

Every Thought Captive

2 Corinthians 10:1-6

Education is the process of imparting to the next generation an understanding of the world and how to thrive in it. God calls Christian parents, and fathers in particular, to bring their children up in the education (*paideia*) and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:4), to give to their children what they have received from the Lord. This is a foundational act in Christ's kingdom, and one we are just beginning to recover. J. Gresham Machen said, "I can see little consistency in a type of Christian activity which preaches the gospel on the street corners and at the ends of the earth, but neglects the children of the covenant by abandoning them to a cold and unbelieving secularism."

Overview of the Text

Paul earnestly pleads with the Corinthians by the meekness and gentleness of Christ (v. 1; cf. Gal. 5:2; 1 Thess. 2:18). Jesus was meek and mild with the vulnerable and weak, but He was also hard on the proud and oppressive (Matt. 23). Paul has written boldly to the Corinthians while being low-key in person, but he will deal with false teachers forcefully when he gets there if he has to (vv. 1-2). He says that even though we live in the body and in the world ("in the flesh"), we don't go to war that way (v. 3). We don't advance the kingdom with physical weapons, as important as those might be for self-defense. Instead, our weapons are mighty in God for pulling down strongholds and casting down arguments and every high thing set against the knowledge of God. Every thought is taken captive to the obedience of Christ (vv. 4-5). The result of this conflict is not only individual change, but also the defeat of strongholds—institutions, customs, idols, and ignorant ways of life that oppose God and enslave people (cf. Rom. 6:19; Col. 2:20ff.). He expects their obedience to be fulfilled and then the disobedient will be dealt with (v. 6).

No Neutrality

The goal of every Christian must be to take every thought captive to Christ. If Jesus is not Lord of all, then He really isn't Lord at all because there would be some other deity to contend with. This is obviously not Paul's view. If God is God, there is nothing outside of His sovereign plan, nothing that can be understood apart from Him. It used to be easier to pretend that many things are neutral—that boys and girls are objectively defined by their God-given biology, for example. "Yes, we believe that God made them male and female, but you don't need to believe Genesis in order to acknowledge that", it was said. Now are now called sexist and oppressive for affirming what everyone "knew" just a few years ago. It's true that you don't need to believe the Bible in order to recognize the differences between the sexes, but the biblical categories have shaped and defined beliefs and behaviors for centuries. As we rebel against them, things are coming apart. Just last month, a Brooklyn College professor said equations like $2 + 2 = 4$ reek of white supremacist patriarchy and objective truth is a social construct. Professor and theologian Cornelius Van Til, who taught at Westminster Theological Seminary for over 40 years, demonstrated the impossibility of neutrality and the presuppositional necessity of the Christian faith. You have to assume God and His world in order to function, even if you won't worship Him; you have to act as though truth is not a social construct in order to argue against objective truth. There is no such thing as an uninterpreted fact. The only question is whether facts will be interpreted rightly or wrongly. This is why for Christian parents it's not enough to just find a school where everyone agrees that $2 + 2 = 4$ objectively. If we are to understand this basic thing in obedience to Christ, we have to know it does so because He made it that way and we are to use it in order to glorify and enjoy Him. If you never "use" math (or music, history, literature, Hebrew, geography,

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science, chemistry etc.) in your job, you are a better disciple—a learner—for knowing these creations of your creator. Solomon “spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were one thousand and five. Also he spoke of trees, from the cedar tree of Lebanon even to the hyssop that springs out of the wall; he spoke also of animals, of birds, of creeping things, and of fish. And men of all nations, from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom, came to hear the wisdom of Solomon” (1 Kgs. 4:32-34). This mind of wisdom, connecting all kinds of seemingly disconnected things, allowed him to rule.

Minds & Hearts

Because there is no neutrality or uninterpreted facts, whatever we learn (or refuse to learn), we are necessarily incorporating it into a bigger story, one that includes the world and our place in it. Is the universe a cosmic accident that began with an explosion and here I am 10-20 billion years later determining my own meaning? If so, human (and all other) life is ultimately meaningless. How does believing this, or just assuming it (tacit belief), affect a person? We are made in God’s image, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to know and be loved by Him. Because He is infinite, we are going to be learning, growing, changing, exploring, and glorifying Him *forever*. Put another way, we are permanently enrolled in the school of Christ. Our 12-20 years of formal education should be done in light of this. Education includes information—the mind—but also the heart. These can be distinguished but not separated. Think back to your favorite class. Why did you love it? It wasn’t just the material, but what that material meant—the way you valued and were affected by it, usually deeply connected to the teacher. This is true even for seemingly less controversial topics or fields. Even if I am never going to write a line of computer code, should I be grateful for those who do? Do I have a responsibility to use the astonishingly powerful tools provided to me in the modern world, and might it help me to know something about them? To know nothing of how wealthy we are is to be ungrateful to God, and to not use these things to bless others is to be unloving to man. Christ-centered education means knowing the truth, loving the truth, and then using that truth to love your neighbor, all in glad submission to God. Jesus said, “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher” (Lk. 6:40). Because teachers are shaping minds and hearts, parents have to know what is being taught as well as what is being caught. You want your kids to do their best to learn the material, honor their teachers, love their peers, respect their mentors, be kind to those younger than them, and be loyal to the people and places God has given them. Parents, leading your children in this is the course God has enrolled you in. It’s a wonderfully tall order that only grace can accomplish through us.

Toppling Strongholds

Number 2 pencils, trapper keepers, and carpooling schedules hardly seem like the munitions of warfare. But when we do all of this by faith to train our children, strongholds fall down. Some take a long time. A little under 300 years after Paul wrote this, animal sacrifice ended in the Roman empire. It took William Wilberforce 20 years in parliament before the Slave Trade Act of 1807 was passed. We labor in the light of eternity, so be faithful with what you have been given, asking God to use these small things in great ways.