

CHRISTIAN *School* COMMENT

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BURSTING THE "BUBBLE"

It's a question many Christian parents have asked: By having my kids attend a Christian school, am I nurturing them and equipping them for life in secular society, or am I potentially harming them by shielding them from it? Jay Ferguson, headmaster of Grace Community School (Tyler, Texas), addresses that question head-on in this issue. I hope you'll consider his excellent points.

One of the criticisms I hear most often lodged at Christian schools is that they're "bubbles": sterile environments shielded from the harsh reality of the world. They think Christian schools leave kids unprepared for the challenges of the real world, or unprepared to engage the culture.

Having seen generations of alumni leave Grace and live a decade or more beyond the "bubble," I find that perspective to be way off the mark. My observations are bolstered by research from Cardus, a research think tank whose recent studies have revealed that graduates of private Christian schools have more close ties with others outside their immediate context than students of other schools. They are just as likely to know public officials, community leaders, and corporate executives—if not be such leaders themselves. The idea that the "bubble" leads to isolation is a myth.

Here are some thoughts as to why I think that is, offered in humble defense of the "bubble"—or, perhaps, to burst it once for all. I cannot speak for all Christian schools; I just know what we're trying to do here by God's grace.

A Framework for Viewing Life

In our school, kids see all of life. In age-appropriate ways, they are exposed to history, literature, and science in all of their grandeur and depravity. Just like in other schools, but with one crucial difference: in the "bubble" kids see these things through a biblical framework.

In his marvelous book *Playing God*, Andy Crouch observes that most Christians operate as though they have four chapters missing from their Bibles: the first two chapters of Genesis and the last two chapters of Revelation. And that distorts their view of reality. In the "bubble," kids get those chapters, so they learn that they are created in God's image to glorify Him and steward His creation. They learn that they and this creation have been distorted by the Fall. They learn that, as redeemed followers of Jesus, God can use them to heal broken relationships with God and others and point the way to how things once were and will be again. They learn that they are eternal beings with a destiny that extends beyond heaven, and that what they do in this life has direct implications for that future.

So everything they study, they see through this framework. They see that all truth is God's truth. They engage in critical appreciation—studying and experiencing the world around them, but not being engulfed by it with no equipping. They are guided to appreciate what is noble, pure, and holy about it and to discern that which is distorted. They learn to be repelled by those fallen aspects, to be appreciative of the glorious ones, and to see their faithful presence as Jesus-followers in the world.

A Framework for Thriving in Life

The funny thing about the "bubble" is that it's really not a bubble at all. As Pastor Matt Chandler says about the Church, it's not a spotless community of perfect people, because you and I are here. There are the same effects of living in a fallen world that exist in any other environment.

Again, it goes back to the framework. All kids are going to struggle. When they do, within what framework do you want them dealing with those issues? In the "bubble," teachers and administrators who all love Jesus and have a biblical worldview come alongside kids, walking them through confession, forgiveness, and restoration. Kids learn in context how their faith delivers them through those struggles in a way that matures them.

After nearly 15 years of watching graduates engage in large universities and have careers and kids, I've seen that the "bubble" doesn't stifle them; it causes them to flourish. As one alum, a missionary, emailed me, "I know many students come back as alumni and say something similar to 'I thought our school was a bubble but I am thankful now.' More than ever I am seeing the fruit of years of labor from our school coming to fruition. Our school is a special place. I know it is because it exists for God's glory." I've heard other alumni say essentially the same thing. The "bubble" is far from perfect. But it definitely has a beautiful upside. —Jay

