

Back To School

School is back in session! We ought to be thankful that we live in a society and at a time in history where education is available and is valued. We can find plenty to criticize in both public and private education. Nevertheless, we ought to take full advantage of the opportunities before us. First, let me commend and encourage our members who teach. We owe you our prayers and support as you equip our children and grandchildren to function productively. Often you are expected to perform tasks that may not even relate to the subject matter you are teaching. And in far too many cases, parents are not supportive of your efforts; if Junior or Sissy is failing, you get the blame despite the fact that Mom & Dad aren't paying any mind when Junior and Sissy play games on their phones instead of doing homework and studying for tests.

But I would also like to say a few words to our Bible Class teachers. You, too, are unsung heroes. And some of you are wearing both hats. You aren't just teaching our children to make a living, you're teaching them how to make a life! And just as we want parents to be involved in their children's secular education, so Christian parents ought to be actively involved in teaching their children about God and his word daily as well as bringing them to Bible class regularly and making certain that they have done their homework and prepared their lesson for Bible class. And let us as adults, whether parents or not, set the example by being in class regularly and being prepared to study and learn.

And now I want to say something to those who are in school, though what I say will have some application to everyone. Please hear me when I say, "Learn all you can!" Learning really is a life-long process, but it's a proven fact that when you're young, it's easier to learn. That doesn't excuse any of us who are older to claim that we're just too old to learn. An old adage is, "you can't teach an old dog new tricks." Well, young or old, you aren't a dog, and we're not teaching tricks!

But young people especially, learn all you can – even in subjects you may not find very appealing. Maybe I should say *especially* in subjects you may not find appealing. As a school child, I had little to no interest in history and geography. I paid little attention, did virtually no study, and made poor grades in those subjects. History was just what a bunch of dead guys had done, and had no intention of going to those places on the map, so why should I care about them? When I started studying the Bible seriously in my early 20's, I came to regret my ignorance. You can't understand the Bible like you should without knowing *when* certain events happened (history) and *where* they took place (geography). I was still young enough to learn, but I had put myself at a disadvantage; I also needed to earn a living and learn other Biblical truths that would help me live a good Christian life. I'm still weak in history and geography, and it's because I didn't get a good foundation when I was in school – and that's nobody's fault but mine.

Let me urge you to focus in particular on reading. Now you may be thinking, "I already know how to read!" Well, that's great, but still focus on reading! Read the Bible regularly, and read widely from other sources. Read for study, read for pleasure! It will increase your vocabulary and help you to understand what you read. You don't have to agree with everything you read. In fact, it's good for you to read things you don't agree with, because it exposes you to other points of view and makes you think about *why* something is true or false, good or bad.

Jesus asked on at least 5 occasions in the gospel of Matthew, "Have you not read . . ." Usually he was in a conflict with His critics (Pharisees, Sadducees), but clearly He expected them to have read *and understood* and made proper application of the Scriptures.

And that leads to one of the most important things you need to learn: how to think critically. By "critically," I don't mean that you find fault with everything. To think critically is to ask "why," and "am I sure about this?" A critical thinker

examines the evidence, considers other points of view, and then reaches a conclusion. Too often today, school students are being fed politically correct propaganda – they are being programmed in *what* to think, rather than being taught *how* to think. Truth has nothing to fear from an honest examination. Learn to ask “why?” and to use logic. Develop skill in sound reasoning.

One good way to do this is to study math and seek to excel in it. Many students hate math, especially algebra and even deeper subjects like calculus. We might complain, “I’ll never use this!” In the first place, that’s probably wrong. You would be surprised how often you actually need to know math. But even if you never have any use for finding the square root of a number (without using a calculator), the fact is that math forces you to think logically. WHY is the area of a rectangle the length times the width? Because that’s the formula in the math book? No, there’s a logical reason. WHY is a negative number times a negative number a positive number? At first glance that doesn’t make sense, but when you think logically about it, the conclusion is clear.

Jesus was very critical of people who didn’t use logical reasoning. One of those times he was in a dispute with the Sadducees who said there was no life after death. This was one of the times Jesus asked, “Have you not read . . .?” Listen to his logic from Matthew 22:31. “Have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” Now, look at His logic. The first point was that God said “I AM the God of Abraham, Isaac, & Jacob.” You remember that God said this to Moses at the burning bush, long after Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had died. God didn’t say, “I WAS their God back when they were alive, but I AM.” Then Jesus’ second point was that God is not the God of the dead, but the living. The logical conclusion is that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were still living at the time of Moses, even though physically they were dead & buried.

So the Sadducees were terribly mistaken in claiming that there is no such thing as life after death. Jesus said they didn't know the Scriptures or the power of God.

The apostle Paul also used logical reasoning, and that's a good example for us even today. Acts 17:2 says that when he came to Thessalonica, he went into the synagogue "and for three sabbaths REASONED with them from the Scriptures." So Paul not only read the Scriptures to them, but applied them logically to show them that Jesus was the savior and they should believe and obey Him. We also see in Acts 18:4 that in Corinth Paul "reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath and persuaded both Jews and Greeks." In 18:19 he does the same thing in Ephesus, and in 24:25 as he spoke to Governor Felix "he REASONED about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come."

So, bottom line, learn all you can! Focus on reading – read the Bible, read other books, read for learning, read for pleasure. And learn math because it will help you to think logically. Don't stop with learning WHAT is true, ask "WHY" it's true. Learn to think critically. Examine the evidence, think it through, and draw good, solid conclusions. That is especially true in spiritual matters. Don't just assume something is true or false. REASON from the Scriptures. Look at the facts, put two and two together, and you'll be on solid ground.