

The Rational Style – Experiencing God with your Mind
Romans 12: 1-2, Colossians 2:1-8

Well brothers and sisters, this morning we are finishing our series on 9 Ways to Grow Spiritually – and I hope that after nine messages you are becoming more familiar with some of the key principles about spiritual growth.

So, let's quickly review those. First, we all have a natural or preferred style of experiencing God and we will find it easy and comfortable to pursue growth in this style.

Second, we must also pursue growth in our opposite style, even though it will feel difficult and unpleasant. We don't do this to change from our natural style but to prevent our natural strengths from becoming a weakness.

Third, your style and spiritual growth is not a private personal endeavor but something that is shared in community with your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ where you benefit from other styles and contribute with yours.

So – I hope these are becoming a basic part of how you understand what it means to grow spiritually in relation to the Triune God.

Now over the past three weeks we've been looking at the green styles of spirituality in order to get us prepared for our March Talk Show series.

And last week as we looked at the Sensory style and what it meant to experience God through His Creation we discovered that there is another layer to spiritual growth and the Green styles.

This is not just about understanding how we experience God but also how the 3-Color tool also lines up with the story of scripture, starting with Creation, Fall, Redemption – and coming around again full circle to the Green area with the New Creation.

And so spiritual growth is not just about being saved FROM sin – but also includes that we are saved FOR the work of

redeeming the creation... And the upcoming TALK Show is one way that we attempt to equip you to participate in this, and actually understand what redeeming the creations means.

And I want to highlight how important it is to understand this brothers and sisters – because this morning we are looking at how we experience God in the Rational Style.

Now speaking about spiritual growth in terms of rationality might seem like an odd combination, in fact we usually think of them as opposites and no where is this more evident than when someone describes experiencing significant growth in their relationship with God because “it went from their head to their heart”? Have you ever heard anyone say that??

In other words, they went from knowing information about God - to knowing God. God began to mean something to them personally and it affected them emotionally and thus it began to impact and change their life.

And maybe a number of you here this morning would describe the growth in your relationship with God in such a way... as having gone from your head to your heart.

So you can relate to what that expression is trying to describe – which is how you started to care and actually believe in a bunch of facts and information about God that had been crammed into your “head” by attending Sunday school and listening to sermons suddenly came alive so that you had a *“personal relationship”* with God.

You realized that there had to be more to Faith than just doctrine, theology and bible teaching. Faith needed to be experienced in our “hearts” - to make it come alive and be authentic... and by the grace of Jesus, this happened for many many people, and that was a good thing.

And now that you’re familiar with the 3 Colors and Nine styles maybe you realize this was the result of thinking the Rational or Doctrinal style was the **only** way to experience God...

And when things went from your “head to your heart” you were actually discovering that your natural style of experiencing God and things really came alive for you.

Which is wonderful brothers and sisters – except that our ignorance of the spiritual growth principles that we’ve been learning about caused us to repeat the pattern we had just experienced.

We did not want our children and youth to have that dull, lifeless, only head-knowledge kind of experience that we grew up with, so we shifted our Sunday school and youth groups away from doctrinal and rational content and began to focus on experiential programming.

We hoped that we could provide our kids and youth with programs that would give them a “heart experience” and lead them to have faith in Jesus as their “personal” savior.

I know this because I was in youth ministry for many years.

And I share this not to be overly critical of past mistakes, but to help us see how important it is to know about spiritual growth principles and how the strengths of a particular style can become its weakness.

So, if we want to be critical of how the Church was too academic, too theological, too rational – too much “head knowledge” in the past that’s fine...

As long as we recognize that today we can be criticized for exclusively focusing on “heart knowledge” emotion, sentiment, experience to the exclusion of “head knowledge.” The pendulum has simply swung in the opposite direction.

Now if you think that’s just fine – take a look around you and count how many young adults you see among us... and that’s probably more than what you will see in your average church.

Church researchers are discovering that the generation of young people who have recently grown up in the church, and

attended all our kids and youth programs - are leaving the church when they become young adults.

Why? Brothers and sisters because their faith hasn't gone from their hearts to their heads. Let me lay it out for you...

In the best-case scenario our kids and our youth are in church every Sunday of the year, and attend their youth program every week that means we'll have given them 52 weeks of instruction, where they do some sort of Bible study for about 30 min... and most of our kids and youth are nowhere near that level of participation, right?

Contrast that with what they do during the rest of the week. They are in school from Monday to Friday for about 9 months of the year, about 6 hours a day, in a classroom - where they are taught how to use their mind to think and understand and make sense of the world around them!

And brothers and sisters, in the end that is what is really shaping them and how they think – how would 30 min each week compete against that?

It can't... and so when our kids and teens become young adults and come into their own mental maturity they would agree with Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 13:11 *"When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me."*

But they would mean it in a totally different way than he did.

The tragedy is that many of our young adults grow up to realize that the faith of their childhood and teens years was nothing more than an emotional experience of a simpler sentimental time that was just there to keep them out of trouble, and make sure they studied hard in school and now they've outgrown it... sort of like believing in Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny, or thinking they would marry their high-school sweet heart.

They quickly discover their faith doesn't have much to offer them as adults in the real world, or worse yet they discovered that it is incompatible with the way their mind has been trained to think and understand the world courtesy of our public education system.

Now again – I'm not bringing this up to be overly critical of, or make us despair about our efforts to raise up our children in the Lord, we do our best God helping us – though it ought to make us sit up and take notice of what is really shaping how our kids and youth think...

I bring this issue up to show you that by observation, study, reflection on the general knowledge that comes from God's creation around us, it is possible to come to a point where we can see a real and genuine need for faith to move from our "hearts to our heads."

And I hope this will affirm those whose natural style is Rational, and also motivate the rest of us to acknowledge that

we need to recover the rational aspect of our faith and grow spiritually in this way – even if it is difficult and unpleasant.

So, to affirm our Rational style people - it's important that we remove any misconceptions that spirituality or faith is somehow disconnected from using our minds, from thinking and using logic and reason - in a disciplined and rigorous manner – and instead emphasize the fact that thinking in this way IS a very spiritual thing to do...

Brothers and sisters if we don't use our minds, embrace reason and logic and disciplined thinking, and encourage others to do so as well - our faith and their faith, will actually suffer.

And the irony in this whole situation is that if we applied just a little bit of disciplined rigorous thinking we would discover that the whole "head vs. heart" comparison is actually a false dualism with no biblical support.

The bible doesn't divide our faith into "head vs. heart"

When scripture instructs us in Deut 6:5 to “*Love the Lord our God with all our heart...*” it isn’t actually referring to relating to how we feel about God and our emotional capacity.

It is actually a command to obey, serve, listen to, honor, praise, be loyal to the Lord our God with the center of our very being – our heart – our “Leb” in the Hebrew.

So yes that includes our emotions and feelings, but it also includes how we think – how we use our mind.

In fact Strong’s Hebrew Lexicon lists the different nuances of this word “Leb” that we translate as “heart” and it lists them in this order: 1. In the midst (of things) 2. Heart (of man) 3. Soul, heart (of man) 4. Mind, knowledge, thinking, reflection, memory

Isn’t that interesting...

Then it goes to also list; 5. Inclination, resolution, determination (of will) 6. Conscience 7. Heart (of moral

character) 8. As seat of appetites 9. As seat of emotions and passions 10. As seat of courage.

So how we typically understand and use “heart” in our day to day understanding in terms of “emotion and feelings” is not the primary usage of this word in scripture.

Now don’t misunderstand me – I’m not saying that emotions and feelings are unimportant and that our mind is more important.

That would simply be falling back into that false dualism and its unintended consequences again - and that’s exactly what we’re trying to get away from with some disciplined and rigorous thinking...

Instead what we are encouraged, actually commanded to do in scripture- is to Love God, with **all** of our inner being, from the very center of who we are, and we need to realize that this includes our mind: and **what** we think about and **how** we think about it.

And this can certainly mean thinking about God and contemplating His nature, meditating on His Word and commands, studying to understand scripture and what it says

– but it also includes applying our thinking to studying and understanding all the various aspects of God’s Creation; science, medicine, art, music, dance, mechanics, sports, electronics, law, economics, languages, history, culture, philosophy... and so on.

Now you might think this doesn’t sound very spiritual, thinking about very earthly, very material things...but it is! Because John 3:16 says *“For God so loved the cosmos – He sent His only Son...”*

And the Cosmos is a beautiful arrangement friends; and it includes all the parts of creation we just listed and many many more – God sent His Son for these things too... so focusing on them is very Christian, very Godly... and we need to train our minds to think about creation and spirituality in this way.

And Romans 12:2 suggests that if we have been transformed by the Holy Spirit renewing our minds – then we have the capacity to determine God’s will for these different areas of His creation - **through our thinking process** - and thus we will experience God with our minds, we will be loving God with our minds.

And Romans 12:2 also tells us that if our minds are renewed then *“we are not to be conformed to the pattern of this aon – of this age”* any longer. (give short elaboration on the “progressive” pattern of thinking of this age that we must not conform to.)

So friends, we have to be deliberate in choosing to think like a Christian so that we aren’t swept along with the current process of unrenewed thinking that is innately passed on to us from our culture and from being educated in its public schools, and that means being slightly more rigorous and in-depth than asking “What would Jesus do?” or just being good and moral.

And we can do that by deliberately choosing to think about and mentally engage with the world around us by analyzing everything according to the biblical storyline of Creation, Fall, Redemption and New Creation.

Let me give you a basic example of how this can work with music and its various styles.

Perhaps some of you remember the days when playing guitar and drums in church was not only frowned upon, it was argued that it was sinful and of the devil and we shouldn't allow it.

Well if we have trained ourselves to think Christianly about this issue, we wouldn't start by asking "what would Jesus do?" nor would we start by asking "is the music reaching people for Jesus?"

We would start off by confessing and admitting that music was created by God, and the potential for different styles of music was also created by God and that developing them was part of

our job as stewards of the earth – and all that was originally good.

Then we'd also affirm that when Sin came along and affected things it didn't create anything new, it simply twisted and redirected our usage and development of the creation for its destructive ends – so any musical endeavor we know now is affected in some way by Sin.

So yes – drums and guitars have been used to make music that does not honor God, but so have organs and choirs... everything is in some way affected by the Fall into Sin.

Then we bring in the good news "For God so loved music... that He sent His only Son..." and instead of rejecting certain types of music – we engage in the study of music; its forms, its features, how it's made, why some arrangements and patterns appeal more than others... and so on so that we can better understand from its Created structure how we can develop and use this part of God's creation according to His will and participate in its redemption.

And then, empowered by the Holy Spirit, we start making music in this way as an expression of our relationship with God and our belief that one day Jesus will return to make this whole creation new and unaffected by Sin.

And through this process of thinking like a Christian, by following the biblical storyline, we recognize that any type of music is acceptable to God provided it has been redeemed and that part of our mission is to go and redeem music.

So this is a very basic, extremely simplified example of how to think like a Christian and how it can help us determine God's will for things and how we can also experience God in the process of doing this.

Now, it takes a commitment from us to discipline ourselves to think in this way – about everything... music, art, relationships, business, sports, weather... as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10:5 “we take captive **every** thought to make it obedient to Christ.” and no it's not easy, especially at first, and it's not always

pleasant because it can be hard work – especially if its not your natural style.

But remember what Hebrews 11:12 says “*No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.*”

And friends, I think Paul does a good job at describing the benefits that can come from such disciplined rigorous Christian thinking in passage we read from Colossians 2 and I'm just going to read it again for you and just listen to in light of what we been speaking about.

² *My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*

⁴ I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. ⁵ For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how disciplined you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.

So friends, did you catch that? The benefits of experiencing God with our minds...

They are; i) the full riches of complete understanding, ii) all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge and iii) not being deceived by other arguments, iv) a disciplined and firm faith in Christ.

Doesn't that sound rewarding? Doesn't that sound like the kind of faith that our young people would find useful in the real world?

Brothers and sisters, I hope you are getting mentally stimulated by this, and anticipating how we are going to practice thinking in this way together as a church in the upcoming Talk Show.

I hope that you will take advantage of this opportunity to grow spiritually in this way so that you can begin to tap into the benefits of understanding, wisdom and knowledge, and have a firm faith in Jesus Christ that is immune from being deceived by other non-Christian ways of thinking.

And I hope that you're already starting to experience God this morning - just by **thinking** about it!

And the good news friends is that this is available to all of us, because we all think, we all use our minds... we don't have to be super-smart, we don't have to be mental giants – we just need to start being disciplined in our thinking, and committed to thinking like a Christian...

Brothers and sisters, expose yourself to opportunities to grow more aware in how you think and what you think about.

Be faithful and cooperate with the Holy Spirit in this and you will grow in your experience of the Triune God in your minds. May the Mind of Christ our Savior live in you more and more everyday! Amen