

John 7:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?

Analysis

And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned? 'The Jews' here are authorities or educated elites who recognized learning. They 'marvelled' (ethaumazon) at Jesus's teaching—astonishment, not necessarily positive. Their question 'how knoweth this man letters' (pōs houtos grammata oiden) asks how Jesus knows Scripture and theology. 'Letters' (grammata) means literacy, education, especially in Scripture and tradition. The phrase 'never learned' (mē memathēkōs) uses perfect participle indicating He never studied under recognized rabbis. First-century Jewish teachers required credentials—study under acknowledged masters, rabbinic ordination. Jesus had none, yet taught with greater authority. This recalls Matthew 7:28-29: 'the people were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.' Reformed theology emphasizes that true authority comes from God, not human institutions. Christ's teaching authority derived from His divine nature and Spirit anointing.

Historical Context

Formal rabbinic training involved years studying under recognized teachers. Paul, for example, studied under Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), an honored rabbi. Pedigree mattered—teachers cited their masters in debates, establishing credibility through lineage. Jesus had no such credentials—a Galilean carpenter's son who never attended Jerusalem's rabbinic schools. His teaching authority came directly from God, not human tradition. This threatened establishment authority structures. The

question 'never learned' echoes Acts 4:13 where the Sanhedrin marveled at Peter and John's boldness, 'perceiving them to be unlearned and ignorant men.' God consistently uses 'unqualified' people to shame the wise (1 Corinthians 1:27). The Reformation challenged Catholic teaching authority by asserting Scripture's supremacy over tradition and hierarchy. God's Word, not institutional credentials, provides ultimate authority.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does Jesus's authority apart from credentials challenge our emphasis on degrees and pedigrees?
2. What is the relationship between formal theological education and spiritual authority?
3. How do we discern true teaching authority from mere credentialism or charisma?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	ἐθαύμαζον	οἱ	Ἰουδαῖοι	λέγοντες	Πῶς	οὗτος
And	marvelled	G3588	the Jews	saying	How	this man
G2532	G2296		G2453	G3004	G4459	G3778
γράμματα	οἶδεν	μὴ	μεμαθηκώς			
letters	knoweth	never	having			
G1121	G1492	G3361	G3129			

Additional Cross-References

Luke 4:22 (Parallel theme): And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?

Matthew 13:54 (Parallel theme): And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works?

Acts 26:24 (Parallel theme): And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.

Matthew 22:22 (Parallel theme): When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way.

John 7:46 (Parallel theme): The officers answered, Never man spake like this man.

Luke 2:47 (Parallel theme): And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.