

## Embracing Coram Deo at Isaac Newton

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(This talk was originally given using Power Point.

We are keeping that format and including the accompanying slides and video links.)



I don't know about you, but I much prefer the kinds of clothes we are wearing today over what is typically worn to a banquet. I am wearing my Isaac Newton Christian Academy Patriots shirt today. Go Patriots! I haven't had much luck being a sports fan.



As a child, I was a Cubs fan. I remember meeting and shaking Ryne Sandberg's hand. It wasn't easy being a Cubs fan on the SOUTH side of Chicago. Of course, the Cubs have never made it easy on their fans. But I am told this is the year!



I earned my undergraduate degree at Trinity Christian College. Our mascot was the Trolls! Who can root for a Troll? They make every list of "The Weirdest College Mascots."



I went to Purdue University for my graduate degree. There isn't much about a Boilermaker to root for. Plus—look at Purdue Pete! He's creepy.



I later became a Virginia Tech football fan. The Virginia Tech Hokies—I still don't know what a Hokie is. I even learned the Hokie's cheer, which is in Latin! A Latin cheer is something everyone can relate to.

It is hard for me to be a sports fan because most sports are watched on television, and I am not a fan of television.

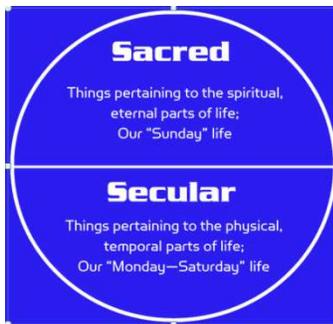
There are other things I am a fan of. I am a fan of my wife, Jolene. She is a great person, and it has been a privilege to be married to her for 22 years. I am a fan of my kids, Kelvin, Jackson and Noelle. I am also a fan of ice cream. I like ice cream—any kind—a lot. Coldstone, Parlor City—I'm good. I really like Dairy Queen Blizzards. Have you tried the new Salted Caramel Truffle Blizzard? It's really good.

Two weeks ago I attended a Biblical Worldview Conference in Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia. I was having dinner with one of the speakers, and he mentioned that in high school he worked at his uncle's Dairy Queen. I asked him to tell me a good story from when he worked at Dairy Queen. He told me about the night they ran out of ice cream. Can you imagine having to tell people at the counter that they don't have any ice cream? He told his uncle that he thought they should close the store, because

there was no ice cream. His uncle told him that they hadn't run out of burgers and fries so they would stay open. He told his uncle, "But people don't come to Dairy Queen for the burger and fries!"

You know another thing I am a fan of? Sunday school. As a child, I received an award for 13 years of perfect attendance in Sunday school. I have also been a Sunday school teacher. I am a fan of Sunday school. But even more than being a fan of Sunday school, I am a fan of applying Sunday school principles to MONDAY school. That is what Christian education is all about, and I am a BIG FAN of Christian education.

Now I want to offer a caution here. Many people think that Christian school is just Sunday school stretched out over the five school days of the week. They think we tell Bible stories and sing Bible songs and pray, and then have regular school the rest of the time. Because this is their impression, they are not even sure there is a need for Christian education. But if that was the extent of it, it would be the equivalent of Dairy Queen running out of ice cream and staying open to serve burgers and fries. That is not the case at Isaac Newton Christian Academy.



### **Sacred/Secular Divide**

Many people think there is a separation between what is sacred and what is secular. This is an old way of thinking that goes back to the ancient Greeks, and is entrenched in American culture, even in some evangelical Christian circles. People think of sacred things as the things related to the spiritual parts of our lives, or our "Sunday" lives—things like Sunday school, and church, and pastors and missionaries, or our personal beliefs about God. They would say these things are important—in fact, more important than the Monday through Saturday things. The SECULAR things of life are related to the temporal and mundane aspects of our lives, like

our jobs, or mowing the lawn, washing dishes or LEARNING—the "Monday through Saturday" parts of our lives. A graphic of this kind of thinking might look like what you see on the screen. There is a hard line between what is sacred and what is secular. The "sacred" section is on top for a reason.

At Isaac Newton Christian Academy, what would running out of ice cream look like? For us, it would mean that we are offering an education, but we are not helping students to move past a sacred-secular divide. We would not be placing this education in the greater context of God's overarching story of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. It means we would not be preparing students to think biblically about every aspect of their lives.

The title of my message tonight is "Embracing *Coram Deo* at Isaac Newton." We use the phrase "*coram Deo*" a lot. Our staff has t-shirts with this written on them. Some of them are wearing those shirts today.

*Coram Deo* is a Latin phrase (Latin again!) that means "Before the face of God." This is a reminder to our staff and students that we are "to live all of our life in the PRESENCE of God, under the AUTHORITY of God, and to the HONOR and GLORY of God."

Colossians 3:17, and other verses like it, remind us that "whatever we do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." WHATEVER you do. There is no divide between what is sacred and what is secular. It is all God's. Is not God the Lord of Monday, just as much as He is the Lord of Sunday? Abraham Kuyper, the Dutch theologian and Prime Minister said, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence in which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry, 'Mine!'" Our faith on Sunday has everything to do with how we

live our lives on Monday. If whatever we do can be done in the name of the Lord Jesus, then our Monday work can be done in His name too.

What about Monday school? God's metanarrative, as outlined in Scripture, becomes the context of a meaningful Christian education. Proverbs 1:7 says that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." Does Sunday school have anything to do with Monday school? Absolutely.

In Sunday school, we learn through Genesis 1 that God is the creator of everything. In Monday school, we learn that science and language are created by God. We also learn how to be co-creators with God making culture in our spheres of influence.

In Sunday school, we learn through Genesis 1-2 that God worked. In Monday school, we learn how to imitate God as a worker, and do our work for His glory. This brings meaning to our work, and helps us to have a proper attitude about our work.

In Sunday school, we learn that people are created in the image of God. In Monday school, we learn how to rightly view and treat others, who are also made in the image of God. We apply this to psychology, philosophy, and sociology.

In Sunday school, we learn through Genesis 3 that man has entered into sin, and everything is profoundly broken. In Monday school, we learn how that brokenness affects everything that we can know and learn. We apply this to political science, to ethics, and to matters of justice.

In Sunday school, we learn that God is faithful, dependable, and immutable. In Monday school, we learn that God's faithfulness and immutability allow us to understand mathematical principles and interpret history correctly.

In Sunday school, we learn that God sent His Son, Jesus as an atonement for our sin. In Monday school, we learn how that redemption restores harmony between God's image-bearers and the earth. We learn how to be co-redeemers with Christ, using what we have learned in every academic discipline to be used by God as He restores what has been broken.

In Sunday school, we learn in Matthew 28 of the Great Commission. In Monday school, we learn how to speak, write, and spell properly to communicate the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the nations without error.



### **NO Sacred/Secular Divide**

Education now has significant meaning. We go after the sacred-secular divide. At Isaac Newton, we call it SSD, and we treat it like a disease.

## **Conflict/Harmony**

We replace it with the illustration seen on the screen. We teach students that things can either be done in conflict with God or in harmony with God. We can live our Monday through Saturday life in conflict with God, or in harmony with God. We can be a physician in a way that is in harmony with God or is in conflict with him. We can be an architect in a way that applies biblical principles or goes against what God has ordained. Everything that we do can be thought of in this way. Washing dishes. Mowing the lawn. Memorizing fraction/decimal equivalents.

Two years ago, our school entered a pilot project with Worldview Matters, an organization based in Seattle, Washington. We were the only school in the pilot project at that time. Dr. Christian Overman, the president of that organization, led our school through a systematic approach to do three important things: (1) to raise the level of biblical worldview integration that our teachers are able to bring into the classroom (2) to elevate the ability of our students to apply critical thinking skills to biblical matters, and (3) to incorporate theology of work into our curriculum. The Board of Directors enthusiastically agreed to enter into the project, and to fund the expense of it, which was considerable. Graduate courses through Seattle Pacific University are not cheap. We didn't really know at the beginning what we were getting into. After a couple of months in the project that first year, we began to realize that this project was having a significant impact on the instruction happening in the two pilot classrooms.

About this time, I received a phone call from a woman who was with the Institute of Faith, Work, and Economics in Washington, D.C. She told me that she had heard good things about what was taking place at Isaac Newton, and thought she would ask me some questions while she was sitting at an airport waiting for a plane. We spoke for about 45 minutes as I told her the stories of what was taking place in our school, and the impact that it was having in the classroom. A few weeks later, we received word that the Institute of Faith, Work and Economics wanted to pay the costs of the pilot project.

Now we are finishing our second year of the pilot project. It has been expanded to every classroom at our school. Other schools around the world have entered into the pilot project and are coming along behind us. Four schools in the United States, and schools in the Nigeria, Kenya, Peru, and Guatemala have entered the project. News is spreading fast. We regularly receive phone calls from schools that want to learn more about what is taking place at our school. Invitations are being extended to our school to lead others in how to do this. Many schools are interested in the project, and an explosion of interest is taking place in Central and South America, requiring the pilot project materials to be quickly translated into Spanish.

Our teachers have been watching video lectures, reading required textbooks, completing projects in their classrooms, and writing papers about their experiences. They have been working hard on this.



### **Worldview**

We teach our students that a worldview is a person's system of beliefs that answers the big questions that everyone has about God, Creation, Humanity, Moral Order, and Purpose.

God—Is there a god? If so, what is that god like?

Creation—How did everything that is come to be?

Humanity—who and what are people?

Moral order—what is right and wrong, and who decides?

Purpose—what are we to be doing on this earth?

Through the pilot project, a sheet of biblical worldview premises has been developed. Under each category of God, Creation, Humanity, Moral Order, and Purpose, biblical truths have been written and are supported by Scripture. Each classroom has a poster of these biblical worldview premises and students have copies of these premises. Through these premises, we are helping our students to see that a Biblical worldview has the answers to all of the big questions of life. Teachers are helping students make connections between the academic subject being studied and the bigger picture of a biblical worldview. They are ensuring that an education at Isaac Newton is authentically Christian, and they are doing all of this without sacrificing academic rigor. They are making sure that we don't run out of ice cream.

In third grade, Mrs. Johannesen was able to guide students in a relevant biblical discussion while studying time, calendars, and dates. Students were able to explain that God is the author of time, but He is not bound by it. He works through people to do His will in His timing. They recognized that God wants us to use our time wisely. They also recognized that God is organized, and we are to model His organization.

In first grade, Miss K was able to guide students in a discussion about the Phonics drills. The students recognized that God wants us to learn how to read so that we can read the Bible. They understood that God never changes, and neither do the phonics principles they were learning. They were able to volunteer that God had a purpose for Miss K helping them understand the phonics rules.

In junior high, Mrs. Cooley guided students in a discussion about their research projects about natural disasters. The students understood that God is entirely good, having no evil elements whatsoever. The students knew that disasters demonstrate how the earth has been plagued by decay. They also understood God's intention for people to be stewards of His creation, and that God calls us to serve and care for those in need.

Now, I have described what is taking place using words, but we thought it would be best for you to see this with your own eyes. I am going to show you a video of Mrs. Greer, our fifth grade teacher, leading some students in her class in a discussion about ecosystems. This discussion is an example of the kinds of discussions that are taking place all over our school. You will notice the students using the sheets of biblical worldview premises that we spoke about earlier. In order for you to best be able to see what is happening, we set it up for filming so you can watch, but the conversation is real, and is an edited version of a 40-minute conversation that took place.

**VIDEO: Group Panel Discussion** (click on link below to view this three minute video)  
<https://www.dropbox.com/s/ezts2nhxpf38gou/Worldview%20Classroom%20Conversation.mp4?dl=0>

These students are 11 years old, and they are already able to understand and think like this. Think about how much better they will be at this after nine years of training. And then think about the impact that this kind of training will have in whatever community and whatever occupation and ministry God calls them to.

I also want to show you two stories about the impact this kind of education is having in the lives of students. The first story is about an 8<sup>th</sup> grade girl named Peighton and her father, Mark Moyer. The second story is about Devon, who is in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Devon is joined by his father, Pastor Jeremy Higgins.

**VIDEO: PEIGHTON'S STORY** (click on below to view this two minute video)  
[//www.dropbox.com/s/csgmviev6c98ec3/INCA%20Banquet%202015-%20The%20Moyers-HD.mp4?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/s/csgmviev6c98ec3/INCA%20Banquet%202015-%20The%20Moyers-HD.mp4?dl=0)

VIDEO: DEVON'S STORY (click on below to view this three minute video)  
<https://www.dropbox.com/s/gx3mkwcx3hl45ya/INCA%20Banquet%202015-%20The%20Higgin's%20Story-HD.mp4?dl=0>

There are many more stories just like these. I am very proud of the quality of Christian education being offered at Isaac Newton. At Isaac Newton Christian Academy, this is what embracing *Coram Deo* looks like:

Our standard is God.  
Our model is Jesus Christ.  
Our goal is Christlikeness.  
Our focus is character.  
Our basis is revealed truth.  
Our motive is God's glory.  
And our enablement is grace.

I can assure you that Isaac Newton Christian Academy is not going to run out of ice cream for many years to come. Go Patriots!