

Sanctifying Reason

(A chapter from the book *Led by the Spirit*)

By Jim Elliff

Much of the argument in this book has been linked to what I have called “sanctified reason.” What does this term mean? As you have seen, I am rooted to the position that reason and Scripture are systemic and essential to sound decision-making. I am not constrained to limit God’s activity to that alone—God can do as he wishes—but the rational approach is the normal way.

We are to actually think through the given situation, wrestle with the options, weigh them, sift them, ponder the implications and consequences, and we are to do all of this in the light of truth as we find it in the Scriptures interpreted in context. And we presume, underneath all of this, God is working.

But if reason is unaided, if it is mere reason by itself, it will do little good. Reason standing alone might lead us to some sort of workable resolution, but it carries the liability of doing so without pleasing God. That circumstance is as unsatisfying to us as it is unsatisfactory to God.

God is always and only pleased with faith. (Hebrews 11:6) To sanctify our reasoning process is to yield to his infinite wisdom and to expect from him every ounce of help that is necessary to make a decision that is both wise and pleasing to him. If faith is anything it is an attentive and conscious recognition of God’s place in all the details of life.

We are to deliberately place our rational faculties at the feet of God. In the same way that one walks out of one room and into another, believers are told to “come before his presence” (Psalm 95:2). By this the writers of the Bible intend to convey that there is a “manifested presence” of God, which is that nearness of God that is experienced or felt. Lovers of God should not be satisfied with only the bare fact that God is everywhere, but should seek his face. And we must do so with an open Bible.

It is true that God works in us “to will and to do,” but this is no excuse for failing to consciously bring our thoughts captive to God—rather, for the believer, the undercurrent of the Spirit’s work within us is seen to be the very reason we will do so.

It is part of loving the Lord with all of your mind (see Mark 12:30) and setting your mind on the things above (see Colossians 3:2) for the Christian to habituate

himself to thinking his thoughts after God’s. However, in the case of determining just what God would have us do in a specific matter, there is motive to be even more intentional about it.

Placing a matter before God so as to seek his presence and to rest in his intervention, is to greatly reduce the options before us. While waiting on God, we often find that God simplifies our choices. There have been many times that I have come to him with a discomfiting jumble of options only to find that spending some period in his presence reduces my selection down to just two—and then, one. I am thinking out my thoughts before God, sometimes with a list of pros and cons, under the brilliant floodlight of the Word.

Müller had something to say about this way God works:

God guides, not by a visible sign, but by swaying the judgment. To wait before Him, weighing candidly in the scales every consideration for or against a proposed course, and in readiness to see which way the preponderance lies, is a frame of mind and heart in which one is fitted to be guided; and God touches the scales and makes the balance to sway as He will. But our hands must be off the scales; otherwise we need expect no interposition of His in our favor.

The hazards of becoming a mere rationalist are obvious. We must be as vigilant to avoid running aground on that sandbar as we are of being swept over the waterfall of mysticism. The guided believer recognizes the decided value of appropriately relating to Christ and not just assuming, in a casual way, the blessing of God on his thinking. You need God, and the Father is far more likely to help you when you recognize the fundamental issue of our total poverty of thought apart from him.

We are not independent thinkers anymore. That describes our old life. Now we are to be God-saturated and Scripture-oriented thinkers.

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