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By Rudolfs Dainis Smits

THE ENDURING VALUE OF WISDOM

“Aristotle says that the aim of education is to make the pupil like and dislike what he ought.” – C.S. Lewis. According to this quote, values we need are taught to prepare us for life, business and professional careers. Sadly, in many instances this is no longer true.

Harvard University (originally New College), founded in 1636, is America’s oldest corporation. It was renamed in 1638 after the Rev. John Harvard, who started the college for training clergy. Facades of Harvard’s historic buildings contain a chiseled stone shield including three symbolic books (two arranged facing up and one facing down) with the inscription, “VERITAS,” which means “truth.” John Amos Comenius, considered the father of modern education, developed an education methodology there that systemized the pursuit of truth as revealed through the Scriptures, nature (science), and reason. The third book in this shield is respectfully turned face down representing the limits of man’s reason. (This is described in *The Harvard Wall* by Gary Brumbelow.)

Harvard University has since abandoned this tradition and become a secular institution that no longer adheres to these ideas. The shield has been redesigned; that third book now faces upward, and the inscription, “for Christ and the church” has been removed. Harvard’s historic building facades, however, remain unchanged, testifying to this lost heritage – the value of wisdom and the pursuit of truth in God: “[The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction](#)” (Proverbs 1:7).

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Proverbs 1:1-7 declares that to know wisdom and instruction, to understand and gain insight, and to receive instruction in wise dealings and righteousness, justice and equity must begin with the fear of God. Scripture teaches that the pursuit of all learning, knowledge and gained wisdom is revealed through the knowledge of God (Scripture); nature (study of science and God's creation), and through Reason (the instrument of logic).

Values are essential for defining who we are and foundational to culture and society. Business and commerce are controlled by accepted standards and values. If these principles are ignored, they will lead to our demise. As C.S. Lewis stated, "A dogmatic belief in objective values is necessary to the very idea of a rule which is not tyranny or an obedience which is not slavery."

Wisdom that values truth found in Scripture. A successful business or organization must maintain vision, mission and a value system for its employees to follow and to benefit its clients and customers. Our work and professional practice will be valued and remain relevant if we operate within the framework of biblical principles that protect the rights, relationships and well-being of our partners, employees, colleagues and customers.

Wisdom that values truth in science (nature). Successful businesses uphold common law and best practices that include justice of exchange, fair prices, and value character and integrity in relationships and professional dealings. "A just balance and scales are the Lord's; all the weights in the bag are his work" (Proverbs 16:11).

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Wisdom that values reason that yields to God. The Bible tells the famous story of King Solomon who, when offered riches and power, chose wisdom instead. Later in life Solomon diverged from the path of truth. He ceased to cherish wisdom over wealth. He compromised truth, wisdom and knowledge in his pursuit of riches, horses and women, and eventually violated the very principles that made him a wise king and leader. He lost the fear of God and the kingdom with it. The lessons shown in 1 Kings 11:10-12 are important ones we should heed.

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Reflection/Discussion Question

1. Why do you think the book of Proverbs in the Bible equates wisdom with the fear of God? What is the meaning of “fear” in this case – and how is this a prerequisite to wisdom, knowledge and understanding?
2. Have you ever compromised – or felt tempted to compromise – your values at work or with a client in fear of what someone might think or say about you? If so, what was the result?
3. Our outward practices reflect internal decisions about what we believe. If we do not practice and protect those values, our lives become a meaningless façade. What is the basis for the value system that guides your personal and professional life? How do your actions contribute to protecting these values?

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4. C.S. Lewis said, “No justification of virtue will enable a man to be virtuous.... I had sooner play cards against a man who was quite skeptical about ethics, but bred to believe that ‘a gentleman does not cheat,’ than against an irreproachable moral philosopher who had been brought up among [card sharks].” What is Lewis saying about merely espousing principles (or values) versus what someone actually lives them out in practice?

NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

Proverbs 9:9, 16:11; Ecclesiastes 12:13, Micah 6:8, Luke 11:42, Romans 11:33, James 3:13,17

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