



Back to School

After a long break our children have now returned to school while others are writing exams. So this seems like a good time to address some issues with reference to education.

As our scholars encounter the pressures of early mornings, various classes, intense studies, challenging exams and extra-curricula's it will be helpful to remind ourselves of at least two issues: the purpose of education and the potential for idolizing education.

No thinking person would question that the education of our children is extremely important. As believing parents we are committed to equipping our children to use their God-given gifts for His glory. And this requires education.

John Adams, whose biography I am currently reading, served as the second President of the United States. He was so concerned about the proper education of the nations' children that he sought to make it the Government's responsibility. Though I disagree, I do concur with his assessment that the primary elements of an education will emphasize the ability to read so as to properly *think*. And sound thinking leads to sound *living*. Just read Proverbs.

Adams believed that the ability to read and therefore to form wise judgments was vital for *'the survival of the rights and liberties of the people.'* When he was 25 years old he wrote in his journal, *"I must judge for myself (i.e. 'I must make right decisions'); but how can I judge, how can any man judge, unless his mind has been opened and enlarged by reading?"* I heartily endorse his passion to impassion others to be learners and especially to learn by reading. Our children need to be shaped into learners, not merely for the welfare of the nation but more importantly – and relatedly – it is vitally important for the welfare of the *Church*. Our children need to be educated so that they will be enabled to make wise judgments in the midst of a very confusing world, to the glory of God. This is the fundamental purpose of education. *Our children are to be educated for the purpose of preparing them for life.* And more to the point, *they are to be educated to live to the glory of God in every sphere of their life.* They therefore need a well-rounded, robust, God-centred education to equip them to live a well-rounded, robust, God-centred life. Such an education will require both informal as well as formal education. Let's focus on the latter.

However one chooses to go about this, parents are ultimately responsible for their child's education. Even when you delegate their education to others you are still responsible to oversee their studies. Your child should be aware that it is expected that they will work hard at their studies. Diligence honours God and slothfulness grieves Him (Proverbs 18:9; 24:30-34). Scholars need to be, well, scholars! They should be disciplined in their studies and this will sometimes require parents to apply discipline to *motivate* discipline. Parents may even at times have to apply 'the board of education to the seat of learning'!

Living to the glory of God is the parental motivation in educating our children. Our goal is to raise and to equip our children to know Christ and to make His Lordship known in every sphere of life. We are therefore to be committed to educating our children to use their unique God-given gifts for His glory. This should be the message that our children hear from us and this should increasingly become *their* motivation.

However, all too often parents lose sight of this purpose and then they place undue pressure upon their children to 'achieve top marks.' But not every child has the same potential to achieve. The idea that anyone can accomplish whatever they set their hearts on is nonsense. Rather we should be encouraging our children to *do* the best that they can and to *learn* all that they can and to *be* all

that they can be to the glory of God. This means that parents must know their children so to guide them in areas of *their* unique giftedness while helping them to persevere where they are not so gifted. We need to *stop confusing getting good marks with a good education – they are not the same*. This leads us to the second issue, the potential of the idolization of education.

Every year I hear the tragic accounts of scholars who have taken their lives driven by a sense of failure to achieve some particular mark or an educational goal. Some hard-working students are fearful to face their parents because they did not achieve top marks. I know of primary aged children who have developed ulcers over such pressures. Yes, primary aged children. While they should be enjoying the adventures of growing up they are instead suffering ridiculous pressures – stress often piled on by their parents. Idolatry is never helpful and it is always destructive.

All too often parents, and therefore children, turn the means of education into its *end*. The goal of preparing children to live to the glory of God is eclipsed by the idol of ‘besting’ others with one’s brains with a view to a large bank account. This is Idolatry. Parents, enough already! Parents and scholars need to be guided by the proper purpose of education.

One way to combat this tendency is to encourage our scholars as they go back to school to *focus on going forward for the Lord*. Such perspective will go a long way towards fighting the good fight against the idolizing of prestige and prosperity.

If your child will be trained in knowledge and wisdom to the glory of God then they need to be educated multi-dimensionally. That is, they require not merely ‘the books’ but rather they need fundamentally ‘The Book.’ Make God’s Word central in your home. Don’t send them to school until they have been to the Throne Room of God. Rubbing shoulders with fellow students may be beneficial but there is no replacement for rubbing shoulders with fellow believers. Not only do they need to attend class but they also need to attend their church. They may need to participate in various Laboratories but they also need to be participating in the laboratory of Body life in their local church.

I want to appeal to parents, and to students of all ages, seek first the Kingdom of God (Matt 6:33). Labour hard in your studies while you labour hard to know the Lord. Learn to discipline yourself so that when it is time for Exams you have so planned and prepared that you will not cave to the temptation to blow off Grace Group or YP or YA or to abandon your ministry because of an obsession with ‘study’. I understand that there are rare exceptions but don’t let this be the norm. Rather, if you *prioritize* then you will not *minimize* your privileges and responsibilities of church membership. Especially when faced with the pressures of an education. I know a family who intentionally makes church/grace group a huge priority during the “pressure times” of schooling – exams, projects, etc. so that they can help their kids learn from an early age how to balance all of their priorities and keep the church a priority. In other words, they are giving their children a wonderful education. Parents, for God’s sake, and for your children’s sake, help them with this. Stop adding to their pressure. In some cases you may need to repent of your *own* idolatry if you will successively deliver your child from hers.

The Lord in His infinite wisdom created 168 hour weeks. He gave us 144 hours in which to labour. And He wisely gave us a 24 hour break to rest and to reverently recuperate so we will live and labour for Him the next 144 hours. Clearly then one of the best ways to combat the idol of education is to properly observe the Lord’s Day. Again, if you *prioritize* then you will be able to plan and to prepare in such a way that you can fulfil your scholastic responsibilities while at the same time not neglecting your greatest responsibility: to honour the Lord.

Much more could be said but let me close with this exhortation: Every day as you go back to school be sure that you are going forward with the Lord.

Doug Van Meter