

# Philosophy of Sunday School- A Way of Thinking

## Why talk about philosophy?

Whenever the topic of philosophy is brought up, I often get questions about the practicality of this topic. Isn't this ministry? Are we not just serving the Lord? What does philosophy have anything to do with my teaching? The answer is- everything.

All that we do, we do because of the way we think. We see an abundance of examples in history. For 1,300 years the Japanese oppressed and conquered surrounding areas – in particular Korea, and killed anyone who dared land on their island. Why? They believed that they are a superior race and that their emperor is a god. This belief manifested itself in their actions. How you think directly influences how you act.

What you believe about God, humans, authority, knowledge, morality, and beauty and order, directly effects the way you prepare lessons, teach, talk to students, discipline, and even set up your tables. So, let's break it down and look at every area.

### Three areas to look at:

There are three areas we will consider – each answering a set of questions about our life.



- **Metaphysics – What is Real?**
- **Epistemology –What is True?**
- **Axiology – What is of Value?**

# 1. METAPHYSICS – WHAT IS REAL?

<i>Topic</i>	<b>The World</b>	<i>The Bible</i>
<b><i>Cosmology – the universe</i></b>	(1) Everything is physical and random (2) Everything is a creation of our mind	Genesis 1:1 – Everything is planned, ordered, created, and in control of God.
<b><i>Theology – God</i></b>	(1) There is no spiritual reality – no God (2) Everything is spiritual – we are all gods	There is one God – a personal, eternal, good, and just God
<b><i>Anthropology – people</i></b>	(1) People are part of and equal to all living things – they are not created, but evolved - animals (2) People have a neutral or good nature influenced by their surroundings	People - Created by God in His image – eternal - Have a sinful nature - Have redemption in Christ
<b><i>Ontology - Existence</i></b>	(1) Everything is random – we have no control (2) Everything is our own creation – we create our own reality	All things are subject to, and in God’s control. He gives people free will, but his overall will of redemption will still come to pass.

***How does this influence our classroom?***

- **What the teacher believes about the WORLD AND GOD**

THE WORLD’S CLASSROOM – NO CREATOR	THE BIBLICAL – CLASSROOM – GOD IS THE CREATOR
<p><b>Randomness is natural</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- students should be encouraged to explore and experiment with any idea they want</li> <li>- Order is hindering to the child – allow for freedom in everything</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Creator is evident in all</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students are to imitate their creator – all projects are orderly and planned</li> <li>- Order is good to the child – the classroom is set-up for the convenience of learning, not only exploring</li> </ul>
<p><b>Reality is the product of our mind</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- if it seems logical to me, it is true for me (ei transgender, bisexual, etc.)</li> </ul>	<p><b>There is such a thing as true reality</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The student does not get to create their own reality – if they are a boy, they are a boy</li> </ul>

- What the teacher believes about HUMANS AND THEIR EXISTENCE

THE WORLD'S CLASSROOM	THE BIBLICAL – CLASSROOM
<p><b>Humans are animals</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Their behavior, just like a dog's can be trained with rewards and punishments</li> </ul>	<p><b>Humans are created in God's image</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The teacher is careful in how they interact with the child – they are precious and cannot be neglected. Students must be loved.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Humans have a good or neutral nature</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Societal norms and rules ruin the good nature of the child – any kind of order (raising hands, walking in lines, sitting straight, etc)</li> <li>- If left alone, they will be the best version of themselves</li> </ul>	<p><b>Humans have a sinful nature – redeemable</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students need control, order, and discipline – this includes seating charts, walking in lines, rules, raising hands, etc.</li> <li>- Disciplining is not only necessary, but good</li> <li>- The ultimate goal is to bring the child to Christ's redeeming grace</li> </ul>
<p><b>Humans have no purpose</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students need to be given the opportunity to discover themselves</li> <li>- whatever it is they set their mind on, is to be encouraged</li> </ul>	<p><b>Humans have a purpose</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- God has his purpose for every child – the teacher's role is to (1) bring them to salvation (2) help them grow in Christ (3) help them discover God's will for their life</li> </ul>

## 2. EPISTEMOLOGY – WHAT IS TRUE?

<i>Topic</i>	<i>The World</i>	<i>The Bible</i>
<i>Truth -</i>	Everything is relative – you create your own truth	God is truth – therefore His Word is Truth All Truth is God’s Truth
<i>Knowledge -</i>	Subjective – all a result of your experiences	God knows all things – knowledge exists outside of our experience of it
<i>Is there truth that exists on its own?</i>	Only what you know, what you’ve found is true	Truth is outside of our existence – it just is
<i>How do we get knowledge?</i>	(1) From within – we create knowledge in our mind (2) experiences of physical world	We discover God’s truth and knowledge both through physical and inner/spiritual world

***How does this influence our classroom?***

- **What the teacher believes about TRUTH AND KNOWLEDGE**

THE WORLD’S CLASSROOM – RELATIVE - SUBJECTIVE	THE BIBLICAL – CLASSROOM – GOD IS TRUTH
<p><b>Truth is relative</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students opinions are valid because they are a result of their own experiences – they interpret the Bible as makes sense to them</li> <li>- Sin is relative – cultural</li> </ul>	<p><b>Truth is from God</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There are false opinions – the teacher must teach the correct ones based on the Word of God</li> <li>- Sin is sin</li> </ul>
<p><b>Knowledge is subjective</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Every child learns from their own experiences – the teacher is a co-learner – shouldn’t tell the child what to do – rather help them explore</li> </ul>	<p><b>Knowledge is from God</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The teacher needs to teach knowledge based on God’s Word. All experiences and thoughts need to be checked against it. A born-again teacher has authority – not a co-learner, but a teacher</li> </ul>

## 2. AXIOLOGY – WHAT IS OF VALUE?

<i>Topic</i>	<i>The World</i>	<i>The Bible</i>
<i>What is ethical/moral?</i>	That which the society decides on	That which God commends
<i>What is beautiful</i>	That which the society sees as beautiful	That which is compared to God’s beauty

*How does this influence our classroom?*

- What the teacher believes about MORALITY AND BEAUTY

THE WORLD’S CLASSROOM – HUMANS DECODE	THE BIBLICAL – CLASSROOM – GOD DECIDES
<p><b>Morality</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students decide with the teacher on rules/ standards</li> <li>- Students need to behave a certain way because that will help them in life, or those around them</li> </ul> <p>Beauty and Order</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creativity is above accuracy</li> <li>- Order is unnecessary – it stifles creativity and therefore learning</li> </ul>	<p><b>Morality</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teacher explains rules based on God’s word</li> <li>- Behavior is seen as a result of the heart – sin is seen as sin</li> <li>- Students are taught about the condition of their heart – more than just politeness</li> </ul> <p><b>Beauty and Order</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Work is measured against a standard</li> <li>- Order is necessary – it provide structure for learning</li> </ul>

## Let's Talk Practically –

### What does a Biblically Oriented Classroom look like?

#### *Students, Teachers, Curriculum, Methods*

**STUDENTS** are created by God with an eternal soul with the purpose of serving God. Because of the Fall of Man though, all students have a sinful nature in need of redemption. Because of their nature, training and restraining is necessary. Teachers need to teach their students rules and enforce them.

At the same time, keeping in mind that students are God's special creation, the teacher's attitude toward them needs to be of one of respect and love as to God's children. A teacher needs to keep in mind that they will need to give an account of every moment spent with the child.

Finally, a child's need of redemption becomes the teacher's primary concern. Fun, creativity, fellowship, and anything else are only tools, but are never the goal. The goal is always to bring the student, an eternal being, to salvation.

**TEACHERS**, just like students are both sinful, and redeemable. When we talk about the Sunday School teacher specifically though, we assume that this is a born-again-mature Christian placed into the ministry by God himself. As such, the teacher has the role of instructing the class. He or she must learn from God through His Word, and pass this knowledge on to the students. Not as a peer, but as an authority. She must also manage the children's behavior, disciplining them when necessary. Such a teacher is both kind and friendly, and an authority to be respected.

**CURRICULUM** is understood to be under the authority of the Word of God with the primary source being the Bible itself. The final word, regardless of its popularity and political correctness must still come from the Bible. Many teachers fall into the trap of prioritizing the children's ideas over those of the Bible itself. Regardless of how fun, interactive, attractive, a curriculum or activity is, the Word of God must be the standard.

**METHODS** are probably the most controversial of all. These directly relate to a teacher's view of the human nature. When we study the Scripture, we see that there is a delicate balance which God keeps between being accessible and close to people, yet staying holy, just, and an authority. Methods reflect this – are students constantly working in groups learning from one another as the primary method? There is nothing wrong with group-work, yet, the authority must still come from the teacher; otherwise, we allow truth and knowledge to become subjective. Discussion times are great! We see Jesus holding discussions on a regular basis – yet he stays the authority in them all.

Disciplining children can be another difficult one, do we appeal to their conscience, or do we punish the behavior? Both can be used, when age of the child and situation is taken into account. The end-goal though is what is most important – will this help point the child to God.

## **How Do I Stay True to Biblical Philosophy?**

I can confidently say that the large majority, if not all Sunday School teachers would say that they want to have a godly class which is true to biblical philosophy, yet, in observing classes I find that at least one third are doing and teaching the exact opposite. How is this possible? We become desensitized to the ideas of the world unless we actively seek to do the opposite.

Our most effective weapon is knowing the truth by actively studying the written Truth – the Bible, and by spending time with the author of Truth. Secondly, learning to constantly sift through all ideas. Every idea you get, every method you hear of, ask yourself – does it support God’s view of humans, authority, curriculum, and methods. Very quickly, many ideas expose themselves as lies if put through this test. Pray that the Lord would teach you to stay true to Him in all you do, especially working with children.