

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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The Sermon: TO BE LEARNED IS GOOD -- IF!

Scripture: Book of Mormon, II Nephi 6:57-61.

O that cunning plan of the evil one! O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men! When they are learned, they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves; Wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness, and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish. But to be learned is good, if they hearken unto the counsels of God.

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How much to you know? It is a strange paradox that the more you think you know, the less you probably do know. The fool always thinks that he is wise; he does not have the capacity even to recognize his ignorance. On the other hand, the truly wise man always knows that he is a fool -- that no matter how great his knowledge, it is insignificant and infinitesimal compared to the things he doesn't know.

Man has accumulated a vast knowledge during his life on this planet. Our libraries are crammed with it; our scientific achievements give eloquent evidence of it. Yet there are countless things that man does not yet know. No one knows what life is, or how it originated in the beginning. We know the laws by which it is passed on from one generation to another, but we cannot create it; we can only destroy it. We do not know what thought is, or the relationship between life and thought. We do not know what electricity is, although we know hundreds of ways in which it acts and ways in which we can use it. We can travel around the world -- from one point to another on its surface -- with the speed of sound, but no one has ever travelled as far as ten miles up into the atmosphere away from this planet; and this planet is only an insignificant speck in the vast reaches of space where distances are measured in terms of light years rather than miles. We don't know how many stars there are, or how far space extends. And in spite of our anti-biotics and our miracles of surgery, we still don't know how to cure the common cold.

One of the quotations which you may

have learned in school is from Alexander Pope, who once wrote: "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing." Learning is sometimes hypnotic. When we get a little of it, we are in danger of thinking that we know it all. Ignorance is also dangerous; but a learned ignorance, which gives the individual the illusion of learning without true learning, is more dangerous than an unlearned ignorance. The man with no learning at all has no learning of which to be proud. But the partly learned man may be so proud of his little store of learning that he doesn't recognize his pitiful ignorance. Therefore many supposedly learned men are pitifully ignorant. Giovanni Papini says: "The imbecility of 'profound' philosophers is so immense that it is exceeded only by the infinite mercy of God." Many adults are like a little first grader boy who once lived next door to me. One day he came running home and breathlessly announced to his mother: "Oh, Mother! I'm almost through school! We finished our first reading book today!"

When men get a lot of knowledge (by human standards) they are apt to think they know so much that they can get along without God, unaware of the vast store of knowledge still hidden to them, but known to an omnipotent and omniscient God. In the words of our scripture reading: "When they are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing that they know of themselves." Almost anyone can teach something to a man who recognizes his ignorance and who is humble enough to want to learn; but God himself cannot teach a man who thinks he knows it all.

God wants those who serve him to be an intelligent people -- yes, an educated people -- because he wants a free people, and only the truth can make men free. Only the truth can teach men how to live according to God's physical and moral laws without violating those laws and suffering the consequences. Only people free from sin can be free from the bondage of sin. Only people who know how to act are free to act. In a society where no one knew how to build an automobile, no one would be free to drive or to ride in an automobile. In a society where no one knew the truth about disease germs and viruses, men would always be in bondage to disease. In a society where men do not know the truth about God, they are in bondage to superstition and the exploitation of priestcraft.

What are some of the dangers of learning? First, it often educates only the intellect, but not the whole man; it leaves the conscience, the moral sense, the spirit, and the emotions untouched. A man with a natural genius for making money, if he has a good education, can make money legally, legitimately, and in a way to benefit himself and bless society. But if the same man uses his genius and his education to swindle others, it would be better if he had no education. Education which gives man skill, but does nothing to direct his moral sense, only makes an amoral or immoral man more skillful in working mischief upon his fellows. Education which fails to educate the emotions along with the intellect gives adult weapons, tools, and skills into the hands of emotional infants who lose their tempers at the slightest crossing of the wills, and lash out furiously with their strength and cunning and skill of adults.

Second, learning brings temptation to use its power for self. Any man who knows more than his neighbors can find ways of exploiting his neighbors, and gathering to himself material wealth, political power, and social prestige and position.

Third, learning is a temptation to

pride. It is easy to suppose or deduce that because I know more than others, I am better than others; that because I have learning I don't need God. Pride and arrogance take over, replacing faith, humility, and teachableness; for those who depend solely on their own learning are forced by their pride to defend their own opinions and actions -- right or wrong. Thus pride in human wisdom brings contention, as each man who is wise in his own eyes and too proud to admit the possibility of error contends with every other man over his interpretation of truth.

Fourth, pride and selfishness in learning prepare the way for self-deceit. One whose primary interest in life is to maintain the correctness of his own position and the morality of his own dubious actions, finds in his education a ready means of rationalizing and deceiving himself. Learning, with pride, increases the capacity for self-deceit. It also increases the capacity for deceiving others and convincing them that truth is error and error truth, because the educated man knows how to use language in skillful flattery and cunning.

There always comes a point at which man's human or worldly wisdom fails, and he finds himself helpless and in need of God. Any learning that leaves out God is still ignorance, for God is the source of all truth, and the educated man whose education does not include or take into account the God who is the Maker, Creator, Sustainer, and Ruler of all things, as well as the Source of all things, has only hypnotized himself into believing that he is a wise and learned man.

We should learn all we can from all sources we can -- from men, from schools, from colleges and universities, from the best books, from experience and experimentation. But we should test all our learning by the wisdom which comes from God -- by the Spirit of truth. We should always beware of the pride that closes the door to God's wisdom and is satisfied with the wisdom of men. "To be learned is good, if they forget not the counsels of God."