

WISE IN HEART

© Eddy D Field III

There is a problem with education in our nation, and the problem is, simply, that schools are not educating people. The quality of education in English-speaking countries has been in decline for years. Many students do not learn important facts, like facts of history. Anders Henriksson has published a book called, *Ignorance Is Blitz: Mangled Moments of History from Actual College Students*, and in his book he records some of the ridiculous things college students have written in their papers, and on their examinations. For example, one wrote, “Bible Legend states that the trouble started after Eve ate the Golden Apple of Discord. This was the forbidding fruit. An Angry God sent his wraith. Man fell from the space of grace. It was mostly downhill skiing from there.” Another wrote, “One major source of conflict since World War II has been Israel’s relations with the Parisians. The Carter administration found itself face to face with this problem during the so-called Iran Hostess Crisis.” (Anders Henriksson, *Ignorance Is Blitz: Mangled Moments of History from Actual College Students*) Students do not learn important facts, and they do not learn how to reason. The *Wall Street Journal* recently published an article with the title, “Exclusive Test Data: Many Colleges Fail to Improve Critical-Thinking Skills” (*Wall Street Journal*, June 5, 2017) In the article, the author states, “At more than half of schools, at least a third of seniors were unable to make a cohesive argument, assess the quality of evidence in a document or interpret data in a table.” Worse than this, many schools have become anti-Christian, and they teach students the opposite of the Christian faith. Ben Shapiro, in his book, *Brainwashed: How Universities Indoctrinate America’s Youth*, has documented that universities teach their students ‘leftist’ ideology. However, a good education does not make a person wise, or virtuous. A person can be well-educated, and a fool. In fact, many people with much formal education are fools, and many with little formal education are wise. So, some Christians are wary of formal education, and fear that it leads away from simple Christian faith. Some Christian ministers are proud that they never went to seminary, and boast that they have been taught by the Lord. Lacking education is no virtue, however. Foolishness is no virtue. Prudence is a virtue, and, in Christian moral theology, it is one of four cardinal virtues. In the seventeenth century and the eighteenth century, Puritans sometimes named their daughters, *Prudence*. In modern times, however, *Prudence* is not popular name. In the Year of Our Lord Nineteen-hundred Seventy-seven, not one girl in England or Wales was named *Prudence*. In the United States, no girls have been named *Prudence* in the last seventy years. This indicates something about the English-speaking nations in modern times.

The Christian is to be innocent, but not naive. He is to have the faith of a child, but the wisdom of an adult. When the Lord Jesus’s disciples discussed which of them should be greatest in the kingdom of heaven, Jesus told them that the humble are the greatest. He said to them, “Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 18:3, 4) When the Lord Jesus sent His apostles into the world to proclaim the Gospel, He warned them that unbelievers would oppose them, and he told them to be shrewd in how they responded. He said to them, “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.” (Matthew 10:16) When Saint Paul explained to the Corinthians the significance of speaking in tongues, he said, “Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.” (1 Corinthians 14:20) The Christian is to be humble, and to be innocent, and to trust God. However, he must be wise and shrewd.

To know something is to understand it as God understands it. God made the world, and He works His will in it. No one can know the world, then, unless he knows it as God does. The Christian is to think God’s

thoughts after Him, as Johannes Kepler put it. The Christian is not only to know the world, but also he is to act wisely in it. To be wise, a man must know the Lord. The Proverbs say, “The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy *is* understanding.” (Proverbs 9:10) Wisdom is not knowledge. Charles Spurgeon explained the difference between the two: “Wisdom is, I suppose, the right use of knowledge. To know is not to be wise. Many men know a great deal, and are all the greater fools for it. There is no fool so great a fool as a knowing fool. But to know how to use knowledge is to have wisdom.” (Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Fourfold Treasure*, 1871, number 991) To be wise is to know what to do with knowledge. It is to know the right thing to do. Prudence is a kind of wisdom. The word *prudence* is related to the word *providence*, which means, *to see before*. Noah Webster defined *prudence* as ‘Wisdom applied to practice. Prudence implies caution in deliberating and consulting on the most suitable means to accomplish valuable purposes, and the exercise of sagacity in discerning and selecting them.’ (Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language*) C. S. Lewis wrote, “Prudence means practical common sense, taking the trouble to think out what you are doing and what is likely to come of it.” (*Mere Christianity*) Prudence is knowing the right end, and the right means to that end. A prudent man is a sensible man. He sets before him the right goal, and then he carefully considers what actions he must take to achieve that goal. Many people are not prudent. They may be educated, but they do not know how to get along in God’s world. The prudent man studies the Scriptures to gain the wisdom necessary to prosper in God’s world. Consider the woman described in the thirty-first chapter of Proverbs: she is wise in the management of her home; she is industrious, and not idle; she is frugal, but not miserly; she makes beautiful things for herself, and for her household. She produces and sells. She makes more money than she needs, and has enough to give to those who have need. The proverbs call her *a virtuous woman*. We may call her *Prudence*.

However much wealth a man has, he must keep it in perspective. This life is not all there is. There is a life after this one. The truly prudent man makes plans for the future, and he especially plans for the future life. The Lord Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount, warned that not every one who calls Him Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven; only those who do the will of Jesus’s Father in heaven will enter. It is not enough for a man to know what Jesus has taught; he must do what Jesus says. Jesus made this comparison: Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.” (Matthew 7:24-27; Luke 6:46-49) Some men are shrewd in this life, and their shrewdness makes them wealthy. Yet, although they may be shrewd in temporal things, they are foolish in eternal things. On one occasion, a man in a crowd that was listening to Jesus asked Him to tell his brother to divide his inheritance with him. Jesus refused, and told the crowd, “Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.” He illustrated his teaching with a parable. A man had more crops than he could store. So, he planned to tear down his barns and build bigger ones. He was self-satisfied, and lived for pleasure. But God called that man a fool, and that very night took his life. Jesus said, “So *is* he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” (Luke 12:13-21) It is not wrong to have wealth; it is wrong, however, to care more about wealth than about God and man.

God entrusts His people with money; some more than others. Every Christian must be faithful to that trust. He must judge for himself how much money to spend on his household, how much to reinvest in his business, how much to save for retirement, and how much to give to those in need. These are not easy judgments to make, and they require prudence. Jesus told His disciples a parable about stewardship, and He told it in the hearing of the Pharisees, who loved money. A rich man had a steward, and that steward wasted his lord’s goods. When the lord removed the man’s stewardship, and called the steward to account, the steward

hatched a plan by which he would collect discounted debts from his lord's debtors, so that they would, in turn, receive him into their homes. He went to each of his lord's debtors, and collected their debts, but at a discount. When the lord learned what his steward had done, he commended his prudence. Jesus then made the comment "the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." That is, unrighteous men are often more prudent than Christians. Jesus then told His disciples, "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." That is to say, although money is unrighteous, a man can use it for a righteous purpose, namely, helping those in need, who will later welcome him into heaven. Jesus further illustrated this teaching with the story of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man wore fine clothes and ate fine food. Lazarus was a beggar who lay outside the rich man's gate, and he was covered with sores. He was miserable, and would have been grateful for the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. When the two men died, Lazarus went to a place of blessing where Abraham was, and the rich man to a place of suffering. The rich man, in agony, cried out to Abraham for Lazarus to give him some water. Abraham said to him that he received his good things in lifetime, and Lazarus bad things. Now, things were different, and nothing could be done about it. If only the rich man had taken care of Lazarus, the way the Good Samaritan showed mercy to the Hebrew man that had been beaten and robbed, then Lazarus and Abraham would have welcomed Lazarus with open arms. (Luke 16) Giving alms does not merit a place in Paradise, however. Not at all. Nevertheless, Jesus said that a man will have eternal life if he will love God with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his strength, and with all his mind, and love his neighbor as himself. (Luke 10:25-37) As Saint James put it, "Faith without works is dead." (James 2:20) The prudent man not only makes plans for this life, but he makes plans for the next.

Great crowds followed Jesus, and he warned them about what is required of a true disciple. He told them to consider that following Jesus means giving up all, and even life itself. He said that when a man intends to build a tower, he must first count the cost, in order to know whether he sufficient funds to complete the project. If he builds without sufficient funds, and cannot complete the building, then he is a fool, and subject of ridicule. If a king intends to wage war against another king, he must first determine his odds of winning, or else he may need to sue for peace. Jesus said, "So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:25-33) When Jesus predicted His death to His disciples, He told them that, if they would be true disciples, they must be prepared to give up all to follow Him. To give up all to follow Jesus, is the greatest prudence. Jesus asked, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26)

The virtue of prudence has a moral, and not only an intellectual, component to it, for prudence is not only knowing the right thing to do, but being disposed to do it. A man may know the wise course of action, but, ruled by passion, fail to follow it. An ancient aphorism states, "Passion mars the judgment of prudence." The Proverbs say, "The wise in heart shall be called prudent." (Proverbs 16:21) Every sin is imprudent. Sin is irrational. Eve ate the forbidden fruit because she was deceived by the serpent. Why did she believe the serpent, and not God? One may answer, "Because she walked by sight, and not by faith." But why did she walk by sight, and not by faith? There is no rational answer. Adam was not deceived when he ate. He knew full well what he was doing. Why, then, did he do it? Again, there is no rational answer. Sin is irrational. Why do men not acknowledge God? It is not because there is no proof of His existence; rather, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork." (Psalm 19:1; Romans 1:19-32) Men suppress the truth in unrighteousness. It takes a sovereign work of God on the sinful heart of man to cause him to be prudent with respect to his own soul.

The Christian cultivates the virtue of prudence. He has made plans for the future by forsaking all to follow Jesus. He hears Jesus's words, and does them. There are many educated people in the world today. They are educated, but much of what they believe is false. They are educated, but they have no wisdom. They are not

prudent in this life, and they are not prudent in consideration of the next. T. S. Eliot, in his play, *The Rock*, depicts the folly of those who have earthly knowledge, but no heavenly wisdom.

The Eagle soars in the summit of Heaven,
The Hunter with his dogs pursues his circuit.
O perpetual revolution of configured stars,
O perpetual recurrence of determined seasons,
O world of spring and autumn, birth and dying
The endless cycle of idea and action,
Endless invention, endless experiment,
Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness;
Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;
Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word.
All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance,
All our ignorance brings us nearer to death,
But nearness to death no nearer to GOD.
Where is the Life we have lost in living?
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?
The cycles of Heaven in twenty centuries
Bring us farther from GOD and nearer to the Dust.

Let those who have not forsaken all to follow Jesus do so. Let those who have forsaken all be faithful to take up their crosses daily to follow him. Let those who follow him be prudent, having not worldly wisdom, but godly wisdom to care for their families, their fellow Christians, and their fellow men.

Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. *Amen.*