

Elementary!

by Patch Blakey

“Elementary, my dear Watson.” Thus we remember Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s famous detective commenting condescendingly to his faithful yet less observant companion. The implication of Holmes’ statement is that what he deduced was simple, easy, based on readily apparent facts. But *elementary* has another connotation, one that doesn’t necessarily conjure up thoughts of base triviality.

In the book of Hebrews, the author states, “Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment” (Heb. 6:1-2). These *elementary* principles of Christ, repentance, faith, baptism, laying on of hands, resurrection, and eternal judgment are called elementary principles. But they are not simple or easy concepts, as the author makes clear when he later writes that he will press on from these, “if God permits.” The author uses the term elementary, not as implying the trivial nature of these principles, but rather the *foundational* aspect of them.

A similar misperception often occurs with regard to those who teach in the elementary or grammar stage at classical Christian schools. Because we see or think of young children in these grades, it is a simple step to conclude that what is imparted is easy or childish, much like the old basal readers: “See Jane run. See Spot run. Run, Spot, run!” But this is not the case, as can be readily

attested to by any parent who has observed the grammar classroom instruction of their young children.

Having been a part of five different accreditation visits this past academic year, I am continually amazed by what the teachers in the grammar classrooms are accomplishing with their students. I have observed first graders who were able to accurately identify the parts of a sentence and to read far above the level of the insipid basal readers of my first grade experience.

I have also witnessed children who have memorized vast quantities of valuable information and who are able to recite it accurately at a moment’s notice. These children are well-behaved, organized, cheerful and eagerly engaged with their instructors in the lesson at hand. The grammar stage education in a classical Christian school is indeed elementary, but more in the vein of foundational rather than trite. This level of education is preparing children for the next stage of their education, the dialectic stage where the focus or emphasis is on logic (and that is not to imply that the grammar stage is devoid of logic).

The articles that are provided in this issue of *Classis* focus primarily on the grammar stage, and for the most part, are written by grammar stage teachers. Some of these teachers I have had the privilege to observe in their classrooms during an accreditation visit and was humbly overwhelmed by their loving but firm classroom control. The kind of teachers that are serving in the grammar stage classrooms of classical Christian schools have invested

a lot of effort in mastering their instructional art. They love their students, the subjects they teach, and most of all, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is not the sort of teacher training that comes from pursuing a degree in elementary education at a state college.

At the heart of all that goes on in a grammar stage classroom is a strong, positive respect and appreciation for the Word of God. Moses commanded the parents in ancient Israel, “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up” (Deut. 6:6-7). Apart from a sound knowledge and understanding of the Bible, these schools would only be creating *classically trained* students, which would ultimately lead us back to the very sort of godless culture we have today. But we want better for our children and for their children. We want children that grow up with a hunger to learn about all of God’s creation and to evaluate all that they read and hear in light of the Scriptures.

The grammar stage at ACCS schools does indeed provide an *elementary* education, but it is not simplistic, it is *foundational*.

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