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Digging wells for our children to drink from.

(A message preached at a teachers' day of prayer in Portadown FPC, May 14th, 2016, by Rev Ivan Foster. [Click here](#) to listen to a recording of the message.)

"And Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham: and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them," Gen 26:18

This portion of God's Word is illustrative of the ongoing struggle that each succeeding generation of believers must engage, in if they are to enjoy the benefits of the covenant of grace.

- That which ensures that there is an ongoing struggle is the unchanging enmity of the enemies of God's people. Conquered by one generation of believers, they will rise up to challenge the next. Isaac found this to be so. "The Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham".
- Here in Ulster, the establishing and successfully running of independent Christian schools is central to that ongoing struggle.

I wish to apply this portion of God's Word to that aspect of God's work in Ulster today.

Learn:—

I. WE ARE ENGAGED IN A SEARCH FOR THAT WHICH IS FUNDAMENTAL TO THE LIFE OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Isaac and his family were the visible church in their day. In the face of the Philistine's expulsion, they were looking for water. The alternative was death.

Let me apply that to Christian Education.

1. Christian Education is no mere adornment. It is as vital for the future well-being of the Church as water is in Israel. Non-Christian Education produces non-Christians! Exceptions are rare, but such is the mercy of God that of His mercy exceptions do occur, but they must never be used to suggest that we can defy God's revealed will with impunity.

2. The problems that beset the Church today require more than mere fine tuning. It is not a matter of a little more imagination, a change of format for our services — there is no substitute for water nor is there a substitute for getting our children out from under the soul-destroying influence of the world's lying philosophy. There is a CRISIS. Here in Northern Ireland, Sinn Fein has controlled the Education Department for years! Just think of that! That band of political cut-throats having charge of the education of children and yet Christian parents are happy to entrust their offspring to such a system.

3. Death will ensue if we do not succeed in our search for wells of water. Christian education must succeed. If we do not open wells for our children then they will perish. Hagar in Genesis 21:15, illustrates this point. Her child was doomed to die without water. That situation which faced the Israelites in Egypt faces us today. The enemy is planing the death of our offspring and making inroads! It reminds me of the spirit that there was amongst the careless Israelite fathers in the days of Pharaoh. "Till another king arose, which knew not Joseph. The same dealt subtilly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live," Acts 7:18-19. The fathers 'cast out their young children, to the end they might not live.' That is what many Christian parents are actually doing today. They place their children under the foul and ungodly teaching of the state system with its evolution, its accep-



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tance of sodomy etc. What other than death can be the outcome of such folly? We see declining sensitivities amongst the young regarding the evil of sodomy. It is increasingly evident that sodomy is increasingly accepted as a lifestyle and the world's view, which they encounter in the schools, is what they are embracing!

CHRISTIAN CHILDREN ARE TAUGHT NOT TO SIN AT HOME AND CHURCH AND THEN SENT TO SCHOOLS WHERE TO SUCCEED THEY MUST SIN!!!

This is abominable and must bring a tragic harvest.

II. CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IS NO NEW THING

When we are in trouble, the direction we turn in for help shows the disposition of our hearts. Peter, "beginning to sink," turned and cried to the Lord saying, "Save me," Matt 14:30. Isaac turned to the source of water his father had discovered, doubtless under God's merciful guidance.

In seeking to start Christian schools, we are only returning to that which our fathers did before under God.

1. As the well was instituted of God for the supply of water, so is the Christian school instituted as a source of life to children. As wells were part of the heritage of Israel, Deuteronomy 6:11, so Christian Education has ever been part of the Christian's heritage. Teaching of children is essential for the continuance of faith. "Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers giveth you . . . Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons," Deuteronomy 4:1, 9. Is it not true that the very laws God demands we teach our children are the laws rejected in modern schools?

2. We seek only that which has been instituted of God. "For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations," Numbers 23:9. We are a separated people and we must keep our children separated also. The raising of our children in the knowledge of God and keeping them from the influence of the world is a fundamental requirement of God's law. "And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them," Esther 3:8. It was meant to injure the people of the Jews in the eyes of the king but it was close to the true nature of God's people. "Their laws are diverse from all people."

3. We seek only that which has blessed former generations. The nation of Israel, the apostles, the leaders of the great Protestant Reformation - all promoted Christian Education. All saw it as essential for the survival, the success of the cause of TRUTH. The Bible-dominated classroom has been a beneficial institution in this land. We seek only its restoration.

III. CHRISTIAN EDUCATION CAN ONLY BE ESTABLISHED THROUGH MUCH HARD WORK

Digging a well is a good illustration! It is hard work and made more so by the fact that Isaac was met with hostility, verse 15! This world is no friend to grace or to God. Though subdued by God for our fathers in former times, it will take the first opportunity to rise up again, Gen 21:25. It is an ongoing battle. No benefit bestowed upon a former generation may be enjoyed without a renewed struggle by the present generation.

1. Recovery of lost blessings is always difficult. We learned this in the 60s! There is much rubbish to be cleared away, Neh 4:10. Calvary shows us how difficult it is to recover lost blessings. What a price the Saviour paid to recover the blessings lost by Adam's sin! What labour our Saviour undertook to buy back paradise!

2. There is a period when work seems in vain. A well is a narrow place to work in. Only so many may



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work in a well. Water may not be seen for some time. So it is with Christian Education. Its benefits may never be seen by the labourer for they may take place far away from the classroom in later years.

3. The knowledge that there is water here will, however, sustain the labourer. "...forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord," 1 Corinthians 15:58.

Isaac knew there was water for he had seen it in the days of his father. There is water there my friends. We must but dig for it.

IV. IT IS NOT ENOUGH FOR US TO RETURN TO THE OLD FOUNDATIONS, WE MUST BUILD UPON THEM

The old paths were made for walking in not standing upon and admiring.

1. It is all too easy to rejoice in re-opening a well and leaving the matter there. Let each one of our schools be the means of promoting the interests of Christian education. Let them issue the challenge to PARENTS, TEACHERS, MANAGEMENT, MINISTERS AND ELDERS everywhere on this vital issue.

2. We ought to labour to leave behind much more than we inherited. When we pass on the torch, let it be brighter than when we received it.

3. To do this will mean strife and struggle. "And the herdmen of Gerar did strive with Isaac's herdmen, saying, The water is ours: and he called the name of the well Esek; because they strove with him," Genesis 26:20. But in the end, the Lord made room for Isaac. "And he removed from thence, and digged another well; and for that they strove not: and he called the name of it Rehoboth; and he said, For now the LORD hath made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land," Genesis 26:22.

May we all see a day when there is room for Christian Education amongst our congregations.

To this end let us give ourselves to prayer.