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A Weekly Publication of Relational Concepts Inc.

Proverbs and Progressive Education

By David DeWitt

Proverbs 1:4 is one of Solomon's biggest concerns throughout the book of Proverbs *to give prudence to the naïve, To the youth knowledge and discretion*. The word for *naïve* basically means *simple*, or even *open minded*. Solomon sees the path of *knowledge and discretion* as one which shapes and focuses the mind. It makes the student more complex. As he or she learns, they become more discerning, less gullible, more critical and judgmental, not just more knowledgeable. So the philosophy of education presented in Proverbs is contrary to the whole idea of western liberal education.

Proverbs is not a liberal education. Although there are many parallels, I am not using the word "liberal" here in the sense of left-wing politics. A "liberal education" (for example, at a "liberal university") means the opening of the minds of students to new ideas, new opinions, and new behavior, while questioning traditional answers. The idea is to broaden the student's general knowledge, rather than shaping their knowledge to a predetermined set of skills and values, as in technical or professional training.

The application is to realize that, when your children attend the public schools in the western world, they are being taught with a **philosophy of education Solomon would not have approved of**. He would say our liberal education just keeps people naïve while giving them more information. It gives them facts they don't have the discernment to live with in a righteous way. The information is not taught in the context of any moral, theological, or ethical foundation. Therefore, the student is not equipped to determine the value of what he or she is learning, or even discern whether or not it is true. It is the wisdom of the world without the fear of God.

So today's student grows up to be intelligent but naïve. They can be a teacher, plumber, contractor, doctor, lawyer, or engineer, but they have no moral framework from which to love their spouse, raise their children, treat their clients, determine religious truth, or avoid the adulterous. For example, our medical procedures and computer technology allow us to do more. But the knowledge to do those things does not carry with it the morality to know if they are good things to do. **Our western education attempts to bring people to maturity without wisdom.**

There's nothing wrong with technology, if it's framed in the context of morality. But technology itself is not morality. It's merely what the people of the builders of the Tower of Babel did—they were creative without morality. Technology is a-moral. But most people creating it are using it immorally. So it often seems to be immoral. For example, internet technology is not immoral, but it makes it easier to watch pornography.

In America, liberals and conservatives accuse each other of having a specific philosophy that they are promoting in their institutions. The interesting difference is that the conservatives admit that, but the liberals won't. So one might suggest that if liberals are open to new ideas, they should also be open to conservative ideas. But that is not possible, except superficially. So how is it that liberals seem to have an agenda? I suggest that a philosophy that believes in an open exchange of ideas will lead to a better life must of necessity believe at least three things:

- Man is basically good, i.e., he is not a sinner. Liberalism cannot believe in sin. They must define it as sickness, or ignorance, or socially unacceptable behavior, etc., all of which are curable by education or rehabilitation or medication or therapy. But they never accept the notion of moral evil. Very smart liberals make very stupid decisions because they do not believe in sin.
- Liberals define themselves as progressives. The idea of progress is that man is evolving. The evidence for this is always technological. Technology is bringing about progress in education, etc. Virtually everyone is better off than 100 years ago, 10 years ago, or last year—we are evolving. But are we better off morally? If you are a liberal, you have to say that you are. An open exchange of ideas, thinking outside the box, has led to an acceptance of divorce, abortion, homosexuality, all religious views, and all views on sexual matters, as long as it doesn't hurt others.
- An open exchange of ideas depends on the idea that truth is not absolute but is relative. Absolute objective truth is in a box. For example, Brian McLaren, leader of the Emergent Church Movement, says the words "absolute" and "relative" should not be used with the word "truth." He describes his movement as not an organization but a discussion. That's liberalism.