

Education in Arts and Sciences



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rom. 1:18–21, Ps. 19:1–6, 96:9, Gen. 3:6, 1 Timothy 6, Proverbs 1, Job 38.*

Memory Text: “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork” (*Psalm 19:1, NKJV*).

Education includes what has been called “the arts and sciences.” But when we learn or teach the arts and sciences from a biblical perspective, what does this imply? Are we simply offering select Bible verses that relate to a particular aspect of modern medicine or art history, for example? In so doing, we can relate our practical lessons to the amazing power of God in creating our complex world. But a simple incorporation of Scripture in a textbook lesson is only a small part of true education—the education that is salvific and redemptive.

For such an education truly to function, we need God’s Word to inform the teaching of every discipline, from humanities to molecular biology. Without it, we can lose sight of God’s enormity, His sovereignty as Creator and Sustainer of our world. In learning to see how God views His creation as organic and purpose-filled, we come closer to understanding how certain disciplines could and should be taught.

This week we will look at some principles involved in how we can teach the arts and sciences from the Christian perspective and worldview.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 5.

The Lord Alone

There is evidence of the living God in all of His creation. This statement has been repeated so often that it has become clichéd. When we consider, for example, the heart of God in creating this world, which humans have proceeded to damage and mar, we may come closer to how we can best teach the arts and sciences.

Take the human gestation period, for example. Biology tells us that new intelligent human life emerges from one fertilized egg and grows to full gestation after nine months. The marks of a loving Creator are all throughout this cycle. The loving-kindness of God can be seen in the place that a fetus develops: right below the steady beating of a mother's heart. As the fetus enlarges, so does the mother's abdomen, right out in front of her person. The expectant mother is made always aware of her child, just as our heavenly Father is always aware of His children.

Read Romans 1:18–21, Psalm 19:1–6, and Nehemiah 9:6. What do they tell us about God's work as our Creator?

Even after 6,000 years of sin and thousands of years after the worldwide devastation of the Flood, overwhelmingly powerful evidence exists, not just for God as our Creator but for the power and love and benevolence of this God as our Creator. It's so powerful, in fact, that Paul, in Romans 1:18–21, says that those who reject this God will be "without excuse" on Judgment Day because enough about Him can be learned from what He has made. In other words, they won't be able to plead ignorance!

Especially in a day and age in which many humans have come to worship the creation rather than the Creator, how crucial that Christian education in the arts and sciences always work from the assumption that God is the Creator and Sustainer of all that exists. In the end, any ideologies and presuppositions that deny or exclude God can lead only to error. Worldly education all but works on the assumption of no God; Christian education must not fall into that trap, nor must it work even more subtly from the principles based on the assumption that there is no God. Either way, humans are bound to wind up in error.

Think about the incredible wonder and beauty in our world, even after sin. How can we learn to draw hope and comfort from it, especially in times of personal trials and suffering?

The Beauty of Holiness

Psalm 96:9 reads, “Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness! Tremble before Him, all the earth” (NKJV).

How do we understand this concept, “the beauty of holiness”? What should this mean to a Christian, and how should it impact what we teach about art and the beauty often associated with it?

Though it has been said that “beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” we mustn’t forget who it was who created the eye to begin with (see *Prov. 20:12*). Though we have to be careful not to worship the creation itself (see yesterday’s study), from the beauty of the creation we can learn about God and, indeed, His love of beauty. If our fallen world still looks so beautiful, who can imagine what it must have been like before the Fall? And this teaches us that God indeed is the Creator of the beautiful.

Study of arts and sciences can and should, then, draw us closer to the character and heart of God. Because we are a part of God’s own artwork and scientific phenomena, we also can learn more about our own identity in Christ.

“God would have His children appreciate His works and delight in the simple, quiet beauty with which He has adorned our earthly home. He is a lover of the beautiful, and above all that is outwardly attractive He loves beauty of character; He would have us cultivate purity and simplicity, the quiet graces of the flowers.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 85.

Read Genesis 3:6. What does it teach us about how beauty alone isn’t necessarily good or holy? See also *Prov. 6:25, 31:30*.

As with everything God has done, we have an enemy who distorts and exploits it. It shouldn’t be surprising, then, that beauty and concepts of beauty can be used against us, as well. Thus, especially in the arts, Christian education, guided by Scripture, must help us learn to be careful in understanding that not all that is beautiful is necessarily good or holy.

What are some “beautiful” things that are not necessarily holy and good? Or, what are beautiful things that can be made unholy and bad, depending upon circumstances? What standard do we use to make these distinctions?

Experts in Error

We know that our world has more than its share of art and philosophy that does not honor God. Many would argue that Christians should not even enter these proverbial tents. Seventh-day Adventist Christians must carefully consider their own business in serving certain industries, patronizing certain establishments, consuming certain media.

In 1 Timothy 6, we are given clear instruction as to what pursuits we should avoid, but we also are given ample explanation. In 1 Timothy 6:9, 10, what are the pursuits against which Paul warns?

Read the rest of 1 Timothy 6. What are the key pursuits that Paul endorses?

Notice in 1 Timothy 6:20 how Paul warns against “what is falsely called knowledge” (*NKJV*). Though he’s working from a different context, the principle is still applicable. That is, think about all the information, all the teaching, all the beliefs, not only now but also throughout human history, that were flat-out wrong. People can, indeed, be experts in error.

For nearly 2,000 years, the world’s smartest people, the experts, believed that the earth sat immobile in the center of the universe while all the stars and planets orbited it in perfect circles. Some very complicated math and science were used to buttress this belief, even though it turned out to be wrong in almost every particular. Hence, we could say that these people were experts in error, and that this teaching certainly was “falsely called knowledge.”

Biological science today, for instance, is predicated on the assumption that life began billions of years ago, by chance, with no God and no purpose behind it. At the same time, an incredible amount of complicated and detailed scientific literature has arisen based on this teaching. What lessons can we take away from this about how people can be experts in error? How should this realization impact Christian education in general and the teaching of science in particular?

Foolishness and Wisdom

Read Proverbs 1. What does this teach us concerning what true Christian education should be about?

The Bible draws a steady comparison between foolishness and wisdom. The book of Proverbs does well to remind us of the dangers of foolhardy behavior and keeping the company of fools. The distinction is clear: God desires that His people seek wisdom, to treasure it and abound in it.

Students of the arts and sciences utilize their talents to gain knowledge and to pursue excellence in their studies. Teachers of these disciplines do similarly. We can be capable of artistic brilliance and scientific breakthroughs because of knowledge and ability.

Yet, from a Christian perspective, what does a knowledge of the arts and sciences really mean if it does not involve knowing the difference between right and wrong, good and evil, truth and error? All one has to do, for instance, is read a bit about the lives of some of those deemed the world's greatest artists in order to see that having wonderful skill and talent doesn't equate with a moral or upright life. One could argue, too, that great scientists involved in the work of creating biological or chemical weapons of mass destruction might be highly educated, highly gifted, but what are the fruits of their work? As stated before, knowledge, in and of itself, is not necessarily a good thing.

Read Proverbs 1:7. How does this text reveal what the key to true Christian education is?

One Nobel Prize winner, an atheist, a man who studies the universe and the physical forces behind it, wrote: "The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless." What should this tell us about how knowledge, in and of itself, can not only be meaningless but, even worse, lead to gross error?

The Lord Answered Job

Read Job 38. What does this teach us about God, not just as the Creator but as the Sustainer of all life? How should this important truth impact how we understand the arts and sciences?

“Many teach that matter possesses vital power—that certain properties are imparted to matter, and it is then left to act through its own inherent energy; and that the operations of nature are conducted in harmony with fixed laws, with which God Himself cannot interfere. This is false science, and is not sustained by the word of God. Nature is the servant of her Creator. . . . Nature testifies of an intelligence, a presence, an active energy, that works in and through her laws. There is in nature the continual working of the Father and the Son. Christ says, ‘My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.’ John 5:17.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 114.

Unfortunately, as stated earlier, so much of science works on atheistic, materialist presuppositions. This means, then, that a scientist could be staring at something of the utmost beauty, of the utmost complexity, even of both the utmost beauty and complexity together, and yet claim that it arose by chance, with no forethought or intention behind it.

This is, in fact, what science claims all the time. Life on earth, in all its beauty and complexity—from butterflies to humans—is explained as nothing but the result of chemicals billions of years ago forming by chance into simple life that, through random mutation and natural selection, evolved into all that lives and moves and breathes today.

Science, as now constituted, argues that the very idea of a supernatural Creator is “unscientific,” since it cannot be tested scientifically, and thus it is a notion that science cannot deal with. This presupposition is not anything that science itself teaches (in fact, science would seem to teach the opposite: all the beauty and complexity of the world do, indeed, point to a Creator), but is, instead, a philosophical position imposed upon the discipline by scientists themselves.

The problem, however, is that Scripture teaches that God not only created everything but that He sustains everything, as well. This means that any true Christian education in science would have to work from radically different assumptions than what science in general claims. Inevitably, clashes will occur, especially when it comes to origins.

Further Thought: Two reasons exist why science, which gets so many things right, gets origins so wrong: first, science, which studies the natural world, must look only to the natural world for answers; second, science assumes that the laws of nature must remain constant. Yet, both these are wrong when it comes to origins.

Take the first one, which requires natural causes for natural events. That's fine for hurricane tracking, but it is worse than worthless for origins that start out with "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (*Gen. 1:1, NKJV*). What can science, which denies the supernatural in origins, teach us about origins that were totally supernatural?

And the constancy of nature? This seems to make sense, except that Romans 5:12—"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (*NKJV*)—presupposes a natural environment discontinuous, and qualitatively different, from anything that science now confronts. A world in which death did not exist is radically different from anything we can study today, and to assume they were very similar when they weren't, also will lead to error.

Hence, science gets origins wrong because it denies two crucial aspects of the Creation: the supernatural force behind it, and the radical physical discontinuity between the original creation and what's before us now.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, talk about the question of beauty. What is beauty? How do we define it? How might a Christian define and understand beauty differently from a non-Christian?
- 2 Christ could have come to earth as a brilliant scientist, to be richly compensated for His groundbreaking research. He could have garnered all fame as a musical performer. Instead, He came and trained as a humble craftsman. He was present at Creation, but He trained as a layperson and fulfilled His duties obediently. What encouragement does this offer us, wherever we may be in our educational or professional journey?
- 3 Although not every Christian is called to teach in schools, Christians can be ever teaching others in word and in deed, with intention or completely without awareness. For this reason, what habits should the Christian cultivate, both as a student of Christ and as a teacher of the world?