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## **CREDENTIALS**

Every parent knows the value of credentials. We have had doors slammed in our faces because we hadn't have the right papers. We have seen others pass us by because they had credentials that we didn't have. This is one reason why most parents encourage their children to get a good education. Even the prestige of the college you attend may make a difference when you are looking for a job.

In this regard it is important to remember that the credentials that we value so highly, mean absolutely nothing to God. God is not impressed by our human achievements. In fact, our earthly credentials may actually be a spiritual liability. God has consistently chosen to do mighty things through common people. His strength is made perfect in our weakness. He has deliberately chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty. God does not want any flesh to glory in His presence (1 Cor. 1:27-29).

## **PETER AND PAUL**

Consider, for example, the credentials of Peter and Paul. They were at opposite ends of the educational pendulum. In the Jewish community, Paul had impeccable credentials. He was born of the tribe of Benjamin, and circumcised the eighth day. He was trained at the feet of Gamaliel and taught according to the strictest tradition of Hebrew Law. He wrote to the Galatians that he advanced in the Jewish community beyond those of his own age. He was at the "top of his class". He was a Hebrew of Hebrews. He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees.

Peter, by contrast, had no credentials in the Jewish community. As far as we know he had no formal education. He was a common man. He was merely a fisherman. He was from Galilee,

and consequently would be held in contempt by the sophisticated Jew. Remember the amazement of Pentecost when they heard Galileans speak in other languages. Such uneducated people obviously would not be expected to be fluent in other languages. Peter's Galilean heritage was difficult to hide. His thick Galilean accent, for example, was evident. The night before Calvary he tried in vain to hide his heritage. Cursing and swearing he sought vehemently to deny where he was from, but his speech betrayed him. Everyone who heard him speak could tell he was from Galilee.

Because Paul had credentials accepted by the Jews, that's where we would send him. Credentials are so important to us that we would consider Paul the ideal candidate to evangelize the Jewish community.

Because Peter was a common man with no credentials, we would send him to the gentiles. We would endeavor to minimize his lack of credentials by placing him among other people with a similar background.

God, however, doesn't think the way we think! His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. His ways are higher than our ways. Our Omniscient God did things the opposite of the way we would do them. He sent Paul to the gentiles, and Peter to the Jews (See Gal. 1:8, Acts 26:17, etc.) Paul even considered his Jewish credentials as garbage. They were, in some respect, a liability. He wrote that the things which he counted as gain to himself, were a loss for Christ (Phil. 3:7).

## MOSES

Moses is another example of a man whose credentials got in the way. He apparently thought he could deliver his Hebrew brethren by the power of his own wit and wisdom. He was the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He had political power. He had credentials accepted throughout all of Egypt. Stephen said that he "was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds" (Acts 7:23).

At the very height of his power, Moses risked it all to save his people. He killed an

Egyptian, because he supposed that his brethren would understand that God by his hand would deliver them, but they understood not (Acts 7:25). Moses failed! He became a fugitive and lived in the land of Midian for forty years. During this time he was a shepherd.

Because Jesus described Himself as the “Good Shepherd,” we think very positively about shepherds. It was not so in Bible times. The Scriptures teach that every shepherd was an abomination to the Egyptians (Gen. 46:34). No occupation could have been more humbling to Moses, or offensive to the Pharaoh. We would never assume that a shepherd could have any positive influence on an Egyptian leader. Perhaps this why God chose to do it that way.

Moses had other obstacles to overcome. When he lived in Egypt, he was “mighty in words and deeds”. When he left, however, he was considered a criminal. Further, after forty years in Midian he was no longer fluent in the Egyptian language. His earthly credentials were reduced to nothing.

Someone said: “The main thing is to see that the main thing is the main thing”. At the risk of sounding blasphemous, the “main thing” in the universe is God. Nothing must ever detract from His glory. When Moses was well educated and powerful, God was not the center of his focus. He gained the victory, however, when his earthly credentials were gone and he had nothing to depend on but God.

God gave him the victory, and Moses knew it. Notice the focus of his victory song: *“I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown in the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and he is my salvation: he is my god, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father’s God, and I will exalt him”* (Ex. 15:1, 2).

Moses discovered that anything that detracts from God must be avoided. Not even an altar to the Lord was to be made of “hewn” stone (Ex. 20:25). Any tool used on the altar would pollute it. Moses realized that anything “we” did, we would admire. Human achievement invariably detracts from our focus on God.

## WHAT ABOUT YOU?

It is exciting to realize that God can do great things through anyone who will let Him. David, for example, was such an unlikely candidate to be king that his family left him in the field to tend the sheep. Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks upon the heart (1 Sam. 16:7). In spite of his many faults, God made David into a mighty king. God can also use you, regardless of your earthly shortcomings.

The Church of Jesus Christ is like a gigantic body with many members. Most members of His Body are common folks. Not many wise, and not many mighty, and not many noble are called (1 Cor. 1:26). There are, however, some mighty, wise, and noble Christians. As you know, some of the most influential people on earth are followers of Jesus Christ. It is important to remember that regardless of your earthly circumstances, God can still use you if your heart is right.

Please prayerfully consider the following advice regarding earthly credentials.

First, we should recognize that greatness in the Kingdom of heaven is different from earthly greatness. Jesus said that the greatest were those who became like a little child (Matt. 18:1-4). David's mighty men gained status by their earthly accomplishments, but Christians advance by humility.

Secondly, the church must guard against giving preferential treatment to those with earthly credentials. We will be judged by the way we have treated the "least" of Christ's brethren (Matt. 25:31-46). We must not defer to the person with gold rings and goodly apparel (Ja. 2:1-4). Human credentials are not a mark of spiritual growth and development.

Finally, we must always give God the glory for those things which He has accomplished through us. Herod was a great orator, but he did not give glory to God. This is precisely why he died (Acts 11:21-23).

Paul said it beautifully: **"When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence**

or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power. (1 Cor 2:1-5 NIV)