

Viruses That Are Killing Christian Schools

-Tom Garfield

“Virus” – n., a poison, 1. Any of a large group of tiny infective agents causing various diseases, 2. Any harmful influence

One of the tangential, but significant results of our four national A.C.C.S. conferences has been to make me painfully aware of the sorry state of Christian education in the United States. We hear from parents, teachers, administrators and board members from literally all points of the compass at these conferences. The most recently completed conference in Raleigh, North Carolina, had more than four hundred attendees, most coming for the first time. (Not too surprising really, considering the accessibility of Moscow, Idaho, to the rest of the nation!) As at the three preceding conferences, these delegates shared with us (unsolicited) sad to awful stories about the Christian schools in their locale. One of the most common comments I’ve heard far too many times goes like this: “We would be happy to send our children to the Christian school near us, but it is little different than the public schools. Biblical convictions and worldviews are not practiced or even promoted.”

After hearing numerous accounts of Christian school problems, and seeing some firsthand, I’ve compiled just a few of the more severe illnesses often afflicting these schools:

Admission Fever: Evidenced by a low grade of student morale, and constant, chronic problems with discipline and poor attitudes among the students. Behaviors typically seen in government schools are also evident in Christian schools with this illness. Most often brought on by administrators and boards succumbing to budget pressures and admitting problem students. Can also be brought on by the lack of a restraining, definitive statement regarding admission standards, i.e. a clear picture of the kind of students desired. Some Christian schools even deny the disease by thinking they are “being a godly influence on needy kids.” **TREATMENT:** Immediately establish precise, consistently high standards for student acceptance, behavior, and expulsion. Follow those measures up with expelling the students that will not comply with the standards. And for the future, be ready to “just say NO” to an unhealthy application.

Verbiage Disorder: Most often evidenced by parents and staff members not being able, or possibly not knowing how to control their speech. Can produce extremely irritating rashes or outbreaks of discontent among all school members. Watch for hotbeds of talk about school or class issues that upset people, but no positive and biblical action is advocated by any of the participants. More delight seems to come from discussion than real treatment. This is sometimes excused by the fear of confrontation, or thinking that they are just “sharing concerns.” Other terms for this affliction are: Gossip, Discontentment, Lack of Submission to Authority, Spreading Strife, Loose Tongue Disease. **TREATMENT:** Repentance is always a good medicine for this illness (and many others), followed up by creating and adhering to prescriptive policies that allow for the biblical addressing of concerns.

Biblical Botulism: Certainly one of the most virulent diseases afflicting Christian schools. When manifested in a school, it has been known to breakdown the resistance even Christian students have to wholesale pagan thinking. Often allowed to enter under the guise of “spiritually training the students” without adequate regard to the biblically-established authorities, i.e. the family and the church. Evidenced by an abundance of “Christian” posters, stickers, banners, flags, songs, and themes, and little substantive emphasis on biblical thinking and living. This mishandling, or poor preservation of the pure gospel is readily apparent in a school when students and teachers speak and think lightly of the Lord’s Name, His Word, biblical apologetics, and consistent Christian behavior in all situations (see Admission Fever). **TREATMENT:** This is so serious that it calls for a complete

reexamination of the school's philosophy, goals, mission statement, admissions policy, etc. in light of Scripture. A realignment of recognized authorities and the school's primary purposes may be necessary. Otherwise the school may be inadvertently inoculating many students against Christianity.

As I stated above, these are just a few of the more serious viruses. There are many others, but these are presented out of a real concern for our sister schools who labor in our Lord's Name. May we all be blessed with the ability to see our work and its results in a right, biblical manner. Your prayers and constructive input for any Christian school you know are critical for its life and health.