

The Value of a Seminary Education

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Abstract

A talk given at Faith Bible Church, Ithaca, NY on 24 Nov 1974.
The topic is covered under three headings all drawn from the Bible:
the value of education; the value of religious education;
the value of a seminary education.

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I'd like to speak this morning about the value of a seminary education. Believe it or not, this is going to be an exegetical message. I had to work a little to work one up along this line, but I have three points here: 1. The value of education; 2. The value of religious education; 3. The value of seminary education. So attacking it in that direction, I think we'll be able to find enough biblical material to operate with.

1. The Value of Education

So first of all, we'd like to look at the value of education. What is the value of education? I want to handle this in a somewhat peculiar way. Let's see how it goes. When God created man, He says to him in verse 28 of Genesis chapter 1: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." And then he goes on to say a few more things about man's commission. Man in creation was commissioned to have charge of the earth. Now the words that we have in the commission—in Genesis chapter 1, verse 28—sound rather agricultural rather than cultural in general. There's been a big argument in Reformed circles in the last ten or fifteen years over the cultural mandate, whether man has been given a commission by God to subdue all things involving human culture and bring them into His will, and whether or not the fall has influenced this thing. But we see in the creation account that man is given charge over all these things.

When we turn over two chapters, to the fall of man, Genesis chapter 3, verses 17 through 19, Adam is rebuked by God, and He says, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree which I commanded you saying, you shall not eat of it, cursed is the ground for your sake. In sorrow you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles also it shall bring forth to you, and you shall eat the herbs of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground. For out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and unto dust you shall return."

We don't see here that the commandments of God regarding subduing the earth are revoked. They are still applied even. But now (it is implied) because of the fall, it is going to be very difficult. Now man is not going to find work a joy. It's not going to be an easy thing. It's not going to produce the kind of results it would otherwise have produced. It's going to be a very difficult sort of thing. So we have these two things in the background of our discussion: the mandate of God given at the creation, and the fact that that continues after the fall, but that a very negative feature is added, with struggle, toil and perhaps not successful. Let us move on.

Let us look at education in the fallen condition. We are all still there, in this fallen condition; even though we have entrusted ourselves to Christ as our Savior, we are redeemed and being

redeemed, we are still fallen. And the best place in Scripture to find information on education in man's fallen condition is the book of Ecclesiastes. Now Ecclesiastes is often looked at somewhat askance by conservatives. I've seen a number of commentators who give you the impression that this is merely man's wisdom, that this is just an inspired record of man's wisdom, rather than that Solomon was inspired by God to say these things. Now I should point out that the book of Ecclesiastes disagrees with this conclusion. In Ecclesiastes 12:9-11 we have: "Futility of futilities, says the Preacher, all is futility; and moreover, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; indeed, he gave good heed and he sought out and set in order many proverbs. The Preacher sought to find out acceptable words, and that which was written was upright, even words of truth. The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by a master carpenter, which are given from one shepherd." Notice the book of Ecclesiastes makes a very strong claim for itself, that you are listening to the wisdom of God as experienced by Solomon.

Moreover, in the New Testament, we have a reference which must surely be to the book of Ecclesiastes, in Romans 8, verse 20. There we find Paul saying, beginning at verse 18: "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation waits for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creation was made subject to futility, not willingly, but by reason of Him who subjected it to futility, in hope..." So, here in Romans 8:20 we have a reference to the futility of creation, and it uses exactly the same Greek word as does the Greek translation of Ecclesiastes in the ancient Septuagint version of the Old Testament. The only passage I can find in the Old Testament that really emphasizes the futility of the created situation with man fallen is Ecclesiastes. So if some of you have doubts about whether or not this is what Ecclesiastes is about, hold them in abeyance for the moment while we examine some material which gives us the word of God, and shows us a very important aspect that we need to recognize about our condition in this world: even though we've been saved, the world itself yet groans, waiting for the redemption of the whole creation.

Well, the first thing, which I really don't need to give you Scriptural support for—I think you know by now from your work at Cornell—education is wearisome, it's unending, and it produces grief and sorrow. Ecclesiastes 12:12: "Further my son, be admonished, of the making of many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness to the flesh." Education is hard work; it is tiresome; it is unending. At least in my experience, and in that of many of those I've talked with, the more you learn, the more you find out you didn't know, and the more you find out you don't know still. In fact, it seems to me that you find out there are things you don't know about faster than you find out about things. In other words, in the time when your total knowledge in some area may grow by a factor of two, your knowledge of things you don't know may grow by a factor of twenty. Rather distressing! But this, I think, is the thrust of the remark

here by Solomon. And in verse 18 of the first chapter, he says "In much wisdom is much grief, and he that increases knowledge increases sorrow." Ignorance is bliss. That doesn't mean it doesn't have some disastrous results. But the more you know, the more you see how bad the situation around us is. The more you see what a mess man has gotten himself into. "In much wisdom is much grief, and he that increases knowledge increases sorrow."

Well, you say, what on earth am I talking about the value of education for and bringing up all these things? We're trying to be realistic! That's one thing.

The second point we need to make under education in the fallen condition: even though it is wearisome, unending, producing grief and sorrow, it is a command laid upon us by God. Still in Ecclesiastes, chapter three, verses 9 and 10: "What profit has he [man] that works in all his labors?" What advantage, what profit, does a person get out of all the work he does? "I have seen the travail which God has given to the sons of men to be exercised in it." He's given him this thing to do, and yet it is labor; it is hard now, since the fall. It was work before, I presume, but it wasn't wearisome, it wasn't hard, it was a joy; but now it is labor. More specifically to the point, back in chapter one of Ecclesiastes, verses 12 and following, "I the preacher," says Solomon, "was king over Israel in Jerusalem, and I gave my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven. This sore travail has God given to the sons of men to be exercised with." It's man's responsibility to find out what is going on here on earth. To find out what everything is about. And to use those things in accordance with God's will. And that has now become a difficult labor. It is much more difficult than it was before. So education is wearisome, unending, producing grief and sorrow, but it is laid upon us by God.

It is incomplete and of uncertain value. The emphasis here is on "uncertain," not that there is no value. Still in Ecclesiastes, moving over to chapters eight and nine. We find that Solomon says in chapter 8, verses 16 and 17: "When I inclined my heart to know wisdom, and to see the activity that is done upon earth, for also there is one who neither day nor night sees sleep with his eyes, then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun; because though a man labor to seek it out, yet he shall not find it. Indeed, though a wise man think he knows it, yet he shall not be able to find it." So there are some things that we really need to know about, that we cannot find just by education. Just studies are not going to give us complete information. Even for us who know the Scripture, God did not reveal everything He's doing in Scripture. He reveals a lot of principles; He reveals a lot of specific things He did in certain people's lives in the past. But it's not possible for us to say exactly what God is doing right now. Or when some disaster comes upon us, it is not possible for us to say exactly what God has in mind. We have the principle: God is working all things together for good to those who love Him. But we may not yet see what the good is going to be. So man's wisdom is incomplete.

In chapter nine, verses ten and eleven, he says: "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might. For there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave where you are going." Your opportunity to work is now; not after you die. "And I turned back, and I looked under the sun, and saw that the race is not [always] to the swift, and the battle is not to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill, but time and chance happen to all of them." You may have five times the education that someone else has, and yet he has got an in with a senator, so he gets the government contract and you do not. You may be better in some area—you are looking for a job somewhere—you are the better candidate; but for some other reason, someone else gets the job. There are all sorts of things where merit does not necessarily produce the best result. Quite often, when you come down to making a choice between two roads you can take, you may have more education than someone else, but not enough education to make the correct choice for sure. So some guy with less education, by chance, makes the right choice, and you, with more education, make the wrong choice. You see, whenever your knowledge is not complete, you can't guarantee that will happen. So education will always be, for men in the fallen state, incomplete. And the value is uncertain in this sense: you can't be certain you've made the right choice, in many, many cases.

However, as Solomon points out, it certainly beats ignorance!

Education, he says—wisdom—in chapter 2, verses 13 and 14; starting in verse 12, he says: "I turned myself to consider wisdom, and madness, and folly. What can a man do that comes after the king?" How are you going to beat me? I have the dough; I've got the time; I've the political power. I have a chance to investigate all these areas. You're never going to get a chance to investigate them like I do, says Solomon. "What can a man do that comes after the king? Only that which already been done. Then I saw that wisdom excels folly as far as light excels darkness. The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness." There is a great encouragement here, you see. Even though the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, it usually is. So if you don't train yourself in running and expect that all the other guys will fall down in the track meet and you're going to win—even though you're the slowest runner—you're not going to win many races. So, what he's trying to point out is this: that even though man is fallen, even though there is this uncertainty, it's still better to know things than not to know them. Yet he goes on at one point right after this, though. "And yet I myself saw that one event happens to both of them. Both the wise man and the fool are going to die." There's that to consider. But it's still better in this life to be wise than it is to be ignorant. It's as much better to be wise than ignorant as it is to be able to see than to be blind. You are able to make many decisions that are going to work out better than a person who doesn't know as much.

And finally, Solomon says: knowledge, in fact, is a gift of God. The last three verses of chapter two in Ecclesiastes. After saying a number of these things about the difficulty of life in the fallen state, he says, "There is nothing better for a man than he should eat and drink, that he should

make his soul enjoy good in all his labor." So, how does man get along in this fallen condition? He tries to enjoy life, even in the midst of all these uncertainties. In the midst of all these difficulties, he tries to go on and conduct his life and tries to enjoy his life. But then Solomon points out this: "This also I saw, this gift is from the hand of God." Even the ability to eat, and to drink, and to enjoy life is from God. "For without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?" I've had as good an opportunity to eat and drink and enjoy things as anybody else has, says Solomon. "For God gives to a man that is good in his sight, wisdom and knowledge and joy. But to the sinner he gives labor to gather and heap up, that he may give it to him who is good before God. This also is futility and vexation of spirit."

So, in summary, what is the value of education in the fallen condition? Although it is wearisome, unending, and produces grief and sorrow, God has laid it upon us to do it. Although it is incomplete and of uncertain value, yet it sure beats ignorance. And knowledge is finally a gift of God. God, who is working all things together for good to those who love him, will work it out that you will get through this life. But he has laid the responsibility upon you to study and to understand things, and to get on with serving Him.

2. The Value of Religious Education

Well then, we come to number two, the value of religious education. We can get this summarized very quickly in two passages in Proverbs. In Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" and "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." If you're really going to have wisdom and knowledge, you don't have the real stuff unless you have a fear or reverence for God. You may know a great many things about the universe, but in the long run you're going to be in very bad shape. Because God is the One who made the universe; God is the One who controls the universe; God is the One who is going to bring everyone into judgement. If you do not know and fear Him, what you've heaped up in these areas of knowledge and wisdom are really going to look rather foolish.

Now Psalm 119 gives us a number of benefits of religious knowledge. We just pick out a few verses scattered through this particular psalm. The first benefit of religious knowledge is real happiness. "Blessed are they," says Psalm 119:2, "that keep his testimonies, that seek him with the whole heart." One who is seeking to know God. One who is seeking to be educated in the area of our interaction with God. "Oh the happiness" is a good translation of this word that is translated "blessed" here. "Oh the happiness of the one who keeps his testimonies, keeps his laws, keeps his revelation, and that seeks him with the whole heart." Many people are looking for happiness, but that is not the way to find it. Happiness is a by-product, not an end in itself. If you make it an end in itself, you won't find it. If you make seeking God an end, you will find happiness, and you will find God. So, one benefit of religious education, if it is true education, if you are really learning how things are in that area, is that we will have happiness.

Another benefit is that we ourselves will be changed into what we ought to be. Verses 9 and 10 of the same chapter. "How shall a young man cleanse his lifestyle? By paying attention to it according to your word. With my whole heart I have sought you. O Lord, let me not wander from your commandments. Your word I have hid in my heart, that I might not sin against you."

So, another thing that is a benefit of religious education is that we have a cleansing of our life. Our own life changes toward what it ought to be from what it has been. We begin to get along better with other people, we begin to be like what people think people ought to be like; even unbelievers believe people ought to be honest, ought to be friendly, ought to be happy, they ought to be a blessing to be around instead of a curse. And yet the only way to have these happen that's going to have any integration with your whole life view, is by coming to know God better, by coming to realize that he has given us plans in his word that allow us to know how we ought to be, and by seeing that he also provides the power to do this.

Another important value of religious education is some very spectacular knowledge that it gives us. Think of verse 18 here, where the psalmist prays: "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law." We see what a marvelous difference there is between the technology and the standard of living we have today and that of two hundred years ago. And it's because some men have spent their lifetime studying natural law, and other men have spent their lifetime studying how to take these laws which the others have discovered and apply them to our life—science and technology. Well, the Bible's suggestion is, that if men were working that hard to discover the Biblical laws, and another group of men or the same group of men were working that hard to figure out how to apply these Biblical laws to their own lives, we'd have that difference in lifestyle in the moral and spiritual realm that we have now in the physical realm. So, he says "Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things out of your law."

And then, he makes some even stronger statements over in verses 97 to 100. "Oh how I love your law. It is my meditation all the day. You, through your commandments, have made me wiser than my enemies." Enemies may be equally intelligent with you; they may work as hard as you do. But they're working just trying to take the whole universe as it stands, and work through it, and trying to figure things out. We have a shortcut. We have to do all that too. But we have information right here from the Creator. It's like trying to figure out how to use a complicated piece of equipment without the design manual and with it. You've sure got an advantage if you've got the design manual. You know how it's supposed to be operated; you know something about how it was built, or at least the instructions for the user. You can go right to it. Otherwise you stand an excellent chance of fouling up something and ruining the whole equipment before you figure out how it works. So, that's the advantage the believer has.

It goes on to say, verse 99: "I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation." Your teachers, presumably, at least know more than you do. On the average, probably they would be more intelligent. Usually college professors are more intelligent than their students, you know, as a whole average. Yet, if they do not make God's testimonies their meditation, you will be wiser than they will.

"I understand more than the ancients..." I understand more than those who have lived years and years. We know, in educational circles, that although young men often have very brilliant ideas, yet the men just before they retire, are usually the men who have built up the mass of data, gotten all this piled up in their minds, and have gotten an overview of it, and they're the ones who generally write far the best texts; they're the ones who can put it all together, and show how the situation stands. So here it says, "I know more than the elders, because I keep

your precepts." One who goes about trying to keep God's law learns more about human nature, more about God, more about the world around him, than someone who studies it but is not trying to keep it. So here, we see something of the value of religious education in the area of wondrous knowledge.

And finally, in the area of guidance. "Your word," he says in verse 105, "is a lamp for my feet, and a light for my path." Having seen what Solomon had said about education: having seen how uncertain it is, how incomplete it is; having seen that nobody knows what is beyond death by observation until it is too late to come back and tell anyone else. God's word is like walking in the dark through the woods, and you've got a lamp, because you've got God's word. But a person who doesn't have God's word, he's just walking without it. Particularly if you think about walking in Palestine, where there are very steep hills, and cliffs, and gullies, and things of that sort. We can even think of Bishop Pike who died in the wilderness; I believe part of this thing involved falling off a cliff, while he was troubled by the sun, and the lack of water and such. But it's very dangerous to be out at night in an area like that without light. And God's word is like a light. It gives us knowledge that we can't get from inside the universe in any other way.

Then verse 130 carries a similar idea. "The entrance of your word gives light. It gives understanding to the simple." A person who is concerned to understand God's word gets a great deal of light from it, gets understanding from it.

Well, all this has been Old Testament material. And some might wonder whether it's still important in the New Testament. That would be somewhat strange if it were not. That after all these things said about learning in the Old Testament, suddenly you say that in the new dispensation which is better, we can all be ignorant and happy. But there are some explicit remarks in the New Testament that seem to go against this anyway. The Great Commission: "Go therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you." The responsibility of the church is to teach believers everything God has commanded. One of the things God has commanded is to subdue the earth. One of the things he has laid upon us is the requirement to try and find out as much as we can about what God is doing in this universe and how this universe is operating, as we saw in Genesis and Ecclesiastes. So one important thing is that teaching is put very central in the Gospel, and the teaching of everything.

Another thing that makes an important value to religious education that we see in the New Testament, which is parallel to the remark about knowing more than your teachers and a lamp to your path, and things of that sort, is found in 2 Peter 3. Here we find, in verses 15 and 16, the apostle Peter says to his hearers: "Consider the longsuffering of our Lord as salvation, even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given unto him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to be understood." The Bible has got some hard things to understand in it, even in the New Testament. It is not true that everything in the Bible is so clear that even a baby can understand it. Some things are; you may have to explain it to them. But some things aren't. "Which"—these some things which are hard to understand—"those who are unlearned and unstable twist, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction." It's dangerous to be unlearned and

unstable, because it will tend to make you twist the Scriptures to destruction—to your destruction, not to the Scriptures' destruction. So, a value of religious education: avoiding destruction, which is connected here with ignorance as well as instability.

Another value, which is very important, and really somewhat down the same line, is avoiding shame in God's presence, even for those who are Christians. Avoiding the shame we would have at the judgment if we have mistreated his word, if we have lived lives that were far less productive than they would be because we didn't understand his word, we were mishandling it, even though we were believers and saved. 2 Timothy 2:15: The word "study" here in the King James sounds rather educational, but is actually an Old English word meaning "work hard." "Work hard to show yourself approved to God, a workman that does not need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth." Work hard on trying to handle the Scripture properly.

And then, a very important value of religious education, found in 2 Timothy 3:16-17: "All Scripture is God-breathed; it is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for instruction in righteousness, so that the man of God might be mature, completely equipped for all good works." The way you get that way, studying Scriptures—religious education.

Well, that completes our second point, the value of religious education: happiness, cleansing of our life, wondrous knowledge, guidance through our life, avoiding destruction, avoiding shame, and helping us to grow in grace, to be what we ought to be.

3. The Value of a Seminary Education

What about the value of a seminary education? Well, Scripture makes clear that the church is supposed to have trained people in the leadership. In Ephesians chapter 4, we have a rather interesting remark by Paul. In chapter 4, verses 11 through 14: Speaking of gifts, which God has given the church, it says "he gave some to be apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastor-teachers, for the perfecting or the maturing of the saints..." And then, this does not show up too well in the KJV—don't know how it shows up in the NASB—but he switches prepositions, "... for the perfecting of the saints, so that they will do the work of service, and that they will edify the body of Christ, until we all come in the unity of the faith and into the knowledge of the Son of God unto a complete or mature man, to the measure and stature of the fullness of Christ, that we may henceforth no longer like children tossed back and forth, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the slight of men and the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive." So here, responsibility: God has given gifts to various people who are saved, so that they might be these various officers; and their purpose is to mature the saints, so that those saints can do the work of Christian service, and so that those saints can edify one another in the body of Christ, so that all may grow up to be mature, so that none of us will be blown around by the various different opinions that exist in the world around us in religious areas.

So the Bible speaks very strongly of the need for trained teachers, and the need for trained leaders in the church, and says that these people are God's gift to the church. Many people take that one thing and they run with it, somewhat like bad fullbacks, who grab the ball and duck their head and run. That works very nicely if the hole is where you are running toward, but if

the hole opens in another direction, you run into the blocker and it's all over. So when we grab a verse from the Bible and run with it, we should keep our eyes open, lest there should be another verse out there that we run into unawares. So saying that it is God's gift doesn't mean there is no responsibility for us. I'll wait around until the gift falls down and comes upon me. It doesn't say how it comes upon you; it doesn't say how you know whether you have a gift of this variety.

In fact, other statements in the Bible seem to indicate that there are some objective things that indicate whether or not a person has these sorts of gifts. In Titus, for instance, chapter 1, verses 5-12, it speaks of the need for trained leaders, and puts a few objective items before us so that we can judge whether or not the person is the right sort for these things. It says in verse 5: "For this purpose [says Paul] I left you [Titus] in Crete, that you might set in order the things that are lacking, and that you might ordain elders in every city, as I appointed you." Then he goes on to explain what the elder ought to be like: blameless, husband of one wife, having faithful children, etc., steward of God, not self-willed, etc., just, holy, temperate, holding fast the faithful word as he's been taught. He's been taught by somebody. Apparently he didn't just sit around, waiting for it to come in by osmosis or something. "That this person may be able by sound teaching, both to exhort believers and to convict unbelievers. For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things they ought not, for the sake of filthy gain." There are a lot of heretics out there in the woods, and you can't stop them by shouting at them; you've got to stop them by wiping out their arguments. And the only way you can do that is to be trained. And it is the responsibility of those in the church to be able to do that.

First Timothy chapter 3, verse 2, also deals with such things; it says, "If a man desires the office of overseer, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, self-controlled, etc., able to teach..." So a person must have the gift to be able to teach. But the Bible indicates that, even though it uses the term "gifts" very often, that there is such a thing as the development of gifts; you don't just let them sit there. You have to work on them; you have to develop them. Just calling them "gifts" means they ultimately come from God, but does not say that there is no activity of man in between that has some effect on the situation. In fact, I think that's what we're seeing pretty well in the parable of the talents and the parable of the pounds, and this sort of thing. God has given something, but then how is it used? The person who doesn't use it, just lets it sit—and I might also say, doesn't develop it, just goes with what he's got—is not using the gift God has given him.

Now Scripture also makes it clear that these men are trained by other such men. This is seen in 2 Timothy 2:2: Paul says to Timothy, "Therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, the same you commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." Paul has committed the Biblical teaching to Timothy; he is to commit them to faithful men, who will be able to commit them in turn to faithful men. You see a concern for organized religious training of men who are to be leaders, who are to be able to teach other people, put forward very clearly here.

Well, so far, I don't suppose we have said much that many would disagree with, even though there is a large number of people in Christian circles who believe that people should not go to seminary. A Bible college education is enough, and if you get more than that, it makes you stale. If you get more than that, you're no good to the church any more. They will usually give the sort of answer, "Well, all this is true, but you don't to go to seminary for that. You don't need to get into all this exegesis." In fact, I've heard a little quip: "When you begin exegesis, then exit Jesus." This may be cute, perhaps, but not very Biblical, I think. How well trained are men supposed to be? Well, you don't need to be very trained; if you know how to lead a person to Christ, that's enough. Well, that's important. If you don't know how to lead a person to Christ, you're probably not in very good shape for work with other people.

But one thinks—and perhaps this is the influence that has produced von Däniken's material also—that all of those guys back there were just ignorant fishermen, and they really didn't know much, and therefore they could probably hardly read or write. Of course we should point out that first and second Peter are in rather good Greek, and about as difficult reading in many ways as far as the Greek structure is concerned as any book in the New Testament. Rather strange for an ignorant fisherman!

So, how well trained were men in the early church? There were the twelve apostles. They had three years of education under Jesus. I don't think we'll match that anywhere in this world! Jesus, I presume, didn't just tell them Bible stories. At least the education he gave them in arguing with the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Herodians, I think that is very impressive. So the disciples had several years of training under Jesus.

Several men were trained for years under Paul. We see Timothy, starting with Paul on his second missionary journey; that would be around AD 51. He is still an assistant in some sense when 2 Timothy is being written about 65, so that's about 14 years later. The way Paul is handling this, Timothy starts out as just an assistant. Then as he gets more training and experience, he moves up until he is something of a colleague. Both Paul and Barnabas had a hand in the training of Mark. So did Peter. We hear a little bit about Titus and Apollos, Priscilla and Aquila, who may have had similar training. So, although the education in the early church was not as formal as it later came to be, it appears to have been lengthy and practical.

Well, what about all these languages and exegesis in seminary? We don't need that, do we? Yes, we do! You see, the early apostles had some familiarity with Hebrew and Greek, and that is what the Old and New Testaments were written in. Most Christians today can get by quite well with just some facility in their own heart language, at least if the Bible has been translated into that language. But leaders in the church, those who are going to be preaching and teaching the Bible, need to have some handle on the original languages so they can understand what the force and ambiguities of the words and expressions in the original are. And exegesis also includes understanding the culture of those to whom the Bible was first written, so that we can translate that too into the culture of those we are seeking to teach. So the kinds of things taught in seminary are needful for leaders in the Christian church. This is not to say that seminaries don't face various problems today, but that is a topic for another talk!

Does the church need scholars? Well, admittedly, there have been some big changes in the nature of education in the nearly two thousand years since the events of the New Testament. The Middle Ages saw the rise of universities, and these are somewhat different than anything that existed in the ancient world. But there were already scholars back at the time of Jesus' ministry. Think of the scribes, those who spent a great deal of effort seeking to understand the Bible. It is true that Jesus often speaks rather negatively about the scribes and the lawyers that he dealt with. But this is not to say that Jesus despised education. Look with me at Matthew 13:52: "And Jesus said to them, 'Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old.'" We see here that there will be disciples of the kingdom of heaven who are scribes, that is, scholars.

We don't know how many or what fraction of believers should be scholars, and how this relates to those who will be pastor-teachers, elders, and so forth in the church. On these matters, no doubt, there have been differences of opinion over church history, and these differences continue today. But my suggestion to you here at Faith Bible Church in Ithaca, New York, many of whom are students at Cornell University and Ithaca College, is this. God has given many of you intellectual and spiritual gifts, and I suspect he wants some (or even many) of you to get a seminary education by which you can become more effective pastors and teachers, helping others to understand God's message to the world. May God give you grace to do so.