

Intellectual

by
Ed Harrell

Dear Brother Dr. Harrell,

Since you have a Ph.D. degree in something (I forget what, but anything will do), I am sure you will be able to sympathize with the problems I am having with the ignorant brethren in the church where I was raised. The main problem is the preacher who is not only ignorant but extremely dogmatic. He thinks he solves every problem by quoting the Bible (which his crude mind has somehow managed to commit to memory), and, unfortunately, this seems to satisfy the ignorant members of the church. My friends and I have repeatedly pointed out that one can prove anything by quoting the Bible, that Brother Simple (the minister) is totally incapable of understanding the Bible since he is not a student of Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic, Coptic, Rumanian, Hungarian, Gaelic, and the other fourteen essential languages, and that even if he was right, he has a very bad attitude about it.

All of this was somewhat less objectionable, of course, before I completed my freshman year at Podunk State. During my adolescence I was often perplexed by Brother Simple's simple explanations and sometimes felt begrudgingly compelled to agree that his view of the Bible seemed to make sense. Of course, I was sure from my studies in high school that the church was in general a pretty ignorant lot, but not until my college experience did I realize what a bunch of clods are in the Church of Christ.

After a year at Podunk State, I am now quite confident in my own superiority and feel it my duty to lead my brethren out of their ignorance. My year at Podunk (which is reputed to be the third best university in the world--just behind Chester Arthur International University and Trade School and Northeast Central County Charity Junior College) has opened my eyes to the extreme wisdom of human wisdom. Professor Hotshot, who they say knows everything in the world (I think this report is probably true since he knows

more than I do), gave a brilliant series of lectures on his system of nonreligious philosophy until he was fired for incompetence. Dr. Reprobate was unfortunately only in the middle of his lectures on the inferiority of Christian ethics when his two children committed suicide, he was arrested on a morals charge, and his wife beat the daylights out of him.

He returned for the final two lectures, but he somehow seemed to be lacking in the old zip. But all in all the year was a great success. The professors assured us each day that they held ancient licenses which allowed them to utter nothing but the truth and that so long as we followed them two paces to the rear and applauded at proper intervals, they would make us in their own image. In fact, they told us that after one year we could go to our homes and act as if we knew everything--although they made it clear that we did not know so much of everything as they knew, but that we probably knew enough of it to make the people at home who knew they did not know everything think that we knew everything.

Now, this is my problem. The people in this church do not think that I know everything. Furthermore, they seem totally indifferent to the fact that I think I know everything. Brother Simple continues to deal with every issue with the same simple references to the Bible. Of course, I have had little time to study the Bible while under the strict regime of trying to learn everything at Podunk (in addition, of course, to a little fun and games). I must confess it is a bit discomfoting to have Brother Simple (who Professor Hotshot assures me is an ignorant bigot, and I believe no one knows an ignorant bigot better than Professor Hotshot) repeatedly give simple Bible answers which make my sophisticated questions seem ignorant. All of which simply confirms the belief of these ignorant people that they have access to a divine wisdom just because they know what the Bible says, and that I (and this makes me the maddest) do not know everything. One brother even suggested that Prof. Hotshot did not know everything, and that if he knew anything, he would know that he did not know everything.

My questions are: 1. Should I leave the church or stay and try to improve it? 2. How can I refute Brother Simple's Bible arguments? 3. Can one be a

Christian with the simple attitude of these people?

Your intellectual friend,

I.M. Smart

Dear young brother Smart (Is that your full name?),

1. There is a law of common sense (which they probably do not teach at Podunk) which states that it is impossible for one to leave from a place which he is not at. There is also a truism which says you cannot improve that which is perfect. Your problem is that Christ made the church perfectly and you cannot improve it. On the other hand, one has to recognize it to be in it, so you cannot leave it. If you have any inclination to be religious, and to go to heaven, I recommend that you try to find the church of Christ. You might begin by looking at the church where you were raised-they sound pretty good to me.

2. Refuting the sublime wisdom of the Bible is very difficult. Some - mostly those who talk rapidly, giggle frequently, and blow smoke-rings - refute the Bible with cute and urbane sophistry. But one has to be very clever to do this effectively, and so I would not recommend this to you. I always recommend to someone in your position that he study the Bible. You would find yourself able to refute anyone who teaches it incorrectly, to answer many questions which you did not know existed, and it might even change your spirit.

3. You are absolutely right to perceive that only one with a right attitude can go to heaven. Paul described it as the "mind of Christ" in **Phil. 2:5**. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount spoke of the "poor in spirit" and the "pure in heart." (**Matt. 5:3, 8**). He told his disciples that they would have to become as little children. (**Matt. 18:3, 4**). I commend to you this spirit which furnishes the wisdom of the ages to all those who will listen to God. - **Vanguard, Feb 1975**

(Editor's Note: I had the pleasure of being around Ed Harrell for most of a week. He was conducting a Gospel Meeting for the congregation in Danville, Ky. Brother Harrell recently passed away. This article shows some of the humor he used to make his points. D.T.)