

Education for the Kingdom of God
“Fundamentals of an Applied Theology: Education for
Christian liberty”
For the October 2002 Chalcedon Report

Ronald Kirk
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Dr. Rushdoony observed that a liberal education historically meant learning the art of life in a free society. The term *liberty under law* aptly summarizes the Biblical view. Here, liberty means full godly obedience. For the one governed by the law of liberty, God increasingly inhibits sinful internal impulses. As the ability for godly self-government grows, God increasingly inhibits the tyranny of man. By faith, man becomes a slave to Christ—wherein is true liberty. Jesus promised an abundant life. Success in living, a down payment on eternity, manifestly testifies of God’s wisdom in granting grace to sinful men. A true Christian education prepares the individual to live for God on *His* terms, with the blessings of life and liberty following in due season.

Here is a brief introduction to the fundamentals of an applied Biblical theology leading to the art of life. They represent a concise Biblical confession of human responsibility before God. Mastering them means possessing a working set of principles remarkably comprehensive of the Biblical faith. These principles can guide the Christian’s thought and decision-making for every human concern and endeavor. For the inspired, earnest and intrepid believer, the following Biblically derived and historically manifest principles offer a powerful and accessible discipline toward a Gospel fulfilled life.

The Triune God, His Creation and Individuality

Intellectual attempts to understand the universe apart from God inevitably lead to the bizarre combination of personal license and totalitarian civil government. Regardless of philosophical or religious justification, or the absence thereof, the results are the same: The sin nature declares itself sovereign and the center of the universe. Others must serve Me, my needs and desires. As the influence of sin mounts and becomes institutionalized, the powerful subjugate the weak, while the lazy evade difficulty and seek as much comfort as possible. The pagan heart and mind can never rightly reconcile the One and the Many without schizophrenia. In the higher order philosophical development of the ancient cultures, wholeness and meaning existed in dialectic tension with chaos, death, destruction, and perversion. It is the *yin yang* of the Orient, and the *Force* of Star Wars. Debauchery becomes a way of life in such a culture, because chaos supposedly feeds order and meaning.¹

On the other hand, Biblical Christians may rest perfectly content with the *apparent* contradictions between individuality and diversity. This is so because we know that God’s handiwork in creation merely reflects His being. God is at once, One and Three. We do not understand, but we accept. Upon accepting God on His terms, life makes sense. We accept our spiritual nature in earthy bodies. We accept my individuality and yours, as created in the image of God. We accept peace and excitement, fulfillment and a thirst for life, difficulty and ease. Such tensions are not antithetical since diversity and change do not equate to chaos. Moreover, we accept good and evil, the true antithesis, because all things work together for the good. Evil loses. Christ reconciles all things in Himself (2 Cor. 5:19).

Thus, we observe God’s principle of individuality. According to this fundamental truth of creation, God created everything in the universe as an identifiable *whole* of some kind. God maintains relationship between every individual entity in the universe, directly or indirectly. This principle provides a seed for understanding both human relationships and the material creation. *Individuality* essentially means *unity* or *oneness*. *Unity* means *separation* from others. Individuality also implies *wholeness*. We distinguish wholeness from damage, brokenness and impurity. An impurity destroys wholeness, as an infected

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body or poisoned water. The Biblical and English words *sanctity* and *holiness* correspond to this understanding.

Noah Webster says, “Unity may consist of a simple substance or existing being, as the soul; but usually it consists in a close junction of particles or parts.” In nature, only subatomic particles appear to be truly simple in substance. Therefore, a fundamental premise of individuality declares every individual to be made of constituent parts, themselves wholes of some kind. The mathematical fraction highly approximates individuality in nature, as a fractional part is a whole of another kind, as in a third of a yard or a quarter of a gallon. Similarly, every individual is a part of some greater identifiable whole. The very term *universe* recognizes the ultimate orderly collection of the created one and many before God.

Man, from the beginning, found his wholeness or holiness, solely in covenantal relationship to God. Man fell by his assumption of truth apart from God and His Word. Man finds restoration to wholeness solely in availing himself of renewed relationship with God through Christ by faith. Certain clear rules of relationship emerge from individuality. We recognize the mutual image of God in us, and therefore the fundamental sanctity of human life. Thus, we possess a moral responsibility to one another. “Owe nothing except love.” Men must honor the liberty of other individuals. God is no respecter of persons. All Christian manners and America’s relational institutions based in liberty owe their existence to the implications of true individuality before God.

Applied to the nature, individuality provides the great organizing principle. Science consists largely in arranging the parts of any area of study into a coherent whole, defining clear relationships between them. The science of any subject is important to a fulfillment of its art. Thus, music consists in pleasant sounds taken in order—melody—and pleasant sound taken at the same time—harmony. Melody and harmony constitute two fundamental elements of music. A mastery of these in relationship to one another provides the knowledge needed to make music. Similarly, a mathematical ratio and a graph are statements of relationship between individuals of different kinds. Counting, addition and subtraction are statements of relationship among like kinds.

An accomplished understanding and use of godly individuality is the most powerful tool of knowledge and Christian dominion. For example, individuality guides the sound curriculum plan, the parts reconciled to the whole. Individuality applied to relationship reflects the commandment to love, and guides its particular expressions. The next principles articulate further expressions of individuality in both spiritual and practical terms.

The Need of and Capacity for Self-Restraint

Due to the nature of the Fall—a self-centered view of life which makes everything revolve around Me—righteous treatment of God and my neighbor is extremely difficult. I am very ready to grant myself liberty, license really, while exacting a much higher standard of others. Therefore, Christian love and general liberty demand self-restraint above everything else. Such self-restraint means treating people well when they are nasty. It means laying my life down for my wife as Christ did for the church. It means graciously conceding a lost political battle for the moment while trusting God to restore right in due season. Consider the proverbial good medieval knight. In single combat, though the bad knight used every ploy to achieve victory, the good knight would cease the fight to hand back his adversary’s

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dropped sword. He knew that, not the strong arm of the flesh, but a righteous appeal to Heaven decided the battle. Providence decides the victory. Simply put, the ends do not justify the means, but rather the means must be in perfect harmony with godly ends. While personal liberty to serve God is certainly the rule, successful self-restraint avoids presumption and unnecessary offense.

God provides the capacity for self-restraint; yet its reality comes by faith. In other words, one undertakes the discipline and practice of self-restraint until by God’s grace the Holy Spirit makes godly personal liberty a second nature—the Law of God written on the heart. Personal practice produces an influence on others. General liberty then appears in a community that generally practices self-restraint. For education, this means systematic training in self-restraint toward the task, regardless of personal whims. The student accepts the learning process to please God and receive the reward of accomplishment in due season.

A Strength of Heart Prepared for Liberty

Trials are necessary to the hope of the Gospel, for trials produce character. This is the fundamental premise of godliness: all true character is *proven* character (the Greek term used in Rom 5:4). Adam failed due to the lack of godly character. As part of restoration, God calls Christians to acquire character in adversity. When mature, true character will stand in any circumstance. Much of the requirement of this life amounts to character training. Character grows through self-restraint in relationships, through the trials of learning new skills, and through Christian enterprise as a stewardship for Christ. Every trial accepted in faith builds character. God comforts those willing to accept discipline.

God’s Assigned Work

Rather than seek a merely heavenly or spiritual being, as Dr. Rushdoony notes, God’s people must abide in the earth. However temporary our station in this life, it is nonetheless the beginning of eternity. We should learn to live for God in adversity, so that we may live forever with Him upon a proven faith in perpetual glory. However, work is central to this glory. Adam worked before the Fall, though without toil. Isaiah identifies every Christian ultimately sitting under his own vine and his own fig tree. Jesus suggests in Matthew 25 that reward for a faithful job well done is *more* work, *more* responsibility (vss. 21 and 23).

The commonly used word *stewardship*, originally taking care of the *sty* for one’s Master, is apt. Stewardship assumes a sphere of authority. Good stewardship requires a sound conscience, void of offense. How can one righteously handle the things which are God’s if sin corrupts the conscience? Training and correcting a godly conscience is thus a principle goal of Christian education. Parents must not wait for a child to feel sorry for his wrong before requiring confession, restitution and reconciliation.

The sciences (learning) and arts (applied skills) are legitimate and required endeavors. Every accomplishment upon a self-consciously and Biblically educated faith contributes to the Gospel, because it magnifies God to the world. “Truth shall spring out of the earth” declares apology for natural science (Ps. 85:11-12). God’s choosing the Tabernacle architects by name for their clever design and craftsmanship abilities likewise defends the creative arts. The maintenance of civil liberty, where God once grants it, constitutes a great stewardship responsibility. “To whom much is given much is required.” Every subject must be redeemed in the hands of the redeemed.

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As Doctor Rushdoony often observed, the Christian does not properly consider the earth evil, as did the ancient Greek. God made the earth good, but, like man, it requires deliverance (Romans 8:21). God uses redeemed man to reclaim the earth for Him. God grants an economy of difficulty, but one designed to yield to faithful effort. Life and the created world are harmonious in Christ, not antithetical. The world is won by faith. Present difficulty is a construct and discipline of God designed to lead us to entire trust in Him, to prepare us for eternity, and to make an effective contribution to Christ’s Kingdom, ministering to others’ lives.

Appropriate Forms for Christian Workmanship

Every entity in God’s creation takes a form appropriate to its constitutive qualities. A stone is hard and unyielding because of its molecular structure. Jesus said, “You know a tree by its fruit.” That is, you know the internal quality based on its expression. This truth holds ramifications for the Christian in two ways—in appropriate human relations and in appropriate expressions of labor.

First, godly men ought to live free and yet in community. To protect liberty, voluntary association, and to encourage community, God provides certain principles to govern relationships. These, necessarily without elaboration here, include *association by covenant*, which is agreement before God; *economic representation or specialization* according to gifts and calling (1 Cor. 12); and *federalism*—acknowledging both independent, peer relationships, and relationships involving authority. Authority relationships are always limited in scope, according to their covenanted purpose. Many separate and overlapping local authority relationships exist. Because covenant establishes authority, reciprocation of power characterizes authority relationships. Thus, I choose my civil representative and then submit to him in his sphere. A general understanding and practice of these Biblical principles lead to the miracle of lasting and loving attachments, in the context of general peace and good will. (The negative law of civil justice intervenes when ordinary relationships fail. Justice, a crucial aspect of governmental form is beyond the scope of this article.)

Second, a principle of appropriate expression guides the form our work takes. What glorifies God in our product? What reflects the excellence of Christ in us? What will exert the greatest influence for Christ in our ways? Should Christians slavishly follow worldly musical fashion, for example, or should Christians master music on God’s terms, while seeking appropriate new forms? Should the natural sciences follow the godless path of the last century, or should we seek new models based on Biblical presuppositions? Should Christians be the creative heads or the slavish tails in human endeavors? This principle suggests that discoverable Biblical principles ought to direct all of our creative and productive activities. Our work should then become increasingly refined, beautiful, useful and excellent. Moreover, our attitudes toward the world become positive and solution oriented, as opposed to negative and merely critical.

Reproduction

This principle is fundamental to Christian endeavor. It lies at the heart of the Great Commission and “hastening the day.” It includes, of course, the basic evangelical premise of the faith, the Good News, but seeks much more. Reproduction requires two constituents: the Seed and the Soil. The Seed is God’s Word. Biblical content interprets and guides empirical learning. No other foundation serves.

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Certainly, Christians ought not to assume an understanding of human conduct on the mere basis of observation. Modern psychology thus walks by sight, not by faith. Reproduction also requires good soil, prepared for its purpose. Good living in every corner of our existence both fulfills God’s blessings of life as a preview of eternity and constitutes the effective influence of the Gospel. Culture is important. Life is important. All human activities represent potential contributions to God’s purpose, and ought to be redeemed in the hands of the redeemed.

A vision for a fulfilled faith, an applied Biblical theology, ought therefore to found the Christian’s every educational effort. Effective methods, because they reflect man’s image of God and his need of conversion, must be re-implemented. The other principles outlined here represent fundamentals toward such an educational method. Jesus said, “Learn of Me” (Matt. 11:29).

Love is the Highest Expression

The final principle brings us full circle to the first. Individuality in right relationship constitutes the principle of unity and union. Our unity lies in Christ. Our union lies in patient and forbearing acceptance of our neighbor as God made him. The only test for church or civil relationship is the violation of particular Biblical commandments. The greatest miracle of human life is the ability to dwell in peaceful union without pressures to conform compromising individuality. Once more, applying the principles of self-restraint and practicing the principles that rightfully govern human relationship establish the basis, by faith, of peaceful co-existence. The key to the success of godly union is the general practice of Biblical love as defined by passages such as Galatians 5 and the book of 1 Corinthians.

As with every other worthwhile endeavor, love is at first a discipline, an exercise of faith. Clearly, love is the highest requirement of the Gospel and its best expression. Christians ought to make every effort to learn charity in practice, to learn what godly love would do in every situation.

Effective Living

As a Christian educator for over twenty years, I have found these principles a true and effective core of applied theology. Spawned from the basic doctrines of the faith, particularly as identified in the historic Reformed expressions, these principles matured in early America. Forged from the trials of life, they formed the basis of our faith and morality-based free market and federal, constitutional, representative republic. The willing student will consistently discover these principles everywhere associated with the good fruit of the faith. The decline of these principles has led to our secularization, and evangelical and cultural decline. If we will once more, in the context of earnest devotion to Christ, learn to love Christian liberty, endeavor to master these principles conceptually, identify them in the circumstances of ordinary life, and endeavor to apply them in ordinary and extraordinary circumstances, the generations will see the promised growth of the Kingdom of God. In thus skillfully practicing the Two Commandments of Christ as a self-conscious way of life, God will be glorified, and we will receive His promised blessings.

¹ See Rousas J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1978).