

for Parents

February 26, 2007

Academic freedom in our classrooms

My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. James 3:1-2

A recent headline in the *Arizona Daily Star* (February 10, 2007) declared, “Plan: Stop School Political Bias.” A former TUSD employee has revealed that out of 150 teachers in his school, he was in a political minority of only about five who were not espousing left-leaning political views in the classroom. Now the Arizona Legislature is considering a bill that would penalize instructors in government schools from kindergarten through university who use their platforms to espouse their political views.

While this may seem to be good news for those who are in the minority, common sense tells us that it will be difficult to enforce and more likely to be ignored, subverted, and perhaps even overthrown by the teachers’ unions in the name of “academic freedom.” Most of us who have chosen to teach outside of government education believe that philosophy (including political philosophy) is so intimately interwoven with subject matter, that it is usually impossible to separate out these views, and often inappropriate, depending on the content being taught.

Just for the record, many of us have not only felt this bias throughout our own schooling, but have been victimized by it as well. These biases actually cause many students (even at the graduate school level) to deny or suppress their beliefs in order to “get the grade” that the student knows the instructor holds over his head as a punishment or reward. For some Christians, this threat can even cause them to deny Biblical truth when it conflicts with the politically popular views of the classroom. I know this is so; I have seen it in graduate school classrooms at the University of Arizona.

Unfortunately, such legislation does not strike at the heart of the problem. The teachers who populate those classrooms in Arizona public schools are generally just repeating what they themselves learned in their own government schooling – whether at the elementary, secondary, or collegiate level. As someone who reads and teaches widely on the subject of Christian world view, I think the real heart of the problem is that Christian churches are not leading their members to discern the truth and to be true salt and light in the marketplace of ideas in this nation. But that’s a subject for another time.

What I want to say today is that Cornerstone teachers rarely advance a political agenda in terms of a hard left or right leaning, but they *are* charged with the responsibility of teaching children to think, and that often involves debunking popular held misconceptions in our society. Our strongest affirmations are for ideas that are clearly Biblical in nature. For example, in our teacher application we specifically ask teachers their views on the sanctity of life – a subject about which we believe that Bible has clearly spoken. They are also charged to refer certain “sticky” issues back to parents. Our freedom at Cornerstone is tempered by Biblical admonitions such as the scripture from James 3 quoted above, not by legislation.