

The Teacher and Critical Thinking

“But solid food is for full-grown men, for those whose senses and mental faculties are trained by practice to discriminate and distinguish between what is morally good and noble and what is evil and contrary either to divine or human law” (Hebrews 5:14, AMP).

Objectives

At the conclusion of this lesson the participant will be able to accomplish the following:

1. Explain (the following terms) critical thinking, cognition, indoctrination, synthesize, analyze, worldview, and evaluate.
2. Develop and utilize critical thinking and problem-solving skills in life.
3. Provide four scriptural references that advocate critical thinking in adult education.
4. Identify the extremes of critical thinking and becoming an independent, autonomous thinker.
5. Uncover the limitations of indoctrination.
6. List ten things instructors of critical thinking teach students.
7. Outline how critical thinking is an integral part of biblical interpretation.

Introduction

You’ve likely heard the old saying, “If you feed a person a fish, you have fed him for a day, but if you teach him how to fish, you have fed him for a lifetime.”

The table that follows humorously depicts a few of the feeding options available when it comes to education:

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Spoon-feeding	Here is what we believe. This is what you will believe! Repeat after me.
Force-feeding	Eat it. It is good for you; whether you like it or not.
Intravenous-feeding	Do not take any thought for what you are eating. The mind is in neutral. Intravenous reminds one of inoculations. It will hurt, but it is for your own good.
Regurgitating the feeding	Throwing up and out answers is not the same as thinking.
Self-feeding	Student learns to eat on his own, to reach your own conclusions, in accordance with God's Word. This is not only what to eat, but why and how.

We are to teach others how to fish for a life span; not expect them to be like goldfish in an aquarium, mouths open and protruding just above the water, waiting for someone to drop in the nutrients.

Christian educators are not merely fish-feeding for the day, but offer critical thinking and problem-solving skills, for a lifetime, "...So that the man of God may be complete and proficient, well fitted and thoroughly equipped for every good work" (II Timothy 3:16-17, AMP).

Like the key Scripture for this lesson states: "But solid food is for full-grown men, for those whose senses and mental faculties are trained by practice to discriminate and distinguish between what is morally good and noble and what is evil and contrary either to divine or human law" (Hebrews 5:14, AMP).

Indoctrination

One alliance of Bible schools stated their mission as, "to equip and train God-called men and women to effectively accomplish apostolic ministry." To achieve this, one of four explanatory points stated: "to indoctrinate in biblical doctrine." The Jesuits used to say, "Give me a child until he is five and I will have him the rest of his life." Both approaches are similar since they advocate indoctrination. The difference is in what is truly "biblical" and the age level referenced. Indoctrination has its limitations. It merely provides typical answers to ordinary questions. Unfortunately, life is not filled with the ordinary. It is illogical to imagine one can provide standard answers in a diverse, degenerated world. Sometimes one is answering questions no one is asking.

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David Martz stated:

The challenge before Christian educators is to help learners grow in Christ and become responsible Christian disciples. This means the ability to think, analyze, synthesize, evaluate, and make decisions based on sound exegetical and theological principles becomes essential. Christian educators have the responsibility to help students learn how to learn for themselves. (32).

“Exegesis” refers to the explanation or critical interpretation of the (biblical) text. The abilities mentioned in the block quotation are demarcated in the table that follows:

Think	Cognition is concerned with the transfer of knowledge. It is the process of knowing or getting knowledge. Incorporating as many methods as possible deepens remembering. Learning is heightened when it is quickly and repeatedly put to use. The physical body ages but the mind continues to develop.
Analyze	Break components down into parts and compare.
Synthesize	Combine and integrate information from various sources.
Evaluate	Assess the value of something and show evidence (Jalongo et al. 1999, 29).

Worldview

Christian education entails the transformation of mind and life. “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:2, *NIV*). Another phrase for “pattern of this world” is worldview (the way a person views the world and sees reality). It is a combination of assumptions, presuppositions, perspectives, values, beliefs, and lifestyles, knowingly or unknowingly, that determine how a person will act; and colors how one sees and interprets their society (Edwards 2000, 33-34).

A Dutch ambassador was entertaining the King of Siam, explaining the wonders of Holland. He told the king that the water in his country would, in cold weather, be so hard that men could walk on it, and even

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an elephant could saunter across it, if one were there. The king replied, “Hitherto, I have believed the strange things you have told me, because I look upon you as a sober fair man, but now I am sure you lie” (Locke, Modified 2007, 3). The king’s worldview did not allow for him to visualize elephants on ice.

One missionary recalls a visitor from New Brunswick, Canada to Nigeria, West Africa. The gentleman was trying to explain a little about his homeland, to a group of village women. He said, “I come from Canada. It is so cold and there is a lot of snow.” The women were baffled. Snow didn’t fit into their worldview. The man quickly saw their bewilderment, “Snow; you know that is a lot like ice.” In tropical African rural life, snow and ice did not fit into the picture.

Each of us evaluates what we perceive, read, or hear through the filter of our worldview and most of us tend to measure anything new by what we already believe and feel....However, because of emotional biases, desires, wishful thinking, and lack of knowledge we often deceive ourselves and interpret our experiences in a way that is consistent with our worldview rather than open ourselves to other possibilities...If we encourage our students to accept their worldviews as yardsticks against which to measure every idea and value they come upon, we are not teaching them to think critically (Carroll, 2007, 10).

Developing Critical Thinking

Robert Carroll states, “Critical thinking is thinking that is clear, accurate, knowledgeable, reflective, and fair in deciding what to believe or do”. The term became popular in 1980 and has gained much ground since then. It is not the same as finding fault, but “critical” in the sense of being crucial.

Instructors of critical thinking teach students to: (a) challenge assumptions, (b) think deeply about issues, (c) pursue the truth, (d) examine honestly and fairly the positions of others, (e) look beyond what is being written by the writer to determine the genuine message being conveyed, (f) advance past simply recalling facts, (g) develop skills for the college years and for a lifetime, (h) apply thinking in a variety of situations, (i) think at higher levels, (j) reflect for themselves instead of only following the crowd, (k) make responsible decisions, (l) support their point-of-view with evidence and reasoning, (m) point out that there are multiple sides to every issue, (n) compare and contrast such ideas, (o) determine and evaluate strengths and weaknesses of differing viewpoints, (p) build a strong foundation or path to sound reasoning, (q) improve problem-solving skills, (r) appreciate the perspectives of others, although not necessarily agreeing with them (s) research and recognize suppositions, (t) openly discuss and appreciate (not necessarily be in agreement) of opinions not the same as one’s own, (u) safely ask questions, (v) admit errors and change beliefs when necessary, (w) go beyond what is stated and elaborate on the idea, (x) get to the heart of the matter rather than staying on the surface, (y) clarify ideas and present them in a concise, clear manner, and (z) get others thinking about thinking.

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Bible students are called upon, through critical thinking, to reflect on the differences between what they have been taught, what they believe, and what the Bible actually teaches. They are avid critical thinkers of the Word. “Now the Bereans were of more noble character...for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11, NIV). “Test everything. Hold on to the good” (I Thessalonians 5:21, NIV). “A simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thought to his steps” (Proverbs 14:15, NIV). “Study and be eager and do your utmost to present yourself to God approved...a workman who has no cause to be ashamed, correctly analyzing and accurately dividing [rightly handling and skillfully teaching] the Word of Truth” (II Timothy 2:15, AMP).

God’s Word is inerrant (without mistakes) and inspired. “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17, NIV). We legitimately compare various interpretations of scriptural passages and doctrines, and debate or explain, with intelligence, why one interpretation is superior to another, and perform a number of hermeneutical (interpretation) tasks closely related to critical thinking. Every Bible reader is an interpreter; a critical thinker. It is a way of life. Each is wholeheartedly devoted to finding, and following, the truth. Robert Carroll said:

Students quickly learn that I’m not interested in what they think or what their opinion is on anything. Anybody can think and have an opinion, but what matters to me as a teacher of critical thinking is what reasons you have for thinking what you do and can those reasons stand up to scrutiny? (Carroll 2007, 26)

Additionally, are they consistent with the theme or entirety of the Bible? Some may think that critical thinking has the potential of destroying faith and confidence in God’s Word and ask, “Is there any such thing as truth? Can I be sure of anything?” Both of these questions “are indeed the very seeds of faith and critical to student development. The leap of faith required by Christianity is actually critical thinking at its best” (Dutton, Hart and Patten).

Critical thinking, in Christian education, should avoid the extreme of allowing critical thinking to promote a secular agenda that attacks biblical authority. Neither should we, or our students, become so engrossed in the ideology of being independent and autonomous thinkers that we fail to have a teachable attitude, or reject spiritual authority (Ephesians 4:11-12), the Holy Spirit’s guidance (John 17:17), or the role of the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:15-18). Every disciple longs for wisdom, understanding, knowledge (Exodus 31:3; Exodus 35:31; Proverbs 2:6; Isaiah 11:2; Daniel 1:4; Daniel 1:17), and the ability to discern what is right or wrong (I Kings 3:9; Ezekiel 44:23; I Corinthians 2:14; Hebrews 5:14).

Solomon was one of the greatest thinkers of all times. He believed a reverence for the Lord was the first step to obtaining wisdom: the ability to think critically (Proverbs 9:10; Psalms 119:130; Psalms 119:99). Well informed decisions, through critical thinking, will enable our students to take a bold stand for truth. They will have a made up mind.

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Lesson in Review

1. Explain what is meant by “critical thinking.” _____

2. Explain what is meant by “cognition.” _____

3. Explain what is meant by “indoctrination.” _____

4. Explain what is meant by “synthesize.” _____

5. Explain what is meant by “analyze.” _____

6. Explain what is meant by “worldview.” _____

7. Explain what is meant by “evaluate.” _____

8. Why is it important to teach and practice critical thinking skills? _____

9. What is the purpose of Christian education, as reflected in this lesson? _____

10. What are the limitations of indoctrination? _____

11. List ten things teachers of critical thinking teach students. _____

12. Using this list evaluate a commonly held assumption, presupposition or worldview in your cultural setting. _____

13. Provide three Scriptures, written out, that advocate critical thinking. _____

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