



# **The Priority of Intellect over Emotion in Religious Experience:**

## **1 Corinthians 12:1-3**

Confusion and disorder within the early Corinthian church led members of that congregation to send questions by letter to the Apostle Paul (1 Cor. 7:1). In chapter seven Paul answered their inquiry about 'sexual relations'. In chapters eight to ten he took up the matter of 'food offered to idols' (1 Cor. 8:1). Chapters twelve to fourteen spoke to the congregational members' inquiries about 'spiritual gifts'.

### **The Corinthian Experience**

This last section discloses a remarkable state of affairs in the first century church. There were sensational displays of extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit within the regular fellowship of the Corinthian church at that time. Seven varieties of objective, verbal, divine revelation were commonly exercised in the church along with two sorts of miraculous powers (1 Cor. 12:8-10).

Observing this historic fact has led some to a simplistic interpretation of these occurrences. A conclusion is reached that if the first century church had members performing miracles and delivering fresh revelations, it is desirable to have the same phenomena in our modern churches. This opinion is often heard within the modern Charismatic movement. It has also been the way of thinking among various radical and cultic groups throughout the last two centuries. In our day those caught up in the current excitement about spiritual gifts claim to have the support of the Apostle Paul because of his report of similar experiences at Corinth.

Let us see if Paul demonstrated in his reply the same childlike enthusiasm for miracle-working and revelation-utterances within church meetings. Let us see if he expected all experiences of his day to be present through all ages of the church. Let us note whether he really does encourage imitation of the early workings of the Holy Spirit at all times and places.

### **Apostolic Caution**

At the very outset there is a cautioning note from Paul. *'I do not want you to be uninformed'* (or ignorant) (1 Cor. 12:1). His suggestion is that at least *some* enthusiasts for the presence and exercise of these gifts *were* 'uninformed'. Immediately the apostle has turned the focus of attention away from feelings, excitement and impulses to intellectual analysis. Ignorance is one of the great enemies of true religion, because the Holy Spirit is *'the Spirit of truth'* (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). The mind of man is a faculty of *his spirit and is the faculty which receives truth*.

Paul begins, not with thrills or feelings, but with intelligent principles. The New Testament, with its gospel, *does* lead to profound experiences which involve all legitimate powers of human emotion. However, these emotions are aroused by the *truth*. The intellect, not emotion, is able to lead the way in analysing any experience. Never bypass the mind. Engage the mind with truth, and truth will stir the emotions. Emotion is not an evil thing, but there is a proper order within man's soul. The place to begin a discussion of the Holy Spirit and his gifts is with intellectual activity.

### **The Usefulness of Pagan Knowledge**

Having called for a mental analysis of spiritual gifts Paul points the thoughts of the Corinthian Christians to what they already *know* (1 Cor. 12:2). In exciting and emotion packed circumstances

it is possible to put aside what you know and to ignore information available to you. To ignore information is to remain ignorant.

Paul is reaching back to the pre-Christian knowledge of most Corinthian church members. *'You know that when you were pagans'* (1 Cor. 12:2) you experienced certain things. Twice Paul mentions that *'you were led'*. Isn't this a very common expression in circles where experience and feeling are dominant, while doctrine and thinking are downplayed? *'I was led to say this.'* I was led to do that. *'Think!'*, says Paul. Did you not also have forceful impulses in your false religious experiences of the past? Pagan religions have *'felt'* leadings. Some are compelling and thrilling. However, false religious leadings lead to *'dumb'* and lifeless idols. They pull and move and *'lead'* men to destruction.

Is Paul saying that images made by men have power to lead them? Not at all! *'What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God'* (1 Cor. 10:19-20). Impulses attending false religion do not come from non-existent gods. However, every false religion has demons present, leading men to worship something other than the one true God. Then the demons drink in the worship of men as if it were offered to them. The rebellion of Satan and other fallen angels was a coveting after being God and after receiving the honour due to God alone. Satan's demonizing of men was expressed in the first temptation, *'You will be like God'* (Gen. 3:5).

There is very real spiritual (demonic) power in all false religion that may be felt and that will lead. Such powers are felt in the occult. For this reason of the gravest danger to us, God commands most forcefully that we have nothing to do with witchcraft, fortune-telling, séances, etc. (Deut. 18:10-14). Those who have been saved out of false religion Paul reminds of the reality of spiritual forces pulling, leading, attracting, and exciting men. It is irrational, but very real. Christians *must not* join in an anti-intellectual approach to religion. Those delivered out of the grip of the cults know why.

In our day, when Charismatics deplore doctrinal Christianity, it is interesting to note that they often find common ground with Roman Catholicism. Usually Catholicism downplays a teaching of biblical doctrine. Yet, Catholicism has numerous adherents emotionally stirred by the worship of Mary, by bowing to images, and by reverencing *'the host'* as being the very Christ. These idolatrous practices provide a very real *'leading'* and an emotional experience which override the intellect. They are at the centre of Roman Catholicism's sympathy with the Charismatic movement.

## **A Doctrinal Test**

Following his appeal to what former pagans already know Paul drew a conclusion: *'Therefore I want you to understand'* (1 Cor. 12:3). The apostle does not want any Christian blindly following a supposed utterance of revelation. There are true and false prophets. The Old Testament is filled with examples of both! Tests are proposed in the Old Testament to discern the difference between the two groups who profess that they deliver God's revelation. Paul does the same.

Charismatics emphasize Scriptures in which the Holy Spirit made men prophets and miracle workers. They are, however, silent concerning the biblical witness to false prophecy and demonic wonders. This body of biblical teaching is rather large in both Old and New Testaments. One would expect that sincere interest in prophecy and miracles would lead to a thorough study of *both* realities in times now past and in written predictions of the future. However, to give attention to all Scripture would compel the asking of the question, *'How do we discern the difference?'*

We must evaluate all claims to revelation (and its related miracles). So the New Testament repeatedly reminds us. All revelations and miracles are not from the Holy Spirit. Jannes and Jambres were Egyptians who opposed God's prophet Moses (2 Tim. 3:8). In doing so they duplicated his lesser miracles. So Paul proposes a doctrinal test for our discernment. What do those who claim to be prophets teach about Jesus? Do they exalt him as Lord? Do they acknowledge him as the true God? Or do they disparage Jesus?

The Apostle John echoed this sentiment. *'Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for **many** false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist...'* (1 John 4:1-3). Do not be gullible. Judge professed prophets by a doctrinal test. What do they believe about Jesus?

Most cults, wanting to be accepted as Christian, claim to believe all that is in the Bible. However, they claim to have had a few additional revelations not to be found in Scripture. Most of them err quickly on the doctrines of the Trinitarian nature of God or on the two natures united in the one Person of Jesus Christ. *'Those who worship God **must** worship in spirit **and** truth'* (John 4:24).

Perhaps you have attended charismatic meetings where teaching is minimal. In some of them everything is calculated to stir the emotions. There are charismatic teachers who say that doctrine has a negative spiritual impact. At times men are urged to evacuate their minds so that they are open to God. Neither Paul nor John would have agreed with such yielding to any spirit. Do not allow any series of emotional elements to 'get you in the mood'.

'Never!', says Paul. That was the way of paganism – being mindlessly led. Keep your wits about you. Exercise intellectual judgment where revelations and miraculous workings are supposedly present. Evaluate the doctrine of all statements! Evaluate all activity doctrinally. Especially keep in view the doctrine of Jesus.

Christian faith is *not* credulity. He is not a great man of faith who is prepared to believe anything at all. He is a man of faith who has believed the great foundational orthodox doctrines revealed in God's Word and who seeks to live in accordance with them. He is a man of faith who ever builds on that foundation with increasing doctrinal clarity and will not be moved from these teachings even if an angel from heaven speaks to the contrary (Gal. 1:8). He knows that every spiritual experience is to be doctrinally judged. He will *'beware of false prophets'* (Matt. 7:15; 24:11) as his Saviour taught him to do. To this end he will keep his intellectual powers well in hand. There must be a priority of intellect to emotion. There must be a priority of doctrinal analysis to credence.

Thus at the outset of his discussion on spiritual gifts Paul issued a caution. He did not rule out the reality of the Holy Spirit's operations through revelations and miracles at Corinth in the first century. He did, however, call into play doctrinal vigilance in judging such experiences.

Walter J Chantry

©2017  
[www.christianstudylibrary.org](http://www.christianstudylibrary.org)