

Like the Master

Luke 6:39-40

As we head into a new school year, Jesus' instruction on learning and imitating—on education—is apropos not just to formal schooling but to the life of discipleship that all Christians are called to lead. What does imitating the master have to do with education? We'll consider this first in light of the nature of God and his creation; secondly, the all encompassing effects of sin; thirdly, God's remedy of continual Gospel instruction and fellowship; and last, we'll consider pitfalls we encounter as we go about this.

God of Sparrows Because our triune God is a sovereign creator and sustainer of everything that is, all of life is personal and connected to him (Col. 1:16-17). God is a story teller who doesn't just sketch the mega themes of the plot, but fills in every detail—even the death of cheap birds (Matt. 10:29). As created in his image, we are supposed to think his thoughts after him and live *connected* lives, every part of our existence fitting together to praise and glorify the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is the art of reading the story while we are in it. Planting tomatoes, going to work, trying out for soccer, reading a novel, texting your friend, eating and drinking, everything we do is part of our devotional life lived *coram Deo*, before the face of God. Since everything is made, sustained, and directed by God, in order to understand anything fully (in our capacity), we must know him and love him. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov. 1:7). A little fear of the Lord is the beginning of a little knowledge.

Fallen All Over Learning biblical wisdom—how to think, act, find a vocation and pursue it—is not like walking through the woods alone reciting poetry. It's more like a battle, and so we are told to “take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). God is sovereign so there is no neutrality anywhere; everything is either obedient or disobedient to Christ, full of life or moving toward death. So the back half of Proverbs 1:7 says “fools despise wisdom and instruction.” There is no part of humanity that remains unaffected by sin. By common grace, we are not as bad as we would be, but there is no part of us that does not need to be redeemed. We are not neutrally ignorant of who God is and what he is like. Fallen man intentionally suppresses the truth: “For what can be known about God is plain to [us], because God has shown it to [us]. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So [we] are without excuse” (Rom. 1:19-20). The denial of God results in the evil deeds we're used to hearing about (1 Cor. 6:9-10). Sin is not just a condition, but a way of life—one that is passed down.

A Fully Redeemed Life A full and biblical doctrine of sin leads to a full and glorious doctrine of salvation. If the effects of sin are great, greater are those of salvation (Rom. 5:20). Our passage teaches that education is necessarily imitative, meaning that the student learns far more from the teacher than we would naturally think. When fully trained, he is like his master (v40). Students, particularly young ones, don't just take away bare “facts” since there are none. This is why Moses tells parents to teach their children constantly about the Lord (Dt. 6:4-7). Paul tells fathers not to provoke their kids, but to bring them up in the nurture and “whole training and education” of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). This necessitates Christian education. God's sovereignty provides the foundation for the material, and the presence of sin requires diligence and care. Some confused parents take these passages to mean that only they can instruct their kids, but at least they get the thrust of the responsibility. Christian parents are called to provide full-orbed training, more than can be accomplished on Sunday morning and Wednesday night.

Problems in the Schoolyard First, the grace of God is active in our midst, and hats off to parents, students and educators who are making this happen. All blessings bring problems, and since sin doesn't come from outside man but rather from his heart, we know where we ought to look. Students: Are you aware of the enormous blessing of Christian education and the sacrifices made to give it to you? Are you aware of what a Fibonacci sequence is, and are you blown away? Do you know you will use nearly everything you learn in school for the rest of your life?

Parents: Are you aware of what your kids are learning, whom they're learning it from, and are you sharing their interests and frustrations? Imperfect teachers are sent from God, just like bad bosses. Parents can't expect their kids to be excited about learning if they are not, so it's important to ask: are you lazy at work? Are you still asking God to give you wisdom and striving for maturity as you serve him in your calling (Heb. 5:14)? Are you in it for the long haul (Ps. 92:14)?

Considering the quality of the school, homeschools, coops, etc., that we see at work in our midst, certainly the biggest threat is our own pride. This is especially the case when most of the Christian church hasn't been blessed with this understanding of the importance and blessing of Christian education. We have to remember it is a gift, pursue it gratefully, and look to give it away.