

RUDE IN SPEECH

“But though I be rude in speech, yet not in knowledge” (2 Cor 11:6 KJV)

What does it mean that Paul considered himself “rude” in speech? The word translated as “rude” is the Greek word “idiotes”, from which we get our English word “idiot”. It is found 5 times in the N. T. Scriptures. Here is the way it is translated in the KJV.

- **“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.” (Acts 4:13)**
- **“how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? (1 Cor 14:16)**
- **“If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?” (1 Cor 14:23)**
- **“But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all:” (1 Cor 14:24)**
- **“But though I be rude in speech, yet not in knowledge” (2 Cor 11:6)**

How is it possible that Paul had “knowledge” but sounded like an “idiot”? The NIV translates “idiotes” in this verse as “I may not be a trained speaker”. It seems, however, that Paul was a “trained speaker”. He was trained under a famous Jewish teacher named Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Further, he advanced in Judaism beyond many Jews of his own age (Gal. 1:14). When he and Barnabas came to Lystra Paul was the “**chief speaker**”. He was so good the people thought he was the Greek god Hermes. This pagan god of commerce was considered to be quick acting and cunning. If Paul sounded like an idiot, it is hard to understand why they thought he was Hermes. Instead, they were convinced that “**the gods have come down to us in human form**”. They even brought bulls and wreaths to make sacrifices unto Paul and Barnabas. At this the apostles rushed into the crowd insisting that they were “**only men**”. Even with these words they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing unto them (Acts 14:8 - 18). One possible explanation for being “rude” in speech involves what happened next.

Next, some Jews arrived from Antioch and Iconium and “**won the crowd over**”. Next, the fickle mob stoned Paul, dragged him outside of the city, and left him for dead. Obviously they threw rocks at his head. This is the best way to kill someone. Even though Paul “**got up and went back into the city**”, he was probably crippled and the bones in his face broken. Note! Some met Paul and said that “**his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible**” (2 Cor 10:10). It is easy to imagine how an intelligent man with a broken jaw could sound like an idiot.

It also seems that Paul had eye problems, easily explained by a broken face. The Galatians were willing to offer him their own eyes (Gal. 4:15). He signed their epistle with “large letters” (Gal. 6:11). While standing in front of the high priest he did not even recognize him as the high priest (Acts 23:5). Later, while putting sticks on a fire, he apparently didn’t see the deadly viper that fled from the fire and fastened itself on his hand (Acts 28:3). Paul’s Jewish opponents prided themselves in their circumcision which could not be seen. Paul’s face could be seen, and it bore the “marks” or “stigma” of his suffering for Christ (Gal. 6:17). Was this Paul’s thorn in the flesh?

If Satan thought rude speech would destroy Paul’s ministry he was wrong. We are not saved by man’s eloquence, but by the Spirit’s power (1 Cor. 2:1-5) Paul even came to delight in insults, weakness, hardship, and difficulty (2 Cor. 12:7 -10). He discovered what all preachers need to be reminded of. God’s power and strength are made perfect in our weakness!