“Let’s Build Something Biblical”

Introduction

Problem: More and more families are ignoring God’s mandate to train our covenant children in the instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:4) and are choosing to educate their children in secular institutions because they do not see the value of Christian education? Why is this? What can we do about it?

A big part of the responsibility in helping families realize the value of Christian education lies on us as Christian educators. We need to work together to provide a type of education that is different from secular or even “Christian” education. We need to provide a type of education that is distinctly Biblical from its foundation. The point of my message to you today is address three essential questions and an aim that will help us work together to achieve this goal.

I. What is our role as a Christian teacher?
   a. Calling- “Why did you decide to become a teacher?” (Think/Pair/Share). Likely, some of you said you felt “called”. What does that mean? When we call someone, we do it with a specific purpose in mind. Rarely do we just randomly call out someone’s name for no reason whatsoever. When God calls us he also has a specific purpose in mind.
   b. Task- This specific purpose is what we would call our “task” and the specific task we have been called to is to teach Christianly. We can think of it as God’s invitation to join him in the work he has already begun in the lives of his children. (Phil. 1:6). We are like invited guests to a dinner party that has already started. The host of the party has already begun his work and we are invited to be a part of it. When we look at our task in this way, we see that our calling is not merely to teach, but to teach Christianly and the task of teaching is so much more than a job merely as a means to receive an income. It is an invitation to be a part of God’s ongoing Kingdom work. When we respond to God’s calling to teach Christianly, we are responding in obedience to the Cultural Mandate from Gen. 1 and 2—“be fruitful and multiple, rule over creation, subdue the earth, form and transform culture.” In order to truly understand the nature of our call we need to see this mandate not so much as a command, but as a promise and an invitation to flourish. It is the expression of the purpose for which you have been created.
   c. Office- We carry out our calling and task from our God-appointed office—a specific position within God’s Kingdom. It is a religious office because of the direct influence we have as teachers to shape and mold the hearts and minds of our students. In a sense we are all worship leaders and we are either leading to our students to worship the one, true God as we reveal Biblical truth through the study of his creation or we are leading them to worship false gods as we elevate the endeavors of science, technology and mankind over the works of God. Our office is an important one and with it comes three implications:
      i. Responsibility- Inherent in our calling, task and office is a huge amount of responsibility because of the power we hold as teachers to influence the lives of children whether for good or for evil. That is why James 3:1 implores us to assume this office with caution. If we do decide to assume it, we need to do so with a commitment to excellence.
ii. Authority—our office also comes with the implication of authority to make wise decisions in our classrooms and schools. Students, parents, gov’t standards, standardized tests or textbooks should not override our decision-making authority in determining how or what we teach. Students will learn best when you lead with an assertive voice and assume a servant-leadership role. Gov’t. standards and textbooks are meant to guide the development of curriculum not serve as the curriculum of the course. As Christian teachers we also have the authority and responsibility to exceed the government standards in the content that we teach and how we teach it.

iii. Servanthood—Go back and examine your response to the question that was posed at the beginning—“Why did you become a teacher?” Ask yourself if your reason(s) were focused on your own desires or the best interests of your students. Our office of Christian teaching implies an attitude of servanthood following the example of Christ as described in Phil 2:3-6. Everything we do in our classroom must cause us to reflect on why we are doing what we do. Is our pedagogical choice based on our own interests and desires or the needs and interests of our students? For instance, if I choose to give my students endless amounts of seat work which they complete quietly and individually am I choosing that instructional technique because it’s easier for me to plan and manage and it gives the appearance that my classroom is orderly and my students are well-behaved? In choosing this instructional technique, am I considering whether or not this is the best way for my students to learn according to their diverse learning styles and needs? How about assessment? Do I choose to use mainly objective and convergent types of questioning patterns because they are easier and faster to score or do I allow for open-ended, divergent types of questions that allow students to think deeply and express their understanding in a variety of ways, but also allows for the possibility that the conversation will take an alternative route and I will have to monitor the path of learning and redirect if needed.

II. Who are our students? Ask for audience response. Lead participants to consider this question from a Biblical perspective.

a. Holistic view of the student— not merely “brains on a stick”; present aim for Christian teaching—“to equip students to become knowledgeable and competent disciples of Christ.”

b. Fallen, image-bearers- Genesis 1:26, 27; Romans 3:23

c. Biblical Throughlines- big picture ideas around which we organize curriculum. They are the qualities that we desire students to develop as God is revealed to them through the curriculum. They help students find their true identity and become who God created them to be. They also link all subjects and topics together by tying them back to basic Christian discipleship principles.

i. God-worshippers- involved in regular and meaningful worship experiences

ii. Idolatry-discerners- adept at identifying and understanding the idols of our time.

iii. Earth-keepers- respond to God’s call to be stewards of all of creation.

v. Justice-seekers- act as agents of change by identifying and responding to injustices.

vi. Creation-enjoyers- celebrate God’s beautiful creation.

vii. Servant-workers- work actively to heal brokenness and bring joy.

viii. Community-builders- active pursuers and builders of communal shalom.

ix. Image-reflectors- demonstrate their response to Christ’s call to be his workers.

III. How then do we teach Christianly?

a. Start with this question—“Why do I do what I do?” Far too many teachers neglect to reflect on their teaching practices. Often what we say we believe (our professed beliefs) about our role as a teacher and who we believe our students are and our pedagogy do not match. We need to be fully aware that what we believe and how we teach are inextricably linked. So, ask the question, “Why do I do what I do?” daily in order to discern whether or not your teaching practices line up with Biblical principles.

b. Evaluate this statement- “Christian teaching involves the integration of faith and learning.” Do you agree? Disagree? Why? (Think/Pair/Share)

We need to rethink “faith integration”. Faith and learning do not need to be combined because faith is already inherently at the source of all learning. Education is never a religiously neutral activity. What we teach and the way we teach will either lead students to acknowledge the one, true Creator God or false idols of our time.. Our role as Christian teachers is to uncover this truth that is at the core of all that we teach and lead our students into a deeper understanding of the God who is at the source of all truth. All truth is God’s truth and we are called to make that truth explicitly clear to our students. All knowledge points to our Creator God and should lead us to live lives of service to him. This is the essence of truly Biblical teaching and what makes Christian education distinct from other types of education.

c. Integrate vs. Integral- Read Genesis 2:4-14

i. Lamanai illustration—as curriculum designers we are like archeologists uncovering what is already there and has been there from the beginning. New discovery for me at Lamanai this trip—there are possibly more than 600 structures on the site—only 6 of them have been excavated. In our teaching and curriculum writing, we are digging for something of much greater worth than ancient buildings—we are uncovering God’s truth. It is at the source of anything and everything that we teach. Our role is to uncover the truth that is naturally at the core of all that we do in the classroom. There is no need to try to add it in or combine it with learning. It is already at the foundation; we need to bring it to the surface and make it apparent to our students in all that we do whether the content that we teach or how we teach it and assess it.

ii. Begin your unit planning with considering how your subject and topic fit within God’s story of redemption—Biblical motif: Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration. Use “Biblical Perspective on Language Learning” as an example.

d. Compare and Contrast 3 frameworks

i. Secular
ii. “Christian”- secular model plus appendages (ie. devotions, evangelism, Christian modeling, etc.)

iii. Biblical—focus on “being” rather than “doing”, grace, and discipleship

IV. Conclusion- a Biblical perspective should inform all that we do in the classroom from how we view our role as a teacher, how we view our students and the content and pedagogies we choose to utilize. The government often determines the learning targets and a broad scope of the content that we teach, but it is our responsibility to uncover God’s truth at the core of that content and teach it in such a way that our students develop discipleship characteristics. For instance, through our teaching we can help students develop higher order thinking skills (Bloom’s taxonomy) that will equip them to engage in Kingdom work as co-rulers with Christ.

V. Q and A