

“Fully Trained:” Jesus Goal for Successful Education

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Personal Comments

On behalf of Global Scholars, I wish to add my welcome to all of you who have come from all over Africa to be here in Banjul for this maiden Africa-wide conference of the Society of Christian Scholars – Africa branch. I am happy that so many people have come from so many different places to focus on what it means to be a Christian academic. As you know the university is one of the most influential places in society and as academics, you have one of the most important and influential positions in our communities.

- You have a good education which gives you credibility.
- You have an important position in the university which gives you respect.
- You have theological neutrality which gives you the opportunity to minister to all.
- You are teaching students when they have often passed beyond the influence of their parents and even their churches; therefore your influence comes at a crucial time and is significant.
- You are in the direct pathway of those seeking to be the most successful people in society. They have to pass through your classes to get to where they want to go. Thus your input in their lives is strategic.
- You have studied interesting topics and traveled to fascinating places and interacted with important people. This makes you the envy of many people in society and provides you with invitations and opens up opportunities to do important things.
- You have the opportunity to influence colleagues and junior academics.
- You have the opportunity to influence policy in the university, the community and even in the nation with your professionalism and experience and integrity.

And, amazingly, you get paid a salary to do all of this.

I get asked to speak at a lot of occasions. My most recent speaking engagement was at the opening ceremony of a training seminar for a group of hunters our university has employed to help provide security to our university hostels. However, I am grateful that God has given me the rich privilege of being a university academic which gives me the honor of calling you colleagues. I can think of few greater privileges than to address such a strategic group.

I am a theologian. I have four academic degrees and all of them are related to Bible or theology. I have taught 26 courses in the two universities I have served in Africa. All of those courses are related to the Bible or theology. In addition, I have conducted or been a resource person for thousands of hours of workshops and seminars outside the university. About 98% of those have also been related to the Bible, theology or Christian ministry. I was a senior pastor for eight years earlier in my life and over the last 20 years, I have averaged preaching over 50 sermons a year. Therefore, you should not be surprised to learn that the approach I will take in this keynote address will be a theological one. And if it sounds and feels more like I am a pastor and this is more of a sermon than an academic presentation, you will understand why.

Introduction

Jesus had many different followers and many different kinds of followers. Luke gives us a description of some of these. I will describe three of them.

Luke 7:11 reads, *“Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a **large crowd** went along with him.”* On this occasion, we are told a large crowd followed Jesus. These were people who believed in Jesus and no doubt many of them benefitted from his ministry through learning and being healed and receiving other special benefits. Although it is a little early in the presentation to start making application, I will say that this *“large crowd”* of followers represents typical Christians today. They believe in Jesus and they identify publicly with him and they enjoy many benefits from being associated with Jesus. We are part of that group and know hundreds of people like this that are part of the *“large crowd.”* We are proud to call them our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Luke 10:1 says: *“After this the Lord appointed **seventy-two** others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go.”* This passage describes the disciples of Jesus who did not just believe in him but volunteered to work for him. They did not give up their regular work and follow Jesus on a full-time basis but they did set aside time to do the work that Jesus assigned them to do. Jesus gave them these specific instructions: *“Heal the sick who are there and tell them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you’”* (Luke 10:9). They were sent out to do the same things that Jesus and the other disciples did which included healing the sick and preaching and teaching about the kingdom those things they had learned from Jesus.

These people represent all of those volunteers who teach Sunday School and discipleship classes and who go out on evangelism and short-term mission trips and do the other work of the church. They represent a higher level of commitment than the ordinary followers of Jesus—the *“large crowd”* believers. They do the work of Jesus. I would hope that all of us are followers of Jesus in that broad sense of the word and I would guess that many of you would consider yourself to be in this second category—you are one of Jesus’ workers. You give a large part of your time doing church work.

However, there is still a third group who followed Jesus. Luke 6:12-13 says: *“One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose **twelve** of them, whom he also designated **apostles**.”* The apostles are then named.

After a night of prayer, Jesus decided it was time to elevate some of those who were already followers and workers to become “apostles.” These new apostles had no doubt followed this three-step process to attain this unique position. At first, these 12 had no doubt been curious but committed followers like those who were in the *“large crowd.”* However, they were very attracted to Jesus and later volunteered to become temporary workers like the 72. After his night of prayer, Jesus recognized their commitment and teachability and invited them to take the third step and become apostles, which would mean they would become **full-time workers** for Jesus. In other words, their whole lives would be devoted to the service of Jesus and his kingdom. Some of them had been fishermen and some had been civil servants. They would leave those responsibilities and focus all of their attention on the service of Jesus.

Here is another preliminary point of application. All of us are Christians in the sense that we are followers of Jesus. As I said earlier, most of you would consider yourselves to be

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Christian workers. You do various things in your church and even in the university that would qualify you to be among the 72. However, I will challenge you today and try to demonstrate that you can even be among the 12—the apostles of Jesus. I believe that God is looking for and wanting to call some people to that third tier of service—the commitment to be apostles of education and more specifically apostles of university education. This presentation is designed to help you understand what that means and encourage you to volunteer in an even greater way to the highest level of Christian service.

After Jesus called those 12 to be apostles, the next thing Luke tells us about is a teaching session that Jesus gave to his disciples. This suggests that immediately after Jesus announced his choice of the disciples who would become his apostles, he went into an orientation workshop that would at least start to explain to them what it would mean to fill this important position.

We are told that immediately after Jesus appointed these men to be apostles, he went out to a flat place where a large group of his disciples and other people had gathered. Jesus then gave 47 verses of profound teaching (Luke 6:3-49). I have found these verses to be some of the most profound and also some of the most difficult teachings that Jesus gave in his entire teaching career.

Since this is the first recorded teaching after Jesus called and designated these men to be apostles, we might consider this to be their inaugural lecture. What that suggests is that Jesus was giving instructions about what it would mean to be apostles—those workers who had abandoned their other careers to serve Jesus full-time. The least we can say about these profound teachings is that they were the expectations Jesus had of those people who were the closest to him. Maybe the “*large crowds*” and the “72” might live by lower expectations but those who were the closest to Jesus would have this very high and selfless standard to live by.

There is one verse in the middle of this inaugural presentation that talks about teachers and students. It is the statement on which I will base most of my remarks in this presentation.

“The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40).

This verse is actually not the main point being made in this series of teachings. Jesus was teaching about leadership and said, “*Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit?*” (Luke 6:39). This statement about teachers and students is actually an illustration of the teaching presented immediately before it which was a statement about leadership.¹

These 47 verses are special instructions for these 12 special followers and one of those truths was the importance of leadership. Interestingly, leadership is illustrated by teaching. If that is true, then there is a very strong hint in this inaugural address that one of their responsibilities as apostles would be to teach other people the truths they had learned from Jesus.

We know this is true from other passages as well. When Jesus sent out his disciples to do their practice ministry, he told them that they were to “*preach the gospel of the kingdom of God and heal the sick*” (Luke 9:2). In other words, they were to do exactly what they had

¹ This is actually a teaching from what I call “incidental theology.” These are truths we learn from things used to illustrate or support other truths. However, truth is truth and even though this was not the main point Jesus was making in this passage, his illustration teaches valuable truth.

seen Jesus doing and a major portion of his time was spent teaching people about the kingdom. Just before Jesus ascended to heaven, he gave the Great Commission which says, in part: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and **teaching** them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19-20). Although these 12 apostles were more than teachers, they were first and foremost teachers.

The university is the location of the most important teachers in world. Therefore the university is the most important institution where young people are going to be fully trained. I will now take a look at Jesus’ statement about being “fully trained” and see how that applies to those of us who are academics in the public universities.

Background of Jesus’ Statement

Jesus was in the middle of a three-year training program for his disciples. Jesus’ training program involved three things.

- **Teaching.** About half of the gospels are made up of the “red letters”² of Jesus which describe the things that Jesus spoke. These were the teachings of Jesus.
- **Observation.** Also about half of the gospels tells us about the deeds of Jesus. The disciples followed Jesus around and observed the things that he was doing. They were learning from his example.³
- **Practice.** On at least two different occasions Jesus sent his disciples out to do an in-service practicum or teaching practice. They were sent out to “preach the gospel of the kingdom and heal the sick” (Luke 9:2).

It was in this way that Jesus planned to make sure his disciples would be fully trained and ready to take over the ministry he was in the process of establishing.

The word “fully trained” is a rich Greek word *katartizo*. Like many Greek words, it is made up of two Greek words. The word *artios* is a broad word that basically means something like normal or suitable or even faultless.⁴ This is the word that is used in 2 Timothy 3:17 “*That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*” (2 Timothy 3:17 KJV). Though the KJV uses “perfect” this is not talking about any kind of absolute perfection. Only God is absolutely perfect. This word is describing that which is normal.

We are just finishing the mango season in Nigeria. Do you know the kind of mangos I like to eat? I like to eat perfect ones or normal ones—those that are mature to just the right degree and do not have worms or soft spots or any kind of abnormal growth in them. If a scientist were able to examine that mango under a microscope, he or she may be able to find some tiny imperfection but for the purpose of the average mango eater like me, that mango is perfect.

That is what this word is describing—a level of wholeness and completeness that one would consider a thing to be normal.

² In many editions of the Bible, the words of Jesus are recording in a red font.

³ I have discussed this balance in Jesus ministry between his words and his deeds in my book *To the Ends of the Earth*, Africa Christian Textbooks, Bukuru 2012, pp. 97-99. When all verses in all four gospels are evaluated, 51.9 percent of them refer to Jesus speaking (red letters) while 48.1% refer to the deeds of Jesus (black letters).

⁴ G. Dilling, ἄριστος, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament Volume I*, Editor: Gerhard Kittel, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1964, p. 475

The word *kata* means down or down from. It can have the idea of “down upon” or in more common language “toward.”⁵ The word “catacombs” refers to caves or tunnels down under the earth. The word “catalogue” literally means that which is written down.

So from an etymological point of view, the word literally means something like “down toward faultlessness or perfection.” In other words, a person is reaching toward excellence and normality. They are moving toward the ideal. However, etymology often yields clumsy results and will only take us so far in understanding a word. In word studies, it is much better to look at word usage. And that is what I am going to do in the rest of this presentation.

I will now focus on what Jesus meant by being using the phrase “*fully trained.*” Obviously, this is the educational goal that all academics have for themselves and for their students. I will do this by pointing out several ways the word *katartizo* is used in the Bible.

Fully Trained (*Katartizo*) Means to Complete a Professional Level of Learning.

Biblical Examples

Completing one’s training is probably the main meaning of this word in this context. Jesus said, “*The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher*” (Luke 6:40). In other words, students are fully trained when they have completed a level of education similar to that of their mentors which enables them to do their jobs properly.

Hebrews 13:20-21 is another example:

Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen (Hebrews 13:20-21).

When you are equipped with “*everything good*” to do God’s will that means you have reached a full level of preparation to do the work God has assigned you. In a general sense, when a person has studied and practiced enough that he or she is able to do what is normally expected of one in that profession, that person can be said to be “*fully trained.*”

In high school my youngest daughter, Laura, started going to the missionary hospital in Jos, Nigeria where we lived and following the doctors and nurses around. Such experiences created a desire within her to become a physician. She went four years to the university and graduated with a pre-med degree. She became an emergency medical technician and started working on an ambulance and later became a paramedic, which is a more advanced level of emergency medical training. Though she had already gone to tertiary level institution for eight years studying medicine and even doing medical work, she was not fully trained.

Four years after she graduated from the university, Laura enrolled in and went four more years to medical school. She spent hundreds of hours doing various kinds of practical medical work under the supervision of doctors. Eventually she graduated as a physician. That means

⁵ Arndt, William F. and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1957, page 406

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that she had already spent 12 years of schooling and practice after she had completed secondary school but she was still not fully trained. She did a one-year internship and got her license to practice medicine. She then functioned for three years as a flight surgeon in the US Navy. However, she still needed more training. She enrolled in a family practice residency that would still take an additional two years. In her final year of this program, she became the chief resident and supervised junior doctors. However, she was still not “fully trained.”

After the three-year prescribed course in family medicine, after having completed her medical degree six years earlier, she took the national family board examinations. About three days later, she sent us a text that simply said, “Well, I passed.” Based upon the criteria established by the national board of family physicians, my daughter Dr. Laura McCain could then be said to be “fully trained.” That did not mean that she knew everything about family medicine that could be learned or would stop learning. However, it did mean she had reached a level of competency where the experts in the field could recognize her as fully trained.

Application to University Lecturers

This is probably the most obvious thing that we as university lectures do. We teach students and train them so they are fully capable of doing their jobs and functioning successfully in the discipline and professions they have chosen.

Being “fully trained” usually means one of two things for our students.

It may mean being able to understand and articulate certain truths.

People in theology and philosophy do not normally have practical skills where they do certain things. Their training involves understanding certain truths well enough to explain those truths to others. This is the kind of teaching and training I do. For example, I recently had a PhD student who completed his course in New Testament studies. During his PhD course, he learned to read Coptic and analyzed a piece of Coptic manuscript from the 4th century that no scholar had ever analyzed. He has developed a certain level of skill in understanding ancient manuscripts. However, this is an academic exercise focused on the discovery of knowledge, not something that one does with his hands in society. He is a scholar who is interesting in raising up other scholars who know how to search out and discover this kind of truth.

It may mean being able to function with certain skills.

This is the more well-known type of learning.

- The accounting department trains accountants who know how to keep good financial records and analyze financial records of others.
- The education faculty trains people who know how to teach at various levels.
- The law faculty trains people who understand legal matters and can help defend or prosecute people in court.
- The engineering faculty trains people who know how to design and build things.
- The agricultural faculty trains people in how to grow better crops.

Most of these professions have professional bodies that administer examinations to those who complete degrees in these fields to determine whether or not they are indeed “fully trained.”

The point is this: One of the basic purposes of education is to help train people up to a proper level of expertise so they can function properly in that particular discipline or profession.

I have not said anything new to you so far. This is what you do every day. This is the normal way that people look at education. However, there is more to being “*fully trained*” than that.

Fully Trained (*Katatirzo*) Means to Discover that Which is Hidden.

Key Scripture

The NIV of 1 Thessalonians 3:10 says, “*Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.*” The NLT translation says, “*Night and day we pray earnestly for you, asking God to let us see you again to fill the gaps in your faith.*” This passage is telling about something that was missing in the Thessalonian’s faith. Paul’s job was to help them discover that missing element and help them fill that gap.

The Point

This means to be fully trained one must be able to discover truth. The search for and discovery of truth is called research in our profession. Luke was a Biblical writer who believed in research. He begins his gospel with these words:

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:1-4).

He states that he had carefully investigated the material that went into this two-volume document. That is a description of research.

I believe that the Luke/Acts combination was prepared as a part of Paul’s defense before Caesar. Luke spent two years while Paul was in prison in Caesarea doing research about the life of Jesus and the early years of Christianity. He then spent the two years in Rome while Paul was waiting for his trial, getting information from Paul about his life and ministry. He then put all of this together as a document that would help demonstrate that the Christian movement was a natural outgrowth of Judaism which was a *religio licita* or legal religion. Based upon the experiences so far, Paul and other Christians were no threat to Rome.⁶

Paul was released from imprisonment that time which demonstrates that this research and writing were successful. Successful research normally produces good results in society. Unless you know how to do research at some level you are not fully trained.

Proverbs 25:2

Proverbs 25:2: “*It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings.*” I have frequently said that this is the “academic’s proverb.”

⁶ For more information on *religio licita* and *religio illicita*, see Danny McCain, *Notes on New Testament Introduction*, Africa Christian Textbooks, Bukuru, 1996, p. 49

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This passage tells us that we can do something that God cannot do. We can learn. God cannot learn anything because he is omniscient which means he knows all things. Because God cannot learn anything, he gets glory by concealing things.

The word “glory” means something like satisfaction or fulfillment. In other words, God gets a certain amount of joy in concealing things from the humans he has created and then watching them discover those things. Concealing things is what makes God happy.

On the other hand, human beings enter this world as empty vessels. We spend our whole lives filling up the vessels of knowledge with truth and facts and information and experiences. In fact, the wise man declares that even if a man has reached the peak of success and become a king in the land, he cannot do anything more glorious and satisfying and fulfilling than searching out and discovering truth. This suggests that the most glorious thing that a person can do is to search out truth which is another name for research.

Some years ago, I met the Emir of Gombe in the Amsterdam airport. He was very friendly and invited me to come see him. A few weeks later, I was doing a workshop in Gombe and remembered the invitation. I had one of the workshop participants take me to his palace. I met his secretary and made an appointment to see him. The emir wore his traditional clothes and entertained me in a huge room with a lion skin and a large throne. We chatted about many things during the conversation. At one point, he asked, me, “Is it true that Christians only pray once a week?” I said, “No, sir. We pray many times a day. In fact, every time we eat a meal, we pray.” A little later, he asked me, “Is it true that in America, when children get to be 18 years of age, the parents send them out of the home?” I smiled and said, “No, sir. Sometimes we would like to do that but few parents do that.” And for the next hour, the emir asked me one question after another. This man had reached the pinnacle of success and, because of cultural protocols, there were some things he could no longer do. However, the most enjoyable and fulfilling thing he could do was to ask questions—to seek out truth.

Application to Academics

Academics do three things.

- We teach.
- We do research.
- We do various kinds of administration.

Early in my academic career, I used to resent the fact that promotion in the university was tied to publication. I would reason, “I am better teacher than most of those people who do all of that research and write all those boring articles.” However, over the years, I gradually learned to appreciate the importance of research and publication.

- Publication means that we have done serious enough research that some editor recognizes its value to society. It means that we have spent time trying to discover and uncover new knowledge.
- Publication means that we become better teachers because we are constantly researching and discovering new things and sharing new insights with our students.

When we fill our classes with the new truths we have discovered from our research we are not only teaching those new things to our students but we are creating a love of learning in them and encouraging and motivating them to also learn how to search out truth.

Personal Example

I have always been a hard worker and been respected in the university. However, after being in the university for 18 years, I led a team in getting a \$500,000 grant to study Pentecostalism in Nigeria. This not only helped change my perception about research but my respect as an academic skyrocketed in the university. My leadership in that research program taught me not only how to do research but how to write proposals and that opened up greater doors for more research and more influence in my university and in the society at large.⁷

Challenge

We who are Christian academics have a theological motivation for research. God himself is the one who has concealed the truth we search out and God himself is happy when we discover that which he has hidden. In addition, when we are doing research we are feeding the natural curiosity God has placed within us and as we share those things we discover we encourage our students and our colleagues in their pursuit for truths that have been hidden.

I challenge you to become the best researcher in your department. You will feel fulfilled; others will learn from and respect you and God will be happy.

Fully Trained (*Katatirzo*) Means to Correct that Which is Misunderstood.

Obviously, there are many theories about our specific disciplines and we cannot positively say that some are right and some are wrong. However, there are things that are indeed right and wrong in our disciplines and God expects us to discover the right and defend it and oppose and expose that which is wrong.

Biblical Examples

Jesus was walking by the sea shore one day when he ran across Peter and James. Matthew describes the event this way. *“A little farther up the shore he saw two other brothers, James and John, sitting in a boat with their father, Zebedee, **repairing** their nets. And he called them to come, too”* (Matthew 4:21). The KJV and other translations translate this *“mending their nets.”* The word “repairing” or “mending” is the word *katatirzo*. It means something was broken or weakened and needed to be repaired and restored to its original condition.

I have been an amateur fisherman that used nets in the past. When we went fishing for shrimp, we would throw our nets in the water and sometimes they would get hung up on sticks or roots and oyster beds and get holes torn in them. If a net has holes in it, then the fish or shrimp are going to get out. Therefore a wise fisherman is one who repairs the holes in his net. Otherwise you are going to experience wasted effort.

This clearly demonstrates an additional use of the word *katartizo*. It means to repair that which is broken, to strengthen that which is weak and to correct that which is out of order.

Here is another example. Paul says in Galatians 6:1, *“Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should **restore** that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.”* This refers to a man who had committed some kind

⁷ In the western world, the money that one raises for research is considered just as important as the publications that one secures. If you have done enough to convince an external funding agency of the value of your research, that is a good indication that you are a valuable scholar.

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of moral offense. His character has been compromised. He has done something wrong. Restoring that person to a level of integrity and honesty is what *katartizo* means in that instance.

The point is that for our students to be fully trained they will need to know how to challenge beliefs and theories that have been weakened and distorted and compromised and restore those truths to what they were originally intended to teach.

This is what Jesus did. The Jewish theologians and particularly the Pharisees had taken the good law that God had given to Moses and had twisted it and perverted it and, in essence, undermined certain truths. Thus, seven times Jesus said, *“You have heard it said . . . but I tell you.”* Note these examples:

- *“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment (Matthew 5:21-22).*
- *“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Matthew 5:27-28).*

One of responsibilities that Jesus had as a teacher was to correct those things that were misunderstood and perverted.

That is certainly one of the responsibilities of a Christian lecturer as well. In fact, this might be one of your most important responsibilities. If you as experts in these various disciplines just look the other way when your colleagues are presenting error and you do not attempt to correct those things, who else is going to correct them?

Application to Education

It is the responsibility of the Christian academic to discover the holes and distortions in the truth of your discipline and correct those.

- It is good to live a holy life and be a good moral example. That is a good starting place in being a Christian academic.
- It is good to win students to Christ and discipline them. That is also a joyful part of your duty as a Christian academic.
- It is good to start your classes with prayer and be known as a public Christian academic.

However, other people can do those things. Unfortunately, there are very few people with the academic tools, the experience and credibility and courage to correct the holes in truth. Fortunately, Christian academics do have those skills. As Jesus said about tithing, *“these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others”* (Matthew 23:23 NAS). Keep on living holy lives and doing evangelism and leading students in Christian service but seriously focus your attention on correcting that which is distorted in your profession.

Jesus said, *“You will know the truth and the truth will set you free.”* Ultimately it is the responsibility of every Christian academic to restore truth that has been compromised in his or her discipline. And when you do that, your discipline and your students will be freer than they were before.

Key Scripture

Paul wrote these amazing words near the mid-point of his career.

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).⁸

In the first of these verses Paul use the word “world” three times. Though sometimes we think of “worldliness” as looking and dressing and acting like the world of unbelievers, there is a much deeper meaning of that concept. Worldliness is simply thinking and reasoning like the world does. Worldliness is primarily a way of thinking which obviously influences the way we act. Paul emphatically declares God’s people must not think like the world.

To show us how intensely Paul believed these things, he used strong military language to make his arguments. However, in this passage he is not thinking about fighting in either the physical or spiritual sense of the word. The fighting he is talking about in this text is resisting and attacking the way of thinking and the perversions of truth the enemy is pushing on us.

Note these three applications of the military metaphor:

We demolish arguments.

The word “*demolish*” is what armies do. They destroy things. The word “*argument*” in this context is the word *logismos* which is the word from which we get logic. The world attempts to use various kinds of logical arguments to undermine God’s claims. Paul said it is our responsibility to demolish those false arguments.

However, we are not going to demolish any arguments without serious thought and research and writing. That is where Christian academics in the various disciplines become important. It is the duty of Christian scholars to do the necessary research and give the necessary thought so they can destroy the flesh-based logic of the unbelieving world.

We bring down high things that oppose God’s knowledge.

The passage says “*We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God.*” The word translated “*pretension*” (NIV) in this context is a word that meant “high things.” It apparently refers to arguments that appear to be prestigious and scholarly, using words that intelligent and well-educated people would use. These are arguments couched in professional and academic language designed to undermine the absolute truth that comes from God. Such high-sounding arguments are only a cheap imitation of God’s whole truth. We as Christian academics must destroy such arguments.

The idea here is that we as thoughtful Christians must unmask the high-sounding arguments worldly scholars present. This is a difficult but essential job that the academic must do. A. T.

⁸ Some of the material in this section is taken from a lecture entitled “Integration and Beyond: A Challenge to Academics for Seeing God’s Truth in All Disciplines,” that I presented at the “Faith and Scholarship Integration in Higher Education” Workshop at the SWBN Studio, Calabar, Cross Rivers State, Nigeria on 13 October 2020.

Robertson says about this passage, “Paul aims to pull down the top-most perch of audacity in their reasonings against the knowledge of God.”⁹

How are we going to do this?

- We will do this by superior research and better logic and more convincing arguments.
- We will do this by continually studying the eternal objective truths found in the Bible.
- We will do all of this in the power of the Holy Spirit who has promised to guide us into all truth (John 16:13).

We bring into captivity every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

I used to think that this passage referred to me disciplining my mind, similar to what Philippians 4:8 teaches. It tells us to think on things that are pure and holy and virtuous and praiseworthy. However, by examining the context of this passage carefully, it is obvious that is not what it is talking about.

The word translated “*thought*” here is the word *noema* which could be translated simply as “thought” or even an “evil thought.” In this context, it is obviously talking about the thoughts of unbelievers who are attempting to pervert God’s absolute truth. I believe this passage is simply saying we Christians must not only demolish the arguments of the enemy and expose the high-sounding rhetoric but we must go on the offensive and bring every thought—every academic discipline—every truth under the authority of Jesus Christ and into conformity with the truth of God.

We must make sure every discipline is brought in line with the way Christ views it. We are being compelled to discover that stamp of God that is on everything God has created.

What are some of the things that we must correct?

- Many scholars use scholarly research and human rights language to insist that a woman has a right to do with her body anything she wants to do. Therefore if her pregnancy is inconvenient, she has a right to terminate that pregnancy. We must have better scientists and better spokesman to point out that those types of arguments are distorted and undermine the value of life that God loves.
- Many scholars also use their research and their modern sense of justice to say that a woman should have the same right to marry a woman as she does to marry a man. We need theologians and philosophers and those with expertise in psychology and physiology to pull down those high-sounding arguments and provide better arguments that marriage is only between a man and woman.
- Many people in Nigeria and other parts of Africa, including politicians, pastors and even some academics justify the use of violence to stop the march of Islam southward in Africa. We do not have to accept the expansionist agenda of Muslims in order to condemn the use of all kinds of conflict and violence.

Discovering and upholding the truth in every discipline is a big duty. And this is the responsibility of the university lecturer. The average layman cannot do this. The average preacher may even struggle to do this. The theologian cannot do this for every possible academic discipline in the world. It is going to take you who are Christian university

⁹ A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures of the New Testament*, electronic version; no page

academics, searchers of truth who are committed to the authority of Scripture, who will demolish the false arguments of our modern anti-Christian world. It will take university people who can thoughtfully study and understand and explain God’s perspective on every discipline God has created. This is the battle God is calling us to join.

Are you up to the task?

Fully Trained (*Katatirzo*) Means to be Established in Life.

Key Passage

There is an interesting use of *katartizo* in the Greek translation of the Old Testament. In Psalm 89, the writer describes a song about the Lord’s promise to establish the lineage of King David. He says, *“Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness—and I will not lie to David—that his line will continue forever and his throne endure before me like the sun; it will be established forever like the moon, the faithful witness in the sky”* (Psalm 89:35-37). To show how permanent David’s kingdom was going to be, the psalmist compared it to the sun and the moon. God said that the kingdom of David was going to be *“established forever like the moon.”* The word *“established”* here is the Greek word *katartizo*. The moon is something that is permanently established in heaven and for the thousands of years that we have been observing it, it has not changed a bit.

- The moon has not gotten closer to the earth nor further from the earth.
- The moon is so consistent in its cycles around the earth, scientists can predict within a second when the moon will rise in 1000 years.
- Every human being who has ever lived has seen exactly the same moon and the same cycles of the moon with no variation.

The moon is one of the most stable and established things in the universe.

Application

One of the things we are seeking to do in our students and in our personal education and ministry is to become so mature and complete in our lives and in our families and in our communities and certainly in our professions that we are strong and dependable and unmovable. This is a concept that appears often in the New Testament and it is found in several Greek words.

- *“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast (hedraios), immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord”* (1 Corinthians 15:58 NAS) The word *hedraios* had the idea of being firm and unmovable and unwavering, particular in one’s faith. (See also Colossians 1:23.)
- *“Stand firm (histimi) then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place”* (Ephesians 6:14). This word means to set or place something or stop something. It has the idea of causing someone to stand firm. A similar use is found in 1 Peter 5:12: *“I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it”* (1 Peter 5:12).
- *“Be on your guard; stand firm (steko) in the faith; be courageous; be strong”* (1 Corinthians 16:13) This word literally means to stand such as when you stand praying (Mark 11:25; See also John 1:26.) It is used metaphorically to mean to persist in doing

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the right thing. Most of the time in the New Testament it means standing up against sin or other negative pressures and for truth and righteousness. Note these other references: *“Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm (steko) in the Lord in this way, dear friends!”* (Philippians 4:1). *“Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm (steko) in all the will of God, mature and fully assured”* (Colossians 4:12). *“So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm (steko) and hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter”* (2Thessalonians 2:15).

The concept of being steadfast and unmovable extends beyond academics. However, it is certainly one of the goals of all who teach for a living. It should be the goal of all teachers at all levels to establish themselves as scholars of ethical character and professional excellence that cannot be moved. Thus when the winds of compromise and the storms of discrimination come, they will be standing on the rock of truth that is never shaken (Matthew 7:24-25).

- Christian academics cannot be moved by money or material assets.
- Christian academics cannot be moved by positions or promotions.
- Christian academics cannot be moved by threats or intimidation.
- Christian academics cannot be moved by pressure from colleagues.
- Christian academics are established in our faith and in our scholarship.
- Christian academics are those who provide stability to our university and community.
- Christian academics are people established in their faith, families and communities.

This is the goal we have for every one of our students—that they may be *“fully trained”* so that they are unshakeable and incorruptible models of what God expects human beings on this earth to be. This is the mission of the Society of Christian Scholars and it should be the mission of all Christian academics.

Conclusion

I have taught New Testament theology for about 30 years at the University of Jos. In Biblical theology, we like to look for themes and emphases on which various speakers or Biblical writers focused. If I ask my students what was the main focus of Jesus, they will say things like salvation, healing, prayer, heaven and even prosperity. However, it is quite clear what Jesus focused on. Note these verses:

- *“From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for **the kingdom of heaven** has come near’”* (Matthew 4:17).
- *“Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, **proclaiming the good news of the kingdom**, and healing every disease and sickness among the people”* (Matthew 4:23).
- *“His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them. He said: ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is **the kingdom of heaven**’”* (Matthew 5:1-3).
- *“But he said, ‘I must proclaim the good news of **the kingdom of God** to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent’”* (Matthew 10:43).

I could point out literally dozens of references to the kingdom in Jesus’ teaching.

Listen to Jesus’ instructions to his disciples:

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- “As you go, proclaim this message: ***‘The kingdom of heaven has come near’***” (Matthew 10:7).
- “...and he sent them out to proclaim ***the kingdom of God and to heal the sick***” (Luke 9:2).
- “Jesus said to him, ***‘Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God’***” (Luke 9:60).

The point is that Jesus sent his people out to teach about his kingdom.

What is the kingdom? Why did Jesus choose the word “kingdom” to describe his work?

- Jesus could have used the word “family of God.” However, the phrase “family of God” is not found in the Bible.
- Jesus could have used the phrase “community of God.” That phrase is also not found in the Bible and would be much too limited.
- Jesus could have used the phrases “business of God” from the commercial world or “team of God” from the sports world but those would have been much too limited.
- Jesus could have even used “church of God.” The word church comes from “*ecclesia*” which means a “called-out assembly.” Jesus only used the word “church” twice in his entire ministry. He was describing something bigger than just the “called out” ones.

Jesus wanted a much more comprehensive word to describe his mission and the best word he could think of was a kingdom. Everything in the world had been touched by sin and had become weakened and distorted. Thus, Jesus wanted a very comprehensive word to describe the restoration process and “kingdom” was his choice.

What did Jesus mean by using the phrase “*kingdom of God?*”

- A somewhat simplistic response is that the kingdom represents heaven where God’s people go after they die. Yes, that is part of God’s kingdom but that is not primarily what Jesus was talking about in his teaching.
- Another interpretation is that the kingdom is a period of peace that will take place when Jesus comes back to this earth. Certainly anything like that would be part of God’s kingdom but again, this is not what Jesus was referring to.
- Another interpretation is that the kingdom is another word for the church. The church is certainly part of God’s kingdom but the kingdom of God is bigger than the church.

All of these things are part of God’s kingdom, but the kingdom Jesus talked about is bigger and more comprehensive than any of those things.

A kingdom has many parts.

- A kingdom is made up of people who do many things like farming and fishing and building and governing.
- A kingdom is made up of land and geological features like mountains and rivers.
- A kingdom is made up of infrastructure like buildings and roads.
- A kingdom is made up of laws and a security and legal system.
- A kingdom is made of many levels of leadership and an administration structure.
- A kingdom is made up of customs and culture and distinct languages and clothing and food and music.

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When we take all those things into consideration and also remember that God literally worked through a nation in the Old Testament period, it must be significant that Jesus deliberately chose to use the word “kingdom.” The use of such a word must mean that Jesus’ ministry was to be very big and comprehensive.

- His coming would affect the people of the world.
- His coming would affect the culture and customs of this world.
- His coming would affect leadership and governance of this world.
- His coming would affect the security forces and the judiciary system of the world.
- His coming would affect the infrastructure of the world and everything in it.

In fact, his coming would affect every part of this world. The kingdom of God is everything that was created by God and Jesus’ responsibility was to restore every part of this world back to its original purpose and position.

We tend to focus on only the spiritual part of God’s kingdom but that is only the starting part. All parts of God’s original kingdom had been perverted and distorted and weakened as a result of the negative activities of Adam and Eve. However, God was not happy to allow this world to remain in this sinful, corrupt, distorted, confused condition. Jesus came to put all things back in order.

And how is God going to restore the world to that pristine condition? He is going to do things the way he has always done things on this earth. He is going to use human beings to restore this world to what it was designed to be.

And what does that mean for you who are Christian academics?

- It means that you who research and teach about anything related to human beings such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, the medical sciences, and those dealing with language and linguistics are all building up God’s kingdom when you discover and present the purest form of your disciplines.
- It means that you who are researching and teaching about infrastructure issues like the various engineering and construction faculties—you are building up God’s kingdom when you studying and teaching and harnessing those disciplines as well.
- It means that you who are involved in the security and safety of the people and buildings of this earth and those that insure justice in society—all of you are building up God’s kingdom when you do these things according to God’s principles.

And who are the best people in the world to do this job?

- It is going to be people who understand that this is their job.
- It is going to be people who have the ability to think and research what God’s original ways were.
- It is going to be people who have the creative ability and the organization energy to lead their part of the world back to God’s original design.
- It is going to be people who are motivated to do this by their faith in, love for and commitment to the creator God of this universe.
- It is going to be people who are disciplined in their thinking and activities.
- It is going to be people who have the admiration and respect of the community.

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When we look for such people, we need to look no further than the Christian believers who are members of academia in the universities of Africa.

So how does this affect us and our world?

- The kingdom starts with humans being restored to a relationship with God.
- The kingdom also includes institutions which God has created like the family and government being restored to their original purpose so they can function the way that they were intended to.
- The kingdom also includes the environment which has been polluted and almost destroyed being restored to the pristine way God originally made it.
- The kingdom includes the principles that God created such as justice and fairness and unity and other positive social principles. These must be refined and improved so that they are being practiced *“on earth as they are in heaven.”*
- The kingdom of God includes all the principles of science and all the elements of this world being sanctified and once again used in a way that brings glory to God.

This is your job as Christian academics. You are academic apostles. You are academic missionaries. It is your job to work full-time to build God’s kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus is calling you to use your position as an academic in Africa’s universities to explain and promote and defend and restore and even develop some part of God’s kingdom.

Of course God wants you to win students to Christ and disciple them so that they have a meaningful relationship with God. However, that is only the starting place and if that is the only reason you see yourself being a part of the university work, you are leaving a huge portion of God’s kingdom under the control and domination of God’s enemy.

Jesus has called us to *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”* (Luke 10:27). That is a comprehensive command. And that is a command that can perhaps be fulfilled better by academics than anyone else because they are the ones who have developed their minds. God wants you to present and uphold all the principles of the universe he created, including his moral principles and social principles and scientific principles and agricultural principles and principles related to health and justice and order and efficiency and beauty.

An appointment as a university academic is not just a job; it is not just about making money and taking care of your family. It is not just limited to the strategic ministry of doing evangelism and discipleship. It is the high calling of discovering and organizing and promoting and defending all of God’s truth that will set people free (John 8:32).

Challenge

I challenge you to look deeper at your academic discipline and your position in the university.

- What part of God’s kingdom is reflected in your discipline?
- How has Satan perverted or polluted or distorted any part of your discipline?
- What hidden truths need to be discovered that will honor God and bless his people?
- What can you do in your discipline to build up God’s kingdom on earth as it is in heaven?
- Will you accept the sober responsibility of being among Jesus’ closest associated and become a full-time academic apostle?