

Shaping the Next Generation

Goals and Methods of Teaching the Holy Scriptures

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INTRODUCTION

As teachers of the Bible to adults and children we are naturally concerned that we interpret the text correctly. We choose the best materials available, we study the background of a passage, we read commentaries, all in an effort to make sure that 'what' we are teaching is accurate. But do we give as much attention to the 'process' of our teaching? Do we attend not only to the 'what' but also to the 'how' of our communication of the Scriptures?

Notice below how concerned the secular educators at Pennsylvania State University are about the 'how' of teaching. These principles were published by Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence in 2010 (<http://www.schreyerinstitute.psu.edu/definition>):

Definition of Teaching Excellence

At Penn State, teaching excellence is viewed as:

- an academic process by which students are motivated to learn in ways that make a sustained, substantial, and positive influence on how they think, act, and feel;
- a process that elevates students to a level where they learn deeply and remarkably because of teacher attributes that are outlined below.

Attributes of an excellent teacher

An excellent teacher is viewed as one who contributes positively to the learning environment by providing exceptional energy, keen interest in students, and extraordinary strengths in the following five roles:

Subject matter expert

1. Possesses thorough knowledge of subject matter and demonstrates a contagious enthusiasm for it;
2. goes further than the standard textbook materials;
3. researches and develops important and original thoughts on the subject specialty;
4. thinks about the discipline, analyzing its nature and evaluating its quality;
5. follows regularly intellectual developments in the discipline and related fields;
6. takes strong interest in broader issues, and is intellectually admirable.

Pedagogical expert

1. Sets appropriate learning goals and objectives and communicates them clearly;
2. demonstrates a positive attitude toward and trust in students and continually works to overcome obstacles that might subvert learning;

3. evaluates and grades student work fairly and promptly;
4. encourages students to think and empowers them to find their own creativity;
5. promotes a wide range of ideas and the open expression of diverse opinions while maintaining an atmosphere of integrity, civility and respect;
6. guides students successfully through exploration of the creative, critical thinking, and problem solving processes and helps students grapple with ideas and information they need to develop their own understanding;
7. promotes student self discovery;
8. pursues teaching and learning as scholarly activities;
9. exhibits a strong sense of commitment to the academic community in addition to personal success in the classroom;
10. provides, on a regular basis, constructive and objective feedback to students;
11. finds unique and creative ways to connect students to each other.

Excellent communicator

1. Demonstrates effective oral and written communication;
2. demonstrates good organizational abilities and planning skills;
3. helps students learn to use effective communication skills;
4. listens attentively and is available and approachable;
5. utilizes teaching tools appropriately and effectively;
6. simplifies and clarifies complex subjects that result in provocative insights;
7. bridges language and cultural barriers.

Student-centered mentor

1. Makes student learning the highest priority;
2. experiments willingly to affect student learning;
3. strives to stimulate each student to learn through a variety of methods and encourages and invites active student participation;
4. helps students connect learning experiences and facilitates development of self-knowledge;
5. conveys to students that they must reach beyond facts to the understanding and application of concepts;
6. instills a desire in students for life-long learning;
7. inspires them to higher intellectual levels and does not give up on students;
8. connects with students easily and is understanding and personable.

Systematic and continual assessor

1. Develops and uses appropriate student outcome assessments to continuously improve student learning experiences in keeping with stated course objectives;
2. employs a systematic approach to assess teaching, keeps the class material fresh and new, makes appropriate changes where indicated and sets clear objectives that indicate the kind of thinking and acting expected of students;
3. creates an environment that invites constructive student feedback to the instructor;
4. adapts teaching style to accomplish the objectives of successful student learning;
5. recognizes own limitations and shortcomings, confronts and learns from them;
6. advocates learning over testing.

Notice to what extent these teaching principles focus attention on the process or the ‘how’ of teaching. Though we may evaluate our adoption of these secular principles with positive criticism, we cannot fail to appreciate the careful thought that has gone into evaluating and clearly articulating them. The people at Schreyer Institute have given much thought to excellence in teaching secular courses in a public university. How much thought do we normally give to our own effectiveness in communicating the divine doctrines of the Holy Scriptures which have implications for all eternity?

Accordingly, these sessions will focus not so much on the ‘content’ of our teaching in the church as the ‘process’ of our teaching—the ‘how’ rather than the ‘what.’ They are geared toward helping us to define the very ‘task’ of our teaching, what we are trying to accomplish and how we are going to arrive at our goal, that the truth of God and the glory of God is magnified in the hearts and minds of the church.

SESSION 1

The Goal of our Teaching Or *What Are We Doing, Anyway?*

We have all heard the quip, “If the student has not learned, the teacher has not taught.” There is certainly truth in that statement, but it can also be an unfair observation. Sometimes there are students who refuse to learn; for effective learning must be in a context of discipline which is sometimes beyond a teacher’s control (compare Prov. 1:5 and 25:3). A more constructive conversation would follow if we were to complete the following statement: “We know that the student has learned if the teacher has _____.”

DISCUSSION:

GOAL #1: Teaching <i>shapes</i> the <i>content</i> of our students' <i>minds</i> .	GOAL #2: Teaching <i>shapes</i> the <i>imagination</i> of our students' <i>hearts</i> .
<p><i>Questions answered in goal #1:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 	<p><i>Questions answered in goal #2:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7.

Why is Goal #2 Crucial to Shaping the Next Generation?

1. Choices are ultimately made in the realm of the _____. We _____ *what we* _____.

2. Affections for God are ultimately driven by the _____.

1 Peter 1:6-9

⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ that the genuineness of your faith, *being* much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, ⁸ whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see *Him*, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, ⁹ receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of *your* souls.

Hebrews 11:8-10

⁸ By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; ¹⁰ for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God.

Genesis 3:6

⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make *one* wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.

From A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, published in 1961; Chapter 1, “Why We Must Think Rightly about God.”

“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. ...Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God.”

“For this reason the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like. We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God.”

“A right conception of God . . . is to worship what the foundation is to the temple; where it is inadequate or out of plumb the whole structure must sooner or later collapse.”

“It is my opinion that the Christian conception of God current in these middle years of the twentieth century is so decadent as to be utterly beneath the dignity of the Most High God and actually to constitute for professed believers something amounting to a moral calamity.”

“The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him. It begins in the mind and may be present where no overt act of worship has taken place.”

“Perverted notions about God soon rot the religion in which they appear. The long career of Israel demonstrates this clearly enough, and the history of the Church confirms it.”

“So necessary to the Church is a lofty concept of God that when that concept in any measure declines, the Church with her worship and her moral standards declines along with it. The first step down for any church is taken when it surrenders its high opinion of God.”

CONCLUSION

We are right to invest much time into teaching the doctrines of the Word. In fact, detailed attention to sound doctrine is often neglected in many churches today. But we must give remarkable attention, not only to our understanding of God, but also to our perception of God if the beauty and majesty and honor and reverence and fear of God will be ‘caught’ in our teaching.

SESSION 2

Shaping the Moral Imagination through Our Teaching

If it is truly in the realm of the imagination that affections are formed and choices are made, and that what we imagine about God shapes our deepest understanding of Him, then we must make the matter of ‘how’ our teaching shapes the imagination of our students one of our primary concerns. The purpose of this session is to illustrate how the imagination is shaped and how our understanding of this process informs our teaching.

1. The Shaping of the Imagination in Deuteronomy 6

A. God desired that His people _____ Him and _____ Him.

⁴ “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD *is* one!” – corresponds primarily to the _____.

⁵ “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, – corresponds primarily to the with all your soul, and with all your strength.” _____.

B. God directed the way in which this knowledge and love would be handed down from generation to generation:

1. _____ (v. 7) Repeated Instruction
2. _____ (v. 7) Daily Conversations
3. _____ (vv. 8-9) Deliberate Images
4. _____ (vv. 20-25) Engaging Narratives

Note how these teaching tools capture the imagination!

2. The Use of 'Forms' to Impact the Imagination

We can certainly learn important information through nondescript, black-and-white text, or through unembellished communication styles. But the creative *forms* of communication are what impact the imagination and shape our affection for the information.

A. Our 'forms' capture and impact the imagination. For example:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

B. God intends that our 'forms' be of a specific moral quality.

Philippians 4:8

⁸ Finally, brethren, whatever things are **true**, whatever things *are noble*, whatever things *are just*, whatever things *are pure*, whatever things *are lovely*, whatever things *are of good report*, if *there is any virtue* and if *there is anything praiseworthy*—meditate on these things.

We must be discerning about what is bad and good, good and better, better and best.

3. The Implications of this Dynamic for Teaching

There are many aspects of our teaching that shape the imagination

- A.
- B.
- C.
- D.
- E.

4. The Implications of this Dynamic for Worship

Teaching in the church is ultimately about the edification of the congregation toward Christ-likeness, so that God is truly worshipped. 'Worship' can be defined as "the expression of our affections that are evoked when we encounter something that is truly awesome or amazing to us." By that standard, we all are born worshippers. We know what it means to stand in amazement at something that has captured our imagination and filled us with wonder. What, then, is 'Christian' worship? 'Christian' worship is *the expression of our affections that are evoked when we encounter the True and Living God.*

This definition causes us to ask two important questions:

1. How well do we _____ the True and Living God?
 - A. What is our _____ of God? Who do we perceive God to be?
 - B. What is our _____ of God? What do we perceive God to be *like*?
2. Are the affections evoked by our knowledge of God _____?

SESSION 3

Recognizing and Encouraging Spiritual Growth

The two categories that have been explored in the two previous sessions, the *understanding* and the *imagination*, are also useful categories for recognizing and encouraging spiritual growth in students. To illustrate this observation we will focus our attention on Hebrews 5:10-6:1 where the author of Hebrews gives us two insightful clues into the nature of true spiritual maturity.

Because the recipients of the letter to the Hebrews had grown sluggish with reference to heeding the Word of God, they were affected in two ways, and both of these ways have to do with their spiritual maturity.

1. Spiritual growth is measured by _____ (Heb. 5:10-14a).

A. The _____ of knowledge of God's Word

Being a mature believer is more than having a knowledge of the Word of God; but being a mature believer is AT LEAST having a knowledge of the Word of God.

B. The _____ for measuring knowledge of God's Word

Can you explain how Jesus Christ is a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek?

What skill would you need to be able to explain this doctrine?

(1) A working knowledge of the _____

(2) A working knowledge of the _____

(3) The ability to draw the appropriate _____ from a comparison of the Old and New Testaments.

C. Encouraging proper knowledge of God's Word in students:

(1) We ourselves must have this knowledge.

(2) Importance of Bible facts and catechesis

(3) Importance of teaching biblical metanarrative

2. Spiritual growth is measured by _____ (Heb. 5:14b).

The word 'discernment' is a form of the word 'judgment.' Discernment is 'exercising good judgment.' It is the ability to distinguish categories of *value* with respect to the imagination. It is having the right kind of affection for the right kinds of things.

A. Discernment is marked by at least four characteristics:

1. Discernment is _____ —“by reason of use”
2. Discernment functions in the _____ —“have their senses”
3. Discernment is the product of _____ or _____ —“exercised to discern”
4. Discernment mandates a _____ —“both good and evil”

B. Encouraging discernment in our students:

1. Teach a proper view of the love and fear of God.
2. Endeavor to make real-world applications from the Scriptures, which offer examples of how the biblical *commands* and *principles* should always direct our decisions.
3. Narrate the biblical wisdom of the 'two paths' (e.g. Proverbs).
4. Lead discussions about current events or fictional scenarios and ask students to make godly judgments concerning them. Ask, “What would God say about this?” Or, “What would a godly believer do in this situation?”
5. Direct their attention to godly role models, including yourself, to their pastor(s), and to other mature examples in the church.

The Best Advice for Teaching: *By God's grace, endeavor to grow in the proper knowledge and love of God, worshiping God in a way that is worthy of Him, then love your students with sincerity. This is truly teaching, called in the New Testament 'discipleship.' Discipleship is not merely the transfer of knowledge from one brain to another, but the transfer of discernment from one life to another. Being this kind of teacher is what allowed Paul to say with boldness, "Follow me, just as I also follow Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1).*