



Desert Hills Bible Institute

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The Telos of Theological Education

The church is the “pillar and buttress of truth” ([1 Tim 3:15](#)). It is the singular institution that God has ordained as his own household and embassy to advance the kingdom of his beloved Son, King Jesus. Precept after precept in both the Old Testament and New Testament commend the cultivation of God’s *torah*—his instruction for all mankind in every sphere of life ([2 Sam 7:19](#))—among humanity in general and God’s people in particular. The Designer and Creator of humanity certainly knows best how his creation may flourish. His graciously given precepts, then, are to be sought more than fine gold ([Ps 19:7–11](#)).

As the pillar and buttress of truth, God has gifted the church with a host of servants and means “for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; ¹³until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. ¹⁴As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; ¹⁵but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love” ([Eph 4:7–16](#)). The designed purpose of instructing and discipling God’s household, then, is to refashion his children more and more into the image we were originally designed and created to express—that of God himself ([Gen 1:26–27](#)). God the Son—Jesus Christ—as the perfect model ([Rom 8:29](#); [Eph 2:10](#); [1 John 3:2](#)), is that quintessential image of the invisible God ([Col 1:15](#); [Heb 1:3](#)). In this ever reforming way of instructing and multiplying God’s image bearers will the earth be filled with the knowledge of glory of the invisible God as the waters cover the sea, as God intended from the beginning ([Hab 2:14](#); [Isa 11:9](#)).

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The church of Jesus Christ exercises this joyful duty of instructing his disciples in many different ways, each with its own advantages: the primary New Testament mode of preaching “everything [Christ has] commanded” in a corporate setting ([2 Tim 4:2](#)); then other modes such as systematic catechism, small group or individual Bible study, evangelistic meetings and Bible conferences, electronic media, formal academic settings, and various other avenues. While regular assembling of the saints is both commanded and edifying ([Heb 10:24–25](#); cf. [1 Cor 11:20–21](#), [33](#); [16:2](#)), specialized and formal instruction has always been necessary and beneficial (see, for example, [Deut 31:9–13](#); [Neh 8](#); [Eccl 12:9–12](#); [Acts 22:3](#); [Col 3:16](#); as well as extra-biblical settings of such instruction throughout church history).

In any discipline, literacy is equated with flourishing—whether economics, social sciences, medicine, engineering, or even zoology. How much more, then, is biblical literacy equated with the flourishing of the church of Jesus Christ? As Western culture secularizes more and becomes less biblically theologically literate, the depreciation of human flourishing as God intended becomes ever more evident. The biennial Ligonier Ministries and LifeWay Research [The State of Theology](#) survey (2022) offers important insight into the biblical literacy of professing evangelical Christians in the United States (and the United Kingdom). Many of the statistics are concerning, to say the least. For example, 61% of *evangelicals* agree that “Jesus is the first and greatest being created by God.” Bluntly, that means that well over half of evangelicals affirm the ancient heresy of Arianism, a teaching that was universally condemned by the church of Jesus Christ at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325. The apostle Paul would be “astonished,” to say the least ([Gal 1:6–7](#)). Both the survey and casual conversation with cultural Christians underscore the need for teaching those, who name the name of Christ, to observe all he has commanded them, and for equipping 21st century saints for the work of the ministry. The survey concludes, “These results convey the ongoing need for the church to be engaged in apologetics, helping unbelievers by providing a well-reasoned defense of the Christian faith, and helping believers by strengthening their clarity and conviction regarding why they believe what they do.”

The Provenance of Theological Education

[Psalm 145:4](#) assures, “One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts.” [Acts 13:36](#) tells of David having served the purpose of God in his generation and then passing from the scene. [Proverbs 13:22](#) commends the righteous for leaving an inheritance to their children’s children. Each generation of God’s image bearers is responsible for faithfully stewarding God’s self-disclosure to humanity. The guarantee of God in Scripture is that that stewardship will be accomplished in a way that the gates of Hades will not prevail against this purpose ([Matt 16:18](#); cf. [Eph 3:10](#)). With complete confidence and joy, then, each generation—our generation—can engage God’s self-disclosure with the hearty devotion and inquisitive probing summoned by [1 Thessalonians 5:21](#) to “examine everything; hold fast to that which is good.” We can be like the generation of Daniel, who, upon hearing

from God concerning his divine purpose for the foreseeable future, “set [his] heart on understanding, and on humbling [himself] before [his] God” ([Dan 10:12](#)). Because of Daniel’s consistent seeking of wisdom from God, rather than any other source at his federal disposal, even pagan rulers recognized “that a spirit of the gods is in you, and that illumination, insight and extraordinary wisdom have been found in you” ([Dan 5:14](#); cf. [1:20](#); [2:17–19ff](#); [9:3](#); [12:8](#)). We can be like the more recent Renaissance generation of seekers of the mysteries of the universe and its operations, among whom was preeminent scientist [Johannes Kepler](#) (1571–1630), a devout Christian who rightly believed that the universe was created by a rational Being. Following the precept of [Proverbs 25:2](#) to search-out what God has concealed in the universe and its operations, scientific discovery, then, according to Kepler, was simply “thinking God’s thoughts after him,” affirming the Creator/Sustainer’s inseparable relationship between true science (*scientia*—i.e., “knowledge”) and faith. Having this invitation from the Sovereign himself, then, to “get understanding” ([Prov 4:5, 7](#)), theology may still be regarded as queen of the sciences, worthy of study and beneficial for all things (cf. [1 Tim 4:8](#)).

“Thinking God’s thoughts after him” is a vocation that is literally as old as time. Again, each generation is charged with this stewardship. Throughout church history, theological educational institutions often have been established in conjunction with churches and/or denominations and have maintained biblical and theological fidelity as long as close identification with the faithful local church is maintained. Because the mission of Desert Hills Bible Church—in glad obedience to Christ’s Great Commission—is to reach the world, Desert Hills Bible Institute is being established as a theological educational ministry of Desert Hills Bible Church and intends to maintain operation under its auspices and in accord with its mission and statement of faith, particularly since the produce of this ministry will be pastors, teachers, and missionaries being sent-out from DHBC “for the sake of the Name” ([3 John 7](#)), as well as faithful, biblically literate followers of Jesus Christ who are better equipped “to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence” ([1 Peter 3:15](#)).

The grace of a *hunger* for theological education only precipitates the grace of theological education *reaching* more and more people as more and more people become appetized by God’s self-disclosure and his purposes. Ian Murray, in *Revival and Revivalism*, paints a picture of the spread of the First and Second Great Awakenings in North America. In it, he quotes Robert Smith, a preacher who had been converted under the preaching of George Whitefield in the First Great Awakening (1740–41). Smith writes of the Holy Spirit’s stirrings in 1788,

The blessed work has spread among people of every description, high and low, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, orthodox and heterodox, sober and rude, white and black, young and old; especially the youth, whom it seems to have seized generally.¹

¹William Henry Foote, *Sketches of North Carolina: Historical and Biographical* (Carlisle, MA: Applewood Books, 1846), 422–24, cited in Ian Murray, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism 1750–1858* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 98.

William Hill, who was one of the students at Hampden-Sydney College in Prince Edward County, Virginia, where this revival evidently originated, would later write,

Persons of all ranks in society, of all ages, both old and young, became the subjects of this work so that there was scarcely a magistrate upon the bench, or a lawyer at the bar in Prince Edward and Charlotte, but became members of the church. Young men and women were generally heartily engaged in the work, so that it was now as rare a thing to find one who was not religious, as it had been formerly to find one that was. The frivolities and amusements once so prevalent, were all abandoned, and gave place to singing, serious conversation, and prayer-meetings—very few comparatively, who appeared to become serious, afterwards lost their impressions, or apostatized; and the cases which did occur were chiefly those who never became members of the church.²

The stirrings of people’s interest in “serious conversation” about the things of God is not always a sign of the Holy Spirit’s reviving God’s church, but revival can never be said to be occurring apart from the exaltation of the Word of God resulting in conviction and repentance of sin accompanied by—and usually commenced by—a proliferation of corporate prayer. The fact that Christ followers at Desert Hills Bible Church are serious enough about the Word of God and having conversations about the things of God that an institute such as Desert Hills Bible Institute can commence and flourish is a very encouraging sign.

The Glories of Theological Education

Christ’s disciples—“from the least of them to the greatest of them” ([Jer 31:34](#))—are said to know God. Moses, wanting to know God in this consummate way, prayed, “let me know Your ways that I may know You” ([Exod 33:13](#)). Seeing the glory of God, as Moses both desired and requested for all God’s people ([Num 11:29](#)), entails knowing “Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” ([Col 2:3](#); cf. [2 Cor 4:6](#)). The more one knows God’s ways—that is, his self-disclosure in Scripture and its precepts—the more one can faithfully know, love, serve, and enjoy God.

The apostle Paul’s heart’s desire was to “attain to the resurrection from the dead” ([Phil 3:7–11](#))—not that mere eternal reanimation was the end in itself. Rather, the apostle sought “knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” and the radically reconstituting power of Christ’s resurrection, being “found in Him” with an imputed righteousness that alone can grant any of us eternal and inseparable communion with the thrice-holy God of the universe who created humans in the first place for the express purpose of being *with* them ([Matt 1:23](#); [Rev 21:3](#)). This pursuit is the high calling of every disciple of Jesus Christ.

²William Henry Foote, *Sketches of North Carolina: Historical and Biographical* (Carlisle, MA: Applewood Books, 1846), 427–28, cited in Ian Murray, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism 1750–1858* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 99.

Focused theological education, then, offers the opportunity to drink deeply at the well of God's riches in Christ Jesus, to pursue, cultivate, and share humanity's *summum bonum*—greatest good—which is God himself ([Exod 20:3](#); [Deut 10:12–13](#); [11:26–28](#); [30:11–20](#); [Ps 23](#); [Isa 45:5–7](#), [21–23](#); [Acts 17:24–28](#); [Phil 1:21](#); [Rev 21:3–4](#), [22–27](#)). While the maxim is true that *finitum non capax infinitum*—the finite cannot contain the infinite—and mysteries of the infinite God will continue to be unearthed throughout eternity, not only can we fruitfully “search out matters” both for our flourishing understanding of the cosmos and the knowledge of the God who created it, in order “that we may observe all the words of this life-giving instruction” ([Deut 29:29b](#)) in this age, but the next age will continue to reveal glories not yet imagined. Because these yet unrevealed splendors—“all that God has prepared for those who love him”—exist in a realm where the invisible God, who is Spirit, exists “as he is” ([1 John 3:2](#)), he has promised that “theological education” will continue throughout eternity; that is, his Spirit will reveal throughout eternity “things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and have not entered the heart of man” ([1 Cor 2:9](#); cf. [Isa 64:4](#)). As Augustine enjoined long ago, “the saints will certainly need no bodily eyes to see what is there to be seen.”

Additional Details

- Additional details may be found in the FAQ section of DHBI's [webpage](#).
- Further inquiries may be sent to dhbi@deserthillschurch.com.