

Education *and* Redemption



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 1:26, 27; Isa. 11:1–9; 2 Tim. 3:14–17; 1 Kings 4:29–34; John 14:17; 1 Cor. 2:1–16.*

Memory Text: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16, NKJV).

The Bible tells a long story about God and His people. Sometimes it is viewed as a love story gone awry, at least temporarily. Or it can be seen as a story of a Father and His rebellious children who, eventually, come around.

But for the purposes of this week's teaching, we will discover in the Bible story another theme, namely, that of a Teacher and His students. They keep failing their tests, but He patiently explains their lessons again and again, until, at last, some learn it.

The Bible story is not unlike our own human stories that we know so well—with one exception. The story of God and His people is assured of a good ending, of reaching its goal. Divine grace toward His people assures that outcome. The human responsibility in this relationship has often been misunderstood and even dreaded by many who have thought of it as onerous. But in fact, the Bible story is essentially an invitation to know God and understand His will. Indeed, learning to know God is our foremost response to His grace. We cannot earn such grace, but we can learn about it, and what is Christian education if not, at its core, education teaching us about this grace?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 21.

In the Image of God

Read Genesis 1:26, 27 and Genesis 5:1, 3. What do these texts teach about how God originally created humanity, and then what happened to humanity after sin?

The phrase “the image of God” has captivated interpreters of the Bible for centuries. What is this image in which the first humans were created? For example, does it mean that God looked in a mirror and formed His new creation to look like Himself? Or does it mean that humans are more like God than all other forms of life are? Or does it refer to a spiritual and intellectual similarity and compatibility between the Creator and His human creation? The Scriptures do not give any precise explanation of this expression even though scholars have derived from Scripture many interpretations of what it could mean. However, we can see that, after sin, this image had been changed, which is why Ellen G. White wrote that the goal of education is to restore in man the image of his Maker (*Education*, pp. 14–16).

How can education achieve such a remarkable goal?

First, we need to remember that God made us to have a relationship with Him, somewhat as parents do with their children. He made us in His image, the same way human parents have children in their image (*Gen. 5:1*), so that He can bring us up to be His children, who belong to His family; He can communicate with us and form a lasting relationship with us. The image of God therefore is more of a “mental image” that enables two beings, one divine and the other human, to have a meeting of minds. This is precisely what happens in education, first at home between parents and children and later at school when teachers take over the work of education. Evidently God intended this process of education we know so well when, distinguishing us from many other life forms, He made us in His own image—He did it so that He can teach us and we can learn from Him, until His image (His mind) is reflected in ours.

The story of Redemption is a story of education from Creation to Incarnation, and from Incarnation to re-creation. God is a teacher, and heaven is a school for all time (see Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 301). What are the implications of this thought for our commitment to Christian education at home, in church, in school, in the university, and throughout life?

Jesus as Teacher

The Bible uses many terms to describe Jesus. He is the Son of God, the Messiah, the Son of man, the Savior, the Redeemer, the Lord, the Lamb of God, just to mention a few. But to those people who knew Him best during His three-plus years of public ministry in Judea and Galilee, He was a teacher. They called Him “Master,” or “Rabbi.” Both mean the same thing, namely, “Teacher.”

Therefore, the teaching profession and the work of teaching must have been a particularly suitable way for Jesus to carry out His public ministry. Somehow His work of Redemption is akin to the work of teaching. What is more, it was foretold by the gospel prophet.

Read Isaiah 11:1–9. What does it reveal about the teaching role of Jesus?

One of the most startling Messianic prophecies in the Scriptures is found in Isaiah 11. Verses 1–3 portray the coming Messiah in educational terms, someone who brings knowledge, counsel, wisdom, and understanding. The whole passage concludes with this remarkable promise: “The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (*Isa. 11:9*). Perhaps it was such teachings of Scripture that inspired Ellen G. White in her book on education to note that the work of education and the work of Redemption are one (see *Education*, p. 30).

Read John 3:1–3. Nicodemus addressed Jesus as a rabbi, and he further identified Jesus’ teaching gifts as coming from God because of the signs Jesus performed, namely, His miracles and insights into the meaning of life. Jesus accepted, if not the title given Him, then surely the origin of His teaching gifts when He responded to Nicodemus that he must be born again to see (understand, as well as enter) the kingdom of God. This means that the authority to teach others, even in the case of Jesus, comes from God.

Surely teaching is a gift of God. It is commissioned by God, it was adopted by Jesus, and it is recognized by those who are taught as having divine authority.

What role do we have in seeing the fulfillment of this prophecy about the knowledge of the Lord going all over the world?

Moses and the Prophets

Read 2 Timothy 3:14–17. What do these texts teach us about the role of Scripture in Christian education?

The word for the first part of the Bible, the Torah, is sometimes translated as “the law,” partly because there are many laws in these books. But Torah really means “teaching” or “instruction.” This understanding is very different from what many think the “law” in the Bible is about, namely, rules and regulations that we have to follow to remain in God’s good graces. Not so; the law is intended as teaching material dealing with how to live successfully and safely in the covenant relationship God intended when He created us in the first place.

The next two sections of the Hebrew Bible, the prophets, report on how well God’s people mastered this educational material and lived by it (the former prophets, or historical books), and what they ought to have learned from this educational material (the latter prophets). The remaining part of the Old Testament (called the “writings” in Hebrew) is full of examples of successful and less-successful teachers and students along with their educational experiences. Examples of educational success in these books would be Esther, Ruth, Daniel, and Job. Among the failures would be Job’s four friends. Of course, the book of Psalms is a hymnbook, but even it has at least three educational psalms: Psalm 1, Psalm 37, and Psalm 73.

The Gospels abound with materials intended for educational purposes, especially in the parables of Jesus. Many of Paul’s letters begin with a strong gospel proclamation but end with educational material, practical lessons about daily life for Christians. The book of Revelation is full of educational material. For example, the whole disclosure, or unrolling of the future of Christ’s church, is revealed in a book that only the Lamb of God—Jesus, the Master Teacher—can open (*Rev. 5:1–5*).

Some may say that not all the teaching material in the books of Moses applies in our time, and that is correct. Deuteronomy 17:14–20, the instruction regarding kings, has some very explicit instructions about the selection of someone to hold the royal office. Today, of course, we do not appoint any kings in our church. How do we determine the proper application of all this teaching material in Scripture for our time?

Wise Men and Women

The words for school, study, and education are clearly understood in our time, but they are not common in the Bible. There is one word, *wisdom* or *wise*, which is much more common. For example, the Old Testament makes mention of wise men and women (*2 Sam. 14:2, Prov. 16:23*).

Read 1 Kings 4:29–34. What does this teach us about the importance of wisdom?

King Solomon is singled out as a very wise man who spoke about animal and plant life and uttered proverbs with great wisdom, meaning as a man of education (*1 Kings 4:29–34*). The books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes contain many wise teachings on numerous subjects, attributed to Solomon, as well as to other wise teachers in ancient times (*Prov. 1:1, Prov. 25:1, Prov. 30:1, Prov. 31:1*).

According to the Bible, wisdom is very much like our education today. It is something one learns from parents and teachers, especially while young (*Eccles. 12:1*), but actually a person accumulates wisdom all through life. Second, wisdom generally has a practical side to it; for example, learn from the ants that save in the summer in order to have enough for the winter (*Prov. 6:6–8*).

Yet, wisdom is not only practical, but it also has a theoretical side to it, for it begins with faith in God and follows certain foundational principles (*Prov. 1:7*). Wisdom helps us live responsibly and for the benefit of others, and it also helps protect us from misfortune. Finally, just like education today, wisdom does not answer all the questions we may pose, but it enables us to be content with what we know while continuing to search for what is still unknown, and that is a good position from which we can learn to know God and to trust in His grace. According to Jeremiah 18:18, the role of the wise teacher is considered on par with the roles of priest and prophet. All three convey messages from God to His people, in the form of instruction in the law, educational counsel, and special messages from God.

How can we learn wisdom and then pass it on to those who come after us? Why is this so important for us, as a people, to do?

Education in the Early Church

One of the remarkable principles of education in Scripture emerges as Jesus, the Master Teacher, prepares to leave His students or disciples. They had been with Him for three and a half years, approximately the amount of time we allocate to a high school or college education. At the completion of either period, depending upon the person, students are often considered ready to manage on their own.

But Jesus knew better, and so He provided His followers with ongoing or continuing education under the tutelage of the Holy Spirit. Elsewhere that teacher or guide is identified as Comforter or Advocate (in Greek, *paracletos*) who will be given to the followers of Jesus permanently (*John 14:16, 17*). He is identified as the Spirit of Truth. While the Holy Spirit is not identified as an educator, the work of the Spirit certainly is educational, particularly as it pertains to seeking and finding the truth.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:1–16. What is Paul saying that is so important in the context of education?

Paul begins by reminding the church in Corinth that when he first came to them he spoke of nothing but Jesus Christ and His crucifixion (*1 Cor. 2:2*)—no clever wisdom, only the gospel proclamation. But that was not the end of it (*1 Cor. 2:6*), because once these new Christians matured, the apostle would be back to teach them wisdom, the things God hid before the world began (*1 Cor. 2:7*), even the deep things of God (*1 Cor. 2:10*). All will be studied under the guidance of the Spirit of God as He joins with the spirit of the learner.

How deep will that study be, and how much learning will be open to those who are led by the Spirit? The chapter concludes with a quotation from the prophet Isaiah: “Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, or as His counselor has taught Him?” (*Isa. 40:13, NKJV*). The prophet speaking to ordinary people of his day would say that no one can do that. But Paul corrected that perception by concluding, “We have the mind of Christ,” meaning that Spirit-filled Christians have access even to the mind of God, and thus to any amount of learning and understanding (*1 Cor. 2:10–13*) that would be needed to know the path of righteousness.

Further Thought: The great gospel commission (*Matt. 28:18–20*) set in motion a remarkable religious movement throughout the whole world. Here a few apostles or missionaries (the two words mean the same—“those who are sent”) went throughout the whole world and gathered up students, made them into disciples, called them to believe in Jesus, baptized them, and proceeded to teach them all the things Jesus has commanded them. The picture is that of Christian converts from around the world, representing different cultures and speaking different languages, coming out of the waters of baptism only to enter a school and begin their education. This is not surprising, for they still had much to learn.

The reason Christians are always learning is not just intellectual curiosity or an eagerness to master knowledge, but rather that the Christian life and faith permeates every corner of daily life. There is so much to learn. Because of that, the letters of the New Testament contain both the proclamation about Jesus (sometimes called by the New Testament word *kerygma* [*keh-RIG-ma*]) and education in all the things Christians have to learn (sometimes called by the New Testament word *didache* [*did-ah-KAY*]). A good example of proclamation is seen in 1 Corinthians 2:2, whereas education begins in 1 Corinthians 4 and continues on and off in the rest of the letter. What is it Christians have to learn?

Work, rest, social issues, community relations, church and worship, economics, philanthropy, relations with the authorities, counseling, family systems, marriage relations and child rearing, food and its preparation, clothing, and even getting old and preparing for the end of life—both one’s personal life and life in this world; to be a Christian means to learn something about all these things and more. Understanding them does not come naturally. It has to be learned.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How important is the educational work for the mission of the church?
- 2 What did Ellen G. White mean when she wrote “Heaven is a school” (*Education*, p. 301)?
- 3 Read 1 Corinthians 2:1–16 again. Look at what Paul is telling us about what God is revealing to us through inspiration. Think about his assertion that the rulers and wisdom of the age will come to nothing. If he could say that back then, what about some of the “wisdom” of our age, as well?