

## **Introduction**

I'd like to begin with a simple observation. Many of you are well educated but don't know it. And the reason you don't know it is because you're being conned. Let's examine the text we read, Acts 4:13-22, focusing on verse 13, and you'll grasp what I mean.

## **Formal Education**

Shortly after the day of Pentecost, Peter and John healed a crippled man at the Jerusalem temple. A crowd of people soon gathered around them as a result to whom they began preaching about Jesus and His kingdom at hand. Temple priests then arrested and incarcerated them, and brought them before the Sanhedrin the next day.

The Sanhedrin was the Supreme Court of the Jews. It was comprised of 71 members who were priests, elders, or scribes. Many of the scribes were Pharisees. The priests and scribes were what we'd call professionals, trained for their positions. Being so separated them from the masses, like Peter and John, who were untrained.

Their counterparts today are formally trained professionals, ones who earned degrees from accredited colleges or universities. Ministers, for instance, have a Masters degree. Attorneys have a Juris Doctor degree. Physicians have a Doctor of Medicine degree, and so on.

The priests and scribes highly valued their training and we do the same today don't we? Higher education is a primary emphasis of our current culture and many of you as well. You want your children to get one and are doing your very best to see that they do.

## **The Con Job**

But there's a vital issue that verse 13, if we're attentive to it, raises. The confidence and clarity with which Peter and John spoke to the members of the Sanhedrin "**amazed**" them. It did so because they

were **“uneducated and untrained men”** to quote verse 13. That’s how those 71 members perceived Peter and John, uneducated and untrained. That perception of theirs raises the vital issue of which I spoke. What does it mean to be educated?

If someone asked you that question, how would you answer it? Several years ago, I had to fill out a form that asked, **“What is your education?”** I wrote down Bachelors Degree, Masters Degree, and Juris Doctor Degree. Let me ask you. Does having 10 years of higher education and three degrees make me educated?

Typical Americans would say, **“Yes, it does.”** They’d say that because of how they define what it means to be educated. It means to earn a degree from a college or university. Everyone who has a degree is educated. Everyone who doesn’t have one isn’t. I have three degrees. My brother has none. So, I’m educated, most conclude, and he isn’t.

But is that true? Is that what it means to be educated and uneducated? In his classic book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, acclaimed sociologist Erving Goffman contends that Americans are being conned. The con is that having degrees makes people educated and competent to serve. He asks a hard-headed question in that regard: **“Does it really take ten years to train a doctor, six years (seven actually) to train a lawyer or seven years to train a member of the clergy, or are these years in higher education part of the con job?”** They’re part of the con job, he concludes, and I agree.

That con job says two things. First, to be educated means to earn a degree from a college or university. And second, by implication, those who don’t aren’t educated. It’s a con job because both propositions are false.

### **What It Means to Be Educated**

What is the truth then? What does it mean to be educated?

Consider the celebrated Greek philosopher, Aristotle. Another Greek philosopher, Plato, founded the Academy in Athens, which was the first

institution of higher learning in the Western world. Aristotle was a student of his at the Academy and received the first higher education of his day.

Now let's compare Aristotle, the thinker, and Peter, the fisherman. Question: Who was more educated? Most people would consider the question laughable. Peter wasn't even in Aristotle's "**league**," they'd say. Aristotle was formally trained by one of the greatest thinkers in human history. He was a pupil and then a colleague of Plato at the Academy for 20 years. Peter, on the other hand, had no formal training at all. Aristotle was far more educated than Peter was.

That's what the vast majority of people would think. And they'd be wrong. The Sanhedrin made a defining observation about Peter and John, the implication of which they failed to grasp. According to verse 13, they "**began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.**" Let's determine what them being with Him meant and what its result was.

That they were with Jesus meant they associated with Him full time for three years. They listened to what He taught about reality and observed what He did. They then recorded what He taught and did in the gospels. But as John pointed out in 21:25 of his gospel, there were "**many other things**" He taught and did that they didn't record. Peter and John listened to and observed those many other things. That's what it meant that they had been with Jesus.

The result was the best of all educations. Remember what we've learned about Jesus. He was the smartest and most informed person who ever lived. He had something no other teacher including Plato ever had, a complete cognitive and practical mastery over all of reality. We can be sure, therefore, that during their three years with Jesus, Peter and John learned the best information about the most important matters in our world and life. They were, as a result, the best educated people who ever lived. They were far better educated than Aristotle and the members of the Sanhedrin were. Who were the best educated people who ever lived? They were Peter, John, and the other original disciples.

That fact answers our question. What does it mean to be educated? It doesn't mean to earn a degree from a college or university. Don't misunderstand me. I'm not denigrating the significance of that. We certainly want the ones who design our buildings, perform our surgeries, represent our cases in court, and so on to be formally trained. It enables them to do what they do, which adds great value to our lives. But it doesn't make them or anyone else educated. Many of you don't have any formal training beyond high school. Yet you're some of the best educated people I've ever met. Why? It's because you've learned the best information about the most important matters in our world and life. And that's what it means to be educated – to know the best information about the most important matters.

### **Identify the Most Important Matters**

Please grasp what that implies. Each and every one of us can be educated. We can be by doing two things.

First, identify the most important matters in our world and life. We do that by making right value judgments about realities and issues. We ask and thoughtfully answer this question, “**What realities and issues most significantly impact our world and life?**” Those that do are the most important matters.

How many of you are familiar with Dale Carnegie's classic book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*? He wrote it because he rightly identified influencing people for good as a most important matter.

Or how many of you are familiar with Richard Foster's book *The Challenge of the Disciplined Life*? He wrote it because he rightly identified money, sex, and power as most important matters.

Or how many of you are familiar with A.W. Tozer's book *The Knowledge of the Holy*. He wrote it because he rightly identified God as the most important matter.

Those are just samplings of the many realities and issues that dramatically impact our world and life. And if we want to be educated,

we must identify what they are. I've done that and made a list of them that includes the following: God, the kingdom of God, the good life, the good person, our fate after death, love, anger, money, sex, criticism, marriage, divorce, children, work, dress, sports, and technology to name a few. All of us need to do identify the most important matters in our world and life. We can't be educated until we do.

We identify them in two ways. One is by observing. Be attentive to the people, activities, and events in the world around us. I've noticed how adversely people react to criticism, for instance, and how deeply affecting their reaction is to others and them. I know, therefore, that it's a most important matter, which is why it's on my list. Another way to identify the most important matters is by studying the Bible. That's because it addresses the most important matters in our world and life. It addresses anger and dress, for instance, which is why they're on my list.

That then is the first thing we must do to be educated. Identify the most important matters in our world and life by observing and, primarily, by studying the Bible.

### **Learn the Best Information**

There's a second thing we must do. Learn the best information about those matters. We learn it by doing two things.

First, we go to what we call "**people in the know.**" I'm talking about masters or teachers who know the most about the matter before us. We read what they write and listen to what they speak and absorb as much as we can from them. I want to know about the good person and the good life, for instance. So I read Dallas Willard's books *The Divine Conspiracy* and *Knowing Christ Today*. Or I want to know about the culture of sports. So, I read Shirl Hoffman's book *Good Game*. Or I want to know about television and entertainment. So, I read Neil Postman's book *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. Go to people in the know.

We learn the best information doing a second thing. We go to Jesus and the Bible. We do because they give us the best possible information

about the most important matters. I'm so convinced that's true that I'd say this. If I have three Ph.D. degrees from Harvard – in physics, philosophy, and psychology – but don't have a working knowledge of what Jesus and the Bible say, I'm not truly educated.

Anyway, do those two things. Go to Jesus and the Bible first and people in the know second. You'll learn the best information about the most important matters if you do, which in turn makes you educated.

Consider the following information about marriage and family. Husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. Sex in marriage is both a reflex and a testimony of the Trinity. Hard-heartedness is the only valid reason for divorce. Parents have an authority over children that is like God's authority over man. Loyalty to the Jesus of their children should be the first concern of parents. And the hard path of discipline to wisdom is better than the soft path of permissiveness to death. That is the best possible information about marriage and family and it's the Bible that reveals it. A woman I know, who has a Masters Degree in family counseling, admitted that she never learned it. But you who've studied the Bible or listened to sermons I've preached did learn it. And that makes you educated. You don't have a Masters Degree in family counseling but you're educated nonetheless.

## **Conclusion**

A quick personal testimony sums it up well in closing. Contemplate two things. The first is what I learned informally the past fifteen years by going to Jesus, the Bible, and people in the know. The second is what I learned formally by going to ten years of college, seminary, and law school. Fact: If I had to choose, I wouldn't train the first for the second. During the past fifteen years, I've learned the best information about the most important matters in our world and life, and that's what makes me educated. It will you as well! Don't fall for the con job. Identify the most important matters in our world and life. Then learn the best information about those matters. You'll be educated if you do.