

The Fear of the Lord and Your Education

A Sermon to Students and Their Teachers

Introduction - Why do I keep preaching on Christian education to a body of Christians who are so sacrificially committed to it already? Several reasons come to mind. We are tempted on all sides to give up or compromise, we are still in the process of recovering a true Christian *paideia* (Eph 6:4), it is really hard work, we need to keep our eye on the goal. I love what we have been given, what we have been able to give, and I want our children and grandchildren to love it as well - but it is hard to do so when you are a kid. Maybe the fundamental reason is that I was personally nearly ruined, hardened to God and all things eternal, by the “free” government education I received.

The Fear of the Lord - The Word of God teaches us much about the fear of the Lord (Job 28:28, Psalm 19:9, 34:11, 111:10, Prov 1:7, 9:10, 10:27, 14:26-27, 15:16, 15:33, 16:6, 19:23, 22:4, 23:17). It is the beginning of knowledge, a fountain of life, a refuge of great satisfaction, and a path to riches and honor. Disciples (students/learners) are to give themselves to it and teachers (parents first) are to teach from it. And when we don't do this, destruction and death fall upon a people (Prov 1:20-29). The parallel structure of verses in Proverbs means that “*hating knowledge*” and “*did not choose the fear of the Lord*” are connected. What does God say? “*Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!*” (Deut 5:29).

The Character of Godly Fear - Godly fear is evidence of the grace of God (Heb 12:28) and is the fruit of God's covenantal love upon us (Jer 32:38-40). It does not drive us away from God; it drives us away from sin (Prov 16:6). This fear creates confidence and is a “*fountain of life*” (Prov 14:26-27). This kind of fear is not in opposition to your assurance; it strengthens your assurance.

The Effects of Godly Fear - Godly fear produces right worship (Psalm 89:7 - “*God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints...*”), emphasizing devotion and sincerity, not entertainment and triteness. It keeps us from bending to worldly pressures and persecutions (Psalm 119:161, Matt 10:28). It promotes faithful ethics like honesty, hard work, and lawful treatment of others in the workplace (Neh 5:15). Godly fear produces humility (Rom 11:20) as well as much rejoicing (Psalm 2:11, 147:11).

Provoking our Children to Wrath - When we refuse to bring up our children in the training and admonition of the Lord, which includes giving them wisdom, knowledge, understanding from the foundation of the fear of the Lord, we provoke them to wrath (Eph 6:4). When we really understand what education is, we can see that there is no such thing as religious neutrality in education. When the state provides us an education that implicitly and explicitly says, “if there is a God in the universe, He certainly does not matter when it comes to these subjects,” we ought to be just a little bit suspicious - no, we should be incensed. We are to render our children to the Lord and not to Caesar (Matt 22:21).

How Have We Provoked Children to Wrath (Rom 1:18-31) - When we refuse to acknowledge where truth comes from, we suppress the knowledge of God and all of God's knowledge. We become barbaric in our thinking and actions, and our children are turned over to wrath and destruction with our blessing. Either we magnify the glory of Christ-the-Creator and Redeemer of all things, openly thanking Him (the Triune God by name) or we descend a dark staircase of unbelief, superstition, and finally outright paganism - and that is exactly where our secular educational system is taking us.

“I advise no one to place his child where the Scriptures do not reign paramount. Every institution in which men are not increasingly occupied with the Word of God must become corrupt...I am much afraid that schools will prove to be the great gates of hell unless they diligently labor in explaining the Holy Scriptures, engraving them in the hearts of youth.”
- Martin Luther

A Word to Disciples (Matt 21:28-32) - Tax collectors and harlots were sinners, rebelling against God's laws and hurting people. But through the ministry of John the Baptist and finally, Christ, many were “*regretting*” their decision and repenting, coming to Jesus. On the other hand, religious leaders looked like they were followers of God, but they refused to believe and follow Jesus. They were able to put up a good show, like many Christian students today - for a time.

The Temptations of the Second Son – A lack of the fear of God leads to disciples who say “yes” externally and then turn and disobey. What causes a student to avoid giving himself to his studies? Laziness (Prov 24:30-34), excuses (Prov 22:13), and lying/cheating (Prov 11:1) are signs of a disciple who does not fear the Lord. With older students, the temptation to be “*too cool for school*” hangs heavy in our age (Is 3:16-26, 1 John 2:15-17). For them it is more important (and satisfying, they think) to know who won the MTV Music Awards and how to dress and walk like them. Paris, New York, and LA are all in rebellion against God; their “lifestyle choice” fashions lure us to push the limits of propriety, morality, and sexual identity. This sad culture of glitz is full of self-worshipping and very insecure people – because they do not fear the Lord (Prov 23:17).

The Victory of the First Son – Like the first son, we often first react to what we have been told to do (by our heavenly Father, our earthly father, our teacher, etc) with, “yuk,” “no way,” or “I do not want to...” Do not despair; this is a normal struggle for us sinners (Gal 5:16-17). However...

All of Grace (Eph 2:8-10) – No one will be a good disciple-student, all the way down to the heart level, unless God grants repentance and faith. God has called you to these good works – you know that. He has called you to them and prepared them for you. Turn and adorn your heart by faith with the fear of the Lord – and so much more will make sense in this crazy, confused world. He is merciful to thousands (of generations) to those who love Him and keep His commandments.

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