

BaptistWay Bible Series for June 22: The discipline of learning

June 16, 2008

Matthew 11:28-30; John 14:23-26; 1 Corinthians 3:1-3; Hebrews 5:11-14

There is a piece of my educational past about which I am not particularly proud. In my junior year of high school, I signed up for accelerated Algebra 2. The teacher was a very likeable fellow. He was a bit unorthodox in his methodology (at least as far as I was familiar). He laughed and joked and made up problems in his head for examples rather than following the book page for page.

Perhaps the most peculiar thing that I discovered about him was that although he assigned homework, he never took it up. As my adolescent logic kicked in, I decided that if he didn't take it up, I wouldn't have to bother doing any homework. It seemed like a great plan ... until the tests. Then I learned a valuable lesson from a painful experience: The day-to-day learning must take place if I am going to gain an understanding and mastery of the subject. My final grade for Algebra 2 was not a passing grade. I had to repeat the course the next year. I did not, however, repeat my mistake.

The Christian life bears some striking similarities to my math class in high school. There are day-to-day assignments no one is grading. But failure to learn from the day-to-day leads to a dismal performance on the day of testing. We often have been guilty of over-simplifying what the Christian life looks like: thinking regular weekly attendance at a morning worship gathering is sufficient. Scripture paint a different picture. In each of the

three passages, the concept of learning as an on-going behavior is prominent.

Jesus' statement in Matthew "come unto me" (v. 29) is a well known offer. Many weary and burdened souls have sought respite in the words of the Savior. But in the midst of the offer to lighten the load we find the command, "learn from me." The emphatic nature of taking a yoke is understandable, but the command to learn seems out of place to the hearers today.

Too often we hope someone learns a part of what we are teaching. Teachers constantly look for new ways to communicate in the hopes a student is paying attention. In calling an individual to discipleship—day-to-day learning—Jesus implies learning is not an option. It is something that must be done.

Now that I am in full math remembrance mode, may I share another story? One Christmas break, I was helping a friend who had fallen behind in her Geometry studies. I went over to see if I could offer any assistance. When my friend opened the book to chapter seven, she could make no sense of what the assignment was asking. In frustration, she showed me the pages of the chapter that offered no support for the expectations in the problems.

I asked a simple question: "Did you cover those concepts in the last chapter?" My friend was floored. It never had dawned on her that she was supposed to actually remember the details from previous chapters. In her mind, once the chapter was done, so were those concepts. It helped bring her into better focus on the subject of geometry.

Have you run into Christians who look at their faith in much the same way my friend looked at geometry? In John's Gospel, we find the expectation of learning put into action.

The mark of one who is following after the Master is putting into practice

all they have learned from Him. Jesus draws the line clearly: If you love me, you'll obey me. If you do not obey me, then your love for me is suspect.

A.W. Tozer is quoted as saying: "The Bible recognizes no faith that does not lead to obedience, nor does it recognize any obedience that does not spring from faith. The two are at opposite sides of the same coin."

The focus on the Christian life is not learning a lesson and then discarding it. It is a lifetime of continually learning from our Savior, applying his truth to every area of our lives, and allowing our lives to be marked by more