

Why learn math?

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Biblical Christians have always believed strongly in education because it is essential for redeemed man to read, write, and count. Thus, in history, biblical Christians have always been on the forefront of literacy and education.

The biblical Christian presupposes that we can know truly on the basis of the Bible, God's verbal and written revelation. This knowledge is not exhaustive (e.g., the Bible does not reveal knowledge about quadratic equations), but it is knowledge that brings a true perspective to all aspects of the human endeavor, eternal and temporal. For example, Psalm 36:9 states, "In Thy light, we see light." This means that no one can see (or understand) anything truly unless he sees it in the perspective of God's revelation of truth. Colossians 2:3 states, "... in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." This means that all aspects of wisdom and knowledge (not just the "spiritual" parts, and including such analytical knowledge as quadratic equations) find integrative meaning, purpose, and perspective in terms in the full and complete revelation of God in Christ.

These Scriptures and many more (see Proverbs 1:7, 9:10; Psalm 111:10) state that true knowledge can only be acquired by a revered submission to the Living God. If the biblical Christian knows on the basis of the Bible's revelation of God in Christ, then it is imperative that the biblical Christian know how to read, write, and cipher. The biblical Christian must know how to read in order to understand in truth God's revelation of Himself in Scripture and in creation. The biblical Christian must know how to write in order to communicate God's truth to others. The biblical Christian must know how to count in order to understand and develop the created order.

Why learn math? Since all knowledge is based upon God and since the ability to count, like reading and writing, is God's gift to man, then it is imperative that we, as parents and teachers, seek to develop these gifts in our children and our students. There are many realms of mathematics which include the theory of number, the practice of arithmetic, and the description of the patterned order of creation (where quadratic equations come into prominent focus). Since mathematics reflects the patterns of God's created order, then the language of that pattern is mathematics. Just like any other language, we must understand the grammar of mathematics if we want to effectively obey God's command to take dominion over what He has made (Genesis 1:26-27; 2:19-20). In the words of veteran high school mathematics teacher Larry Zimmerman:

God commands His children to subdue and replenish the earth and take dominion over it mathematics is essential in subduing and replenishing tasks Without a working knowledge of the patterns of God's speech used in the creation, humans are powerless to replenish the earth and are in danger of being themselves subdued by it.¹

Because of these dominion imperatives, Christian educators, whether they be parents who are homeschooling or teachers in a day school, are required under God to adequately develop math skills and understanding in their students. If we can show students that their math work is part of gaining a working knowledge of the way God has ordered His creation, then we have overcome a major motivational obstacle that sometimes is phrased as a question: "Why do we have to learn math?" We learn math in order to catch a glimpse of God's creational speech. As we learn mathematics, we are one step away from discerning the patterned order of creation. As we learn this patterned order, then we are one step away from the encountering the Living God. The astronomer Johannes Kepler (1572-1630) encountered the Living God as he explored the mathematics of God's creation. After he developed the elliptical law of the motion of the planets around the Sun, he fell to his knees and exclaimed, "My God! I am thinking Thy thoughts after Thee!"

The goal of teaching mathematics is to instill in the student this response of praise to God. Not praise to themselves because of their ability to do math, but praise to the Living God who has granted them the gift of logical reasoning whereby they can worshipfully discern the faithfulness of God revealed in the created order.

¹ Larry Zimmerman, *Truth and the Transcendent* (Florence, Kentucky: Answers in Genesis, 2000), p. 65.