

A LEARNED MAN

John 7:15-18

Intro: How do you identify a learned man?

- By the degrees after his name?
- By the diplomas on his wall?
- Perhaps---but not necessarily.
- The man who invented---or significantly improved---the electric vote recorder---the stock ticker---duplex and quadruplex telegraphy---the mimeograph---the carbon transmitter in telephones---the phonograph---the incandescent lamp---the alkaline battery---the movie camera---radio tubes---and held patents on over a thousand other inventions---had only three months of formal education.
- Yet Thomas Edison was made a member of the National Academy of Sciences in 1927.
- Stephen A. Forbes---the father of the Illinois Natural History Survey---was a highly regarded professor of Zoology and Entomology.
- He was the dean of the College of Science and chairman of the faculty committee on education policy at the University of Illinois.
- Forbes had not received so much as an hour of formal education in any of the subjects he taught.
- But he was---without a doubt---a learned man.
- And---of course---there was Solomon.
- His wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the sons of the east--- and of Egypt.
- He wrote 3,000 proverbs---and over a thousand songs.
- He spoke of trees---animals---birds---creeping things---and fish. (I Kings 3:29-34)
- We know he was gifted by God with wisdom---discernment---and breadth of mind.
- But we know nothing of his education.
- So what makes a man learned?
- Sometimes it is formal education.
- Sometimes it's the personal pursuit of knowledge.
- Sometimes it's life's experiences.
- Sometimes it's a combination of all three.
- Sometimes it's none of the above.
- Such was the case with our Lord.
- Last week we left Him teaching in the temple---having arrived midway through the Feast of Tabernacles.
- The Jewish leaders had been expecting Him---but had lowered their guard when He didn't show up at the beginning of the feast.

- When He did appear---He was able to begin teaching unopposed.
- For a time.
- But before long---the religious leaders of the day began to challenge Him.
- And their first attack was on His right to teach.
- “The Jews therefore were marveling, saying, ‘How has this man become learned, having never been educated?’” (John 7:15)
- In spite of what it may at first seem---the Jewish authorities were not expressing admiration for Jesus here.
- They weren’t marveling at what He was saying.
- They were marveling at His audacity to publicly speak in the temple.
- He hadn’t attended the rabbinic schools.
- So---in their eyes---He hadn’t earned the right to teach.
- He wasn’t a learned man---in their opinion.
- Jesus’ answer to them---however---tells us some very important things about the nature of a truly learned man.
- And they have nothing to do with formal education.
- That’s not to say a formal education is not valuable.
- Every high school counselor will tell you just how valuable it is.
- In fact---next week we’ll be celebrating Jake and Kate’s graduation from high school---and learning of their further educational plans.
- They’ve both done very well in high school---and I’m confident they’ll excel in college.
- However---at the rate man’s knowledge is expanding today---even full-time straight-A students can’t stay on top of everything.
- According to the “knowledge doubling curve”---something often attributed to Buckminster Fuller---human knowledge doubled every 100 years until the 20th century---and then began doubling every 25 years.
- By 1982---however---it had started doubling every 12 months.
- And now it supposed to be doubling every 12 hours.
- It’s even been calculated that in our computer driven world---knowledge is expanding at the rate of six hundred millions words an hour.
- So is it possible to be a truly learned man---in such a time as this?
- Is it possible to speak or teach with authority---knowing that what we say is as true today as it was yesterday?
- Even in this postmodern---truth denying---world?
- Absolutely!

- It is---if our learning is similar to our Lord's.
- And if the things we teach are the same things He taught.
- Let's see what made Him a learned man.
- And let's see how we can become learned men and women as well.

I. The first thing we'll note is that a learned man knows God's word.
KNOWS GOD'S WORD
John 7:16

- "Jesus therefore answered them, and said, 'My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me.'"
- When Jesus spoke---the people were amazed because he taught as one having authority---and not like the scribes. (Mark 1:22)
- The scribes and rabbis never made a statement on their own authority.
- They would always preface their teaching with---"There is a teaching that..."
- And then they would cite quotations from other rabbis and authorities for everything they said.
- Jesus wasn't like that.
- He spoke with authority.
- He didn't do so---however---because He felt Himself to be the final authority on all things.
- He did so because He had been sent by the Final Authority.
- "My teaching"---He said---"Is not Mine."
- It didn't originate with Him.
- It was the teaching of the One who sent Him.
- And who was it that sent Him?
- It was His Father.
- God sent Him---with a message.
- And it was that message that Jesus shared.
- He spoke only what the Father told Him to say.
- And He made that very clear in John 12:49-50.
- "For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me commandment, what to say, and what to speak.
- 'And I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me.'"
- Jesus could speak with authority because He was speaking God's word.
- And so can we.

- We don't have to know what everyone else has said about something---before we can speak with authority on it.
- Not if we know what God has said about it.
- We don't have to know everyone's thoughts---or the latest claims coming out of colleges and scientific institutions---if we know the truth about it.
- Now that's not to say it's wrong to try to keep up with what "the science" is telling us.
- Nor that it's ill advised to be familiar with what's being taught.
- In fact---I think it's important to stay somewhat abreast of current thoughts and theories.
- Especially in the sciences that touch on human biology.
- But our knowledge of the origin of mankind is not dependent upon knowing the latest discoveries and interpretations.
- We can authoritatively state that God created man in His own image---because God said it.
- And what God says trumps anything anyone else might say.
- Now---we do have to be careful to say only what God has actually said.
- Not what others have said He said.
- And we must be very careful not to teach as authoritative our interpretations of what He has said.
- As if they are what He actually said.
- We don't want to find ourselves in the position of the medieval church---which branded Galileo as a heretic---because his findings contradicted the teachings of Aristotle.
- Teachings that the church had wrongly equated with biblical truth.
- But if we actually know what God has said---we can speak it with authority.
- And there is no need to be intimidated into silence by a lack of formal education.
- For as Paul noted in I Corinthians 1:25---"The foolishness of God is wiser than men."
- If what God says about something differs from what a room full of PhDs has to say about it---I know who I'm going to believe.

II. A learned man knows God's word---and he obeys it.
OBEYS GOD'S WILL
John 7:17

- "“If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself.”"
- Jesus said if the Jews had been doing God's will---they would have recognized the source of His teaching.
- And that's because spiritual understanding is produced by obedience to known truth.

- If they had obeyed what they had known to be true---they wouldn't have reacted against what Jesus was saying.
- They would have been doing it---and they would have recognized it as being from God.
- By the same token---if we want to be truly learned in the things of God---we must commit ourselves to obeying what we do know---before we can really learn anything else.
- A truly learned man isn't one whose head is full of facts.
- But one who puts into practice what he knows---and who benefits from his learning.
- The amazing thing about doing God's will is that the more we do it---the more we are able to discover what else He wants us to know---and to do.
- If we had to wait until we understood everything about God and His will before we did anything about it---we'd never be able to do anything.
- So we act upon what we know.
- And the more we do what we know He wants us to do---the clearer His will becomes in other matters.
- For as the writer of Hebrews noted---those who are mature are those who---because of practice---have their senses trained to discern good and evil. (Hebrews 5:14)
- If the Jews had trained their senses by doing what they knew God wanted them to do---they would have had the discernment necessary to ascertain the source of Jesus' teaching.
- Let's learn from their mistake.
- The last mark of a truly learned man is that he seeks to glorify God---not himself.

III. SEEKS GOD'S GLORY John 7:18

- "“He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who is seeking the glory of the one who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.””
- Jesus was truly a learned man---committed to sharing and practicing what God sent Him to teach.
- He didn't glory in His wisdom---or seek the admiration of others for His profound teaching.
- He wasn't out to make a name for Himself.
- He simply wanted others to know what God had taught Him---so they could benefit from understanding God's will for their lives.
- And He didn't want the credit for the good that came from His teaching.
- He wanted God to get the credit for it---because it was God's teaching in the first place.
- He was simply the one sent to deliver it.

- A truly learned man recognizes that he knows nothing apart from God.
- God is the one who gave him the ability to learn in the first place.
- And what he has learned---has been made possible only by the continuing grace of God.
- Acknowledging that keeps him from falling into the trap that so many “educated” people fall into today.
- The same trap they fell into in Paul’s day.
- “For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.
- Professing to be wise, they became fools.” (Romans 1:21-22)
- A truly learned man avoids that danger.
- Because no matter how many diplomas he may---or may not have---he’s a man who---like Jesus...
- Knows God’s Word.
- Obeys God’s will.
- And seeks God’s glory.
- If you want to be a learned man---the way to start is to simply turn your eyes upon Jesus.
- It’s through Him that our eyes are opened to the truth.
- It’s through Him that our eyes are opened to the will of God.
- And it’s through Him---and the Spirit He has sent---that we are empowered to live a life that brings glory to our heavenly Father.
- That’s where we must begin---if we desire to be truly learned men and women.