our work well, we need to train ourselves in godliness and diligently search the Scriptures. This should be done on a personal level. It can also be done together as overseers. This Handbook is one way of addressing this need. But there are other means possible as well, such as office bearers conferences and/or workshops.

The Scripture teaches us that when one aspires the office he aspires a noble task. We must encourage younger brothers to prepare for office. This is done in the men's society, but it could also be done in organizing study evenings for this purpose.

The minister's task is to teach and instruct, but he himself needs to be equipped as well. The elders do well to ask about this. Does he see the need for this himself? How does he do this? The budget contains a book allowance. This is done so that the minister can continue his study. Does he use it well? To stimulate such study it can be beneficial to give him time to study.

6. Evaluation

1. The discussion can deal with the Scriptural and confessional basis for this chapter, as well as the goal mentioned. Do we all agree on this? Are there points that have been overlooked?
2. How can we help the congregation to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus?
3. The evaluation can deal with the instruction that takes place at home, in school and in the church. How does this function? What is our task as office-bearers? How can we help the parents to teach their children? How is the bond between church and school? What is our approach to home schooling? How can we foster the awareness of why we establish our own schools? How can we stimulate the participation of the whole congregation in the schools?
4. With regard to the church: is there a good library? Does the library function well? How can we promote the use of a good library?

5. How do we as office-bearers train ourselves? Do we take the time for this? How can we prepare younger brothers for the office? Does the minister study? Does he have time to do this?
6. Are there points in this chapter that need our further attention? Why? How shall we do this?
7. Are there any concerns that need to be addressed as a result of this evaluation?
What are these concerns?
Why are they a concern?
What plan of action could be taken to address this?