

### Welcome

When I was on staff at my first church, I got word that one of our Sunday School teachers was going to do the book of Revelation. I did some poking and figured out she was planning to do the whole Rapture/Antichrist/Left Behind approach - one that is a profoundly bad reading of the book of Revelation. I made her aware of my concerns and we met to discuss them. We ended up reaching a compromise - she taught her perspective, and I came in as a guest teacher for a couple of weeks to offer an alternative perspective.

But during our meeting, she asked a question I've heard on several occasions in my pastoral career. As I was walking her through the historic context of the Revelation, the symbolic language that feels opaque to us but was a fascinating artistic puzzle for the original audience, she stopped me and say, "Do you ever wonder if your education has made it harder for you to know God?"

That reaction is what theologians call anti-intellectualism, and it's particularly prominent in Evangelical denominations like ours. In many Christian circles, education and reason are seen as enemies of faith. Whether it's distrusting a pastor who talks about things like historical context and biblical genre or treating science as an enemy - denying climate change, evolution or the efficacy of modern medicine, Evangelicals like us are more than twice as likely as the general public to say that faith and reason are at war, and that we're on the side of faith.

We're going to spend the next few weeks talking about this tension because it's a false one. Faith and reason were not designed to be enemies. Quite the opposite - God created us as rational beings, and God expects us to use our reason as a way for our relationship with him to grow.

In other words, I want to say to you what I said to my friend the Sunday School teacher: reason is not the enemy of faith. The more I learn about God, the more I've learned to know God. Reason enhances our faith. God created us that way!

### Message

[Series Master Slide] During the Summer, we're asking one basic question: How do we know God? We began last week with the conviction that, if God is our creator, then God is knowable. God is knowable because God *wants* to be known and, by becoming human in the person of Jesus, made himself knowable.

We have four major sources of knowing God: Scripture, the record of God's interactions with us throughout history; Reason, our ability to think and learn and discover; Tradition, how others on the journey of faith have known God; and Experience, what we learn about God from our own lives.

Throughout the summer, we're going to dive into each of those four sources of knowing God, and ask how we can know God better. We began with Experience, exploring how we can know God better through what happens in our lives - our private practices and acts of service both in relation to others.

Next, we explored Tradition. From our local Catalyst experience to the global church, we saw how sharing in the faith experiences of others helps us know God better.

Today, we're exploring the third source of knowing God: Reason. Reason is a tool humanity honed during the Enlightenment - you might remember Rene Descartes' famous dictum, *cogito ergo sum*: I think, therefore I am. Reason, most basically, is our ability to know through making sense of our observations and experiences. Our ability to think and puzzle and assemble. Our ability to make meaning.

We identify Reason as a source of knowing God in part because careful thinking has been the way of God's people from the beginning. When asked what the greatest of all God's commandments is, Jesus famously quoted from Deuteronomy:

Jesus replied, "The most important commandment is this: 'Listen, O Israel! The LORD our God is the one and only LORD. And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.' The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these." -- Mark 12:29-31

The most obvious tool of Reason is the scientific method - hypothesis, testing, evaluation, repeat. Thanks to the rigors of the scientific method, we've unlocked the secrets of the human body, of electricity, of the airwaves. But we also see the impact of reason in our social sciences and mental health. We see reason in philosophy and theology. Reason is about rigorous thinking. Approaching a problem or a question in a way that we can think clearly about the answers we want and how to get them.

Our Bibles on our phones and screens? Thanks, Reason. Our lists of spiritual practices and the quick start guide we put together? We used Reason to do that. Our C-Groups and how they run? Reason. Our instruments and sound equipment? Reason.

You're starting to get the idea, right? We can't escape from the artefacts of Reason in our world. We're inundated and surrounded. And that's okay.

But again, a lot of Christians have a strong anti-Reason streak. We don't *call* it that, but we do refuse to acknowledge the hard truths science tells us - that we are hurting our planet, that the Earth is significantly more than 6,000 years old. We resist the aid of psychology, demonizing those who seek counseling or medication as lacking faith. And like my Sunday School teacher friend, we are suspicious of theological systems that challenge received wisdom (even if we've never seriously examined the origins of our own beliefs. They're *ours* and we don't like what's ours to be challenged).

How many of us here have been told by other Christians that questions are bad, doubts are demonic? Questions and doubting are the tools of Reason. So if you have that sort of faith, it's *always* going to see Reason as the enemy.

[Scripture Slide 1] But that's not the only model of faith. In fact, it's far from the main model of faith. Our history is filled with those who found Reason to be an invaluable part of their faith. Those who follow Paul's insights in his letter to the Romans:

Ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God. -- Romans 1:20

People like Hildegard von Bingen, who lived in the ninth century, and is considered the founder of natural science in Germany.

Or Nicole Oresme, a theologian and bishop of Lisieux, who is famous for a number of scientific discoveries, including how light interacts in the atmosphere.

The guy who literally invented the scientific method, Sir Francis Bacon, was a believer. So was Galileo Galilei. Even though the Church at the time demonized him for scientific findings that contradicted church teaching, Galileo didn't see a conflict between his faith and his science.

Robert Boyle, one of the most important figures in Chemistry, was a Christian apologist, defending his faith as ardently as he investigated how our world is put together.

Isaac Newton and Johannes Kepler were both Christians.

Gregor Mendel, who invented modern genetics, was part of the preaching team at his church.

Werner Heisenberg, who won the Nobel Prize for creating quantum mechanics, was a believer.

The first woman to win a Nobel Prize in Medicine, Gerty Cori, was a believer.

Stop me if you're picking up on a pattern - thousands of our most important scientific advancements have been made by people who saw no tension between their faith and their ability to reason. For many of them, their reason *informed* their faith, enriching and expanding their knowledge of God.

They're people who took Jesus' command to "Love the Lord with all your mind" as a command worth following.

So... what happened?

As you can imagine, that's a complicated question, but a good bit of it has to do with how Evangelicalism developed in the United States. Not to go too far down the history rabbit hole, but a number of denominations that have a strong anti-intellectualism streak (like the Southern Baptist Convention I

grew up in or our own Church of the Nazarene) grew a lot on the American frontier as it pushed westward. One of the major problems frontier churches faced was finding qualified pastors.

Denominations established seminaries in the East - schools like Harvard, Yale and Duke have divinity schools that trained pastors in the complexities of Biblical interpretation and preaching. And for most of those preachers graduating from seminary, the last thing they wanted to do was move to a one-horse town on the frontier, away from the comforts of established cities.

So the churches on the frontier didn't have a lot of trained pastors. Now that has never and will never stop God's church, so God raised up a generation of pastors who didn't have access to the training a good seminary education offers. God worked through those men and women, and the Church grew on the frontier.

But a generation or two later, the cities caught up with the frontier, bringing with them schools and seminaries. Pastors now had the ability to get that training and education. But they didn't want it. Churches had had twenty-plus years of being steeped in biblical literalism - treating the Bible like a textbook rather than a library of diverse genres of literature. Attempts to introduce the tools of reason - science, psychology, theology - into our denominations was met with a mixed reaction. Some loved the new tools, and saw how their faith could grow deeper. Others resisted; they felt like their faith - the faith they'd inherited from their parents and grandparents - was under attack.

That feeling of attack developed into anti-intellectualism. Science says the earth is more than 6,000 years old, so science must be anti-faith. Psychology encourages us to find healing using tools not mentioned in the Bible so it must be dangerous. Theology seems to make simple ideas like Jesus as God's son and the path to salvation needlessly complicated. Theology encourages us to ask questions rather than just have faith. So theology can be dangerous.

It's that sort of experience that can, did and does give rise to anti-Reason in the Church.

So today, I want to address that big picture concern. I want to show that God designed us to be rational creatures, and to use our ability to reason as a way to know God better.

One of the pitfalls of frontier faith was that they tended to treat salvation as the end of the road. Come to a big revival, come down to the altar and get saved! It's not so much that those revivalists didn't think nothing came next... it was more that they just focused so much on conversion they left out everything else.

When I took the class to get my motorcycle license, we spent about an hour on how to inspect your motorcycle for safety. What are the various parts of the bike? How do you know if there's a problem? What are the steps to starting it up?

That's all really important! But can you imagine if that were the end of the class? If after all that, all I knew how to do was turn the motorcycle on? Your sort of missing the whole point of turning the motorcycle ON if you still don't know how to ride it.

So too, it's good to know that Jesus saves us from our sin but what does Jesus save us *for*? What's the life we live after that?

[Scripture Slide 2] That's where reason plays a big part. Turn with me to Romans 12. Throughout the book of Romans, Paul has been illustrating the difference between a person who doesn't know God, and one who has found the freedom from sin Jesus gives us. Now, in Romans 12, he's beginning to illustrate what we're saved *for*, what a life empowered by the Holy Spirit looks like. And something Paul says right up front is that a life with God takes work. We have to learn to think like God, not like the world.

**Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. -- Romans 12:2**

God transforms us by changing how we think. God doesn't stop us from thinking, but God transforms our thinking so that we begin to see the world as God sees the world. God expects us to use our minds. To reason. And as we learn more about God, about how God sees us and our neighbors and the world, God works to transform us to be more like God. We're going to explore more of what this looks like next week.

That's not a new idea Paul is introducing. Your homework this week is going to be reading Proverbs 8 - it's a poem about divine wisdom, and how God used wisdom to form the whole world. Proverbs makes a staggering claim - that as we know the natural world better, we know God better. We learn wisdom from studying the world. This of course points us directly to science (as all those believing scientists I mentioned earlier can tell us). We're going to explore how the Scriptures point us to science more fully in a couple of weeks.

For today, I want to leave you with a couple of straightforward questions: are you loving God with all your mind? What are you doing to learn to see the world the way God does? How are you putting yourself in spaces that God can shape you, transform you by renewing your mind?

God gave you a brain, and God expects you to use it. God designed your mind as a way to know God better. God is anywhere and everywhere you look. SO for the next few weeks, we're going to explore how our Reason is a path to know God.

### **Communion + Examen**

[Communion Slide] Knowing Jesus is experiential.

1. When in the last week were you thinking like God?

2. When in the last week were you not thinking like God?
3. How can you let God shape the way you think in this next week?

**Assignment + Blessing**

Sacred Reading of Proverbs 8 this week!