



## **Everybody Ought to Know**

The Top 5 Things Every Teacher Ought to Teach Every Student in Every Subject

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I teach college. Every semester I get a new crop of students—actually, several crops of students, one in each class. I have goals and objectives for each course and plenty of material to cover. I take those goals very seriously, and I think—a lot—about how I can best reach them. To fail to reach the academic goals for my courses is to fail as a teacher and to defraud my students.

But as a Christian teacher, I have another set of goals for my students, goals that don't (usually) appear on the course syllabus. And this other set is just as important as the academic ones—in the long run, even more important. I find that years after my students graduate these are the goals that they best remember and most appreciate.

And they ought to be the goals for every Christian teacher, for every one of his students.

### Who God Is

We have to start with the most important subject. God is the Creator and Ruler of the universe; He is the one from whom, and through whom, and to whom are all things (Rom. 11:36). It doesn't get any more comprehensive than that. If our students are to know anything else, they must start by knowing God.

When we talk about God, we normally organize our discussion around two big ideas: His person (who He is) and His work (what He does). His attributes, or the descriptions of who He is, are most simply organized after the well-known children's prayer: He is great, and He is good. His works are usually listed as just three: creation, or bringing the universe into existence; providence, or keeping the universe in existence (preservation) and directing the affairs of people and nations (government); and miracles, or everything else.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Two comments: first, many theologians would treat miracles as a special type of providence; and second, my definition of miracles seems jocular at first, but it actually works pretty well. More detailed attempts at defining miracles have often suffered from circularity and other flaws.

There are many ways to integrate these ideas into your teaching, even if you don't teach theology. In language arts you can talk about the importance of truthful communication because God is true and about the image of God in all writers, even those who don't know Him. In history you can talk about providence every day. In science you can talk about creation and what it tells us about God, in every lesson. In math you can demonstrate that its orderliness comes from the fact that it's the design language God chose for the universe. And on it goes. Every subject, properly studied, is a way to learn about God. And learning about God is a way to worship. This is what makes Christian education Christian.

### Who We Are

The human being is complicated. Much of the reason for that is that he is the combination of two significant opposing forces. First, he<sup>2</sup> is created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26–27), and that image remains in him even in his fallen state (Gen. 9:6; James 3:9). This means that all of us have wonderful attributes and are capable of praiseworthy things. We can commend the positive qualities of pretty much anyone we study.

On the other hand, the human is fallen and has been since the first human generation (Gen. 3). This fallenness extends to everyone who has ever lived (Rom. 3:23), except for One (1 Pet. 2:22). So the very people we commend must also be viewed as defective, as sinful, as capable of great evil.

This extends to how we treat our students as well as how we treat our subject areas. As images of God, our students must be treated with respect, both by us as their adult educational leaders and by their peers. These days our culture is giving

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<sup>2</sup> I am intending the masculine gender here to be inclusive. The Scripture passage cited above makes it clear that both sexes are made in the image of God. Grammatically, as Churchill is alleged to have said, the masculine embraces the feminine, and in any case, the conventions for inclusiveness in English are all pretty clumsy and thus unsatisfactory. The discussion between complementarians and the egalitarians will have to wait for a separate essay.

much attention to human rights and in particular to the problem of bullying. The bases for both of these subjects are laid by the biblical teaching on the image of God in mankind.

## Whom We Are Called to Be

Because God has created us in His image, we are here for a purpose, and we will be dissatisfied with anything short of that purpose. In short, we are called, designed, to be servants of the God who created us (Col. 3:24). There are a number of principles that spring from this simple idea.

### Empowerment

God gives his servants the authority and the strength that they need to accomplish what He has called them to do. We can all succeed—and not just in the touchy-feely way that Miss America contestants talk about. We have the skills necessary to do what God wants—even if our skills are very different from the next guy's.

### Excellence

As servants, we are stewards; we are responsible for how diligently we fulfill the tasks God has called us to do. We need to be reminding the students before us that whether today's task is completing a math worksheet, organizing their desks, or competing in the National Spelling Bee, they should be diligent to do their best because they will give account to God of their stewardship, and that day, by the grace of God, has the potential to be unimaginably joyous.

### Eternity

We are servants for eternity, and we seek eternal goals. Both we and our students need to raise our vision beyond today's grades, and this week's cliques, and the issue of the month. We need to develop the perspective of eternity. How will what I'm doing today make a difference in a *billion years*?

## How to Be That

Not everybody can succeed at the all-important task of being a servant of God. The reason for that goes back to who we are. We're in God's image, but we're busted, and we're busted badly. Every part of us is broken—our bodies, our brains, our loves, our choices. We can't be what God has made us to be, and because of that, we can't do what God wants us to do, even if we think we want to.

That's why Christian education has to start with a Christian student. You can't mold Christ-likeness

in an unregenerate student. If you try, you'll get either open rebellion or hypocritical conformity that will probably show up as open rebellion later. That's one of the main reasons why Christian schools lose many of their graduates.<sup>3</sup> So we need to be evangelists in the classroom, challenging our students to "examine yourselves, whether you be in the faith" (2 Cor. 13:5) and modeling a walk with God that is both convicting and attractive.

Regeneration doesn't automatically guarantee success as a servant. The salvation event includes a lot of simultaneous wonderful things (see Eph. 1), but it is just the beginning of a long, sometimes painful process of being conformed to the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 8:29). God empowers that process through His Spirit, but He also prescribes for us certain spiritual exercises that build spiritual strength in the believer; theologians call these the "means of grace" that include Scripture, prayer, and fellowship with other believers.<sup>4</sup> We need to keep the importance of these exercises before our students, again modeling them in our daily activity.

## What Matters

What does it look like to be a servant of God? Jesus' answer to that question is profoundly simple. The most important stuff, He said, was to love God and to love your neighbor (Matt. 22:35–40). Everything we do can be organized under these two headings. Loving God looks like speaking of Him, respecting authority, and refusing to go along with our friends who want to do wrong—among many other things. Loving your neighbor looks like putting his needs above your own, defending him before others, letting him get the credit, stopping gossip, and a lot of other things.

While Christianity is much more than a list of do's and don'ts, the Scripture does lay down a lot of both. But we do our students a disservice if we divorce morals and behaviors from the heart and from the foundation of right and wrong in the character of God and our relationship to Him—our love for Him. When we make our expectations of our students clear, we need to give them the whole story.

So there they are—my most important goals. May they be yours too.

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<sup>3</sup> I recommend Ken Ham's *Already Gone*, available [here](#), for further discussion of this phenomenon.

<sup>4</sup> For a further discussion of the means of grace, see [here](#).