

Ten Pitfalls and Ten Commandments for Christian Academics

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After several years of teaching at the tertiary level followed by 26 years of training and supervising Christian scholars teaching in universities around the world, I have observed a number of pitfalls which even dedicated and well-meaning Christian scholars encounter. These pitfalls hamper our impact and limit our influence. My presentation will identify ten of these pitfalls, followed by ten “commandments” which serve as antidotes, guiding to greater effectiveness.

Some of the pitfalls I will discuss are the following: pride, an imbalance from investing so much time in our academic work that we neglect other important areas of our lives, fear of identifying with Christ in the face of unbelief and opposition, manipulation which seeks to trick people into “evangelistic” conversations, stridency and anger against those with whom we disagree, sloppy research and ineffective teaching, failure to assess where an unbeliever is on a spiritual receptivity scale, failure to see scholarship as a godly and strategic calling and ministry which is integral to the Church’s role in the world, holding a “Christian worldview” that is neither centred on Christ with a passion for him nor global in scope by embracing the all-encompassing purposes of Christ, and finally, failing to follow the appropriate protocol for the university by using church-appropriate language and behaviour.

God has called us as academics to bring the fragrance of Christ into the university. To do this we need to be whole, healthy persons of integrity, bringing shalom to a professional community which is often marked by fragmentation, pride, a love for sin, and animosity for God and the Gospel. For us to provide an effective missional presence in the academy we need God’s help to have the right measure of wisdom, reflection, humility, skill, excellence, knowledge, perception, and love. Let us be faithful stewards of this strategic role to which God has called us at the very nexus of influence in the university—the classroom itself.