

## Sermon Notes “Education”

Material for this message was drawn from a series of sermons by Dr. Calvin Wittman (2009)

### **Introduction**

In this study, we come to the topic of education. Education has long been near and dear to Southern Baptists. Our founding fathers recognized the important role education plays in the part of making fully devoted disciples of Jesus Christ. It is to that end that article 12 of our confessional statement, the Baptist Faith and Message, deals specifically and uniquely with the topic of education.

Article 12 says

"Christianity is the faith of enlightenment and intelligence. In Jesus Christ, abide all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. All sound learning is, therefore, a part of our Christian heritage. The new birth opens all human faculties and creates a thirst for knowledge. Moreover, the cause of education in the Kingdom of Christ is co-ordinate with the causes of missions and general benevolence, and should receive along with these the liberal support of the churches. An adequate system of Christian education is necessary to a complete spiritual program for Christ's people.

"In Christian education there should be a proper balance between academic freedom and academic responsibility. Freedom in any orderly relationship of human life is always limited and never absolute. The freedom of a teacher in a Christian school, college, or seminary is limited by the pre-eminence of Jesus Christ, by the authoritative nature of the Scriptures and by the distinct purpose for which the school exists."

Of course, when we talk about Christian education we are talking about all education with decidedly Christian worldview. Irrespective of what you may hear and to what the militant secularists may claim, as our confessional statement affirms, Christianity is the faith of enlightenment and intelligence. As we shall see, one does not have to check their brain at the door to become a Christian. Far from it, only by coming to know Jesus Christ can someone truly claim to be educated.

When we talk about Christian Education, one of the issues often raised, and even addressed in our confessional statement is that of academic freedom and how that term has been used as an excuse for all manner of errant teaching. Over the years and across the country we have witnessed Christian college after Christian college abandon the faith of their founding fathers and give way to the pressure of the spirit of the age. This has been, of course, a major problem in Southern Baptist life and one which has not gone unaddressed. For the purpose of our study, however, we will confine ourselves more to the issue of Christian education as it relates to the individual, the family and the local church.

Let's begin our study by taking a look at the biblical mandate for education.

## **I. The Biblical Mandate for Education**

Contrary to the postmodern spirit of our age that disparages any claim on absolute truth, the Bible begins not only by assuring us that absolute truth is knowable, but by telling us that God Himself is the very source of that truth.

Scripture tells us in **Psalm 31:5** and in **Isaiah 65:16** that God the Father is the source of all truth. Since He created all things, knows all things and is in absolute control of all things, all truth is God's truth. In fact, the beginning of wisdom, says **Psalm 111:10**, is the fear of the Lord and **Psalm 119:60** tells us that truth is to be found in the word of God, which is true from the beginning.

The New Testament informs us in **John 14:6** that that Jesus Himself is the truth incarnate and **Colossians 2:3** assures us that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are to be found in Him. Thus, any worldview or educational system which is not rooted and grounded in the biblical truth about Jesus, suffers from a fatal flaw. How can people really know the full truth about any part of creation without a sure and certain knowledge about the Creator? That is why any truth apart from Jesus is merely a partial truth, waiting to be made complete in light of the knowledge of Who He is.

God has given each of His children the Holy Spirit, who is called the Spirit of Truth. Jesus said in **John 14:26** that He will teach us all things and cause us to remember the things Christ has taught us. According to **2 Peter 1:21**, it was the Holy Spirit who inspired the word of God and **Hebrews 4:12** assures us that God's word is the guideline for all truth. And **2 Timothy 3:14-17** tells us that God's word is the instrument of measurement by which we are able to discern truth. God has always been concerned about truth and has always desired for His children to learn His truth.

Beginning in the Garden of Eden, when in **Genesis 1:28** when God told Adam to have dominion over the earth and to subdue it, God has always encouraged man, His crowning creation, to learn and to seek wisdom and knowledge. In **Deuteronomy 6** God speaks through Moses, commanding the Israelites not only to learn but to continue to teach successive generations the truths which have been entrusted to them.

Moses says, "**Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which the Lord your God has commanded me to teach you, that you might do them in the land where you are going over to possess it . . . These words which I am commanding you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons 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 up.**" (NASB)

**Psalm 19:7** says, "The instruction of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is trustworthy, making the inexperienced wise."

**Proverbs 3:13** says, "Happy is a man who finds wisdom and who acquires understanding."

And we are all familiar with **2 Timothy 2:15** which says, "**Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth.**"

God has always directed His children to learn, to seek knowledge, wisdom and understanding and the place to begin is by fearing the Lord and knowing His word. A healthy Christian life is characterized by a hunger and a thirst for truth. Jesus says in **Matthew 5:6**, "**Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.**"

God has always encouraged His people to learn and the learning has always been directly tied to actions. This is the biblical mandate for learning, it walks hand in hand with the biblical mandate for Christian living and service.

## **II. The Method of Education**

The Scriptures outline for us how we are to go about the process Christian education.

### **A. Personal discipleship is the responsibility of every believer**

God intends that each of us will become responsible for our own spiritual development. That's why Paul tells us in **Philippians 2:12**, to "**work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.**" Each of us is responsible for developing our own Christian walk.

Scripture tells us in **Psalms 119:11** to hide the word of God in our hearts, so that we might not sin against God. It tells us in **1Thessalonians 5:17** to pray without ceasing, in **Ephesians 5:18** we are commanded to continuously be filled with the Spirit, and in **Philippians 4:8** we are told that, "**Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable - if there is any moral excellence and if there is any praise...**" these are the things we are to think about and dwell upon. And **Colossians 3:16** says, "**Let the message about the Messiah dwell richly among you, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, and singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, with gratitude in your hearts to God.**"

Sounds like a pretty good plan for personal discipleship, doesn't it?

- Read the bible
- Pray
- Be filled with the Spirit
- Think on the right things
- Teach and admonish one another with the right attitude

We are each responsible for our own spiritual development.

### **B. Christian education begins at home**

Christian education is grounded in the home - There can be no question about it, according to scripture, Christian education begins at home, mom and dad are responsible for teaching their children how to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

**Deuteronomy 4:9** says, "**Only be on your guard and diligently watch yourselves, so that you don't forget the things your eyes have seen and so that they don't slip from your mind as long as you live. Teach them to your children and your grandchildren.**"

**Proverbs 4:1-10** clearly teaches that children are to be instructed in the ways of God by their parents.

**Ephesians 6:4** tells fathers to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Contrary to popular belief, the church is not primarily responsible for teaching your children the things of God. The church is to complement and reinforce parental education, but the home is where children are supposed to learn how to be followers of Jesus Christ.

Many parents, especially today, are not comfortable being responsible for their children's spiritual development and want to hand off that responsibility to someone else. I've heard some people even blame the local church when their children rebel or fail to follow Christ. It seems many people want someone else to accept the responsibility God has given them, but even looking at it practically, there is no way the church can be anywhere nearly as effective in training up a child to follow God as their parents can be.

If your child came to Sunday School and church every week for an entire year and never missed a single Sunday, we would only have 156 hours each year to teach your child how to be a Christian. And that is working from the presupposition that we can get teachers who are willing to give of themselves sufficiently to teach our children. Increasingly it is becoming more and more difficult to get people to teach our children. But again, supposing we could get all the teachers we needed, and your child were to attend every week without fail, we would only have 156 hours a year, between worship service and Sunday School.

According to recent surveys, the average teenager spends between 20 and 50 hours a week in front of a television or a computer screen, and you don't have to be a social scientist to understand the impact television and the internet have on children these days. That means in three to four weeks, the internet and television programmers have just as much time as the church has with your child in an entire year. The numbers are even worse for those children who have a television in their room.

For the record parents, you should never put a television in your child's room. Think about what you are letting into the most private space in their life. And the computer is

something else parents should monitor closely. The system of this world and the prince of the power of the air are all dead set on keeping your child from becoming a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ. Don't fall into their plan by giving your children unrestricted access to the entertainment media. What goes in their heads will invariably impact who they are and what they think. God wants you to be intentional; He wants you as the parent to be proactive. Like all other forms of discipline, your children may fight you on it for a while, but in the end, you will be thankful you stood your ground.

And parents, television and the internet are not the only enemies you have. While I am grateful for the Christians who serve as light amidst the darkness in our public schools, the truth is that the public education system is no friend of Christians. In fact, did you know that public education as we know it today, was designed specifically and intentionally to rob our children of their faith?

John Dewey, a professor at New York's Columbia University, is known as the father of modern public education. Dewey, was the first president of the American Humanist Association and was a signer of the Humanist Manifesto. Dewey was motivated by a belief that Christianity was the principle problem that needed to be overcome in public education. His influence on public education and the absence of God in our public schools is still seen today.

At the website, About.Com under the heading of Agnosticism/Atheism there is an article on Dewey where a number of quotes are given. Listen to some of the things Dewey said:

"Modern philosophy certainly exacts a surrender of all supernaturalism and fixed dogma and rigid institutionalism with which Christianity has been historically associated. There is nothing left worth preserving in the notions of unseen powers, controlling human destiny, to which obedience and worship are due. I believe that many persons are... repelled from what exists as a religion by its intellectual and moral implications."

Is it any wonder that public education is so antagonistic toward our faith? And tragically, that godless humanistic philosophy which Dewey injected into our public schools has become pervasive. It starts in kindergarten and goes through the highest levels of our public universities. I applaud anyone whose children are serving as witnesses to our culture in public schools and I am thankful for public school teachers who are Christians and who choose to continue to be a light amidst the darkness. But I cannot blame any Christian mom or dad who feels led to take their children out of public schools to either home school them or put them in a private Christian setting. Again, this simply goes to underscore the importance of parents teaching their children Christian truth at home. Christian education begins in the home and God will hold parents responsible for the kind of Christian training their children receive.

So, there you have it. The biblical method of education is this, we are each responsible for our own spiritual maturation, we are to teach our children at home and we are to

complement that teaching in the local church where we are to teach and admonish one another.

### III. Christian Education and the Local Church

The local church is God's ordained institution for the expansion of His kingdom. One of the things the local church is tasked with doing is that of discipleship. From the Old through the New Testament we find the public reading of the word of God to be a central act in the house of worship. Ezra read the word of God and as the people stood and repented, Jesus Himself went to the Synagogue and read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and Paul commands his readers to read his epistles in all the churches. The local church is the place where discipleship and teaching often take place.

This is done in several ways. One way is in the public proclamation of God's word through preaching. Paul tells Timothy in **2 Timothy 4:2** to preach the word, in season and out of season. Go through scripture and do your research and you will find that the principle responsibility of a pastor/teacher is to preach the word, to rightly divide the word of truth so that God's people will be instructed in God's truth.

Additionally, this teaching ministry of the church extends to bible study and discipleship classes. Both expository and topical studies are used by churches as they seek to take disciples deeper in their walk with God. All of this is in keeping with God's directive to learn, to seek knowledge, wisdom and understanding.

But the mandate to learn was never supposed to be an end unto itself. The biblical directive to seek knowledge and understanding is always geared toward making us better disciples and thus better servants of God. In other words, learning always has an end, that is, to help us become the people God wants us to be so He can use us as He wants to use us. Learning was designed to make us sharper instruments in God's hand, and instruments are made for service. God allows us to learn so that we can teach others. That's what's supposed to take place in the local church, people who have been taught are in turn supposed to teach others.

The philosophy behind Christian education is found in the **Deuteronomy 6** passage we read a minute ago and is carried on in **2 Timothy 2:2** where Paul instructs Timothy by saying, "**And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful me who will be able to teach others also.**" The Biblical method of education is this: We are to learn so that we can teach others, who will in turn, teach others, and perpetuate the process.

One of the problems with Christianity in our country is not a lack of knowledge, we have more translations of the bible, more commentaries, and more educational opportunities than any other generation of Christians at any time in the history of the church. Ours is not a problem of the lack of knowledge, our problem is that somewhere along the line we have disassociated learning with service. Folks, God gave you knowledge, wisdom,

understanding, truth and insight, not just to fill your heads, but to fill your hearts and thus to fill your hands with the work of furthering the kingdom of God.

In fact, **Hebrews 5:12** warns us about the dangers of attaining knowledge but not putting it to use, a condition which reveals a certain level of spiritual immaturity. The writer of Hebrews says, "**For though by this time you ought to be teachers...**" You see, spiritual maturity necessitates taking what we have learned and passing it along to others. So committed to learning and education is our Lord that He intends all of us to be sharing what we have learned with others.

This is part and parcel of the great commission. Jesus tells us in **Matthew 28** that as we go we are to make disciples, and what is it we are supposed to do as we make disciples? We are to teach them to observe all that He has commanded us. Learning and obedience, or observance is always connected. That means to those whom He has given more knowledge, the more accountable you will be. Jesus tells us in **Luke 12:48** that whom much is given much will be required.

The degree to which God has poured learning and knowledge into our lives is the degree to which we will be held accountable.

## **Conclusion**

So how do I put this truth about Christian education, about learning and discipleship into application? Allow me to suggest several things you can do.

Get a plan for personal discipleship - There are dozens of daily reading bibles and personal discipleship programs which you can use that will help you as you seek to become a more fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ. Get intentional about your children or grandchildren's spiritual formation - Don't leave to someone else that for which God will hold you accountable. Get involved in passing on - The opportunities are there, God has given you the necessary knowledge, all you need to do now is to take action.