

Romans 1: 18-25

It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings. (Proverbs 25:2)

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)

Faith, Intellect and Surrender

On my wife's and my last vacation, I came upon a treasure; a number of books dealing with the history of the Church, a study of which I am convinced is profitable – and enjoyable – for every believer. One of the things I have learned in researching this history is the formation of a split in the last several hundred years between appeals of the Church through faith and those through the intellect. This split has grown into the modern tension between science and faith, creating the false idea that the two are incompatible and forever at odds with one another.

This “pseudo-dichotomy” can be traced back to the rise of mysticism in the Church, back around the mid-1200s. Now, before you put this aside (to read only as a non-prescription sleeping aid), what that means in plain English is that the early mystics wanted to have a direct contact with God, which they apparently were not getting in the formalities of worship and the purely intellectual pursuits of theologians in that day. This is understandable when you consider that people want to have personal relationships with one another; friendships, marriages and even business partnerships are rarely successful when there is no emotional component. God made us emotional beings because God Himself has emotions – Jesus made several references to His Father's *pleasure* in doing certain things, and the author of Hebrews (cited above) noted that faith is the key to pleasing God.

But being able to know and understand is another, equally human desire; what the late physicist Dr. Richard Feynman once called *the pleasure of finding things out*. God understands this need as well, as evidenced by the quote from Proverbs above. The reference to “kings” is for every believer, as God's plan was for us to be a kingdom of priests to serve Him (refer to Revelation 5:10). In other words, God does not reveal the details to every last mystery – either about Himself or His creation – because He wants us to figure them out and He knows the pleasure we receive in revealing something new about Him. Have you ever set up an Easter egg hunt for your children? Maybe something a little more sophisticated as they get older? If so, then you know how much pleasure *you* get out of watching the kids search out the clues and find the hidden prize. I believe God gets pleasure out of setting up clues for the rest of us to follow and learn more about Him.

The problem, however, is that as the Church grew, believers drifted away from the guidance of the Holy Spirit Who was to be their help and guide into all truth. As the Church set up its earthly structure, worship became more of a formality and the desire to understand her Lord better became more of an intellectual exercise. As the Church distanced itself from God, believers got the idea that God Himself was distant and everything we could learn about Him was – pardon the phrase – academic. This led to abuses of the earthly authority the Church had and the feeling among believers that something was missing, which gave rise to the mystics and their desire for a more personal connection with God. (Indeed, the mystics could be considered the first agents for reform within the Church.)

Since that time, the Church rarely seems to get it right when it comes to balancing the emotional and the intellectual. Each looks upon the other with suspicion; Pentecostals and Holiness denominations see only cold formality in more mainline denominations, while those same mainline denominations view Pentecostals and Holiness churches as a Christianized version of the first line of Robert Service's classic poem *The Shooting of Dan McGrew*: "A bunch of the boys were whooping it up in the Malamute saloon." In fact, I have been to churches at either end of this particular spectrum which could have used an infusion of the other – mainline sanctuaries that could have loosened up a little and Pentecostal congregations that would greatly benefit from a reminder that the Apostle Paul *did* write that "everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way" (1 Cor. 14:40). The church seems to experience swings between one extreme and the other.

The Church, however, is not supposed to strike a balance between the two, because such a balance implies human effort. Instead, we as believers must remember that we are the Body of Christ, while Christ Himself is our head. The key to reconciling the emotional with the intellectual is the key to most everything else in the life of a believer – *surrender*. The same action that started us on our walk with the Lord in the first place. The same yielding to Him that makes things so much easier, and yet seems to always be one of the hardest things for us to do. Both the intellectual and the emotional sides of the human psyche must be brought as an act of the will under the Lordship of Jesus in order to find proper development for the Kingdom of God and fulfillment for the believer.

Worship is supposed to be not a matter of the intellect or the emotions, but one of Spirit and Truth, as Jesus told the Samaritan woman in John, chapter 4. The believer is guided by the Spirit into contact with God while his or her desires, requests and thoughts are brought into line with those of the Lord. Oswald Chambers, in his classic devotional *My Utmost for His Highest*, wrote that prayer does not change *things* so much as prayer changes the *believer* and the believer then changes things. When properly guided by the Spirit, true worship satisfies both the emotional and the intellectual longings of the individual.

The incident with the Samaritan woman was, in fact, an example of what happens when both the emotional and intellectual sides of worship are

not properly guided by God. Both the Jews and Samaritans were Israelites. But Israel had been divided centuries before the Babylonian exile into Judea and Samaria because of idol worship. The exile cured that disorder; both parties worshipped the Lord, but lingering issues remained. As the Samaritan woman told Jesus, the Samaritans worshipped God on one of the mountains of Samaritan territory, while the Jews maintained the Temple in Jerusalem and insisted worship take place there. Both sides had nothing more to do with idols, but both sides also had nothing to do with each other.

The Jewish argument was one based primarily on the intellect; God *did* say that He would dwell in the Temple (and the Tabernacle before it) and would meet with the Israelites there. And since God *is* God, after all, He is to be obeyed, isn't He? Their desire to obey, reinforced by generations in exile, produced a rigidity that turned obedience out of love for God into mere ritual. The Samaritan argument was based more on emotion – our *ancestors* worshipped God here, and that's good enough for *us*. There were also secondary, underlying emotional factors working on both sides as well; the Jews regarded the Samaritans as “half-breeds” and the Samaritans denied food and lodging to Jews passing through their territory on pilgrimage to Jerusalem. But the key point is that both sides got “off the track,” as it were, in terms of attitude toward the God that both sides were supposed to be worshipping. Without the guidance of the Spirit, as the passage from Romans cited above clearly states, intellect and emotion *by themselves* can lead a person not only to miss what the Lord has for them, but into wrong ideas that have nothing to do with Him.

Jesus corrected both arguments, telling the woman that the heart attitude must come first; when *that* is right before God, worship can take place *anywhere*. His response to the intellectual challenge also brought an emotional satisfaction to the woman. Despite the fact she was a social outcast, she ran to the village and urged the people to come see Jesus; you don't do that unless you're really excited about what you're telling people about.

The first step is, of course, faith. You can only go so far on intellect, and you eventually reach the point where you have to make a decision to accept Jesus as Lord in your life that is beyond reason. So, faith has a definite emotional side to it all. But once that step of faith is taken, God rewards both the emotional and the intellectual as we learn more about Him and are guided by the Spirit into all truth. The above passage in Hebrews says that God rewards those who earnestly seek Him, and that includes all aspects of the human personality. This is evident even in the First Commandment: *You will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*

When a person loves someone, they want to learn more about that person and can take great pleasure in the learning. Granted, at the moment this is a little one-sided, as God already knows everything about us. But we can learn more about Him and, by extension, His creation. There will come a time when we shall know Him fully, even as we are fully known (refer to 1 Cor.

13:12), but for now we can enjoy the fact that the Author of all knowledge wants us to learn and enjoy doing it.

For the Glory of God and the Lord Jesus Christ
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