

UNSCHOOLED AND ORDINARY

“When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.” (Acts 4:13)

The “Rulers and elders of the people” considered Peter and John to be “unschooled”. The Greek word so translated is “agrammatos” which literally means “unlettered”. In the papyri this word is often used of those who could not write and had others sign for them. The word translated “ordinary” is “idiotes”. It is found 5 times in the N.T. Scriptures and is translated in the KJV as “ignorant”, “rude” and “unlearned”.

It is obvious that Peter and John were considered educationally inferior by the Jewish leaders, but were they? Could they read or write at all? Obviously their work as fishermen prevented them from spending much time reading. Our English word “school”, as you know, comes from the Greek word “schole” which means “leisure”. Schools were for people with leisure, and the common people had very little leisure. That’s why they were unschooled. No matter what their educational level was, we know that Jesus did not make a mistake in choosing the 12. He prayed all night before selecting them (Lk. 6:12 - 16) the 12, as you know, are an integral part of the foundation of Christ’s Kingdom (Eph. 2:20). Their educational level, therefore, becomes quite relevant as we evaluate Christian education in our own day and age.

Primitive man, we are told, did his first writing on clay, plaster, or stone. Later, papyrus was developed as a cheaper and more easily transported means of communication. Paper was not discovered until the second century of the Christian Era and the printing press was not used by Gutenberg until 1439. Consequently, most people in history had little or nothing to read.

Even though today we have millions of printing presses, and paper is cheap, illiteracy is still a problem. Even though we have thousands of libraries, magazines, books, and newspapers, illiteracy is still a problem. Even though we have computers, FAX machines, iPods, and Blackberries, illiteracy is still a problem. Certainly it must have been a much greater problem in the day of Jesus? Meir Bar-Ilan has published a study on “*Illiteracy in the Land of Israel in the First Centuries c.e.*”. He admits that a definite answer is not possible, but after extensive research concludes that Jewish literacy at that time of Christ was less than 3%. The Wikipedia Encyclopedia agrees with this percentage, but thinks perhaps 10% of the Jews in Roman Palestine could at least write their name, but nothing more.

At this point it is important to remember that Jesus trained the 12 to rely on Him, and not on excellency of speech or men’s wisdom (1 Cor. 2:5; etc.) He told them not to worry about what they would say in times of persecution, for He would be speaking through them (Matt. 10:18). He strictly forbade them to leave Jerusalem until they had received the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4 - 8). Their success was therefore not due to their education or intelligence, but to the power of the Holy Spirit working through them. Peter obviously spoke eloquent and powerful words at Pentecost, but even more amazing, his shadow apparently also had healing power (Acts 5:15).

New Testament scholars speak with a united voice regarding the excellent Greek contained in Peter’s first epistle. There are at least two possible explanations for this. First, inspired men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:20 - 21). God, Who created the universe, is certainly capable of giving eloquent and grammatically correct language to anyone He wants to. The second, and more probable explanation, is found in 1 Pet. 5:12. Peter said that he wrote this letter with the help of Silas. Peter could use scholars without having to be one.

The selection of unschooled and ordinary men to be in the foundation of Christ’s Kingdom, however, speaks volumes to those who want to have the mind of Christ. If we think like He thought, we will place more emphasis on spiritual gifts than educational achievements. We will encourage people to wait for power before standing in line for human endorsements. Someday, we will sing the Song of Moses. We will cast our crowns at God’s feet and confess “thine is the kingdom, and power, and glory forever! Amen”