

INTELLECTUALISM

by August Van Ryn

with additional comments and/or clarifications by George Cofresi.

I feel constrained to raise my protest against the increasing trend toward intellectuality as “almost necessary” for usefulness in the ministry of God’s Word as we hear of it even among those who seek to live and serve in Christian simplicity.

What is intellectualism? The dictionary defines it as the “theory that knowledge comes wholly from pure reason, without aid from the senses.” Now as long as this is confined to search and research in purely natural and material realms, we’re content to let the intellectual have it his way, but when it intrudes into the realm of spiritual and eternal realities, then intellectualism may become a positive menace and an affront to the God Who hath spoken. To say, or to act, that knowledge in divine things comes wholly from human reason is to deny the truth of divine revelation; it suggests the denial of the authority of the Word of God; it substitutes human reason for divine faith. It results in the sad fact that, when human reason runs counter to God’s truth (and it nearly always does), then God’s Word is discarded and denied.

Most isms have a malodorous aroma, whether it be Socialism, Communism, or Catholicism, or even intellectualism: all isms suggest a particular view or creed or class; and it is practically true that, whenever something becomes an ism, it arraigns itself against God and truth. The believer in Jesus needs to fortify himself against their subtle conceits and deceptions. Thank God, we can look forward to that glorious day when all “isms” shall be “wasms”, and God’s Word shall still stand fast. The many hammers will all be beaten and marred, but the divine “Anvil” shall stand unmoved.

Reading the writings of some of the modern intellectualists one gets the impression not, as Job said, “that wisdom will die with them,” but rather that wisdom was born with them. However, as in the case of every other ism, there is nothing new in intellectualism either. It is as old as the hills. If you want an accurate description of the present-day higher critical intellectualism, you can find it in that great verse - 2 Cor. 10:5, which reads: “Casting down imaginations, (the Greek word is “reasoning logical argumentations-) and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” Apparently, there were plenty of the intelligentsia in Paul’s day; all the brains weren’t passed out in the twentieth century. Paul encountered some of them when he visited Athens. Those philosophers spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear

some new thing. And Paul, who preached the story of man's guilt and the remedy therefore in a crucified and resurrected Savior was just a babbler. Acts 17:18. And that's the opinion today of the intellectualist in regard to anyone who preaches the simple story of the gospel.

According to the text just quoted- 2 Cor. 10:5- human reasoning exalts itself against the knowledge of God. The vast majority of intellectuals deny that the Bible is the authoritative Word of the living God, The reason for this is plain, for the Bible states plainly that the truth of God can only be understood as the Holy Spirit reveals it, and that, of course, goes against the grain for the man with brains.

In the above striking verse, Paul, by the Spirit, insists that human reasoning must be cast down. There is an interesting picture in this verse of Scripture. Man's own thoughts are likened to so many soldiers which constitute the garrison inside a mighty fortress that has high walls and strong redoubts: all bent on keeping the Lord Jesus Christ on the outside. That's intellectualism in a nutshell. Those walls, those human thoughts must be broken and conquered Christ must enter this strong fortress which is rebellious man. Every thought, like many defeated soldiers, must be captured and be brought into subjection to Christ: Human thoughts are arraigned against God. Says the Scripture: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts and let him return unto the Lord . . . for as the heavens are higher than the earth. so are . . . My thoughts higher than your thoughts-" Isa 55:7,9.

The truth of the matter is that God does not countenance human thoughts except when in conformity with, and in submission to His thoughts, as expressed in His Word. The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. God knoweth the thoughts of the wise that they are vain- 1 Cor. 3:19,20. "Can man by searching find out God?" Job 11:7. "Every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart is only evil continually"- Gen. 6:5. "Out of the heart of man proceed evil thoughts..."- Mark 7

Whenever the natural, unconverted man thinks, in relation to spiritual matters, he thinks wrong. There are a number of examples of this in the O.T. Scriptures, with their spiritual application to us today. There is Naaman, who comes seeking a cure for his leprosy; said he: "Behold, I thought he will surely come out to me"- 2 Kings 5: 11, but he thought wrong. In Esther 6:6 we read: Now Haman thought in his heart, "To whom would the king delight to do honor more than to myself," but he was wrong. The rich man in Luke 12:17 thought within himself saying "what shall I do?", but he thought wrong too. The great apostle Paul (and if there ever was an intellectual he was it) said in those days of his blindness: "I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things

contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth”- Acts 26:9, but oh, how wrong he was! You see why these were all off the track, don't you? It was because they had themselves in the center of their thoughts. To me, said Naaman; to myself, said Haman; the rich farmer thought within himself, and Paul thought I ought to. All these were wrong because human thought exalts itself and dethrones Christ; it sits in judgment upon the Word of God, instead of vice-versa. Hear what the Bible has to say to the intellectual then and now: “The preaching of the Cross is to them that perish foolishness.” Four tremendous ideas are embodied in this pregnant statement:

1. The Cross. It wipes out all human reasoning. Christ was crucified at Calvary-the place of a “skull”. Thus the cross is the death knell of all mere human wisdom, for “after that the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe”- I Cor. 1:21, to the intent that no flesh should glory in His presence- I Cor. 1:29. The Cross proves man's fearful guilt in that it required the Son of God to die for him as the only possible remedy for his sin. The Cross being reared at the place of a skull (where human brains are OUT) tells the story that man's wisdom is foolishness.

2. The cross is preached. This eliminates all human reasoning. The gospel is not to be proven, but to be preached. It is a divine proclamation, which leaves no room for argument or reasoning. Let a young fellow receive a notice to report for army induction, it allows no discussion. It is a proclamation, not an invitation for his opinion. You just obey it or else. Even so God's truth is preached for the obedience of faith. Rom. 16:26. There is no place for human reasoning.

3.The preaching of the Cross is foolishness to many. The preaching of the Cross is foolishness to the intellectualist, while on the contrary man's wisdom is foolishness with God- 1 Cor. 1:20. You can have your choice. You can have what man thinks is foolish, or what God says is foolish,. Not many wise men after the flesh are called- I Cor. 1:27, simply because they are wise in their own conceits. God has hid these things from the wise and prudent and has revealed them unto babes.

4.The preaching of the Cross is foolishness to them that perish. If anyone rejects the summons the gospel proclaims, then it proves such an one is perishing. Foolish in their wisdom they perish, but to believers, called by divine grace, Christ (crucified and risen) is the power of God and the wisdom of God- I Cor. 1: 18 - I. Cor. 1:24.

It is a sad fact that intellectualism often gives rise to conceit and snobbery. “Knowledge puffs us”, says God- I Cor. 8:1. The philosopher is often vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind- Col. 2:18. Eph. 4:17-18 gives

solemn description of the reasoner who usually rejects divine revelation, saying he walks in the vanity of his mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in him, because of the blindness of his heart.” “Such are proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife. Railings, evil surmising, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, supposing that gain is godliness” I Tim. 6:4-5. To the believer who knows the truth their vaporings often are utterly ridiculous, yet so tragic.

Jude speaks of these types of men when he says: “These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit”- Jude 19. They put themselves in a class apart above the ordinary garden-variety of folks. But don’t be deceived or impressed by their bluff. God’s Word says that, in the realm of spiritual verities, they know nothing, for “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”- I Cor. 2:14 They think they know, but “if any man think he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know”- 1 Cor. 8:2

No man perhaps ever matched the apostle Paul in power of intellect, nevertheless, many of his contemporaries sneered at him because he did not make a display of his tremendous capacities, but he lived, spoke and wrote in humble self-effacement. His preaching was not with “enticing words of man’s wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit and power”- I Cor. 2:4.

Of our blessed Lord Himself the Jewish leaders said: “How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?”- John 7:15. On another occasion the Jews remarked: “From whence hath this Man these things, and what wisdom is this which is given unto Him that even such mighty works are wrought by His hands; is not this the carpenter?”- Mark 6:2,3. On what possible basis could a carpenter know as much, yea more of the Scriptures than a university graduate or post-graduate? As a matter of fact, Jesus (or a believer in Jesus also) knows more about spiritual things than any unconverted intellectual, no matter if that paragon had as many degrees back of his name as a thermometer has degrees. No unsaved soul knows anything at all of God’s truth; that’s what the Scriptures tell us.

God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; He hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the mighty”- 1 Cor. 1:27. Of Jesus they enquired: “How knows this Man letters, having never learned?” They meant that He had never been to college; He never had had any formal education. so how could He know? Yes, how did He know? He knew, of course, because He was God. But when He became

Man. He did what all men do - from birth on He began to learn. How did He know having never learned? The answer is that He did learn, not in a university or seminary, but in God's school which is the ideal one and open to every Christian. Isa. 50:4-5 tells us about it: "The Lord hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary. He wakeneth morning by morning, He wakeneth Mine ear to hear as the learner. The Lord God hath opened Mine ear I was not rebellious, neither turned away back." That's how He knew. He did two things- He listened and obeyed. That same avenue is open to you and me, without having to go for special religious or academic training. Each morning Christ fed on the Word and, having learned, He obeyed its precepts. He was not rebellious. The reason the intellectual does not understand the Bible is that he is not willing to submit himself to its searching demands- he is rebellious; that's why he fumbles and stumbles around in the dark.

Furthermore, Christ learned not merely for the sake of knowing, nor to display His vast knowledge, nor to dazzle people with His wide-ranging vocabulary. No, but to speak a word in season to the weary and the heavy-laden. That's an additional reason why higher religious education can be a menace, for it feeds spiritual pride; it is so apt to magnify man rather than exalt the Person of Christ, or meet the need of sinner or saint.

In Acts 4:13, we read: "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and perceived that they were unlearned (they hadn't been to the seminary either) and ignorant men (that was altogether too gratuitous a conclusion for the ignorance was on the part of their persecutors; not on the part of those apostles), they marveled and they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus." That's it, they had not been to college but they had been with Jesus. They astonished their hearers with their knowledge of the Scriptures and their boldness in declaring the truth. And they recognized the explanation consisted in that they had been with Jesus. One may spend many years in acquiring the highest possible training but yet know nothing whatever of the things of God but let one come as a humble disciple and learn in the school of Christ and the world will still be astounded and stirred. There is no substitute for learning in His school. If seminary teaching makes the Word of God more precious and makes one more of a humble servant of Christ, well and good, but the risk isn't worth the dubious advantage, in my sober judgment.*

* (The author is clearly seeking to be kind and generous in his remarks, but his expression: "dubious advantage" leaves no doubt that he holds out little hope for these institutions. However, we would respectfully suggest that this is not strong enough. The Seminary system is

subversive of the principles and provisions of the Scriptures for the education, growth and development of God's dear children - G.C.)

Our Lord did not use His knowledge to hold theological controversies with His adversaries. When they raised their “how can’s?”, as in John 6:52 when they said:

“How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?” Jesus did not go into a lengthy argument to prove the logic of this profound statement, but He merely reiterated it, saying: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood ye have no life in you.” This was not an explanation of His original statement but an emphatic repetition of it. The truth of God is not given for the purpose of convincing unbelievers, but for convicting them; not to give their minds some gymnastic exercise, but to bring their wills into subjection to God’s will. But the natural man loves to reason; it feeds his pride.

The intellectual reasoner should do what the wise men did at the birth of Christ. These came from the East (the East was famous for its boasted wisdom- 1 Kings 4:30). But those magi turned their backs on the East and came and knelt at the feet of a little Babe, in whom were hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. They worshipped Him (not His mother, of course). The wise religious leaders of the Jews of that day knew the Scriptures (They could tell the wise men where the King was to be born and give scripture and verse for it), but they knew not Him. It was to the lowly, uneducated shepherds that the angelic messengers announced the coming of the Saviour into the world; it is such who saw Him and worshipped. The wise may know much, but generally the humble know Him. God reveals Himself to babes.

Intellectualism loves the use of big words. When you read many of their writings you need a dictionary handy. This again is nothing new; it has always been the hallmark of highbrowism to razzle-dazzle with big words; it sounds so impressive to the ignorant. Such use is really a confession of inferiority on the part of the one using them. He feels he has said so little that he has to throw in a few big words to make up for the lack of thought.

The use of big words is of course un sparingly condemned in God’s Word, both by precept and by example. Hear what Peter says: “They speak great swelling words of vanity”- 2 Peter 2:18; or Jude 16: “These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men’s persons in admiration because of advantage”. You see that the use of many-syllable words is nothing modern; the intellectuals were there 20 centuries ago.

The apostle Paul, God's specially chosen servant, has not a good word to say for this display of human knowledge. Says he: "Christ sent me . . . to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the Cross of Christ should be made of none effect" I Cor. 1:17. He did not use words similar to these, which I recently came across; such as "existentialism", or "world esuriency", or (how do you like this one?) the "thaumaturgic Christ". This fad for polysyllabic bombastic verbosity (please forgive) is laughable were it not so pitiable.

"And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God . . . And 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"- 1 Cor. 2:1,4,5. And again he says: "For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, we have had our conduct in the world and more abundantly to you-ward"- 2 Cor. 1:12.

A mark of true intelligence and education is to preach or teach the Word of God in simple, every-day language, so that even a child can understand. Many may not use the jawbreakers we mentioned a while back but may yet fail to speak simply. I was told long ago that when you want to say spade, say spade. Don't say "a long instrument employed in the pursuit of agriculture." We read in Acts 11: 19 that the early believers, scattered by the persecution that then raged, went everywhere preaching the Word. That verb "preach" (Greek-laleo) means ordinary talk; it is the common word in the New Testament translated "speak". Notice in how simple words Paul speaks. Read his sermons, for instance, in Acts 13 or in Acts 17, or his defense before the Jews in Acts 22, or before King Agrippa in Acts 26. Even a child can grasp what he is saying. Read his epistles and be thrilled by cadences like these: "For by grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast." Or as in Tim. 1:15: "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief."

Listen to the sublime discourses uttered by our blessed Lord; listen to the words of Him Who spake as never man spake; the words of Him in Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Here is a sample: "For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."- Luke 19: 10. Sixteen one-syllable words, yet telling forth the most amazing truths. Read that matchless record the apostle John gives us of Christ's works and words. He treats of the highest possible themes in the simplest possible language. Here is a style worth imitating.

Are we against higher education; an education for Christians that shall furnish greater capacity for handling the Word of God aright? Indeed, we are not. *

* (The idea of higher education in Divine things is an absurdity since every child of God is in the Highest School possible - the School of God! With the Holy Spirit ever present and a text book that needs no updating, why would any child of God want to stoop to an institution designed by the finite to understand the infinite! - G.C.)

Who were more highly educated than our blessed Lord or than his humble servant, Paul? But they used their tremendous capacities, not for display or for theological discussions, but to stoop down to the lowly who needed their ministry of grace. If higher education leads to lower thoughts of self, to a readiness to self-effacement, to humbleness and meekness that Christ may be glorified, more power to such so blessed. But my experience in life has been, I am sorry to say, that with rare exceptions, superior knowledge leads to a superiority complex; leads to class-consciousness even among believers. This the Scripture itself declares when it says that “knowledge puffs up”. Even with true believers, unless knowledge is gained in the school of Christ and is balanced by an ever-deepening sense of one’s own nothingness, it is very apt to lead to spiritual pride. The tenor of Scripture is that growth in knowledge should be preceded by growth in grace- 2 Pet. 3:18. It has been argued that many of our early brethren were highly educated men, and that we need more of those now in order to be able to meet the intellectual on an even keel. Praise God, some of those pioneers were men of learning, but they did not acquire their education in order to be useful in His service, but having great knowledge, they humbly relinquished all earthly glory and prestige and identified themselves with a despised crowd of ordinary humble believers. Of one such the story is told that when someone he wailed the fact that he had associated himself with such an insignificant group of believers when he might have had such a prominent position in the world, he quietly said: “Which world?”

One of our Lord’s glorious titles is the “Logos- the Word.” He, Himself is the Logic; He is “It”. Let Christ Himself be before the soul; let our purpose be to know him, to exalt Him, and then intelligence cannot become a danger; otherwise it will.

The Scriptures themselves were the argument our Lord Himself ever used. Read His talk with Nicodemus. In that chapter that tells of Nicodemus’ conversation with Christ, we are told that the cause of man’s blindness is not that the Word of God is difficult to understand (and needs a college graduate to make it plain), but that men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. Said He on another

occasion: Ye will not come to me (not: ye cannot). “How can ye believe which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?”-John 5:44. When walking with the two to Emmaus He said: “Oh fools and slow of heart to believe all that prophets have spoken; ought not Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself”- Luke 24:25-27. And again in verse 44 of this same chapter: “These are the words which I spake unto you while I was yet with you. that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses and in the prophets and in the Psalms concerning Me.” No wonder those two who walked with Him that day could say afterwards: “Did not our hearts burn within us, while He talked with us by the way and while He opened to us the Scriptures?” Their hearts burned; not their heads throbbed, God would fain reach the heart, while man loves to exercise his mind. In 2 Cor. 4:4, we read that the devil blinds the minds of them who believe not, but in verse 6 we find that God shines into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Let me briefly sum up what has been said thus far:

The Bible plainly teaches that the unbeliever cannot understand the things of the Spirit of God. Therefore, there is no sense in trying to prove the truth of the Bible to a sinner, it is to be preached, not to be proven. Man loves to argue but when the proud intellectual wants to argue and use human reasoning in divine things, it is wrong to accommodate him, for he knows nothing about it. To reason with him is to pay him a misleading compliment for it suggests he can understand, when the Bible positively states he cannot. It is true we find on several occasions that Paul reasoned with the Jews, but he did not reason about the Scriptures, but out of the Scriptures- Acts 17:2. He wasted not one breath to prove the Bible is the Word of God. In Acts 26, when speaking before King Agrippa, he told this ruler that he had witnessed both to small and great, saying none other things but those which the prophets and Moses did say should come, “that Christ should suffer and that He should be the first that should rise from the dead.” etc.- Acts 26:22-23. Paul preached the Word, accepting its absolute authority and expecting others to do so.

Now, as to the need for higher academic education or religious seminary training in order to make one a more capable minister of God’s Word, I fail to find any warrant for such an idea in the Scriptures; nay, rather the reverse. Moses had had a superior education at the court of Egypt, but he was sent to the backside of the desert to learn to know God; as has been well said: “For forty years in Egypt, he learned to be somebody. and then for forty years in the sticks he had to learn to be nobody,” for

those are the kind of ministers God uses. The great apostle Paul had all the degrees going, but he retired to the shadows for many years to get rid of his knowledge and to acquire the knowledge of God. Both these men and many others needed to know self-effacement and to acquire spiritual power; and neither of these are attained in universities, but only in the school of Christ. If one wants the ability to meet the intellectual (who is usually an unbeliever) on his grounds, he is prostituting whatever gift he may have. It has been urged we should be able to meet the college graduate on his own level; to me that is altogether too low a level; even the humblest Christian lives and knows on a higher plane.

Many will agree that the least educated Christian can understand the Word of God, but it takes some measure of education to enable one to make it known intelligibly. but this too the Bible flatly refutes. God delights to use weak, human vessels that so the excellency of the power may be of Him and not of us. In this connection, I recently came across this gem in a book called "John Bunyan". It is a comment by a John Burton, a contemporary of John Bunyan and it was written even before John Bunyan wrote his world-famous "Pilgrim's Progress". This man writes in 1656 concerning John Bunyan: "This man is not chosen out of an earthly but out of the heavenly university, the Church of Christ, therefore receive this word . . . not as the word of man, but as the Word of God ... and be not offended because Christ holds forth the glorious treasure of the gospel to thee in a poor, earthen vessel by one who hath neither the greatness nor the wisdom of this world to commend him to thee . . . through grace he hath received the teaching of God, and the learning of the Spirit of Christ, which is the thing that makes the man both Christian and a minister of the gospel. He hath, through grace, taken these three heavenly degrees to wit: UNION WITH CHRIST, THE ANOINTING OF THE SPIRIT AND THE EXPERIENCE OF THE TEMPTATIONS OF SATAN, which do more to fit a man for that mighty work of preaching the gospel than all the university learning and degrees that may be had" ... I say "Amen" to this with all my heart, Here is a man who had not one whit of formal education, whom God yet used in such amazing fashion. He has been read more than any author in the world's history.

Preach the Word out of a deep experience of fellowship with the Lord, and God will bless it. Man's reasonings, philosophies and hypotheses are so much rubbish. The Bible s God's revelation, and once something is made known it calls for no special mental capacity to understand; just a submissive will to believe and obey. The gospel is preached for the obedience of faith; not for the rational consent of the mind. When Paul left Ephesus he did not commend to the elders a course in mental development, but he commended them to God and to the Word of His grace- Acts 20:32.

It is also being advocated by some that if we are to meet the educated class we must needs study theology, comparative beliefs, philosophies, etc. In other words, we must sample all the poisons being peddled by ignorant or bigoted quacks, in order to be able to refute them. But that's a risky business, for while some are smart enough maybe to taste and then spit out the stuff before swallowing, others are not so dexterous, and sad experience bears witness that many young Christians have been doped and duped by Satan's potions and have had their faith wrecked. Personally, I know quite a few younger men who have lost their faith while in institutions of learning. One brokenhearted father told me how his son had gone astray and abused his father because he had only taught him the great truths of the Bible; now he found out that the atheist was right. Said his father to him: "Why don't you bawl your mother out, too?" "What for?" said the boy. "For giving you pancakes and syrup, and bacon and eggs for breakfast and not garbage once in a while. You want good food for your body, but swill for your soul."

Don't waste your time and risk your soul reading up on what Jehovah Witnesses, or Mormons or Christian Scientists believe. Just listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd as it comes to you through His Word, and you'll instantly know the growl of the wolf when he comes around. If you study the Word in His presence, you can meet every argument Satan may put up.

While the unbeliever cannot understand the truth, on the other hand, the believer often fails to use the capacity God hath given him. Believers - often, young men, waste a lot of time that could and should be given to the serious study of God's Word. There are many books and commentaries to enable one to grow in a sound knowledge of the great truths of the Scriptures.*

* (While there are indeed "many books and commentaries" easily obtainable, there are not as many that can be called "sound" and therefore "profitable". Human thoughts and opinions are forced upon the text of Scriptures that find their origin in religious traditions or unbelief. Books of this character find a wide audience in Christendom Here are a few passages of Scripture that give counsel applicable to the use of "Christian literature" outside the Bible itself: Eccl 12:11, 12-14, Josh 1:8, Ps 119: 97-102; Prov. 2; Ezra 7:10; Jer 15:16; Isa 8:20; Lk 1:20; 10:38 - 42; Jn 5:39,44; 8: 31-32; Acts 17:11; I Cor 2:4; 6; 2 Cor 2:17; 4:2; 10: 4,5; 11:2,3; Entire Epistle to Colossians; 2Tim1:13,14; 2:14-19; 3:14-17; Rev 3:8)

There are no classes among believers. Every child of God is perfectly capable of understanding even the deep things of God, while no

unbeliever is. And the ability to understand does not depend on mental power or higher education. Unbelievers' minds are darkened, blinded by the Devil and ignorant - Eph. 4:18. But when a soul gets saved through God's matchless grace, a mighty transformation takes place. The mind is completely renovated, for the believer gets a "renewed mind"- Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23. This miracle is wrought within by the Spirit of God, as we read in Titus 3:5. The Christian, an entirely new man, is now vividly, mentally and spiritually alive and capable of understanding the deep things of God-1 Cor. 2:10; Col. 3:10. Please notice that this is said indiscriminately of all believers, and in addition to this spiritual renewing of the believer's mind, there is something even more wonderful and which sets the believer apart and above every unsaved person, no matter how great he may be. This lifts the believer to the highest level of true intelligence, enabling him to grasp, appreciate and communicate God's truth. I refer to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, who not only has made God's Word a living power by His inspiration, *

* (While we appreciate what the author is trying to say, we fear that the wording of it might leave the horrid notion in the mind of a young believer that "God's Word" is one thing and the Spirit's "inspiration" is another, the latter being the 'additional' (!) element required to give "God's Word", "living power". Such a thought would divide the unity of the Godhead, denigrate holy writ and redefine inspiration. The Holy Spirit moved upon Men of Old (2 Pet 1:21) not upon the Word, securing a true communication from God ('God breathed', 2 Tim 3:16) without administer or need of additional "inspiration" - G.C.)

and Who not only furnishes the believer the illumination he needs but the power of its interpretation as well.

See how this shines out in Acts 4. The Jewish leaders marveled at the apostles and they recognized they had been with Jesus. But that was not the only reason that these men could speak with such power and boldness. They showed no such strength when they walked with the Lord. It was the indwelling and anointing with the Holy Spirit that made them so fearless and empowered them to preach the Word so forcefully; yet, most of them were men of no special education. The secret of spiritual power and the ability to teach and preach Christ is, therefore, evidently not found in higher education, but in a lower estimate of self; *

* (To suggest that "the secret of spiritual power" lies in a "lower estimate of self" is to turn believers in upon themselves. Occupation with self always leads to weakness and defeat. It is the Spirit's ministry to engage our hearts with the Glorified Christ. Such occupation produces "the explosive power of a new affection". See Jn. 15:26; 16:13,14; 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil 3:1-3; 4:13 etc.)

in a life yielded to Him with Whom all things are possible. What the Church needs is not more intellectualism, but more spirituality; and colleges do not have that as part of their curriculum. Again, I say- there is not a hint in the Bible that advanced training is a requisite for usefulness in the ministry of Christ, but many statements that do show it can be a serious detriment. The educated intellectual needs the same simple message as the ignorant, uneducated one; he needs the message that a child can understand, namely, that Christ died for our sins and that without Him there is nothing but eternal doom. That's not what he wants, of course, but that's what he needs.

It may be true that there is a great lack of ability among us Christians, but this is not due to a lack of education, but to a lack of devotion to Christ. I am afraid of anything that fosters a special "class" among saints; it CAN BE A MENACE TO true Christianity. The only degrees the Bible mentions are degrees in spiritual development- from babes to young men to fathers; not from elementary to high school to college. In Matt. 13:15, we read: "For this people's heart is waxed gross and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes, they have closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and should understand with their hearts, and should be converted and I should heal them." But the very things hidden from those worldly-wise ones, Jesus revealed and interpreted in detail to His disciples. God hides these things from the wise and prudent and reveals them unto babes.

Ah, what we need is not education; not the storing of the mind, but the enlargement of the heart; a heart wholly in love with Christ. No matter how much a highly educated speaker might seek to exalt Christ, yet the listener will almost certainly be impressed with the orator rather than with his message. Often the speaker increases and Christ decreases, which is the reverse order. I read once that a Christian went to hear Dr. Joseph Parker speak in London- then a well-known orator and a true Christian. Upon coming out he said: "What a wonderful speaker!" The same evening he went to listen to Mr. Spurgeon and upon leaving the tabernacle he said: "What a Saviour Jesus is!"

Love to Christ- a deep appreciation of Christ's love to us- is the great need in Christian ministry. Once one of the brains of the country came regularly to hear a famous preacher. At last, he asked permission to say a few words and went on to tell how God had made him aware of his guilt and now he was saved. After the service the famous preacher asked him what message or thought had led him to Christ. "Oh, it was nothing you said," was the reply, "but as I left the church last Sunday night, a colored woman next to me slipped on the icy steps and would have fallen had not I grasped her and held her up. She turned to me with tears glistening in

her eyes and thanked me and then said: “Does yo’ all luv’ mah Jesus?” That’s what saved me”; and it still will. I have listened to a number of educated preachers and most of them left me unmoved and untouched. Very correct, oratorical, but cold as ice, often. Education is bound to make the speaker conscious of himself; it is almost impossible to avoid this snare.

The danger is that seminary training first of all leads to a class-consciousness; to a subtle superiority complex. Next, it will require the giving of a degree and title, for if you know as much as Solomon, if you don’t be a Dr. or Rev., you’d still be in the class of nonentities. We see all this in the religious world in its unscriptural system of the clergy and the laity; in the giving and taking of titles. God’s Word knows nothing whatever of classes among the saints. One is your Master and all ye are brethren; One is the High Priest and all the saints are priests on the same level.

Higher training loads (and often overloads) the mind with a vast accumulation of facts, without the corresponding development of character and the deepening love for Christ that must balance knowledge, if one is not to crash over top-heavy. I have found that academic training may result in correctness of words, expression and facts, but it usually lacks in emotion and passion; it fills the mind but fails to move the soul.

If one is truly spiritual, earnestly desiring to serve the Lord, nothing can hinder such an one from being a student. Going to college does not make one a student; nor failure to go prevent one from being a student. The ideal school is God’s school. Read about it in Mark 3:14,15: “And He ordained twelve that they should be with Him, and that He might send them forth to preach and to have power” ... What wonderful three-year university course under the Best Teacher that ever lived! And His school is still in business. Note the divine order: 1. First of all- to be with Him (in His presence to learn both by His words and His ways); 2. thus to be made fit to teach others; 3. as a result, to have divine power.

This method of learning to preach and serve Christ- in a personal walk with the Lord and in fellowship with believers- (as these twelve men did when they walked together during those years) cannot be exaggerated. It is God’s method of teaching and cannot be improved upon. Learning in His school, in association with humble believers in daily fellowship, that’s God’s way. In this way the preacher gets the help, encouragement and often the rebuke, criticism and letdown he needs in order to balance knowledge with humility; and if he is not humble, he is of absolutely no use to God.

One thing that is perfectly obnoxious and unbearable in a servant of Christ is conceit, and yet there is so much of this very thing. And it's nothing new. Did you ever notice how many, many times the Lord had to rebuke His disciples for their pride and self-seeking? While He spoke of His forthcoming fearful suffering and His death, they were arguing among themselves as to who should be the greatest- read Mark 9:31-37. Read also Matt. 16:23; Matt. 20:24-27, etc. Pride is a subtle sin that no one is impervious to; least of all preachers, since such are so often patted on the back and praised.

It is almost a necessity for a young brother, if he feels the Lord has called him to be a preacher, to learn his "trade" in daily fellowship with an assembly of believers; not in a seminary. He needs criticism, wise or otherwise, from older brethren who have some experience in life. I don't think seminaries have a course on this, and hence his education would be sadly neglected. He must not get the wrong idea that the service of Christ is a sinecure. Our Lord, in Luke 22:36- taught the twelve to pay their own way through life; not to look to others for support. Money is to have no place in Christian service. It is a path of sacrifice. Every servant of Christ, if he is to be well-balanced, needs the discipline, the trials and frictions that association and contact with fellow-believers bring; the criticism, correction and advice of older and wiser brethren. He needs to learn while he serves, even as the twelve disciples did under Christ's tutelage. Head knowledge must be balanced with character development and growth in appreciation of the love of Christ. There is nothing glamorous in such a path so it is not popular. We'd rather be somebody. We need more surrender to the claims of Christ. Theological training is NOT the answer to our problem, but it might well make it worse. Let each one of us learn at the feet of Him Who said: "Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart."