

# Intellectual Snobbery

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## Introduction

All of humanity profits from the accomplishments of those who have achieved advanced educations. Most of the advancements in technology and medicine and the modern “marvels” we enjoy every day have come from such folk. No thoughtful person will despise those who possess exceptional academic credentials merely because they have achieved them. However, neither will a thoughtful person despise those who have **not** had the same educational opportunities. Yet, so often those who have obtained advanced degrees fall prey to such pomposity (although even the illiterate are not immune to such). While allowing for exceptions, generally there is a well-attested haughty and superior attitude in “ivory tower” academe.

## Secular Illustrations

A principal cause of pride among secular academia is the atheism and humanism that generally grips it. Denying the existence of God, its members, whether consciously or unconsciously, have replaced Him with themselves. Students who enroll in a state university need to be warned that some, if not most, of their professors will be on a mission that goes beyond teaching their assigned courses. These learned “doctors” will ridicule and try to ruin their faith in God, Christ, the Bible, and Biblical morality. In fact, it seems that some, upon learning that a student is a “believer” to any degree, feel compelled to destroy that faith before even getting to the subject matter of the course. (Many of them have added radical, left wing ideology to their atheism giving their students a double dose of intellectual poison.)

A case in point is the scientific community. It is so snobbish (and defensive) concerning evolution that it rejects even the mention of the Biblical account of creation in high school or college textbooks, except, perhaps, as an absurd superstition. The Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. is so totally under the control of evolutionists that, at least in years past, it would not allow any sort of display of creation models or materials to be exhibited. (If the concept of Biblical creation is so ridiculous, why not let it be displayed so that its absurdity might be self-evident?)

A few years ago, the renowned atheist and evolutionist, Carl Sagan, made some rather heady boasts about his evolutionary dogma and his willingness to defend it. However, when Thomas B. Warren accepted his challenge to publicly debate the issue of origins, Sagan refused to even acknowledge Warren’s offer, much less take up the challenge. Intellectual snobbery makes the evolutionist look with condescension, disgust, or at best, pity, upon those

poor, unenlightened, superstitious folk who still believe in God and in what the Bible says about how all things began. Never mind that the evolutionist has only a threadbare, unscientific, and unprovable **theory** to propagate so arrogantly!

### **Brethren and Academia**

Just as all of us have profited in the secular realm from those who have achieved advanced degrees, we have also benefited from those who have gone on to high levels of study in matters that pertain to the soul. One need only mention such names as Alexander Campbell and J.W. McGarvey from the past to realize the Truth of this statement. Highly educated men, deeply dedicated to Truth, have arisen in more recent times as well. The contributions that such have made to the proclamation and defense of the Truth are incalculable, and we should all thank God for them. Several brethren whom I love and respect for their soundness in the faith have advanced degrees—there is certainly no virtue in ignorance.

As sad as it is to contemplate, however, much of the apostasy that has stolen many of our schools and that has been corrupting and/or dividing congregations for the past few decades is directly related to “academia” and its attendant intellectual snobbery. Several brethren apparently checked their humility at the door of the auditoriums where their doctor’s degrees were conferred, if not at some point before. Verily, they have been educated—if not beyond their intelligence, then at least, beyond their convictions and their humility. The old adage states that “there is no fool like an old fool.” Running a close second might be, “There is no fool like an educated fool.”

Some of these men were “picked green.” Their teachers in our colleges and universities urged them, immediately upon graduation with their undergraduate degrees in Bible (or other fields), to pursue graduate studies. Those who did so deprived themselves of the “real world” experience of working for even a short time with a local congregation of God’s people. Such work is an “education” in itself; it requires and gives one time to do deeper study and reflection on his own, and from it, to develop firmer convictions in the Truth.

It is apparent that some of these young men were not prepared for what they were fed in the theological seminaries and denominational “divinity” schools (or were they already shaky in some pivotal matters upon arrival?). Some of them were seemingly so enamored with education and with educators that they swallowed the Satanic philosophies of existentialism, modernism, unbelief, and more recently, postmodernism, hook, line, and sinker. I am not claiming that they became instant infidels, but that in some cases (judging by what they have been writing and saying the past few years), their faith was substantially damaged on such fundamental issues

as creation, verbal inspiration, the virgin birth, the oneness and distinctiveness of the church, authorized worship, and the necessity of baptism.

When some of these young men (some are not so young any more) finished their advanced studies a generation ago, they were invited back to teach in our schools to replace the older (and generally faithful) men as they retired. Some among this younger generation have been honest enough to admit that they are ashamed to let their denominational academic peers know that they are members of the church of Christ. They have openly declared that they are seeking to lead the church into a broader fellowship. Others chose pulpit rather than classroom work, and unwary elders, impressed with those academic credentials, turned their flocks over to what they later discovered were two-legged wolves.

Whether behind the classroom lectern or the pulpit stand, school administrators and elderships in numerous cases practically gave these men carte blanche to proliferate their doubts and compromises. We are now into a second generation of an unseemly enamoration with formal academic achievement in some circles. This means that many of our schools now have administrators and many of the congregations now have elders who are of the same compromising sort. Consequently, they not only **tolerate** such professors and preachers, they **protect** and **defend** them. Some of them will tolerate no other kind. Intellectual snobbery is a significant root of the current digression.

### **Other Instances of Snobbery**

Those who are highly educated among us do not own a copyright on pride and conceit related to education and intellect. As I stated earlier, even those who are illiterate may fall prey to this unwholesome malady. Those who are so carried away with the academic credentials of a brother that they ignore the fact that he is a false teacher are guilty of their own sort of “transferred” intellectual impudence. Members of the church (whether “degreed” or not) who reach the point that they believe they can no longer learn anything from faithfully-delivered and well-prepared Bible class and pulpit lessons have joined the snob crowd (there seem to be several of these in every congregation, judging from the careless attendance of so many).

Some have “outgrown” the Biblical ideal of restoring and maintaining the church as the Lord built it. They refer to congregations that are determined to be faithful to the Book as “up tight,” and in their conceit they move across town or down the road to a congregation that has compromised, if not abandoned, the Truth. Some of them have rebelled against the faithful upbringing of their parents, and in their egotistic desire for freedom from “parental restraints,” they have rejected the Gospel and have joined a denomination. Others have moved to a faithful

congregation with an evangelistic zeal—not for the lost, but for changing the church to conform to their liberal human concepts and desires. After patiently working their way into a position of influence, they then, sometimes successfully, have introduced their “superior” ideas to their spiritually and intellectually “inferior” brethren.

Several congregations now have two vastly different worship assemblies on Sunday mornings, one which they usually style “traditional” and the other “progressive” or “contemporary” (or, accurately stated, “compromising” or “apostate”). The “traditional” one is no less than a concession to brethren who still want to worship “in spirit and truth” and who might leave if they did not have this worship opportunity. The “contemporary” assembly typically includes such things as “praise teams” (often involving women leading singing), women passing the bread and fruit of the vine, women reading Scripture and leading prayer, responsive readings, only “contemporary” songs, and dramas and skits instead of Gospel preaching—all borrowed from denominational sources, please note.

One congregation a few years ago introduced cell groups at its Sunday evening worship hour, but also continued an optional assembly at the building to humor brethren who still had “traditional” hang-ups about Sunday night assemblies. I cannot understand how brethren who love the Truth and who grieve over doctrinal corruptions before their eyes can remain in such congregations. The leadership in these churches is apostate or it would not allow/provide an assembly wherein liberals can ape the denominations. Even if Truth-loving brethren are “permitted” to have their own assemblies of Scriptural worship, how can they continue giving their money, time, talent, and influence—and their fellowship and implied endorsement—to such apostasy? Are they nailed to those defiled pews? Are they letting emotional attachment to a building or to kinships and/or friendships outweigh convictions and conscience?

### **Conclusion**

While pride, arrogance, and snobbery are not confined to the adherents of theological liberals, these traits are often exhibited by them. Alas, all such intellectual elitism is completely foreign to the humility and meekness the Son of God exemplifies and teaches (Mat. 5:5; 20:26–28; 23:11–12; Luke 14:11). Such self-exalting snobbery abounds both in the world and in the church of our time, but it is by no means new. The Pharisees exemplified this arrogance (John 7:48–49). Paul encountered it in Athens among the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (Acts 17:18–21, 32). He addressed it in his first letter to the Corinthians:

Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?... Seeing that Jews ask for signs, and Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto Jews a stumblingblock, and unto Gentiles

foolishness; but unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.... For behold your calling, brethren, that not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called (1 Cor. 1:20-26).

He rebuked it in the Judaizers who “confidently affirmed” their ill-begotten, misguided, and unscriptural doctrines (1 Tim. 1:3-7).

I am not opposed to education or to academic achievement and excellence, but a highly educated apostate is only a more effective weapon in the devil’s arsenal than one not so well educated. We should all be wary of letting such matters triumph over humility before God, His Word, and one another. We would all do well to remember that true wisdom and intellect are not carried away with themselves. “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12).

**[Note:** I wrote this MS, and it originally appeared as an “Editorial Perspective” in the October 2001 issue of *THE GOSPEL JOURNAL*, a 36-page monthly of which I was editor at the time.]

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