

Intelligent, But Not Too Smart

When I say that others are not too smart, I obviously put myself in the list of smart people. All of us, at least secretly, think we are discerning persons who follow the sane and sensible course. We can detect the flaws in the reasoning of others. Some of the conclusions of others are so illogical that we can be amused by them. But not our own!

In view of this, I feel confident that you will cut me some slack as I proceed. You will detect that my talent is in pointing out the inconsistencies of the rest of you. ☹

We are blessed to live in the age of scientific information and to have educational advantages exceeding the dreams of previous generations. However, preconceptions, emotions, and subjectivity can prevent us from processing accurately the information we receive. You will be able to agree with me as I illustrate this -- until I mention one concerning which you have an emotional hangup. Let's see.

Carl Sagan died last week. We enjoyed his educational programs which revealed the mysteries of creation, especially those concerning the limitless heavens and "billions and billions" of heavenly bodies. He was deeply intelligent, but he was not sensible enough to admit that the creation has a Creator.

We are astute to figure out that the new century and new millennium will begin January 1, 2001, but that will not keep most people from celebrating January 1, 2000 as the starting time! (Or, have you not figured that out? Let me illustrate: you are not a year old when born but after the first year. You are ten only after you have completed ten years and begin the eleventh. So it is with centuries and millennia.) In spite of knowing this, we will celebrate the new century and new millennium a year early!

Keiko, the "Free Willie" whale, has been called "the six million dollar whale" because that much has been spent to prepare a place for the diseased creature down the coast at Newport and to transport him/her there. And that is not all, for there is continued cost of personnel to care for the whale and to purchase and feed the 150 pounds of fish needed daily.

Such care for a whale may be the intelligent and emotional thing to do, but is that the smart (sensible) thing when we have to leave countless sick and starving children without the help they need just to survive?

Mistreated and injured animals are often given extensive care and expensive treatment to restore them while at the same time thousands of unwanted animals must be put to death in our large cities each year.

Many sincere people have tried to make a spiritual, Bible-directed, activity of preserving our environment. Drastic efforts are made to preserve endangered species from extinction as though it were a mandate from God. But observe how God handled all this before we took over. He didn't control erosion very well, he allowed the air to be polluted by countless volcanic eruptions, he permitted various minerals to leach into streams and lakes, he let grasslands and timberlands burn endangering wildlife, and he allowed many kinds of creatures to become extinct.

Great demands are being made to preserve the habitat of the wild creatures because of claims that they cannot adapt to changes brought by man. Just this year, however, in this immediate highly developed area, some of the most shy creatures have surprised us. A peregrine falcon roosts on a downtown Portland bridge across the

Willamette River. Crows eat out of the dumpsters, and one swooped within a few feet of our moving car recently. The elusive coyotes have become a problem by their eating a lot of neighborhood cats. Cougars have been spotted even close to schools. A dove built her nest on the hood of a car on a car lot in the city. And in many populated areas the deer make gardening impossible. Yes, wise conservation is needed, but it must be weighed in view of human need rather than trying to keep the earth in some primeval condition – which has always been undergoing drastic changes.

A generation has been nurtured on movie and television portrayal of animals with human feelings and characteristics. So animal life is being considered by some as about as sacred as human life – even more than unborn human life. Vegetarian diet is being preached with religious fervor. God’s word is ruled out in favor of our intelligence, for he said, “Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and as I gave the green plants, I give you everything” (Gen. 9:3; Also see 1 Tim. 4:1-5). In such things we trust more in sophisticated logic than in being sensible.

It would be nice to be able to save all our trees, however those who cry loudest to save our forests still want to live in houses and read newspapers made from them. These are human needs. If we save one forest, it only means that lumber and pulp must be taken from another somewhere else to serve our needs.

Environmentalists make it difficult for the oil, chemical, and manufacturing industries these days, yet the protesters want to drive their automobiles, have their houses heated, and use many things daily that depend upon creating hazardous materials in manufacturing. Is that being really smart?

Oregon rivers could produce enough electricity for several states that they would need no oil or gas for household use. But protesters are even advocating removal of existing dams in order to save the habitat of salmon.

A bad attitude against big businesses and highly paid business executives has been cultivated in our time, but the critics still like their products, stock in their companies, and the good jobs they offer. They have launched no campaigns against athletes, actors, and entertainers receiving riches far in excess of that of CEOs.

Those who cry out against use of animals in medical science don’t refuse medications and procedures first tested on animals. They don’t offer themselves as guinea pigs.

While women are having such a field day with sexual harassment lawsuits, they dress and conduct themselves in the most sexually enticing manner that our loose laws and morals allow in order to gain the lustful attention of men. Is that sensible, or am I the insensitive one by putting some blame on the women?

Enough of that. I have probably been successful in agitating most of you by now. We will all agree that intelligent approach should be made to all these things mentioned so that sensible solutions can be found. The problem is that we cannot agree on what is intelligent and sensible. However, so far the things mentioned in illustration have less to do with spiritual values and practical religion. No we get into the sticky stuff.

I am writing this on Christmas day, 1996. In former years I joined with other objectors to giving special attention to Christmas and Easter. I decried the emphasis given to any religious holiday. I could present the tedious arguments against such. However, I was among the chief offenders, for I emphasized the first day of every week

as a special day of worship and service – a religious holiday. The scriptures support no such emphasis but, on the contrary, Paul gives the keeping of days neither a plus nor a minus in Romans 14:5-9. Individual preference! My attempts at logic did not make me smart enough to accept Paul's simple statement.

Since I reasoned that we must follow intelligence instead of emotions, I disdained the people like the Pentecostals who would pray with uplifted hands. I was so sensible in my reasoning that I could countermand Paul's instructions for people to lift up hands in prayer (1 Tim. 2:8)! It is nice that you are too smart to do such a thing.

Even though I have been intelligent enough all along to know that Paul spoke of Phoebe being a deaconess (Rom. 16:1), I was smart enough to know that other teachings about the role of women would prevent her from filling the appointment of a deaconess! Don't be upset for I am talking about myself, not you!

I didn't have to go to college to learn that women are not to exercise authority over men. So it is clear that she cannot pass the communion or collection trays, usher, lead singing, head a committee, or serve as treasurer of the congregation. We just cannot afford to let her usurp authority over men in serving them! Smart! ☹ And since she cannot speak in the assembly or teach a man (as we so laboriously argue) we are sensible enough to let her do these things only in song or on the printed page. Even with the men listening in silence, we permit her to teach and pray in song. Never mind that the scriptures say nothing about a church treasury, passing collection baskets, serving communion, ushering, serving on committees, or leading singing. Nevertheless, these become men's prerogatives when we intelligent beings institute them! We are growing smarter progressively!

Even though Jesus began the Communion during a Passover meal, and the church in Corinth ate the ritual meal during a fellowship meal, we know that such a thing is sinful because Paul told hungry, greedy, divisive people to eat at home rather than to divide and disrespect the body. "What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in?" (1 Cor. 11:22). Suddenly, the assembly becomes a "church building." It is sinful to eat and drink in a certain structure. They were drinking wine, for some were getting drunk. Drink that at home! But you may drink water in the structure. You may assemble in a non-church building and eat (but not drink wine). You may not eat where you worship but you can worship by offering thanks where you eat. It is sinful to have a kitchen in a "church building" but a drinking fountain and restroom are approved. They were told to eat in their homes, but it is all right to eat in the cafeteria instead. In which area are we growing faster, intelligence or smarts! Or do we not need a "head start program" to help us see that it was not the practice of eating together that was to be stopped but it was the abuse that turned it into a drunken, divisive gathering that Paul was condemning?

We intelligent people have known that it is sinful to sing meditative songs while we are partaking of the bread and wine (Oops, fruit of the vine!) because that is having two forms of worship at the same time. Of course, if you want to pray privately or read Scriptures while the trays are being passed, that time is fine! ☹

Who has read in the Scriptures instruction, permission, or example of taking the kids out during the preaching so they can be taught at their own level? Such is not "authorized." But where do you read of kids being in the assembly in the first place?

We have been very discerning in the use of money from the church treasury. Never mind that we don't read in the Scriptures of a church treasury or a list of causes for which a group may rightly decide to collect and use money.

Every intelligent, honest person knows that the Scriptures authorize congregational singing only. At the moment, I cannot recall where those passages are, but it surely says that somewhere. Oh, yes, I have found it. In 1 Corinthians 14:26 (the "assembly chapter"), Paul says, "When you come together, each one has a hymn, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation." Even though the gifts of revelation, tongues, and interpretations were exercised individually rather than congregationally, we know that Paul meant, "Each one has a hymn *to lead*"! Good sense always prevails!

Carl Sagan helped create in us an awe for our mysterious, limitless universe. We are such tiny specks in it. We are more sensible than he, however, in recognizing with reverence and worshipful awe an omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient Creator and Sustainer. The loving character of our God is revealed in his effort to bring us back into communion with him and to be glorified with him eternally. Deity gave himself to make this possible. By our intelligence, we can believe this factually, but how sensible are we in our practical application?

Is it possible that this creator of the billions of stars who made plans to save us from the time of Adam, came to earth in human flesh, and died as our substitute is concerned with our hair-splitting trifles? Is he trying to save us or entrap us by details? It is we, not God, who makes big issues of such trivial things.

Will he condemn to eternal damnation both the woman and the men she converts to Christ through her loving proclamation of the gospel? Is he so incensed by people lifting up hands in prayer, or clapping while singing praise to him, or singing a worshipful song during communion, or eating a fellowship meal together in their "church building", or being uplifted by a touching song by a quartet, or cooperating congregationally with other congregations in a worthwhile project, or dividing the assembly into classes for instruction, or drinking wine from individual glasses, or accompanying their praise with instruments – is he so incensed by any of these trivialities that the sincerest of worship becomes damning, his love turns to disgust, his grace is replaced by vengeance, and his justification reverts to eternal condemnation?

Does the one who died to save us reject us so readily? What kind of a God do you have? He knows you cannot be saved by your correctness, else he died in vain. He only wants your acceptance and praise.

Well, to any who might still be with me, I'll admit that I have served you a dish of prickly pears. In this hodge-podge, my format has not been followed. You, being both intelligent and sensible, might safely conclude that I am neither. But try picking out all those stickers! Prickly pear stickers have barbs making them extremely painful to pull out. Growing up with them on the farm, I found that they come out easier after they have festered, if you can just bear the discomfort for a while. So give yourself some time.

Intelligent people can devise high-sounding, scholarly, sophisticated argumentation for anything they wish to advocate or make an issue of. We can make black appear white and white seem black. We are not too smart, however, when we convince ourselves contrary to common sense!

Even we who are not so endowed intellectually are not exempt from using some “horse sense.” Maybe that’s not a scriptural term, but it is not anti-scriptural. Paul exhorts, “Do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (Eph. 5:17). Since he does not outline a formula for understanding, he must be encouraging us to use the common sense with which we are endowed. While it is true that intelligence and “horse sense” will not bring us all to the same conclusions about everything, they should lead in that direction as we realize that God is trying to save us rather than to entrap us. And good sense will lead us to accept and work with other sincere disciples while making allowance for our differences. []