

The Inherent Danger of Religious Intellectualism

What God exclaims man excoriates. What man applauds God abases. Our world's valuation system is starkly disparate from God's. There are three things that our world holds in very high esteem: Riches, Physical Beauty, and Intellect. If an individual possesses any of these attributes, then the world deems him worthy of its plaudits and attention. But hath not God chosen the poor in the world rich in faith? Do not our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness? Has He not chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise? These principles reflect God's economy. Our observation does not make beauty, intellect and riches bad, conversely, they can be good. However, man has displayed a propensity to fall into self-conceit when these characteristics are present, either in themselves or in the objects of their affection.

Pro. 26:12 Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him.

There has been a trend amongst us to become more learned, to become intellectuals. It seems like the younger ministers of today are intrigued by higher knowledge and are impressed by great oratory and "deep" theology. Great speaking and well-spoken facts captivate these young minds and motivate them to imitation. Why are we seeing this more now than times past? It is because we are feeling the pressures of this world's valuation system and we are adopting its philosophy of what is exceptional. And to reiterate, the world places intellect on a high pedestal. No doubt, given the right motive, learning is good. However, as we study, we must take great care that our doctrine does not eclipse our discernment. If intellectualism is the exercise of intellect at the expense of emotion than (I beg license of the reader) religious intellectualism is the exercise of intellect at the expense of spiritual discernment. In this definition lies the issue at hand. The inherent danger of religious intellectualism is its proclivity to conclude issues solely through our mental faculties.

We cannot ignore the fact that there is a great need for study amongst ministers. However, what has happened in some theological pursuits is that men have moved away from what theology is all about. Theology means, the study of God. In their endeavors to increase in knowledge, too many scholars have lost sight of God altogether. They are studying for sake of

learning and learning alone. And when they have obtained their facts, they know nothing more of the character of God or His holy Word. They themselves have not been challenged to come into the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. We must be ever vigilant to keep Christ central in our all of our religious pursuits. The end of such misguided scholars are individuals and groups such as the Jesus Seminar. These so-called sages devote their work to studying Jesus and promulgate that Christ was not of a virgin birth, performed faith healing of maladies that were only psychosomatic, did not do nature miracles, did not feed the five thousand, walk on water or rise from the dead¹. These individuals have dedicated their life to studying Jesus and yet do not truly know him. Very sad indeed. This is an extreme example of intellectualism. Yet, one does not get to this point over night. There is a long slow process that occurs before such heresy is embraced. We are not likely to see such extreme foolishness in our ranks. We are, however, more likely to see the seeds of such extremism.

Today in the ranks of Pentecost we have more learned men than ever before. Degrees and doctorates are becoming more common. We also have amongst us some of the greatest oratory ability that we have ever seen. However, along with these proposed good things there has been noticed another trend; leaning on intellectual accomplishments men are getting accustomed to preaching without the anointing of the Holy Ghost. Leadership skills, well-orchestrated church services and professionally architected sermons have become primary and satisfactory to some. I contend that what we need is less human polish and more Holy Ghost power. There are many things that we see and perceive that the intellectual mind would deem success. But when a man gets too accustomed to operating in the physical realm without the benefit of a Spiritual influence he is headed for trouble. Paul said, my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. Dear reader, the Holy Ghost will NEVER lead you wrong.

When mental reasoning overrides old convictions we have taken a step in the wrong direction. There are convictions amongst us that cannot be articulated well enough to satisfy the carnal mind, they don't really add up. As a matter fact, human intellect will make mincemeat out of some of things we stand for today. Our Apostolic history teaches us that though some convictions could not be articulated well enough to satisfy the wisdom of

man, they were still right. Time proved they were right. What intellectual basis did our dear elders have to preach against television when it was first introduced? Television was actually wholesome and innocent in the beginning. Pastors could not explain it with words, but they felt something in the Spirit. What of cigarettes and liquor? My dear friend, there are some things that go beyond our religious intellect they must be discerned in the Spirit.

Why was it that some men “saw” the danger and yet others walked on oblivious into Satan’s trap? Because some only perceived with a scientific method while others heard from God in a place of prayer. The good elders knew, *we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.* There are some things that can only be spiritually discerned. And if you’ve spent too much time in pedantic reading and not enough time the prayer room you are likely to fall prey to religious intellectualism—thinking things through instead of praying things through.

There are some that would blithely explain away our old convictions with ease and smooth words. But we are not swayed for we know that the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. This is the reason we still hold fast to convictions that make no sense to the carnal mind. Facial hair on men, uncut hair on women, jewelry, inordinate use of video, are some old stances that cannot be understood by the religious intellectual. But let not our faith stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

As we encourage our young men to gain knowledge let it be in the spirit of the Apostle’s words:

Eph. 1:16–19 Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers;

Eph. 1:17 That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:

Eph. 1:18 The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,

Eph. 1:19 And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power,

Col. 1:9–10

For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

Col. 1:10 That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;

¹The Acts of Jesus: The Search for the Authentic Deeds of Jesus (1998), Harper: SanFrancisco, [ISBN 0-06-062979-7](https://www.amazon.com/Acts-Jesus-Search-Authentic-Deeds/dp/0060629797)