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# Article XII. Education

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Christianity is the faith of enlightenment and intelligence. In Jesus Christ abide all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. All sound learning is, therefore, a part of our Christian heritage. The new birth opens all human faculties and creates a thirst for knowledge. Moreover, the cause of education in the Kingdom of Christ is co-ordinate with the causes of missions and general benevolence, and should receive along with these the liberal support of the churches. An adequate system of Christian education is necessary to a complete spiritual program for Christ's people.

In Christian education there should be a proper balance between academic freedom and academic responsibility. Freedom in any orderly relationship of human life is always limited and never absolute. The freedom of a teacher in a Christian school, college, or seminary is limited by the pre-eminence of Jesus Christ, by the authoritative nature of the Scriptures, and by the distinct purpose for which the school exists.

*Deuteronomy 4:1,5,9,14; 6:1-10; 31:12-13; Nehemiah 8:1-8; Job 28:28; Psalms 19:7ff.; 119:11; Proverbs 3:13ff.; 4:1-10; 8:1-7,11; 15:14; Ecclesiastes 7:19; Matthew 5:2; 7:24ff.; 28:19-20; Luke 2:40; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; Ephesians 4:11-16; Philippians 4:8; Colossians 2:3,8-9; 1 Timothy 1:3-7; 2 Timothy 2:15; 3:14-17; Hebrews 5:12-6:3; James 1:5; 3:17.*

## (Sermon Title) Matthew 28: 18-20

**Introduction:** We are living in a time in which there are many who would try to identify the Christian faith with individuals who have little education or who simply do not understand the world as it really is. They have equated deep faith with a rejection of true education or genuine intellectual pursuits. Christian faith has been defined by Communist leadership as an "opiate" for common people.

In reality the Judea-Christian tradition has always been immersed in a strong hunger for learning and a consistent urging of the people to pursue wisdom and understanding. In the Pentateuch Jewish families were commanded to make the teaching of God's truth a daily pursuit. In fact they were told to teach this truth many

times during the day. (Deuteronomy 6) In the New Testament epistles Paul admonished Timothy to study in order to show himself approved unto God. (II Timothy 2:15) Teaching and studying are the twin rails of Christian growth as throughout the centuries the faithful have nurtured the truth of our Lord's word in our hearts.

In the text for this message Christ Himself commissions the church to teach. In these last words before His ascension Christ noted the source of the power available to the church, the action to be taken by the church (teaching) and His companionship of the church in this great endeavor. If education is important enough for our Lord to make it a focal point of His last earthly instructions to us it is certainly important enough for our attention and our best service.

### **Baptist Focus**

We owe a great debt to those Baptists who have preceded us. They have prayed, preached, fought, bled and even died in order that we might enjoy the opportunities that we now have. In Baptist life:

Fellowship - Has always been a pressing matter

Worship - Has always been an essential matter

Evangelism - Has always been a burning matter

Missions - Has always been a driving matter

Education - Has often been a divisive matter or seemingly no matter at all

We talk passionately about renewal in missions and evangelism, not education.

We have started many great schools only to see too many lose their way.

The Baptist Faith and Message statement on education reads in part "the cause of education in the Kingdom of Christ is co-ordinate with the causes of missions and general benevolence." Through its six seminaries the Southern Baptist Convention invests 25% of its Cooperative Program budget in theological education. While this is a noble effort, it is far less than that of the mission enterprises in other areas. At the undergraduate level Christian higher education among Southern Baptists (at least until the last two decades) has been under the arena of the State Baptist Conventions. Recently the seminaries have organized and launched colleges as well as graduate programs. Current Southern Baptist history is replete with examples of Baptist colleges and State Baptist Conventions dissolving their relationships. This is a sad commentary on our professed commitment to Christian education in the realm of higher education. For our students in primary and secondary schools we have largely neglected the opportunities for Christian education that can be provided through church-based schools. We have abdicated to the government the education of our children, and they we have wondered why our children often do not hold the values of our historic Christian faith. We would like to blame government or someone for our difficulties, but the truth often is that we have walked away from both our responsibilities and opportunities in shaping the future of our children.

### **A Call to Action**

Our Lord's Great Commission tells us to go out into this world of great need, and as we are going to make disciples. Education is absolutely indispensable in the making of disciples. We are to teach the truth of salvation to bring sinners to repentance. Then

we are to teach the truths of Christian living to make true disciples of our Lord. This is an ongoing and unfinished work for our Lord.

If we are to take seriously our Lord's Great Commission there is the absolute necessity for a focused renewal in the area of Christian Education among Southern Baptists. Too often we operate under the seeming dictum that we must decide between education and missions. This is an absolutely false dichotomy. The more we engage in Christian education the more we are compelled to go in service through Christian missions. The more that we go in service through Christian missions, the more that we are driven to Christian education to sharpen skills and increase vitality. **Thus I would issue a call for a renewal in Christian education among Southern Baptists.**

The Need for Renewal can be seen in many areas. Among these are the following:

There is a **Need for Renewal of Relationships.**

We have relegated church work to church vocations.

We have relegated education work to educators.

By making these mutually exclusive, false and dangerous divisions in our churches we have relegated our church members and students to confusion over the seeming mutual lack of trust between church leaders and educators.

Educators too often see church leaders as ignorant conservatives.

Church leaders too often see educators as keen minded and cold hearted heathens.

We all need to remember the Great Commission of our Lord and renew our relationships accordingly.

There is a **Need for Renewal of Responsibility.**

Educational institutions and their related denominations seem to be focused in finding the shortcomings of each other.

We look for someone to blame, and we blame each other for difficulties in educating and training our people for living in difficult times.

Therefore, our students are denied the spiritual and intellectual growth that is fostered in a mutually supportive, vibrant Christian education environment.

We all need to grow up and accept the responsibility for our strengths and weaknesses and work to help each other to enhance our mutual work.

There is a **Need for Renewal of Relevance and Vitality.**

For many Baptists looking at Christian education is like visiting a museum To view an endangered or nearly extinct species.

Christian higher education must be a laboratory where our best minds and our hottest hearts are combined in the singular task of educating and training the leaders who will literally change the world in their various disciplines in the name of Christ.

There is a **Need for Renewal in Outcomes.**

We have become market driven as opposed to master molded. These are not mutually exclusive domains. We can provide the market with leaders who have the top skills needed with the bonus of hearts that have been molded for servant leadership.

There is a **Need for Renewal of Courage.**

We have become politically correct rather than passionately Christian.

There is a **Need for Renewal of Offensive Power.**

We have majored on accommodation rather than transformation. Christian education is transformational in the arenas of both academic discipline and character.

There is a **Need for Renewal in the Audacity to Stand for God.**

Society calls us irrelevant at best and dangerous at worst.

There is a **Need for Renewal of Integration.**

We have isolated faith and discipline. In recent years there has been a call for professors to integrate their faith into their discipline of study and teaching. I would propose that this is not a matter of integration of faith into discipline. Rather this is a matter of permeation of all that we are and do with the living presence of the Holy Spirit.

There is **Needed Action in Renewal.**

**Educational Institutions Must Renew their Christian Character and Practice.**

It is not enough for an institution merely to talk about Christianity.

It is not enough merely to have Christian faculty and staff working at a given place teaching generic material.

Christian institutions must foster a total Christian worldview in their formal declarations as well as their daily practice.

### **Educational Institutions Must Become Laboratories Rather than Museums.**

We must recapture the wonder and awe of our God in academia.

We must recapture the magnitude of our opportunity to change lives.

We must recapture the focus of the Great Commission.

We must attract the very finest minds and hearts for faculty.

We must dispel the idea that if one is a conservative Christian he/she cannot have a world class, keen mind.

We must hire the very finest Christians for faculty and staff and take care of them.

### **Denominations Must Be Christian in Relating to Educational Institutions.**

We must provide adequate funding for our educational institutions so that they are never tempted to sell their souls for alien funding.

We must welcome dialogue and not isolate the academy from the church.

We must hire those who are of us and then treat them like family.

We must truly believe that Christian education is worthwhile. It really does matter where our children and adults are educated.

**Conclusion:** The time for renewal within Christian Education within Southern Baptist life has come. There is need for renewal within the institutions of higher education as well as within the denomination. Certainly none of us have arrived at perfection.

If we each choose the path of renewal there is hope that the very best days in Christian higher education are before us.

If we neglect the path of renewal there is almost certainly an era of decline and drift before us.

In the balance is nothing less than the future health and well being of our institutions and denomination. Far more importantly, in the balance is the question of our commitment to our Lord's Great Commission the education of future generations of Christian leaders.

Dr. Kinchen