

Nov 17, 2019

## Matthew 22:34-40

### Ockenga Fellows Retreat 5: Education

*Jonathan M. Romig*  
[CornerstoneWestford.com](http://CornerstoneWestford.com)

**Does education matter?** Most of probably think, “**Of course!**” In Westford alone an estimated **45%** of the **population** has a **four-year college degree** or **higher**.<sup>1</sup> At the very least we live in a community that **values education**. Maybe I should **rephrase** the question. Does education matter... **to God**? A Pharisee, one who was “an expert in the law” asked Jesus a similar question (Matt 22:35).

**Matthew 22:36-37** (NIV)

36 “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

37 Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”

Jesus calls us to love God with our **minds**. This means we **are to employ thinking and learning and education** in our **worship of God**. The more we **develop our minds** the more we can love God.

Jesus’ answer comes from **the Shema** in Deuteronomy. Shema means “**listen**” but not just “**hear**” but “**hear**” and “**obey**.” The Shema was a prayer the **Jewish people** said **twice daily, morning and evening**. **Jesus** probably prayed the Shema twice a day every day. In the Shema we find a close connection between **loving God** and **education**.

**Deuteronomy 6:4-9** (NIV)

4 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. 6 These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.

God wants us to love him with everything we are, which Jesus says **includes our minds**. He wants **his commandments** to **go deep** into our **hearts**. But how do we do that? **Through teaching**.

7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

The way **God intended** for his people to **know the faith** and grow is for one generation to teach it to the next (Psalm 78:5-7). This means that **God values education**.

### Education matters to God.

This **doesn’t mean** God **loves educated people more than non-educated** people or that he can only use people with a **degree**. Rather, God values **Christian Education**, the time **parents** and **teachers** in the church teach the Scriptures **and** God also **values non-Christian education**, not having to directly do with Scripture. God cares about **Bible studies**, and **community groups**, and **theology books**, but God also values **math, biology, chemistry, engineering, technology, art, writing, communication, theater, education**, and the list goes on and on. The poet David wrote:

**Psalm 19:1-2** (NIV)

1 The heavens declare the glory of God;

the skies proclaim the work of his hands.  
2 Day after day they pour forth speech;  
night after night they reveal knowledge.

That means if we **study nature** we can **learn something** about God. When you sit under a **good teacher**, and that teacher helps you learn **science** or the nuances of a **foreign language** or how to solve a **complex math equation**, while it might seem you're just learning a subject, you're also learning about the **type of God** who **created that subject**. You're learning that God is **endlessly creative** and **good**.

I'd like to take a moment and speak to our **educators**. If you are an educator—a **homeschool** teacher, a **private school** teacher, a **public school** teacher, a **university** teacher, a **tutor**, if you are one of our **Christian Education hour teachers**, or in **any other area** of education—would you please **stand**? Let's acknowledge them with a **round of applause**.

We need good teachers because good teachers and educators help us see how **everything God** has **created** has **value** and **worth**.<sup>2</sup> **Christian** and **Bible things** matter to God. It's **not just those things** that matter to God but everything. I appreciate this quote from a poet who wrestled with this concept.

“I was brought up in a Christian environment where, because God had to be given pre-eminence, nothing else was allowed to be important. I have broken through to the position that because God exists, everything has significance.” - Evangeline Paterson, Irish Poet

Because God created everything everything has significance (Acts 14:15). To believe only Christian things matter to God, or spiritual things, is actually a form of **early church heresy** called **gnosticism**. The gnostics believed the **body** was **bad** and the **spirit** was **good**. But the Bible says everything God created is good. *Education matters to God*. This means...

## **All truth is God's truth.**

It doesn't matter whether truth comes in the form of a Bible study or a classroom lecture, if it's true, it's good. The very **nature of truth reflects God's character** as a **God of truth**.

**James 1:17** (NIV) Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

Every truthful thing comes from the one who is true. We see truth most clearly embodied in Jesus himself.

**John 14:6** (NIV) Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

As Christians, we are to **love truth**, whether it comes to us from the **revelation of God's Word**, the **Bible**, or the **chemistry lab science experiment**. Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin all affirmed this. But maybe some of you are thinking, “What happens when those things **conflict**? What happens when the truth of the Bible seems to conflict with what we see and experience in learning? There are two options: either the **science** is **wrong** or **our interpretation** of the Bible is wrong. In other words, how we're reading the Bible is incorrect.

For example, how old is the earth? Is it around 6,000 years as the **Creationists** say based on the **genealogies** in the Old Testament and the **seven-day creation account** in **Genesis one**? Or is it 4.5 billion years old like the scientists say based on their study of **geology** and the **fossil record**?

As part of the Ockenga Program we read the book *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* by Mark A. Noll. I highly recommend it and would love to sit down and talk it over with anyone interested in reading this book. I learned a couple **really interesting things**.

- **Ellen White** (1827-1915), the founder of Seventh-Day Adventism, originated the idea of a **young earth**, which means contrary to popular opinion it's not part of traditional Christian beliefs.<sup>3</sup>
- Up until the middle of the 1950-60s most **conservative Protestants** believed in an **old earth** and that God filled our world through a series of creative acts.<sup>4</sup>

For some of you this may **concern** and **worry** you. You love the Bible and want to take it **seriously**. For others you might feel a sense of **relief**, like you might actually be able to **believe science** and the **Bible**. But if you're like me, you probably have **more questions**. So I suggest you pick up a **book copy** or **audiobook** of the *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* and read it for yourself. Educate yourself.

*All truth is God's truth.* Even as we **highlight the mind** we need to **humbly heed** this **warning**.

## **Knowledge is not an end in itself.**

We want more **knowledge** because we want to **know God better**. But it's easy for it to become an **idol**.

### **Ecclesiastes 12:12b-13** (NIV)

12 ...Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body.

13 Now all has been heard;

here is the conclusion of the matter:

Fear God and keep his commandments,  
for this is the duty of all mankind.

Studying can **wear you out**, especially if our study is **not rooted** in a **relationship with God**. To "fear God" means to **know**, **love**, and **honor** him. If we pursue learning for ourselves and not God we're in **trouble**.

**1 Corinthians 8:1b** (NIV) ...But knowledge puffs up while love builds up.

**More education**, if done for **self**, creates a "**big head**." You can **learn** a lot of **amazing things**, but if they're separate from the fear of the Lord, you'll miss **who** it reveals. **Paul warns Timothy** of those who are...

**2 Timothy 3:7** (NIV) always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth.

Knowledge is not an end in itself. We educate ourselves and grow and learn **in order** to more clearly **know our creator**. Education is **spiritual formation**. It can help us **love God more** or it can lead us **astray**.

As part of the Ockenga program we toured **Boston College**. I learned it is a **Jesuit school**, so it's **Catholic**, founded by Saint Ignatius of Loyola. They have **three driving questions** they want every **teacher** and **student** to **live by**. "**What are you good at? What do you love? What does the world need of you?**" If a student says, "I just want to get the best degree I can so I can make as much **money** as I can," they say, "That's **not enough**. That **won't** make you **happy**. You need your life to be about **something more**." You **don't have to be Christian** or **Catholic** to go there, and they **don't force** their beliefs on anyone, but they do bring **the way of Christ** into everything they do. It helps them make education about **something more**.

*Education matters to God. All truth is God's truth. Knowledge is not an end in itself.* God worked through education to **provide leadership** to Israel and the church.

## Many of God's chosen leaders were highly educated.

This does not mean **every one** of God's chosen leaders was **learned** but **many of them were**.

- **Moses - Acts 7:22** (NIV) Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.
- **Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, & Abednego - Daniel 1:4** (NIV) young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians.
- **Ezra - Ezra 7:6a** (NIV) this Ezra came up from Babylon. He was a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses, which the Lord, the God of Israel, had given.

How about in the New Testament?

- **Jesus - Luke 2:40** (NIV) And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

Jesus himself was a bit of an **intellectual prodigy** when his parents found him talking with the most **learned minds** in the **temple** in **Jerusalem** (Luke 2:46-47). **What about Jesus' twelve disciples?** Weren't they a bunch of **uneducated men** who launched the most successful **missionary effort** in the world?

The disciples likely spoke two or three different languages, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.<sup>5</sup> Several of them were **small business owners (fishermen)** and at least one of them was a **tax collector**. All of them sat under the **Rabbi Jesus'** teachings for about **three years**. That's **practically a three-year M.Div.** What I like about the **disciples** is they show Jesus can use both the **intellectual** and the **simple to grow his kingdom**. **Elsewhere** in the New Testament **Luke** was a **doctor** (Col 4:14) and Paul was **highly educated**.

- **Paul - Acts 22:3b** (NIV) "...I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors..."

If we study further Paul's life we find a clear example of how his education helped his **mission** to reach the **Gentiles** (the non-Jewish people) with the **good news of Christ Jesus, the gospel**.

## Education matters for the gospel.

The **gospel** is the **good news** that **Jesus Christ** came to save anyone who **repents** of their **sins** and **believes** in **him**. This is a **simple message**, but not always simple to **communicate** in a **winsome way**. This is where education can help. *Education matters for the gospel.*

## It helps us reach our neighbor.

When the Apostle Paul arrived in **Athens** he saw a city full of **idols** (Acts 17:16). He was so **bothered** by them that he went into the **synagogue** and into the **marketplace** and began telling Jews and Greeks about the gospel message—that Jesus died and rose again. As he was doing this he encountered a group of "**Epicurean and Stoic philosophers**" (Acts 17:18). They invite Paul to speak at a **rock formation** called the **Areopagus** (or **Mars Hill**) where the learned **met to discuss the newest ideas** (Acts 17:21).

**As Paul addresses** them he uses **religious beliefs familiar** to them to **explain** the **actual truth**. He talks about their **altar "to an unknown God"** and how he knows this God—the one and only God (Acts 17:23).

He then explains how this God **isn't** like their **idols**. His God **doesn't need anything** from them. He then quotes some of their **Athenian poets** to explain how God is **not far** from us yet also **different** than us.

**Acts 17:28-30** (NIV)

28 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

29 "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. 30 In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.

Paul is saying, "**Your poets** seem to understand that God created us. Well they're **right**, but they're also **wrong**. God isn't like your idols. He's so much **greater**. **Repent** and **come to Christ**." What's the result? A **group** of those listening **believe** and **become believers** (Acts 17:34).

Education is **worthwhile** in and of itself as it helps us **know** God and his **character** better. The better we know **creation** the better we can **understand** the **Creator**. But education can also help us reach our neighbor with the gospel message. It's **not just a means to an end**, but it can aid our **mission**. *Education matters for the gospel. It helps us reach our neighbor.*

### **It helps us love our neighbor.**

Let's go back to our passage in Matthew, the **great commandment**. Loving God with all of our **mind** can **actually** help us **love** our **neighbor better**.

**Matthew 22:37** (NIV) Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

If we're to **love our neighbor "like" we love God** that means we're also to love them with **minds**. It's by using the mind that we can **love** our **neighbors better**, more **thoughtfully**, more **carefully**. The more we **understand science, math, sociology, psychology, economics, writing, politics**, and the **arts** the better we will know how to **care** for each other. *Education can help us love our neighbor better. Education matters.*

I want to **close today's sermon** by playing a **video** we watched as part of the Ockenga Fellows program. It shows how **three churches** are partnering with a **middle school** in **Boston** through a program called the **Boston Education Collaborative** through the **Emmanuel Gospel Center**.<sup>6</sup> *In it the churches are demonstrating how education matters to God and how it matters for the gospel.* I'll say a **closing prayer** after the video.

*Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes endnotes and references, or share it through [Apple podcasts](#) or [Google Play Music](#). Read the [story of our church here](#).*

<sup>1</sup> See Doctorate of Ministry demography study by Jonathan Romig August 25, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Noll, Mark A.. *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (p. 245). Eerdmans Publishing Co - A. Kindle Edition.

<sup>3</sup> Noll, Mark A.. *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (p. 13). Eerdmans Publishing Co - A. Kindle Edition.

<sup>4</sup> Noll, Mark A.. *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (p. 189). Eerdmans Publishing Co - A. Kindle Edition.

<sup>5</sup> Michael L. Brown, *What Language Did Jesus and the Apostles Speak?* Published January 19, 2013. Accessed November 14, 2019. <https://askdrbrown.org/library/what-language-did-jesus-and-apostles-speak>

<sup>6</sup> We heard from Ruth Wong, one of the women featured in the video, at our retreat.