

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Board of Directors
The American Association of Christian Schools

A THEOLOGY OF EDUCATION

Introduction:

While the term “education” does not appear in the Bible, educational terms including “teach,” “teaching,” “teacher,” “learn,” “mind” and “learning” appear hundreds of times. To evaluate education theologically implies beginning with God.

Overview:

God is, and He is a rewarder of them who diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6). He is sought (and found or known) through obedient learning (Jer. 29:13; Rev. 1:1-3). God is revealed through His Son (John 1:18), through the Scriptures (Rev. 1:1), through creation (Ps. 19:1-3), through conscience (Rom. 1:18-20), and through consequences (Pro. 24:32; Is. 26:9,10). Essentially, education is God’s revealing Himself in these ways and man’s effort to know Him.¹

God’s Original Intent for Man and a Definition of Education:

God created man for conforming, communing, and coworking with Him (Gen. 1:26-28; 3:8; Rev. 21:3).² God made man in His image, after His likeness, and assigned him occupation of and dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:26-28). Man in the image of God had mental (and moral) capacities, but man was not omniscient and needed to learn so that he might accomplish God’s purposes for him. The first education occurred when God communicated to man, in the form of a command, man’s purpose (Gen. 1:28).³ From the beginning, education involved hearing and conforming to the truth of God. From this “first mention” (Gen. 1:28), education may be defined as the transfer of truth to be obeyed or, more simply, the transfer of wisdom.^{4,5}

The Fall:

When man disobeyed God, sin entered every aspect of his being, including his mind and will, and affected his relationship to God and mankind (Rom 5:12). Although God’s creation-purpose for man (Gen. 1:26-28) was not rescinded, man no longer had a knowledge unified in God (Col. 2:3), had insufficient ability to find or know God (or truth), and had little or no desire to do so (Rom. 3:10-12). When man sinned, God cursed the ground for man’s sake (Gen. 3:17-19), and man’s creation-assignment was affected by corruption and sorrow (Ec. 12:12).

¹ A case can be made that education is the pursuit of God. Also, “seeking” may be too restrictive and may suggest the “seeker” (student) does not find.

² Implicit to this statement are the educationally-important truths that God created man, and that God created man (and all things) for God’s pleasure and glory. Education as some form of directed evolution is unscriptural. Education will be either Creator-centered or creature-centered (or a combination of the two), resulting in two different frameworks for truth (worldviews). Cf. Morris, pgs. 51-63.

³ Man was commanded to be fruitful, multiply and replenish the earth, and subdue it.

⁴ Wisdom is here defined as the right use of knowledge. Education as the transfer of wisdom is suggested by Colossians 1:28 and Proverbs 2:1-9, as well as Genesis 1:28.

⁵ Education after the fall can be according to the truth (“true education”) or according to error (“false education”) (I Cor. 2:5-8). Education according to the truth is not optional (Dt. 6:4-7; Eph. 6:4; Ps. 78:7-11).

Redemption:

But “God so loved the world” that He provided for man’s redemption so that the defaced image of God in man might be replaced with Christlikeness. Man so changed is then restored to a place of conforming, communing, and co-working with God (Col. 1:20).

Purposes of Education; Coherence of Knowledge:

The ultimate purpose of education is to see Christ formed within man (Christlikeness)⁶ so that man increasingly communes and co-works with God for God’s glory and mankind’s blessing⁷ (Gal. 4:19; Eph. 4:11-13). Although education through non-Christian sources may be useful (e.g., Acts 22:3), education that does not contribute to the Biblical purpose of education is vain (Eccl. 1:13-18). Knowledge is unified in Christ (Pro. 1:7; II Cor. 10:5).⁸ Education is inherently religious (Col. 1:16,17; 2:3).⁹

Curriculum; the Student:

The sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments are the framework for all true education, and the primary text to be mastered (Jn. 17:17).¹⁰ Only a Spirit-indwelt man can understand the “things of God” (I Cor. 2:9-16), although the natural man, made in God’s image, can learn fragments of knowledge and be trained in skills and attitudes (Dan. 1:4). A heart willing to do His will is necessary; that is, learning is **for** doing (Jn. 7:17). Education includes studying that which equips a student to “prove all things” and to “hold fast that which is good” (I Thess. 5:21). Education prepares man for both time and eternity (Dt 32:29).

The works of God, including creation, are the second object of study (after the Bible), to the end that men know and glorify God by their lives and service. Studying the works of God to this end is the basis for studying any academic discipline (Horton, p.8).

⁶ Christ lives in the believer as the Spirit of Christ, which Spirit is fully formed; the personal “character” of the Christian is progressively changed (“formed” Gal. 4:19) into His image (II Cor. 3:18). Education is roughly equivalent to progressive sanctification. Restoring the image of God includes knowing God and imitating Him and His character and works (Horton, p.6).

⁷ True education equips a man to “occupy” (cf. Lk. 19:13) and subdue (Gen. 1:28), which involves active participation in the non-sinful activities of this life to better the lives of others.

⁸ For example, the study of U.S. history includes the study of the underlying truths which have led to a constitution which has allowed maximum freedom among citizens for the pursuit of God. Furthermore, all truth is of God (see Gaebelein).

⁹ Facts do not exist in a void. Education is concerned with knowledge, truth, values, attitudes, morality, relationships, and purpose, which are religious issues. Also, all educational leadership censors (selectively controls) the curriculum to accomplish desired curriculum outcomes. Course organization and content have universal coherence only as they are consistent with God and His Word (Col. 1:16,17).

¹⁰ “The Bible is not only the most important subject matter but also the source of the principles determining the other subject matters [including the content] and the way in which they are taught” (Horton, p.7).

Accountability; School Authority:

In addition to each individual's personal areas ("spheres") of responsibility for which he is accountable to God (Rom. 14:12), God established other spheres of responsibility (or authority or jurisdiction): the family (Gen. 2:24,25), state (Gen. 9:6; Rom. 13:1), and church (Mt. 18:15-20).¹¹

God commissioned the family to have jurisdiction over child training and education (Gal. 4:1,2; Eph. 5:22-6:4). The church also is a teaching institution, as God has commissioned the church to disciple (or teach) all nations (Mt. 28:18-20). The primary role of the state in education is to protect the family and the church (religious assembly) in performing their educational responsibilities (Rom. 13:3).¹² Ultimately, individuals are responsible for their own education (Rom. 14:12; Pro. 2:1-5), and then for the education of those around them (Mt. 28:18-20).¹³ Schools have authority only as the home and church delegate that authority to them.

The Teacher and Teaching Method:

God established the family for parents to educate their children according to the pattern that those who have mastered the material teach and motivate those who have not (Gen. 18:19; Ps. 78:1-11). This pattern for education is repeated in the church (II Tim. 2:2). The teacher teaches to ends which are pre-determined by Him (Lk. 6:40). The teacher teaches so that the student learns to operate independently of the teacher, continuing a self-motivated education throughout his life (Ex. 18:20). Furthermore, while education has "wearying" aspects (Gen. 3:19; Eccl. 12:12), education also is to be refreshing (Mt. 11:28-30).

Two primary qualifications for teachers are a mature example motivated by the fear of the Lord (Lk. 6:40), and the ability and willingness to discipline (Gal. 4:2; Heb.12:5-11), motivated by love for God and the student (Heb. 12:6). The teacher develops the curriculum, recognizing student uniqueness (Pro. 22:6; Jms. 1:14). The teacher uses a variety of teaching methods, following Christ's example (Lk. 11:1-13). The process of education involves teaching "line upon line" (Is. 28:10, 13), with the student's being changed from "glory to glory" (II Cor. 3:18), in all aspects of life (Lk. 2:52). In all things, Christ must be preeminent (Col. 1:18).

¹¹ Business could be considered a fourth sphere, or simply an extension of the family sphere. Voluntary associations are formed through the limited surrendering of sovereignty by one or more of the other spheres of responsibility.

¹² While Scripture does not directly preclude the participation of civil government in the teaching process, scripture does not give responsibility for education to the state.

¹³ While all individuals have responsibility to "transfer wisdom" to those around them, certain ones are specially gifted for this (Eph. 4:7-12).

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