

Wisdom, Joy, and a Christian Education – Proverbs 1:1-9

Introduction – As we enter into another school year, it goes without saying that we are a nation of fools and the reason we are is that for generations we have been taught and now teach (even Christians, churches and denominations teach) that when it comes to every subject taught in the government schools, God is irrelevant if he/she even exists. We have turned away from wisdom. The false pen of the scribe certainly works falsehood...we have rejected the word of God; so what wisdom do we have? (Jer 8:8-9). Even though I am preaching to a congregation that believes God has commanded us to provide a thoroughly Christian education for our children and for the covenant community, we still need to let the Scriptures gird up our minds and hearts for the work before us. For both teacher and student -

The Purposes of the Proverbs Teaches us About Paideia (Prov 1:1-9) – Education is not simply about what we think of as school (but it does include that). Both the Hebrew (Deut 6) and the Greek (Eph 6:4) mindset of instruction and education of children is about what was called “paideia” which encompassed the entire enculturation of a child into his or her people.

The purpose of Proverbs, Solomon tells us, is to “*know wisdom and instruction*” (v2a). “*To know*” is not an abstract proposition here; it implies a relationship (see 9:10). This relational knowledge becomes a tool “*to perceive the words of understanding*” (v2b), that is, to see the world around us and discern truth, goodness and beauty. This understanding is not our own (see 3:5-6). Considering vv2-3 together, wisdom instructs us not only what and how the world is, but what it should be. The idea of a “values-free education” is simply an oxymoron to the Christian mind; there is no neutrality in education. Stalin knew this to be true (“*Education is a weapon, whose effects depend on who holds it in his hands and at whom it is aimed*”). And so, to claim as a nation that we provide a neutral education is evidence of naiveté or worse, malevolence.

But, the paideia and searching for wisdom described in Proverbs, this kind of education protects the gullible and naïve (the simple) and matures the young (v4). This right kind of education is just as valuable to the most learned (v5) – there is always more wisdom to grow into for wisdom is found in the infinite God. Finally, v6 emphasizes that this kind of discipleship teaches us how to grasp some of the deepest and darkest enigmas of life, to find meaning, or sometimes to find grace instead, in the midst of life’s most bewildering times.

We are All Students – To be a disciple of Jesus Christ means that you are a student; always a learner; always following a Teacher. Jesus taught that to be His disciple meant to deny oneself (Matt 16:24-26) and with a devotion that dwarfed all other loves, to follow Him (Luke 14:26) – This means that our lives are to be filled with learning and following Jesus, His wisdom and instruction. To take dominion over all the earth means we have a lot to learn.

Wisdom Requires Submission to God – Education begins with submission to the educator and his/her god. Teachers, and not just their teaching, have an enormous impact on students and that is the way God built the world (Luke 6:40). The teacher and the student must acknowledge God and thank Him for all things, declaring His glory in everything (including everything you are studying), or we will suppress the truth in darkness and turn created things into idols, including our own intelligence (Rom 1:18-31). This is the great sin of the so-called “Enlightenment.”

Submission Acknowledges Christ’s Lordship over Everything – If Jesus is Lord of all, and He is (Matt 28:18, Phil 2:10-11) and if we are to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, and we are (2 Cor 10:3-5), then it simply follows that a Christian education is the work of thinking God’s thoughts after Him. When we discover truth, goodness, or beauty and we see these things for what they are, we find ourselves knowing God – which is why “knowledge” is so relational. It begins with a proper reverence for Him: “*the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*”

The Pursuit of Wisdom is Hard – Paideia is discipline and the pursuit of wisdom is a good work so do not grow weary (Gal 6:9). This is the way God has made it (Prov 25:2), but ever since the Garden, our work has been much harder than God originally ordered. Students: it may not be “your teacher’s fault” that the lesson is so difficult. Teachers: in the midst of the hard lesson, remember your goal and remind the student of the goal. We are seeking knowledge/instruction/wisdom to the glory of God.

The Pursuit of Wisdom Brings Joy – The spirit of the age and culture in which we live claims there is no God, you are only a bag of random chemicals, and there is no destiny for anyone. Among other things, this drives our youth to cynicism, self-loathing, and despair. Cynicism is taught in this nation’s schools and embraced in our culture; it is lifted up as ideal. Instead, when you teach math/economics as “the way God works in this world,” when you teach history as “how God has providentially moved in and through the lives of men and women,” when you teach literature as “story, word, and meaning under the One Who is Word, Who is Author of the Story and Who is Truth-meaning,” and when you teach Wisdom as Someone to pursue because He was sent for you – everything changes. If everything is under the lordship of Jesus Christ and if “*in His presence is fullness of joy; at His right hand are pleasures forevermore,*” and if we believe that, then school, education, discipleship are all the work of pursuing joy.