

Christ Community Covenant Church

Back to School: What are parents to do about education these days?

Pastor Dave Scherrer - August 18, 2013

Big Idea: *To explore God's concern for education and to further discuss what a parent is to do to participate in God's plan for education.*

Intro on our Back to School mini-series

Everyone knows that education begins at home:

A young boy once approached his father to ask, "Dad, why does the wind blow?," to which the father responded, "I don't know, son." "Dad, where do the clouds come from?" "I'm not sure, son." "Dad, what makes a rainbow?" "No idea, son." "Dad, do you mind me asking you all these questions?" "Not at all, son. How else are you going to learn?"

So to spare us the indignity of saying, "I have no idea" over and over we send the little pickers to school. And yet that too is filled with certain anxieties, whether it is public, charter, private or home schooled. We are not going to get into that debate this morning, what we do want to explore is the "idea" of school and what the real purpose of education is all about.

Discussion: Our greatest concerns/fears regarding schools and education.

Comments from the congregation:

- False teaching (taking God out of the picture)
- Myth of neutral education (not morals)
- Standards: what is a good education? Facts/emotions, ability to think well, how can that be measured?
- Treat children as individuals vs. collective. Not person-centered. Parents need to be active in their children's education.
- Children not taught to fail – lowering the bar (not just in education).
- Ideology vs. growth – postmodern.
- Taking into consideration individual learning styles (especially in the university environment).

Proverbs 16:16

How much better to get wisdom than gold!

To get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver.

What is the purpose of education according to Scripture?

It isn't straightforward. There isn't a verse that states simply and concisely the purpose of education and school. In fact the word school is used only once in the entire Bible. Education per se referring to a system of learning isn't mentioned once. We know that Paul learned under the teaching of Gamaliel, a famous and influential rabbi and teacher of his day. We know that there was a long history of teaching the Law to children that was pretty rigorous. But the Bible doesn't specifically say a lot.

Solomon, the wisest man in the world we are told, had this to say:

Ecclesiastes 12:12

"Of making many books there is no end, and much study wears the body."

A couple bazillion students are very excited to hear that opinion being voiced. Really, is all this book learning all that helpful?

Solomon goes on to say (v13): ***"The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."***

When Paul writes to his friend Timothy he states that every Christian is to,

2 Timothy 2:15

Do your best (study) to present yourself to God as one approved as a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

The Greek word translated “study” suggests diligence and to exert oneself, but there is a second aspect to this verb and that is to make haste to apply oneself. There is a sense of urgency or importance. In the Greek it is a very active word, to study is not a passive idea. Therefore, in order to educate ourselves, we must apply ourselves to study with diligence and urgency to the Word of God. John Piper, the writer, preacher and theologian said, *“The reason we teach children to read is so that they can learn to read their Bible and thereby to know God.”*

In Old Testament times, the primary purpose of education among the Jews was the learning of and obedience to the law of God, the Torah. The Torah generally refers to the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The secondary purpose in education was to teach about the practical aspects of everyday life: a trade for the boy and the care of the house, application of dietary laws and how to be a good wife for the girl.

The home was considered the first and most effective agency in the education process, and parents were considered the first and most effective teachers of their children. This responsibility is expressed in Genesis 18 where God states his expectation that Abraham will train his children and his household to walk in the ways of the Lord. Deuteronomy 6:7 gives an interesting insight into how parents were to teach their children about God: *“You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.”* The parent was to use the various ordinary activities of life as avenues to teach about God. All of life was permeated by religious meaning and teaching about God should flow naturally from its activities.

Frankly, the pursuit of education didn’t happen culturally until we had the time and status of life that we had the luxury of learning rather than just staying alive. The Greeks had some schools for the rich, but mostly just hired tutors for wealthy families. In the sixth century we see some activity in the forming of schools but they were largely religious in nature. It wasn’t until in the mid 14 and 15th centuries we began to see schools and academies forming to learn non-religious skills and knowledge. I would guess that some of us had parents or grandparents who did not or could not go to school because staying alive had first priority (Grandpa Scherrer).

Through the centuries spreading education and the starting of schools, both religious and non-religious, has been a regular practice of the church. The church has historically promoted education and the improvement of the mind. The Reformer John Calvin was a strong advocate for universal education, believing that every child should be trained in reading, writing, math, and grammar, as well as religion. Martin Luther taught that education was essential, “both to understand the Word of Scripture and the nature of the world in which the Word would take root.” The modern Sunday school movement began in 1780 when Robert Raikes began educating poor children who were otherwise overlooked by society. Our oldest most prestigious universities, including Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Oxford, and Cambridge, were all founded by Christians as religious schools.

Founding Mission Statement of Harvard College (1643)

Let every student be plainly instructed, and earnestly pressed, to consider well that the main end of his life and studies is to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life (John 17:3), and therefore to lay Christ in the bottom, as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning.

John 17:3

And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

God is interested in education because it helps those he loves to be able to know him. But rarely do we see things in regards to our education in that manner. The world has filled us with purposes for education and school that are lofty and perhaps socially advantageous, but according to scripture – off point. It is not about getting a better job and escaping the poverty line. It is not about changing the economic plight of a third world country. Education is not a cure-all for society's ills. Education, like so many things, and in and of itself is not wrong. Like money it can be used to our advantage or to our disadvantage. But education does nothing to combat ungodliness. In fact, knowledge, apart from the love of God, leads to pride (1 Corinthians 8:1). Nicodemus was "Israel's teacher," yet he did not understand even the basics of spiritual life (John 3:10). Paul was a highly educated man, having been trained in the best Jewish school of his day (Acts 22:3), and he used his education to communicate effectively to people of many cultures (Acts 17:28; Titus 1:12). Yet Paul's education certainly did not make him holy (1 Timothy 1:16), and he warned of those who were *"always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth"* (2 Timothy 3:7). Simply knowing facts does not make one a better person and it is indeed possible to be a highly educated fool.

We learn about God and learn to obey God so that we can be established in Christ. Let's look at one verse that I think points this out:

Leviticus 10:8-11

⁸ And the LORD spoke to Aaron, saying, ⁹ "Drink no wine or strong drink, you or your sons with you, when you go into the tent of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations. ¹⁰ You are to distinguish between the holy and the common and between the unclean and the clean, ¹¹ and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes that the LORD has spoken to them by Moses."

God has a standard for His Priests and He establishes it as a permanent ordinance in the lives of the priests and He gives them his reasons – to pursue Holiness and to teach the people to do the same. It is that simple it seems.

We can look to the life of Christ to see how he grew up and learned:

Luke 2:52

⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

Mental, Physical, Spiritual, Social, Moral

What has gone wrong?

[Teacher and education disclaimer]

I am especially concerned on the university level of education but at every level, the educational system bears all the marks of political and ideological battle. In the elite academy, various strains of postmodernism are at war with each other, even as various feminists, multiculturalists, and ideological theorists engage in academic battle.

Literature has been debased by postmodernist deconstruction, and texts are now treated as platforms for political posturing. According to French deconstructionist philosopher Jacques Derrida, the author of the text is to be treated as "dead," meaning that it is now the reader, rather than the author, who will determine the meaning of the text. Of course, this means that there is no standardized meaning of the text at all.

From kindergarten to graduate school, education has been transformed from a process of learning into an opportunity for enhanced self-esteem. In my field of psychology and psychotherapy, too often the secular therapeutic worldview seeks to relativize issues and reduce questions of objective fact to matters of individual feeling.

The concern and agenda is carried on in subtle manners and to our youngest children. There is sex education curricula provider called the Sex Education and Information Council of the United States (SEICUS) and they have established Sex Ed curricula standards that they mail to every public school in America. These guidelines have explicit standards for what they believe every person as young as 5 year old should understand about their body and physical intimacy. Marriage and heterosexuality are not values. It frankly seems dangerous to me.

How can we recover a concept of authentic education?

The Christian response to this question will be very different from that offered by alternative worldviews. As the psalmist instructs us, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" [Psalm 111:10]. Our worldview begins with the existence of the one true God, who has revealed himself to us, and who alone has the authority to determine what is true and false, good and evil, right and wrong. Thus, a Christian understanding of education is rooted in a worldview that takes the world seriously, because we first acknowledge the Creator of the universe. We understand that all education is moral education because we know that morality is not a mere human invention—it is the very structure of creation itself and the very substance of God's revelation to his creatures.

Yet, as T. S. Eliot lamented, our contemporary tragedy is not just that Christians do not think, but that they do not think in anything recognizable as Christian categories of thought. The evaporation of the Christian worldview—even among Christians—is one of the greatest tragedies of our time and one of the greatest obstacles to Christian recovery and the reassertion of a Christian concept of education in our era.

2 Timothy 4:3-4

³ For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

WWJD? - What W Would Jesus Do?

I believe that if Jesus were here and saw the confusion and drift of schools today he would be in them. I'm not saying that He would make sure that Bible readings were reintroduced into the schools or even that an opening prayer over the PA system would be started up again. I'm saying He would be there. On the campus, talking to teachers, sitting with principles, hanging with custodians, not so much telling them what they were doing wrong as showing them love and telling them the truth in a person-centered and understandable and patient manner.

2 Timothy 4:5

⁵ As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

How can the Church help?

I believe that we are the Christ Like expression that the schools long for; people who care for the disenfranchised, care that justice is found in our schools, care that education is excellent and well-rounded for every aspect of our humanity, mental, physical, social, and moral. People who care to be positive and encouraging and willing to offer grace and mercy and support, not anger and judgment and grief. We approach schools like we approach every civic and social endeavor – by bringing the love and truth Christ to the meeting.

We can do that by our prayers and by our physical support. We can do that by choosing the field of education as our profession or one of the dozen other disciplines that finds its way onto our campuses.

4Cs - A Community Minded Church

Prayer