

Don't Be a Spiritual Illiterate

“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).

To be illiterate is to be unable to read or write. Anyone able to read this lesson is not illiterate. It is possible, however, that one can be spiritually or biblically illiterate.

Jim Russell, in his book, *Awakening the Giant*, wrote, “Biblical illiteracy spawns serious weaknesses in Christian character. Hosea 4:6 states, ‘My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.’ Lack of knowledge leaves Christians today without any sense of biblical vision, mission, or strategy. They remain ignorant of the central purpose of discipling that brings Christ-centered meaning and power into their lives.”

Peter and John, common men, standing before religious professionals, spoke with boldness. These men were unlearned (did not have the benefit of an education). They had not attended Jewish schools. Their spiritual knowledge came from heaven and sitting at Jesus’ feet. The religious leaders viewed them as uneducated, illiterate laymen. However, they took knowledge that Peter and John had been with Jesus. Peter and John had attended “The School of Jesus.” The religious elite marveled at Jesus’ followers, and seeing the healed man standing, they could not argue.

“For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty”
(1 Corinthians 1:26-27).

Several times in the New Testament, we read, “I would not have you ignorant.” In this lesson we will look at several of these situations. In each case the subject under discussion is of such importance that it calls for careful study and attention to reduce misunderstandings and spiritual illiteracy.

“Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea” (1 Corinthians 10:1).

Paul closed 1 Corinthians 9 talking about the Christian race. The prize received is eternal salvation. Paul confessed that he did not want to run the race only to become a “castaway”—someone who fails, is rejected, and does not obtain the prize.

In chapter 10 he explained what takes place when a Christian stops living a holy life, walking in truth, and does not endure to the end. He did not want us to be ignorant of the fact that one can be redeemed, yet later rejected because of sin. Paul put forth as an example the children of God overthrown in the wilderness. They were delivered and enjoyed the blessings of God. But, because of their disobedience, they were later rejected, destroyed, and did not reach the Promised Land. God does not tolerate sin.

Paul provided this passage:

-  As an example and a warning not to be involved in sin (1 Corinthians 10:6).
-  As an admonition that God's judgment in the past is written to warn us against sinning and frustrating the grace of God (1 Corinthians 10:11).
-  So the Christian would "take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12).
-  To prove that "God is faithful" (1 Corinthians 10:13). True believers should never fall into sin and submit to temptation. God does not allow us to be tempted above what we can handle. With each temptation, He provides a way of escape.

Having started the race, we must continue running to receive the prize.

"Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant" (1 Corinthians 12:1).

Paul spent three chapters providing information on the gifts of the Spirit. These gifts come from God and are used for His glory. Each person can serve the church in a spiritual area.

The gifts reveal God at work through human vessels. Various gifts allow us to:

-  Speak like God speaks.
-  Think like God thinks.
-  Act like God acts.

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

This chapter begins by exhorting believers to walk pleasing to God. Believers are expected to obey God's will by maintaining high standards of holiness. A believer should abstain from fornication, keep his vessel in sanctification, and remain unblameable in holiness (1 Thessalonians 4:3, 3:13).

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Paul wanted Christians to be fully informed on an important subject—the believer's hope. Jesus is coming soon! This is referred to as the "Rapture." It comes from a word meaning, "caught away" or "caught up."

-  Christ will descend from heaven for His church.

- 📖 The dead in Christ will rise first.
- 📖 Both the resurrected believers and the transformed believers will be caught up together to meet Christ in the air.
- 📖 Living believers will be transformed, their bodies taking on immortality. This will happen in a twinkling of an eye.
- 📖 They will be united with Christ.
- 📖 The believer's hope is that Jesus will return soon so that he can "ever be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

"But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:8-9).

Unbelievers continue to mockingly ask, "Where is the promise of his coming?" (2 Peter 3:4). Christians continue to look forward to the coming of the Lord and the promise of a new heaven and earth.

God counts a thousand years as almost nothing. He does not measure time by human standards. God views time from eternity's perspective.

"He can accomplish in one day what we might expect would take a thousand years, or He can take a thousand years to accomplish what we would like to see done in a day." (*Full Life Study Bible*, page 1997.)

The Lord delays His coming because He is longsuffering and does not want anyone to perish. The gospel should be preached to everyone. God is patiently giving sinful mankind the opportunity to repent.

Peter demanded that all Christians live holy and godly lives, looking forward to the coming of the Lord.

Christians hasten the coming of the Lord by committing themselves to evangelizing the entire world and by desiring and praying for His return.

Gene Edwards in *The Silas Diary* supposed that many of the early believers were "illiterate, but that does not mean they are ignorant." He suggests that the apostles taught through offering practical advice, answering questions, and telling stories. The student(s) would repeat the stories back to the teacher. Mistakes were corrected until the student(s) could repeat the story almost word for word.

“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.” (Hosea 4:6)

People in Hosea’s day were destroyed by their lack of knowledge. Not because knowledge was not available but because they rejected God’s Word. People today continue to be destroyed because of their sinful ways, love for the world, and rejection of truth.

“Those that rebel against the light can expect no other than to perish in the dark.”
(Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible)

“Both priests and people rejected knowledge; and justly therefore will God reject them. The reason why the people did not learn, and the priests did not teach, was not because they had not the light, but because they hated it—not because they had not ways of coming to the knowledge of God and of communicating it, but because they had no heart to it; they rejected it. They desired not the knowledge of God’s ways, but put it from them, and shut their eyes against the light.” (From *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: New Modern Edition, Electronic Database.*)

“Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Corinthians 2:11).

Satan is always trying to gain advantage over us and lead us away from God. Christians should not be ignorant of Satan’s devices. Before Paul wrote 2 Corinthians 2: 11, he was talking about “forgiveness.” One way we allow Satan to get an advantage over us is by refusing to forgive.

Spiritual illiteracy can be costly. It is a matter of eternal life or death.

Study Questions

1. What affect does a lack of biblical knowledge have on Christians today? _____

2. Where did Peter and John receive their spiritual knowledge? _____

3. How did the religious professionals view Peter and John? _____

4. Why did Paul say, “I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea”? _____

5. What do the various gifts of the Spirit allow us to do? _____

6. What is expected of believers according to 1 Thessalonians 3:13? _____

7. What subject did Paul address in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18? _____

8. What is the believer’s hope? _____

9. When Jesus returns and catches away the church, how long will they be with the Lord?

10. What answer would you give those who ask, “Where is the promise of His coming?” (2 Peter 3:4)? _____

11. How did the apostles teach the early Christians who were illiterate? _____

12. According to Hosea 4:6, why were the people rejected? _____

