

Developing a Biblical Mind: Equipping Students for the Marketplace of Ideas

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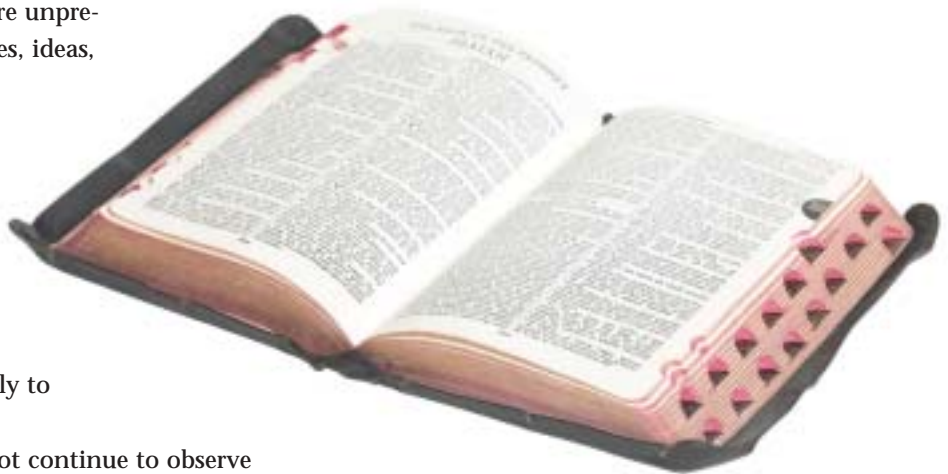
Many Christian students are unprepared for the philosophies, ideas, and paradigms they encounter in today's Western universities and society. Philosophies like humanism, postmodernism, environmentalism, and genetic determinism continue to dominate the culture, causing many to abandon their Christian faith as they become converted intellectually to these and other worldviews.

As Christian educators, we cannot continue to observe this situation with indifference. It is imperative that we train our students to *think biblically*, which means that students should (a) learn to love God with all their minds (Mark 12:30), (b) understand the times in which we live (1 Chronicles 12:32), and (c) develop a truly biblical perspective on every area of life and study.

The Mind in Focus

Why should we think? There are two main reasons given in the Bible. First of all, God has *commanded* us to think, instructing us to love Him with our heart, soul, *mind*, and strength (Mark 12:30). We can easily come to wrong conclusions about God if we do not think about His nature, ways, and character. The proliferation of worldviews such as Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, animism, Marxism, and atheism is a clear example of what can happen when humans fail to come to right conclusions concerning the cosmos and the nature and character of God.

The second reason we should think is that our mind *needs* to be renewed. As Romans 12:1–3 (NASB) states, we are not to be “conformed to this world,” but rather “transformed by the renewing of [our] mind.” Illustrating our need to have it renewed, the Bible contains many



descriptions such as the following that refer to the possible conditions of the human mind:

- Futile (Romans 1:21, NASB)
- Hardened (2 Corinthians 3:14, NASB)
- Blinded (2 Corinthians 4:4, NASB)
- Hostile (Colossians 1:21, NASB)
- Fleshly (Colossians 2:18, NASB)
- Depraved (1 Timothy 6:5, NASB)

The third reason we need to think is to prevent us from becoming captive to false philosophies. The Bible sounds a clear warning when it exhorts us in Colossians 2:8–10 (NASB) to “see to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.”

As Christians, then, we must learn to use our mind for the purpose God intended. We are called to *understand* God and His ways, not just *know* Him personally (Jeremiah 9:23–24). Understanding God means we must learn to love Him with our mind as well as our heart! And it is imperative that we as Christian educators teach our students not only to think about the world they live in but also to seek to understand God's ways—for every

part of life, including history, politics, economics, law, and ethics. The mind can and must be renewed.

Three Steps Toward Developing a Biblical Mind

There are three steps we can take to begin developing a more biblical perspective on the world we live in.

1. *Recognize* that you have been influenced by the ideas and paradigms you currently have in your mind.

All humans have ideas and opinions, some of which are true and some false. When I was five years old, I believed in Santa Claus. I now know that Santa doesn't exist, and I have replaced that idea with truth. Muslims believe in a god called Allah, who has given them specific commands to bring the world into conformity with the Quran. Marxists believe that social evolution is a scientific fact. Humanists believe that abortions and same-sex "marriages" are rights. Animists believe in the "spirits" of objects such as the trees, storms, and mountains. All humans have ideas that influence the way they see the world and consequently the way they live.

We absorb ideas and ways of viewing the world from many sources—including the schools we attend, the books we read, our parents, the media, our church, and our friends. Some of these ideas concern political events and issues in our nation; others concern economics; and still others concern opinions about state law, society, U.S. foreign policy, taxation, and other such matters. We must learn to identify the ideas and philosophies we have considered true, and we must be willing to examine them in the light of the Bible. As educators, we need to reexamine the ideas and paradigms we are teaching our students.

2. *Rethink!* Identify ideas and philosophies that are not biblical.

There are many ideas we hold about the world we live in that are simply not true. As Harry Conn (1978, 15) explains, "The greatest problem we have in the United

States is not ignorance; it is believing things and concepts that are not true."

As Christian educators, we have the task of helping students discover truths in every area of life and reject false ideas and philosophies. Ideas that aren't true will bring bondage, according to Scripture. Jesus said that

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only "the *truth* will make you free" (John 8:32, NASB; emphasis added). The second step in developing a biblical mind, then, is to reexamine the ideas that we hold about the world. Centuries ago, many people believed the earth was flat. In every generation, societies believe false paradigms that shape their direction. To renew the mind, we have to be able to identify these ideas, analyze them, and then neutralize their effects on us. A few of the many

false ideas and philosophies shaping the West include the following:

- Naturalism is the idea that the universe came into being and is governed by only "natural" causes and forces. This philosophy dominates the educational domain today through the teaching of macroevolution in science as true and of abortion, homosexuality, and same-sex marriage in ethics as normal.
- Humanism is the belief that humans are the center of the universe and that people's happiness is the highest value. This philosophy led to the U.S. Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade*, which granted individuals the "right" to abortion.
- Dualism is the idea that life is split up into secular and sacred realms that have nothing to do with each other. This idea permeates the church, and it is used effectively by atheists to convince Christians that they shouldn't apply their Christian moral views in the public sphere. This argument occurs while atheists promote the legislating of their nonbiblical moral views.
- Relativism is the idea that there is no absolute truth but that truth is determined by such factors as a person's culture, ethnicity, and gender. Moral relativism has infiltrated the church, and it is used by atheists to argue for the acceptance of "diverse" moral perspectives and lifestyles.

- Postmodernism is the idea that there are no truths to be found at all since truth does not exist (a claim containing a contradiction within itself!). Postmodernism promotes “diversity” of values, “tolerance” of perspectives, and “multiculturalism”; and it has devastating effects on a society’s ability to distinguish right from wrong.
- Environmentalism is a paradigm emphasizing the priority of nature and of the environment. Some current doomsday scenarios made popular by followers of this philosophy include the beliefs that global warming is occurring and that global starvation is due to finite resources.
- Scientism is the belief that “science” can and will lead us into all truth. (But who determines what a “scientific” statement is?)
- Determinism is the idea that our choices are not free but that they have been determined by chemical, environmental, social, and genetic factors. This idea has led to the acceptance of homosexuality as a normal sexual orientation.
- Globalism is a philosophy emphasizing commitment to global issues and agendas, often at the expense of national sovereignty. A question raised by globalism, for example, is whether—and if so, to what degree—the United States should obey United Nations resolutions.
- Tribalism is an emphasis on the importance of ethnicity, often to the detriment of the welfare of the society as a whole. It continues to be very destructive in Africa, where tribalism hinders nation building and cooperation among diverse ethnic groups.
- Multiculturalism is a philosophy teaching that all “cultures” (and therefore by implication all values and morals?) should be given equal opportunity to shape the direction of society. (But since cultures are shaped by worldviews, it is folly to think that all cultural practices, values, and ideas are good and will be able to create a free, just, and righteous society.)
- Fatalism, often heard among Christians, is a belief that the world will head inevitably in the direction it is currently going, regardless of the actions of individual Christians.
- Pessimism, also popular in the church today, is a be-

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lief that the world cannot be significantly changed because evil must triumph or because Satan is so powerful.

In order to challenge and replace these and other paradigms, we must begin to think again—to *examine ourselves* and our ideas. Is it biblical education to teach our students that the world is overpopulated, for example, without examining the truth-value of this claim? Given the influence of the overpopulation philosophy today in shaping debates in politics, economics, and ethics, should

we not at the very least be willing as educators to *ask* whether this idea is true? Or, as another example, should we teach that a person can be born with a homosexual orientation without first considering the origin and nature of a human choice? Given that the Bible describes us human beings as possessing a body, soul, and spirit, is it not possible (and indeed more logical) that our choices originate in our *heart*

and not in our genetic code? For how could we repent—that is, change our choices—if our decisions or orientations were a part of our physical being?

3. *Replace wrong ideas, or falsehoods, with truth.*

The third step we can take to begin renewing our mind is to replace wrong ideas with truth by *throwing out false ideas*. As Ephesians explains, we must “lay aside the old self,” (Ephesians 4:22, NASB), “be renewed in the spirit of [our] mind” (Ephesians 4:23, NASB), and lay aside falsehoods (Ephesians 4:17). False ideas cannot be made right by simply adding Scripture verses to them, any more than a computer with a virus can be fixed by adding more programs. If Christians believe in abortion, for example, no amount of Scripture memorization will correct the problem. The only way to redeem a mind captured by the philosophy that supports abortion is to throw out the idea of having a right to abortion.

Teaching Students to Think biblically

Philosophies and paradigms will always circulate in and shape cultures. History shows that to be true. Not all ideas can be true, however. In every era it is the task of the church—and certainly Christian educators—to examine

ideas and then teach God's truths for every area of life. For example, there are kingdom truths for marriage, family, economics, law, politics, philosophy, ethics, physics, and chemistry. Believing in philosophies and paradigms that are false—and then teaching them to our students as truths—is not biblical education.

Here are four things Christian educators can do to begin developing a truly biblical mind in their students.

1. Promote critical thinking:
 - By teaching the importance of the mind and of reasoning
 - By teaching the principles of the scientific method but not of enlightenment scientism
2. Cultivate a hunger for truth—all truths—including the truths of such subject areas as chemistry, physics, economics, law, and politics. We must never ignore or sidestep the real questions of life. If we do, we are saying that we do not have the truth or that the answers to those real-life questions lie outside the Bible in some other belief system. Students need to see that God applies to all of life. To teach biblically, then, teachers must learn to do the following:
 - Identify the questions
 - Ask the questions
 - Answer the questions
3. Demolish fortresses like relativism and naturalism. For example, 2 Corinthians 10:3–5 (NASB) states that we are to destroy “fortresses” and “every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God.” Teachers, therefore, must explain not only why moral absolutes are right and why the Bible’s account of Creation best fits the facts of science but also why relativism and naturalism are false, or contradictory, and are therefore invalid explanations of reality. Thus we can destroy fortresses in our students’ minds while simultaneously building a foundation of truth.
4. Teach a comprehensive biblical worldview:
 - God’s sovereignty over all of life—no secular/sacred dualism
 - The nature and character of God—such as His justice, righteousness, and loving-kindness
 - God’s purposes in human history—to have us “disciple” nations (Matthew 28:18–20)

In conclusion, God made the human mind for His glory. Just as with our heart, will, or emotions, however, the mind must be renewed and brought under the

Lordship of Christ. One of the greatest needs in the Body of Christ today is to develop a biblical mind—to think God’s thoughts, have His perspective on all areas of life, and understand the times in which we live. Having a distinctly Christian way of thinking is not merely one option among many, reserved only for academics or intellectuals. Rather, we as Christians are commanded to learn to use our mind so that we can come to love God more deeply, participating in and promoting His ways and purposes on earth. To that end, let us work to develop a biblical perspective on all of life.

Reference

Harry Conn. 1978. *Four Trojan horses of humanism*. Fenton, MI: Mott Media.

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Knowing the Scriptures

12%

of adults believe that the name of Noah’s wife was Joan of Arc. (The Bible does not provide her name.) (1997)

56%

A majority of adults are convinced the Bible proclaims that the single most important task in life is taking care of one’s family. (1997)

75%

Three-quarters of Americans believe that the Bible teaches that God helps those who help themselves. (2000)

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