

In Light of Logic

Degrees and Titles

Ephesians 4:14 (NIV)

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness (*panourgia*) of men in their deceitful scheming.

This verse reveals something about the systematic way that Satan blinds the minds of the unwary. In the *NIV*, the word “craftiness” is the Greek word *panourgia*, made up of the words *pan*, meaning “everything,” and *ergon*, meaning “work.” In other words, Satan is willing to do anything to deceive. God, on the other hand, competes within the rules that He has established. He does not seek to persuade or control by coercion or deception, but by appealing primarily to reason and rationality.

One of the ways that the Adversary controls the world and perpetuates deception is through the fallacy of degrees and titles. Many so-called “experts in their field” promote all manner of falsehoods and are believed without question because they have an impressive list of degrees and titles behind their name. Evolutionism, one of the most sophisticated lies of our time, is promoted by misguided “experts.” And these people are credentialed to the max.

On the one hand, men are overly impressed with a man's credentials, giving credence to his words not on their own merits but on the basis of his title or degree. Logically, however, there is no guarantee that the degree or title is a real indicator of expertise. As Peter Berger wisely observed: “The capacity of people to accept evident nonsense increases, rather than decreases, with advanced education.”

One could acquire his degree without demonstrating any real evidence of a superior knowledge of reality. His degree simply means that he has passed muster with his academic mentors, who may be very deceived. Many so-called “experts” have proven to be fools in time, regardless of the number of their degrees and titles. Logically, one needs to be persuaded by the fruit that an individual produces by their research or expertise, and not solely by their reputation or educational background.

On the other hand, this fallacy is committed by those who attempt to disprove a man's assertions or research strictly on the basis of the man's lack of credentials or having the “right” degree or title. This fallacy was employed by the enemies of our Lord in a vain attempt to discredit him.

John 7:14 and 15 (NIV)

Not until halfway through the Feast did Jesus go to the temple courts and begin to teach. The Jews were amazed and asked, “How did this man get such learning without having studied?”

The Jewish leaders recognized that Jesus Christ had not gone to the right schools or been brought up in all the traditional methods of learning the law of Moses. He acquired his knowledge of the Word of God by his own study and under the direct tutelage of God. This fact is evident from the record in Luke 2, which describes Jesus as a twelve-year-old boy sitting with the doctors of the law.

Luke 2:46 and 47 (KJV)

And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.

Even at twelve years old Jesus already had more knowledge and understanding of Scripture than the men who had all the theological credentials and degrees from the great learning centers of his day. Yet at twelve he obviously had not been exposed to much "formal education." But did that invalidate his message? It did not to those who were willing to be rational, listening to what he said rather than disregard him because he did not have the right credentials or because he was so young.

The apostles ran into the same problem in Acts 4, when in the wake of the healing of the lame man they were brought before the high priest, the elders, rulers and scribes.

Acts 4:13 and 14 (KJV)

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.

"Unlearned" is the Greek word *agrammatos*, meaning unlettered or illiterate. Peter and John were obviously not illiterate, because Peter's sermon in Acts 2 indicates that he was well versed in the scriptures, which he quoted freely. It is possible that he was not perhaps the most perfect grammarian or speller, or that he had not read Aristotle or Thucydides. This was more the concern of the high priest and his coterie. They did not recognize Peter's degree from "Jesus Christ University" at which he studied. The word "ignorant" is *idiotes*, meaning "uninstructed." The root word *idios* simply means "one's own." Peter and John had not been through the proper educational channels of their day. They were self-educated, or had learned on their own, as the word *idiotes* indicates.

Yet for all that, they could find nothing to say against the apostles because the healed man was standing with them. Once again it is the fruit of what is spoken, taught or researched that is the ultimate test of its truth or falsehood, not the external standards which men may impose, such as degrees or titles. Despite all their education, for these men to reject the apostles on the basis of their lack of formal education or training in the scriptures when the proof of their veracity was standing beside them, gives dramatic evidence of their blindness to logic and rational thought.

Having said all this, however, it is important to note that it is not *altogether* illogical or irrational to place some amount of importance to degrees and titles, because they do indicate that a person has undergone some systematic course of study to become qualified in some way. We would not want to employ an unlicensed doctor, dentist, lawyer or other professional who had not received a degree from a reputable institution. However, we would not be acting rationally if we assumed that because he has such credentials, he is to be absolutely believed just because he has such a title or a degree. The degree or title simply gives him the opportunity to establish a basis for us to trust him initially, or to give him “the benefit of the doubt.” Continued trust must be earned by his performance and demonstration of *real* expertise.

Because the world’s system is structured around the tendency of people to distrust their own judgment and rely on the opinions of “experts,” many of us will find that we need to have the “right” degree or title before we are granted much credibility. Though we may decry this fact as fundamentally illogical, we must agree that it is the way it is. Expending the effort, then, on earning degrees and titles may be a pragmatic concession to reality. Going beyond this to expect others to respect and believe us because we have a title or a degree would reflect “the pride of life,” and not true Christian humility. And to be overly awed at someone because of his or her degrees and titles would be equally illogical, and fundamentally unchristian as well.