

John 7:14-24

Introduction

We saw last week that it's the time of the fall Feast of Booths and that Jesus has now gone up from Galilee to Jerusalem in Judea for the last time. Six months from now, at the Feast of Passover, Jesus will go up to Jerusalem publicly and show Himself to the world. But for this Feast of Booths, Jesus goes up not publicly but, as it were, in secret – because His time has not yet come. Having *gone up* to Jerusalem in secret, we read in verses 14-15:

I. John 7:14–15 — But when it was now the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and began to teach. The Jews then were astonished, saying, “How has this man become learned, having never been educated?”

We've heard of “the Jews” twice in the introduction to this chapter:

- John 7:1 — ...the Jews were seeking to kill Him.
- John 7:13 — No one was speaking openly of Him for fear of the Jews.

So when we read here that “the Jews” were astonished, that's not a sign of something good. The astonishment of a humble and believing heart leads to praise and strengthens faith. The astonishment of a calloused and unbelieving heart only causes offense and hardens the heart further in unbelief (cf. Lk. 11:38; 12:26; Jn. 3:7; 4:27; 7:21; Acts 2:7; 4:13; 13:41). Jesus' knowledge of the Scriptures and His ability to discourse about those Scriptures couldn't be doubted. But in the Jews' opinion it was precisely Jesus' “learning” that made His teaching so dangerous: “*How has this [man/person] become learned, having never been educated?*”

The Jews are seeking to discredit Jesus and His teaching not by dealing with the substance of the teaching itself, but rather by assuming from the outset (*a priori*) that it can't possibly be legitimate. If Jesus is uneducated (having never studied under any rabbi), then all His great “learning” *must* be the result of being *self-taught*. As astonishing as that may be, if Jesus is self-taught then His teaching *must* be novel – it must originate with Himself and be unrelated to all the body of teaching and tradition that has come before. But if the teaching of Jesus is a novel teaching that originates with Himself, then Jesus Himself *must* be a self-promoting counterfeit. We can almost hear the Jews congratulating themselves. By this “irrefutable logic,” they've succeeded in discrediting Jesus and His teaching without ever needing to ask what His teaching might be.

So how will Jesus respond? Because the fact is, there *is* an important element of truth in their “argument.” Jesus *is* “uneducated,” and truly “novel” teachings *are* dangerous. At this point, a deceiver might become flustered, or defensive, or scornful, or all of the above. But none of these things does Jesus become. A deceiver might try to deny any legitimacy to any of the premises of the Jew's argument. He might try to say that “novel” isn't necessarily bad and then resort to promoting Himself and His novel teachings. But Jesus doesn't do this. We read in verse sixteen:

II. John 7:16 — So Jesus answered them and said, “My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me.”

The very calmness and simplicity and authority of Jesus statement in the face of the Jews’ accusation testifies to its truthfulness. In light of how apparently “airtight” the Jews’ logic is, Jesus words come like a thunderbolt out of a clear blue sky. “Jesus answered them and said, ‘My teaching is **not Mine**, but His who sent Me.’”

In Jesus’ case, the fact that He’s “uneducated” (unschooled by the Rabbi’s) does not *mean* that He’s “*self-taught*.” In fact, the very opposite is true. “My teaching,” says Jesus, “does not *originate* with Me (it is not Mine); instead, it *belongs* to Him who sent Me (it is *His* teaching).”

But why should the Jews believe this? Why should they take Jesus at His Word? The answer is very simple. *If* Jesus’ teaching is not His own, but belongs to the one who sent Him, then Jesus’ teaching will not at all be “novel.” *If* Jesus’ teaching is not His own, but belongs to the one who sent Him, then it will in some way be wholly related to and in full agreement with (even if it’s not identical with or a mere repetition of) the whole body of the genuine “teaching” and “tradition” that has come before. That’s why Jesus goes on to say in verse seventeen:

III. John 7:17 — “If anyone is willing to do His will [the will of God who sent Me], he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself.”

On the one hand, Jesus is assuming that the will of God had been *objectively* revealed in the Law of Moses and in the Prophets. This is an assumption with which all of the Jews agreed.

On the other hand, Jesus also assumes that if one would truly “know” the will of God it’s not enough to merely possess the objective revelation of His will in the Scriptures. One must have not only an intellectual knowledge of God’s will, but also the experiential knowledge of God’s will that comes from truly *desiring* and *choosing* to **do** His will. The Psalmist writes:

➤ Psalm 40:8 — I delight to do Your **will**, O my God; Your **Law** is within my heart.

It’s the “delighting” and the “doing” in this verse that’s the key to truly knowing. The Apostle Paul writes:

➤ Romans 2:17–23 — If you bear the name “Jew” and rely upon the **Law** and boast in God, and know His **will** and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the **Law**... **having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth**, you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? ... You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God?

Knowing the will of God is a spiritual exercise of faith by which we come to know and understand the will of God—as it’s revealed objectively and clearly in the Scriptures—in a living and experiential way. So the Apostle Paul writes in other places:

- Romans 12:2 — Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, *so that* you may prove [experientially discern and demonstrate] what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.
- Ephesians 5:8–10, 15–17 — You were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), proving [experientially discerning and demonstrating] what is pleasing to the Lord... Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.
- Colossians 1:9 — For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will **in all spiritual wisdom and understanding**.

Jesus' teaching is not at all a novel teaching that originates with Himself. It's a teaching that belongs to God who sent Him and therefore a teaching that's fully in accord with the whole body of genuine teaching and "tradition" that's come before. And yet to truly see and recognize this perfect continuity, one must know—in the fullest sense of that word—what the will of God is. "If anyone is *willing* [subjectively desiring and choosing] to **do** His will [objectively revealed in the Scriptures]," Jesus says, "*he will know* of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself." Is this the kind of "knowing" that we have? Have we come to *know* that the teaching of Jesus is of God because by grace and by faith we're daily desiring and choosing to *do* God's will?

Remember the assumed logic of the Jews. **If** Jesus is uneducated (having never studied under any rabbi), **then** all His great "learning" *must* be the result of being self-taught. But nothing, Jesus says, could be further from the truth: "My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me." The Jews' logic continues: **If** Jesus is self-taught **then** His teaching *must* be novel. But nothing, Jesus says, could be further from the truth: "If anyone is willing to do His will [as it has been objectively revealed in the Scriptures], he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself." Finally, the Jews' logic concludes: "**If** the teaching of Jesus is a novel teaching that originates with Himself, **then** Jesus Himself *must* be a self-promoting counterfeit." With this Jesus agrees, and yet since the first "if *a* then *b*" is faulty and since none of the rest of the premises apply to Jesus then neither can this conclusion. To the contrary! Jesus can now take what is legitimate about this last argument and show that it only proves the opposite of what the Jews have concluded.

IV. John 7:18 — "He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory [that is correct]; but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him, He is true [He is not a counterfeit], and there is no unrighteousness [no lie or deceit] in Him."

The Jews want to say that the teaching of Jesus *must be novel* without ever truly dealing with the substance of His teaching. The Jews want to say that Jesus *must be a self-promoting fraud* without ever truly dealing with the substance of all His words and deeds. But the whole life and ministry of Jesus, with all of His *words* and all of His *deeds*, is irrefutable evidence that He sought *not* His own glory, but rather always and only the glory of the one who sent Him.

Jesus Himself has just said, “My teaching is *not Mine*, but *His* who sent Me.” *Therefore*, given the fact that the teaching of Jesus is wholly in accord with the prior revelation of God’s will in the Law and the Prophets, Jesus Himself must be “*true*,” having no unrighteousness [no lie or deceit] in Him.

Do you see how perfectly “true” and therefore how perfectly trustworthy our Savior is! Do you see the beauty of the example He sets for us – that we should be totally unmindful of our own reputation or glory, and conscious only of the praise and honor and glory that belongs to God—and therefore seeking after His glory by always desiring and choosing to do His will?

But now Jesus anticipates the obvious objection that might be made. Remember what Jesus said: “If anyone is willing to do His will [as it has been objectively revealed in the Law and the Prophets], he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself.” Jesus assumes that though the Jews know intellectually what the will of God is, they are not desiring and choosing to do God’s will, and this is why they aren’t able to see or acknowledge that His teaching is from God. But what proof of this does Jesus have? Jesus goes on to ask in verse nineteen:

V. John 7:19 — “Has not Moses given you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why do you seek to kill me?”

Was it lawful for the Jews to be seeking to kill Jesus? Had Jesus ever truly done or said anything worthy of death? Later on in this chapter Nicodemus, himself a Pharisee, will ask his colleagues:

➤ John 7:51 — Our Law does not judge a man unless it first hears from him and knows what he is doing, does it?

That the Jews are not willing to do the will of God is blatantly self-evident from the fact that the will of God is revealed in the Law of Moses, the Law of Moses forbids that anyone should be put to death without sufficient credible testimony, and yet the Jews, without ever truly “listening” to Jesus are already seeking to kill Him. How can the Jews know whether the teaching of Jesus is of God if they’re not themselves willing (desiring and choosing) to do the will of God?

“*Why*,” Jesus asks the Jews, “do you seek to kill Me?” What does this reveal about your hearts? And what does this reveal, in turn—even to us—about the one they’re seeking to kill? What did Jesus say in chapter three?

➤ John 3:20 — “Everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.”

And what did He just say to His brothers?

➤ John 7:7 — “The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it, that its deeds are evil.”

To this point Jesus has been responding to “the Jews” (the religious establishment and their followers) while also being conscious of “the crowds” of Jewish pilgrims at the feast who were listening in. But now we read in verse twenty:

VI. John 7:20 — The *crowd* answered, “You have a demon! Who is seeking to kill you?”

Obviously, this “crowd” is more interested in “proving” that Jesus has a demon (that He’s insane and out of His mind) than in really having their question answered. But why are they so antagonistic? It’s because they’ve heard in Jesus’ words to the Jews an implicit rebuke to themselves as well. Jesus said: “*If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself.*” But what if they aren’t convinced that the teaching of Jesus is of God? Is Jesus really saying then that none of them are keeping the law? If they don’t acknowledge that Jesus’ teachings are “of God,” are they then, by default, law-breakers? But in any case, they’re certainly not the ones seeking to kill Jesus.

Jesus knows what they’re thinking. That’s why He doesn’t try to “defend” Himself by proving that “the Jews” really are trying to kill Him. Instead, He shows how even if they’re not the ones seeking to kill Him, they, too, are not willing to do God’s will; *therefore* they, too, are wholly unqualified to know whether His teaching is of God.

VII. John 7:21 — Jesus answered them, “I did one work, and all of you are astonished.”

We’ll see in a moment that the “one work” Jesus refers to is the work He did on a Sabbath—on His last visit to Jerusalem—when He healed the lame man at the pool of Bethesda (cf. Jn. 5:1-16). Apparently, many of the people who were present in Jerusalem then are the very ones who are here again in Jerusalem and saying now that Jesus has a demon.

Back when Jesus did that “one work,” they were all “astonished” – not just at the work itself, but at the fact that Jesus had done this work on the Sabbath. Didn’t the Law of Moses prohibit all unnecessary work on the Sabbath as the very definition of keeping the Sabbath holy? Their astonishment wasn’t the kind that caused them to believe in Jesus, but the kind that caused them to take offense at Him. But now Jesus will reveal the depths of their hypocrisy and their failure to truly know and understand what the will of God is. “I did one work, and all of you are astonished...”

VIII. John 7:22 — “*For this reason* Moses gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath.”

“For this *reason*,” Jesus says, “Moses gave you circumcision (only the NASB really gets this right). For *what* reason did Moses give them circumcision? Jesus is referring back to His healing of the lame man, but now looking at that healing in its broader significance as an expression of God’s saving and redeeming purposes. For this reason—for the sake of God’s saving and redeeming purposes for man (as expressed in the healing of the lame man)—Moses gave you circumcision.

Circumcision wasn't just an empty ceremonial rite, it was a covenantal sign. It was a sign of God's redeeming purposes for His people and of their special identity as His chosen people. It's as if to emphasize this point that Jesus says that circumcision is not really from Moses, but from the fathers – it's even from the days of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob when God first called them out for Himself and promised to bless them and through them to bring the blessings of His salvation to all the families of the earth. Circumcision was a covenant sign pointing to the people's need for and God's promise of redemption.

“For this reason Moses gave you circumcision... *and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath.*” Jesus is implying, here, that circumcising on the Sabbath (when the eighth day of a baby's life falls on the Sabbath; cf. Gen. 17:12; 21:4; Lev. 12:3) is perfectly appropriate and even *right and good because* of what circumcision is and *because* of what the Sabbath is. The Sabbath pointed the people back to their deliverance from bondage in Egypt and reminded them of God's redemptive purpose that they should one day share in His eternal rest. If Jesus is saying, “*for this reason* Moses gave you circumcision,” He's also saying, “*for this reason* Moses gave you the Sabbath” – as a covenant sign of God's merciful, gracious, saving purposes for His people. So what could be a more legitimate and appropriate “*work*” to do on the Sabbath than to administer the rite of circumcision?

Only that's not how the Jews looked at things. They looked at the two laws and concluded that when they came into “*conflict*,” the circumcision law “*superseded*” the Sabbath law. They **admitted** the “*necessity*” of performing the work of circumcision on the Sabbath (in order to resolve the formal “*conflict*”) but failed to see the appropriateness and the *beauty* of performing the work of circumcision *on the Sabbath*. They also reasoned from the legitimacy of circumcising on the Sabbath to the legitimacy of *necessary* works of mercy *on the Sabbath*. And yet once again, while they **admitted** the “*necessity*” of performing works of mercy on the Sabbath in cases where a person's life was at stake (in order to resolve the formal conflict), they failed to see the appropriateness and the *beauty* of performing these works of mercy *especially on the Sabbath*. “*Obviously*,” the crowds would have reasoned, “it won't hurt a man who's been lame for thirty-eight years (Jn. 5:5) to wait just one more day for healing *in order to keep the Sabbath holy*” (cf. Lk. 13:14).

But do you see, now, how Jesus has exposed their hypocrisy and their total and complete failure to truly understand what the will of God is? *For this reason*—for the sake of God's saving and redeeming purposes for man (as expressed in the healing of the lame man)—Moses gave you circumcision, and it *ought to be* (Jesus implies) *for this reason also* that you circumcise a man on the Sabbath” (showing forth *especially on the Sabbath* the saving and redeeming purposes of God). And yet you circumcise on the Sabbath only as if that were a “*necessary evil*” – only because it's necessary to resolving a formal “*conflict*” between two laws. If we can't already see all of this in what Jesus has said to this point, He makes it explicit in verse twenty-three:

IX. John 7:23 — “If on the Sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because on the Sabbath I made an entire man well?”

Circumcision itself pointed forward to the greater redemption that was even now being announced in Jesus' works of healing (specifically, in His healing of the lame man). If, then, they

themselves circumcised on the Sabbath, *why* are they angry with Jesus for making a man's whole body well on the Sabbath? Will they dare to answer that they circumcise on the Sabbath *only* because it's a *necessary* thing and not also because it's a *beautiful* thing? Will they dare to answer that they perform works of mercy on the Sabbath *only* because it's a *necessary* thing and not also because it's a beautiful thing? Will they dare to answer that even "works" which announce the redemptive *fulfillment* of circumcision should only be performed on the Sabbath "*if absolutely necessary*"?

And so Jesus concludes, as we might imagine, with righteous indignation and also with earnest concern for their souls:

X. John 7:24 — "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."

Because they judged what the will of God was according to appearance (according to carnal and fleshly standards), it was impossible for them to truly know and understand the will of God – no matter how much they might read and study the Scriptures. And as long as they don't truly know and understand the will of God, they'll never be able to "see" that the teaching of Jesus is of God – that it is by no means novel, but rather the fulfillment of the very Scriptures they claim to love.

Conclusion

Do you see yet again the infinite wisdom of Jesus and how perfectly "*true*" He is? Have you entrusted yourself wholly to Him, desiring and choosing to do the will of the One who sent Him? Those who are truly willing to do God's will, will always recognize in Jesus the one who speaks to us the very words of God.

But do you also see in the face of Jesus' perfections how lacking in true wisdom we can be? How often do we judge what the will of God is according to appearance (according to carnal and fleshly standards), rather than with righteous judgment (as those truly *desiring* and *choosing* to *do* His will by faith)? To us also, then, Jesus says: "Do not judge [what the will of God is] according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."