

## **A Heart of Humility: The Teacher-to-Teacher Relationship in a Christian School Environment**

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We all know about the advantages of Christian education, including excellent test results and the godly character developed in students when Christian families and strong churches work together to provide both biblical instruction and training in worldview issues. Some have even described Christian schools as an oasis in the dry, thirsty, barren culture of postmodernism and relativism. And as a Christian school educator for 13 years, I have experienced many benefits of working in a ministry with fellow believers.

In reflecting on these strengths of Christian schools, I keep coming back to the word *environment*. In a sense, Christian school classrooms, facilities, curricula, and teachers look similar to those found in any other private or government school. Therefore, a foundational distinctive must be a commitment to apply the truth of Scripture to educational settings.

A unique blessing of a Christian school is the coming together of a Christian faculty. One common attribute among Christian schools is a commitment to find, hire, train, and use educators who profess a commitment to Christ. It is this bond of believers that provides the foundation for a working environment that is unique in the professional world. If faculty members succeed in living out biblical standards and successfully pursuing a deeper relationship with their Savior, the environment of a school becomes a supernatural atmosphere of both growth and kingdom-building moments of eternal significance.

However, God's Word teaches us that there is no perfect school environment. We know that even with the best of intentions, saints are sinners saved by grace. We anticipate problems, having the light of Scripture to teach us how to respond to these situations. We should not be dismayed or discouraged when flaws show up in any system. They encourage us to fix our eyes on the Savior and to long for the day of the new heaven and earth.

Problems can impact the relationship of teachers with their colleagues, just as they can impact relationships with students or parents. Pressures of life can exacerbate seemingly small issues and create a sense of intense need and isolation. End-of-the-semester fatigue as well as paperwork overload can cause even the quietest souls to lash out in frustration. Christian educators can fall victim to deeds of the flesh, including bitterness, jealousy, selfishness, gossip, outbursts of anger, and a host of other sins. Scripture is very clear that we are not to practice these works of the flesh (Galatians 5:16–21).

Instead, Christian school personnel need to put into practice biblical standards of relationships, a practice that not only models a victorious and living relationship with Christ but also deepens and strengthens the environment of a school. In meditating on this subject, I considered both the many attributes of effective, dynamic relationships encouraged by Scripture and the many passages that outline effective, honest, vibrant relationships. The last five commandments deal with our relationships with others, and the Sermon on the Mount is full of powerful teachings on biblical attitudes toward others. All of these attributes and passages should be studied, meditated on, and applied in order to effectively enhance the relationships of teachers in a Christian school environment. One attribute that seems to be a foundational attitude toward effective relationships is biblical humility: “Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be *clothed with humility*, for ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time” (1 Peter 5:5–6, NKJV, italics added).

Faculty members are to pursue biblical humility under the umbrella of Christian love. This endeavor includes a commitment to submit to God, eliminating self-promotion and selfish ambition. This attitude of humility builds a firm foundation for developing and fostering relationships that cause the world to marvel. Humble people contribute to a positive environment; they are calm in stressful situations and approachable.

Humility destroys the very core of sinful human nature—pride. A proud person is hard to love and is incapable of loving anyone other than self. Biblical history is full of God’s wrath against human pride. We see it dealt with in individuals and nations. Pride promotes factions and dissensions, and it fuels bitterness and isolation.

What are some of the benefits of humility in a school environment? First, humility generates a spirit of unity and cooperation. Truly humble people seek a common good instead of personal desires. When teachers care more about improving the mission of the school than about their personal agendas, they create a great sense of community and cooperation. Teachers are more willing to volunteer and sacrifice when the Spirit has given them a heart of humility. I have observed in our school a teacher who always checks to see whether our detention hall has a teacher to monitor it. Occasionally, faculty members forget that it is their turn to monitor this hour before school. I have known this teacher to fulfill the duty willingly and never mention it to the other teacher. When a faculty seeks biblical humility, there is unity within the entire school.

Second, biblical humility promotes honesty in communication. Truly humble people speak the truth in love and listen in love to truth. When receiving admonition, a humble person remains patient and demonstrates forbearance. I know of a faculty member who was confronted by an explosive parent. I watched with admiration as this teacher accepted the criticism with sincerity and love. This gentle spirit calmed the wrath of the parent, and a useful discourse of the situation resulted. By the end of ten minutes, the parent was apologizing for having incorrect information and an ungodly attitude. Humble people can also show great courage in speaking truth when it may not be politically

expedient to do so. These types of people eliminate political environments that so easily enslave a school.

Third, biblical humility provides a framework for understanding and forgiveness. When we are humble, we can understand a situation because we are able to feel love and compassion. And with humility, we can practice forgiveness, the winning edge of Christian relationships. All successful, long-term relationships depend on practicing biblical forgiveness: forgiving because Christ has forgiven us. I know of both a teacher who practiced biblical forgiveness toward a man who murdered his brother and another faculty member who experienced the peace and victory of forgiving someone who killed her father. These are extreme circumstances, accomplished by a supernatural outpouring of God's spirit. They serve, however, as a model for us to forgive when wronged. "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32). If faculty members practice this kind of forgiveness, supported by a heart of humility, they will see a dramatic impact on the atmosphere of their school.

This school year, make a commitment to build others up and worry less about yourself. Ask the Lord for a heart full of true, biblical humility.