

The Gospel of John (47) **Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles (2)**

Introduction:

Today we will give our attention to John 7:14 through 24. John 7 records our Lord's appearance at the annual Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. This event transpired approximately six months before His crucifixion, which would occur at the next Passover in the spring of the following year. Last week we considered our Lord and His interaction with His unbelieving brothers in the north in Galilee, from which they traveled to Jerusalem in Judea to the feast, having left Jesus behind (7:1-13). Today we will read of our Lord's travel to Jerusalem where He once again encountered the reaction and rejection of the ruling Jews, showing their unreasonable and sinful hostility and animus toward Him. In the dialogue of Jesus with these Jews we may learn of Him more fully and we may glean some lessons for our own walk and fellowship with our Lord and Savior.

Because all male Jews were required by Jewish law to travel to Jerusalem to keep the feast, all in Jerusalem, including the hostile Jewish leaders, looked for Jesus. We read in John 7:11-13:

“Then the Jews sought Him at the feast, and said, ‘Where is He?’ ¹²And there was much complaining among the people concerning Him. Some said, ‘He is good’; others said, ‘No, on the contrary, He deceives the people.’ ¹³However, no one spoke openly of Him for fear of the Jews.”

But Jesus had gone up to Jerusalem alone, not in order to promote His name, but in order to teach the people the Word of God. And so, we read of what transpired in **verses 14** through **24**:

¹⁴Now about the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and taught. ¹⁵And the Jews marveled, saying, “How does this Man know letters, having never studied?”

¹⁶Jesus answered them and said, “My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. ¹⁷If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority. ¹⁸He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him. ¹⁹Did not Moses give you the law, yet none of you keeps the law? Why do you seek to kill Me?”

²⁰The people answered and said, “You have a demon. Who is seeking to kill You?”

²¹Jesus answered and said to them, “I did one work, and you all marvel. ²²Moses therefore gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. ²³If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the Law of Moses should not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath? ²⁴Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.”

In this section of our passage we will examine four major matters. First, we will consider the source and nature of our Lord's knowledge for teaching (7:14-16). Second, we will consider the manner in which we may come to understand in a measure the teaching of our Lord (7:17). Third, we will consider the test by which the Jews may authenticate Jesus and His teaching (7:18-19). And then fourthly, we will consider our Lord's reaction and response to those who reacted and rejected Him and His teaching (7:20-24).

I. The source and nature of our Lord's knowledge for teaching (7:14-16).

The Feast of Tabernacles (or Booths) was seven days in length. It was about in the middle of this feast that Jesus went into the courts of the temple and He began to teach the people. We read this in **verse 14**: “*Now about the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and taught.*”

A. The importance of preaching and teaching the Word of God (7:14)

Preaching and teaching the Word of God to the people of God was a major emphasis of our Lord Jesus’ ministry. We might tend to think that our Lord’s earthly ministry was primarily one of healing the sick and delivering those oppressed of the devil. But actually, our Lord’s primary mission, apart from suffering and dying upon His cross, was to preach and teach the Word of God to the people. And so, although Jesus healed many people of their infirmities and delivered many people from spiritual bondage, His chief calling during His earthly ministry was to proclaim the Word of God to His people. Actually it is in Mark’s Gospel that this emphasis of our Lord’s ministry is set forth quite clearly. Consider these verses:

Mark 1: 14f. “Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, *preaching* the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.’”

Mark 1:21f. “Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and *taught*. And they were astonished at His *teaching*, for He *taught* them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”

Mark 1:35ff. “Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed. And Simon and those who were with Him searched for Him. When they found Him, they said to Him, ‘Everyone is looking for You.’ But He said to them, ‘Let us go into the next towns, that I may *preach* there also, *because for this purpose I have come forth.*’ And He was *preaching* in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and casting out demons.

Mark 2:13. “Then He went out again by the sea; and all the multitude came to Him, and *He taught them.*”

Mark 4:1ff. “And again He began *to teach* by the sea. And a great multitude was gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat in it on the sea; and the whole multitude was on the land facing the sea. Then He *taught* them many things by parables...”

Mark 4:33f. “And with many such parables *He spoke the word to them* as they were able to hear it. But without a parable He did not speak to them. And when they were alone, He *explained* all things to His disciples.

Mark 6:1f. “Then He went out from there and came to His own country, and His disciples followed Him. And when the Sabbath had come, He *began to teach* in the synagogue.

Mark 6:6. “And He marveled because of their unbelief. Then He went about the villages in a circuit, *teaching.*”

Mark 6:34. “And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So *He began to teach them many things.*”

And so, we see this affirmed quite clearly: Our Lord's ministry was largely a preaching and teaching ministry. This is so much the case that *the people often referred to Him or addressed Him as "Teacher."* Again in Mark's gospel we see this:

Mark 4: 37. "And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, '*Teacher*, do You not care that we are perishing?'"

Mark 5: 35. "While He was still speaking, some came from the ruler of the synagogue's house who said, 'Your daughter is dead. Why trouble *the Teacher* any further?'"

Mark 9:38. "Now John answered Him, saying, '*Teacher*, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us.'"

Mark 10:35. "Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, '*Teacher*, we want You to do for us whatever we ask.'"

Mark 12:13. "Then they sent to Him some of the Pharisees and the Herodians, to catch Him in His words. When they had come, they said to Him, '*Teacher*, we know that You are true, and care about no one; for You do not regard the person of men, but teach the way of God in truth. is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?'"

Mark 12:18f. "Then some Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him; and they asked Him, saying: '*Teacher*, Moses wrote to us that if a man's brother dies, and leaves his wife behind, and leaves no children, his brother should take his wife and raise up offspring for his brother.'"

Mark 12:32. "So the scribe said to Him, 'Well said, *Teacher*. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He.'"

Mark 13:1. "Then as He went out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, '*Teacher*, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!'"

Mark 14:13f. "So He sent out two of his disciples and said to them, 'Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him. And wherever he goes in, say to the master of the house, "The *Teacher* says, 'Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?'"

Now some diminish the role and importance of teaching the Word of God. They emphasize to the exclusion of teaching the need of *power to work miracles*, or of providing *a direct word from God* apart from the Scriptures. Some emphasize *practical living* to the diminishment of sound and substantive teaching. But this is not what characterized the work of ministry of our Lord Jesus. We have seen that Jesus Himself declared that this was the reason for which He was sent. *The ministry is largely, not exclusively, but largely, teaching the Word of God.* The earthly ministry of our Lord Himself was mainly *a preaching and teaching ministry.* He had a message to proclaim to His people. And similarly, He has sent us into the world to teach His Word to people who are lost in ignorance and error. For it is by being taught the Word of God and upon believing the Word taught, God accomplishes His purposes in their lives.

B. The reaction of "the Jews" to the knowledge of Jesus (7:15)

We read in **verse 15** that "the Jews" were amazed and impressed with the knowledge of Jesus. We read, "*And the Jews marveled, saying, 'How does this Man know letters, having never studied?'"* The manner of education among the Jews in the first century was largely a matter of children being taught by

their parents in their home. However, later in the first century a noted rabbi, **Joshua Ben Gamla**, developed formal education of Jewish children. This was largely centered in the instruction provided for Jewish children in the house of a Jewish rabbi living within the community. But Jesus was home schooled, instructed by His father and mother and to the degree that he could interact with the leaders of their local synagogues. But it was apparent to the Jewish leaders of Jerusalem that the knowledge that Jesus conveyed in that manner and content of His teaching, far surpassed what was possible merely through home education.

C. The doctrine that Jesus taught had been taught Him by the Father (7:16).

Apparently these Jews inquired directly of Jesus how He had acquired His understanding. We read in **verse 16**, “*Jesus answered them and said, ‘My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me.’*”

First, let us recognize the great importance and value of sound, biblical doctrine. We read in 1 Timothy 4:6 that the test of a good minister is measured *by what he teaches* the Christian brethren, i.e. his doctrine.

If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of *the good doctrine* which you have carefully followed.

If Timothy followed Paul’s instruction laid out in this epistle, and he taught all that he had read in this epistle to the folks of the church, then he will be found to have been a faithful minister of Jesus Christ. The point is this, *a minister cannot be a good minister unless his doctrine is in accordance with the revealed Word of God.*

Paul says that Timothy had been “*nourished on the words of faith and of the good doctrine.*” Perhaps the “words of faith” and “the doctrine” should be regarded as the same thing. The word “nourished” carries the idea that Timothy had been well taught in the teaching of the Christian faith. The Word of God, the doctrine of the Word of God is “nourishing” to a sound and solid faith. Doctrine is not deadening; it is *nourishing* to the believer. And here we see that a primary test of whether or not a minister is a “good” one is based on the doctrine he holds and teaches.

I do not know precisely how doctrine has come to be a dirty word among so many who attend evangelical churches. I suspect that it is due to a reaction of cold formalism. It could not be out of reaction to the presentation of doctrine itself, for again, we read that *good doctrine nourishes the believer.* I suppose the main reason people dismiss doctrine is because they see it is irrelevant to life and deadening to worship. But both charges are groundless. Others decry doctrine because they regard it as divisive to the church body, that it will drive people away.

Interestingly, even the newer Bible translations seem to recognize the aversion of many people to the very word, doctrine. The translation of our New King James Version in which the word, doctrine, is used, is rather unique to translations. Consider these translations of **John 7:16**:

ESV “So Jesus answered them, ‘My *teaching* is not mine, but his who sent me.’”

NAS “Jesus therefore answered them, and said, ‘My *teaching* is not Mine, but His who sent Me.’”

NIV “Jesus answered, ‘My *teaching* is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me.’”

CSB “Jesus answered them, ‘My *teaching* isn't mine but is from the one who sent me.’”

And again, here is our NKJV: “*Jesus answered them and said, ‘My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me.’*”

Some charge a pastor with this crime: “Oh, he teaches too much doctrine” as though that were a bad thing! It is sadly a common notion among believers that you can become too doctrinal in your Christianity! But this is wrong. The idea that one can give himself over to too much doctrine is not found in the

Scriptures. *Doctrine is nothing more or less than a statement of understanding about biblical teaching or truth.* Can you have too much truth? I heard one once say in a gathering that the problem with the Pharisees is that they had too much truth! “Oh really?” I responded. “Did Jesus have too much truth?” “No, the problem with the Pharisees was not that they had too much truth but that they had too much error rather than truth.”

You cannot attain too much truth. Oh yes, it is a danger to be “ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:7), but again, that is not a problem of knowing too much, it is a problem of not knowing the truth. *Good doctrine is nothing more or less than a clear understanding and statement of biblical truth.*

Second, let us attempt to understand how this “Man”, Jesus Christ, attained His knowledge. The Jews were quite amazed and impressed with the knowledge our Lord revealed in His teaching. They did not embrace it, as we can see from their rather derogatory inquisition of Jesus. “*How does this Man know letters, having never studied?*” **Matthew Henry** said of Jesus, “Moses was taught the learning of the Egyptians, but Christ was not taught so much as the learning of the Jews.”

Now we might speak up to answer the challenge of these Jewish leaders, “How does this Man know letters, having never studied?” “Well, Jesus Christ is God, therefore He has infinite knowledge of all things.” But that would not be the best response to this question. Jesus answered their question in another way. We read, “*Jesus answered them and said, ‘My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me.’*” Jesus said that God the Father had taught Him His doctrine.

It is here in which we should attempt to understand the manner in which our Lord Jesus existed as God incarnate and lived in this world. Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God who took upon Himself our human nature, which occurred in His incarnation. As such, Jesus Christ is one Person with two natures, a divine nature and a human nature. When we speak of Christ’s human nature, we are speaking of His physical human body and His human soul, which includes His mind, His affections and His will. His divine nature is His eternal spiritual divine essence, in which He is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.¹ His two natures exist in one Person.

How His two natures relate with one another in His one person was carefully articulated in the Creed of Chalcedon of 451 AD. It reads as follows:

We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable (rational) soul and body; consubstantial (coessential) with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, *to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather of the property* of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God, the Word the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning (have declared) concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.

Our Lord Jesus has two natures in His one Person. This means that He has two different “minds”, if we can use that term, one divine and one human. He has two different sets of emotions or affections, one divine and one human. And He has two different wills, one divine and one human. These two natures are in His one Person from His incarnation and will continue unto eternity. The risen Lord Jesus Christ is the God/Man enthroned over the creation, serving on behalf of His Father.

¹ From the **Westminster Shorter Catechism**, Q & A #4.

The issue at hand is how the divine nature and the human nature was manifest when Jesus Christ ministered on earth. The Apostle Paul addressed this somewhat in Philippians 2:6-8, which reads,

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷*but emptied himself*, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Phil. 2:7 ESV)

When Paul wrote that Christ Jesus “emptied Himself”, he was not saying that in His incarnation Jesus Christ became any less God than He was in eternity, but rather, in His incarnation, Jesus Christ voluntarily declined to call upon His divine attributes to assist His human nature in fulfilling His role as our Savior. Rather, He was born as a human baby, although having the fullness of the divine nature dwelling within Him (Col. 2:9). Jesus Christ was as any baby, in all its weakness and helplessness, but He was, of course, born pure, innocent, without sin. But as a baby, He was limited in His human nature in His knowledge, and He had other human limitations that is true of any baby born into this world. His divine nature was present in His person even as a baby, but He never called upon the attributes of His divine nature in His mission on behalf of God to save His people. We read in Luke 2:52 that “Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.” He did so as His Father instructed Him through Him being taught in His Jewish home, hearing the Scriptures read and taught in the local synagogue, and as God His Father illuminated His understanding through His own prayer, meditation and reflection. Of course His ability to learn and grow in wisdom far surpassed any of us because He was without the limitation that sin has placed on us. He was without sin. As He was taught He learned readily because He was wholly open, receptive and responsive to His Father. His advancement in knowledge was so significant that when He was 12 years old, the transitional age of a Jewish youth to responsible manhood, He amazed and confounded the teachers of Israel while asking and answering questions within the temple. His parents had searched for Him and finally found Him in the temple. There we read of Him,

Now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. (Luke 2:46f)

Everything the Lord Jesus knew in His human nature, was due to Him having been instructed by His Father. As **Matthew Henry** (1662-1714) wrote:

As God, equal with the Father, he might truly have said, *My doctrine is mine, and his that sent me*; but being now in his estate of humiliation, and being, as Mediator, God’s servant, it was more congruous to say, *“My doctrine is not mine, not mine only, nor mine originally, as man and mediator, but his that sent me; it does not center in myself, nor lead ultimately to myself, but to him that sent me.”* God had promised concerning the great prophet that he would *put his words into his mouth* (Deut. 18:18), to which Christ seems here to refer.²

The point is this: when the Lord Jesus taught in the temple on this occasion recorded in John 7 and all were amazed at the content of His teaching, so that the Jewish leaders asked, “How does this Man know letters, having never studied?”, “Jesus answered them and said, ‘My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me.’” Jesus did not claim that His understanding stemmed from the source of His own divine nature, but rather, God His Father had instructed His human nature in the truth. The Father instructed Him in whatever knowledge He needed in order to have a true and deep relationship with Him and also to enable Him to fulfil His mission as the Messiah.

² Matthew Henry, **Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible**, vol. 5 (Fleming H. Revell Company, n. d., originally 1721), p. 966.

As the works which He did were those which the Father had given Him to do (John 5:36), so the words which He spoke were those which the Father had given Him to speak (cf. John 3:34).³

II. The manner in which we may come to understand in a measure the teaching of our Lord (7:17).

This is quite interesting. In verse 15 the hostile Jewish leaders challenged Jesus' ability to teach, since He had no formal training or instruction. But here Jesus challenges their ability to understand the truth and relevance of what He was teaching. Or as one put it, "The Jews challenge the ability of Jesus to teach; Jesus challenges the ability of the Jews to hear."⁴

How may we as Christians be assured that we will come to understand truth and to be able to distinguish it from error? Jesus declared in **John 7:17**, "*If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority.*" Here we see the true key to coming to understand the spiritual truth of the Scriptures is to resolve that you will live according to that truth when you learn it.

God does not reveal truth to an individual who then makes a decision whether or not to believe it and do it. God reveals truth to those who are resolved by His grace to do His will as He reveals it to them. **J. C. Ryle** (1816-1900) wrote of this important principle:

The difficulty of finding out "what is truth" in religion, is a common subject of complaint among men. They point to the many differences which prevail among Christians on matters of doctrine, and profess to be unable to decide who is right. In thousands of cases this professed inability to find out truth becomes an excuse for living without any religion at all.

The saying of our Lord before us is one that demands the serious attention of persons in this state of mind. It supplies an argument whose edge and point they will find it hard to evade. It teaches that one secret of getting the key of knowledge, is to practice honestly what we know, and that if we conscientiously use the light that we now have, we shall soon find more light coming down into our minds. In short, there is a sense in which it is true, that by *doing* we shall come to *knowing*.

There is a mine of truth in this principle. Well would it be for men if they would act upon it. Instead of saying, as some do, "I must first know everything clearly, and then I will act," we should say, "I will diligently use such knowledge as I possess, and believe that in the using fresh knowledge will be given to me." How many mysteries this simple plan would solve! How many hard things would soon become plain if men would honestly live up to their light, and "follow on to know the Lord!" (Hos. 6:3).⁵

F. F. Bruce (1910-1990) also wrote of this principle that the willingness to obey results in the ability to understand the truth of God's Word.

As then, so now it is not simply intellectual penetration that will determine truly whether Jesus' claim to impart the Father's teaching is well founded or not; an attitude of heart is also important. If there be a readiness to *do* the will of God, the capacity for discerning God's message will follow. Whoever has that readiness of heart will recognize in the teaching of Jesus a message which authenticates itself to spiritual perception and conscience as the truth. Truth must ultimately be self-authenticating; it cannot appeal to any authority external to itself: 'great is truth and mighty above all things'. A faithful messenger seeks no credit for himself but for the one with whose message he has been entrusted. Jesus' whole desire is that those who hear what He has to say should glorify God by believing it, since it is God who has commissioned Him.⁶

³ F. F. Bruce, **The Gospel of John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1983), p. 175.

⁴ Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 366.

⁵ J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 2 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), pp. 15f.

⁶ F. F. Bruce, **The Gospel of John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1983), p. 176.

I have received questions of concern: “Pastor, there is so much error and false teaching out there, how do I know what is true? How do I recognize what is false?” The answer is that if you desire and resolve to do the will of God from your heart, you may trust the Lord that He will preserve you and lead you into the truth that He would have you walk. But, if you have reservations or qualifications to your willingness to do His will, you will probably be deceived by someone sometime. Jesus said, “*If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority.*” The Lord will give that one understanding and assurance that a doctrine is true to His Word.

III. The test by which the Jews could authenticate for themselves Jesus and His teaching (7:18-19).

Jesus then said to them,

¹⁸He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him. ¹⁹Did not Moses give you the law, yet none of you keeps the law? Why do you seek to kill Me?”

In **verse 18** our Lord Jesus contrasted Himself as One who proclaims truth with one who would be a promoter of error. The one who promotes error is actually a promoter of himself. He is seeking recognition or “glory” for himself. This is what motivates him.

“The word translated ‘glory’ means ‘honor as enhancement or recognition of status or performance.’ It is the opposite of self-effacement and humility. It is saying, ‘I must become greater, he must become less,’ a ghastly antithesis to the message of the Baptist (3:30). Ultimately, the contrast is between the one who is ‘true’, that is, faithful and reliable, and one who is ‘false’, a term that is often contrasted or described as at enmity with truth and is frequently used to depict unrighteousness and wickedness.”⁷

But in contrast to the one who is untrue and has no righteousness in him, Jesus describes Himself: “but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him.” The true one does not seek his own glory.

By this statement Jesus is disavowing the questioners’ shallow formalistic criteria of authority (v. 15). He forces them to make a decision with regard to intent that shows His words and works. Can they, and dare they, brand them as evidence that He is seeking His own glory? Or must they acknowledge that all His words and works are designed to heighten the glory of Him who (in Jesus) loves and seeks out the world and calls it to repentance and faith? Those are the questions in terms which the people have to come to a decision with regard to His mission. Everything is at stake here. For if He is truly seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, then He is true and trustworthy and “there is no unrighteousness in Him”; in other words, then what applies to God (Psa. 92:15) applies to Jesus, and to accept His teaching is to “set His seal to this, that God is true” (John 3:33).⁸

Now perhaps at first reading **verse 19** seems to be rather awkwardly inserted at this point. It reads, “*Did not Moses give you the law, yet none of you keeps the law? Why do you seek to kill Me?*” But actually, it fits the context quite well. The Lord Jesus had just given irrefutable evidence that His teaching was of God, for both His words and works were designed to bring glory to God, not to Himself. [This would not have been true had Jesus followed His brother’s counsel to go to Jerusalem in order to promote Himself, cf. John 7:3, 4] Jesus now goes on the offensive, charging the Jews (i.e. hostile Jewish leaders)

⁷ Klink, p. 367.

⁸ Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John; A Theological Commentary* (William B. Eerdmans, 1997), p. 263.

that they did not have the desire to do God's will, therefore they were in no condition to embrace His teaching as true. They were ones characterized by unrighteousness.

Jesus called upon Moses and the Law of God in order to convict them of their sin. Jesus declared that they were lawbreakers. They did not desire to do the will of God, or else they would purpose to obey His law. He specifically charged them with violating the 6th commandment, which reads, "Thou shalt not kill (murder)" (Exod. 20:13). He asked them, "Why do you seek to kill Me?" Of course not all the Jews that were standing before Him had those murderous intentions, but the Jewish leaders did so. We had read that earlier. John 5:18 records, "This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God." And we read at the beginning of this chapter in verse 1, "After these things Jesus walked in Galilee; for He did not want to walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill Him." They were guilty of breaking this commandment because it was their desire to kill Him.

IV. Our Lord's reaction and response to those who rejected Him and His teaching (7:20-24).

And so Jesus was standing before the crowd, but in telling forth these words He was directing His accusation to those Jewish leaders in the crowd. He was making clear to them that He knew what their true intentions were, and their desire was not to bring glory to God, as were His intentions, but they desired to bring glory to themselves. And in their thinking Jesus was standing before the people preventing them from achieving their desires, to have absolute control over the people and to obtain and retain the regard of the people. Their concern was not for the glory of God but they desired glory for themselves.

But then we read of the reaction of the people to Jesus' accusation in **verse 20**: "*The people answered and said, "You have a demon. Who is seeking to kill You?"*" I can well imagine the scene. The people react, thinking that Jesus is out of His mind in making this crazy, unfounded accusation. But the Jewish leaders standing in the midst of the crowd knew that He knew them and that He knew their evil intentions and of their evil plotting to have Him killed.

In **verses 21** through **23** we read of our Lord's response to this reaction of the people.

²¹Jesus answered and said to them, "I did one work, and you all marvel. ²²Moses therefore gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. ²³If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the Law of Moses should not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath? ."

When Jesus said, "I did one work, and you all marvel", He was referring to the one miracle that He had performed previously in Jerusalem. He had healed a man lying beside the Pool of Bethesda a man who had been paralyzed for many years (Cf. John 5:2ff). The reaction of the Jewish leaders was that Jesus was to be condemned because He had performed this "work" on the Sabbath Day. They had then sought ways to kill Him (Cf. 5:16).

Our Lord then called upon a positive commandment of Moses regarding a common practice on the Sabbath Day. He did so to demonstrate that He, Jesus, had not violated the law of the Sabbath, which is the 4th commandment. He spoke of Moses having given the commandment to circumcise the infant boys, which Moses declared should be performed on the eighth day after birth. We read of this in Genesis 17:10ff:

¹⁰This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; ¹¹and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. ¹²*He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised*, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant. ¹³He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh

for an everlasting covenant. ¹⁴And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.”

It is at this place that John provides a parenthetical explanation. We read again verse 22, “Moses therefore gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath.” He qualified his statement by saying that circumcision was actually given by the Fathers, in other words, the Patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. However, Moses had written the account in Genesis 17, so it was legitimate for Jesus to have said, “Moses therefore gave you circumcision.”

Now if a male child was born in Israel on the Sabbath Day, the eighth day would fall on the following Saturday, or Sabbath Day. So, then, what were they to do? Do they break the law by not circumcising on the Sabbath, or do they break the law by circumcising the boy on the Sabbath? Are they to perform the “work” of circumcising the male child on the Sabbath, or were they to wait a day? The Scriptures are clear, the male child was to be circumcised on the eighth day, if that eighth day fell on the Sabbath Day, it made no difference. In other words, to circumcise the male child on the Sabbath was not to be regarded as breaking the Sabbath. It was viewed as an act of mercy, which was certainly permitted on any Sabbath Day.

D. A. Carson explained how Jesus was confronting the Jews:

So here were Jesus’ opponents, then, formally ‘breaking’ the Sabbath *so that the Law of Moses* in respect to circumcision *may not be broken*. They did this regularly; Jesus performed just one work, the ‘one miracle’ (v. 21), yet it called forth deep resentment. Why then are they *so angry*?⁹

The point of the text was that Jews had established a hierarchy of precedence in keeping the law. They did so that they could keep the law in their own thinking. Again, here are the words of **D. A. Carson**:

Jewish thinkers of about this time argued, on the basis of the precedence of the eighth day circumcision over Sabbath, that any *necessary* act of mercy could be lawfully performed on the Sabbath. Circumcision was viewed as a perfecting rite: one member of the body, by this rite, was perfected, and had to be perfected on the eighth day; how much more, then, must an act be undertaken, even on the Sabbath, if it perfects the whole body, i.e. if it saves a life. Jesus establishes a slightly different hierarchy by removing the criterion of urgency or necessity. The Jews might well reason that a man who has been paralyzed for thirty-eight years can surely wait one more day to be healed. But by eliminating the necessity from consideration, Jesus’ hierarchy of precedence forges the tightest possible link between circumcision and the *healing of the whole man*—and this in a context that has just reminded us that circumcision antedates the law of Moses, and therefore, the Sabbath laws, anyway (v. 22). Jesus’ healing of the whole man thereby becomes a fulfillment of Old Testament circumcision, on the very day that served as a signal of God’s Old Testament purposes of redemption and rest. Jesus’ reasoning is not the pettifogging exegesis of a theologian determined to exonerate His own mistaken practice at all costs, but insistence that His activity is the fulfillment of the redemptive purposes of God set forth in the old covenant, and therefore an anticipation of the argument not only in Galatians 3 but also Hebrews 4. It is further evidence that Moses wrote of Christ (John 5:46).¹⁰

Our Lord concluded His argument with a word of exhortation. **Verse 24** reads, “***Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.***” The adversaries of our Lord had been unjustly judging Him, not carefully considering matters in the light of the Holy Scriptures. They were quick to condemn, having become full of rage against Him, the very One that sought their good, desired their salvation.

Here in verse 24 our Lord forbid one kind of judging even when promoting another kind of judging. We are to make righteous judgments regarding truth and error, right and wrong, and good and evil. But we

⁹ Donald Carson, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans. 1991), p. 315.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 316f.

are to think through matters, for our own prejudices and assumptions can easily lead us astray, the result being our own error and folly. May the Lord grant us mercy and grace as we attempt to read and understand the will of God that is set before us in Holy Scripture. And may each of us desire and be resolved to obey this Word as the Lord enables us to understand it rightly, which will ensure our clear path in the will of God before us.

Here is an “additional note” from **D. A. Carson** on verse 24:

In an age when Matthew 7:1 (‘Do not judge, or you too will be judges’) has displaced John 3:16 as the only verse in the Bible the man in the street is likely to know, it is perhaps worth adding that Matthew 7:1 forbids judgmentalism, not moral discernment. By contrast, John 7:24 demands moral and theological discernment in the context of obedient faith (7:17), while excoriating self-righteous legalism and offering no sanction for censorious heresy-hunting.¹¹

J. C. Ryle also gave some good words of counsel based on verse 24, with which we will close:

The principle here laid down is one of vast importance. Nothing is so common as to judge too favorably or too unfavorably of characters and actions, from merely looking at the outward appearance of things. We are apt to form hasty opinions of others, either good or evil, on very insufficient grounds. We pronounce some men to be good and others to be bad, some to be godly and others to be ungodly, without anything but appearance to aid our decision. We should do well to remember our blindness, and to keep in mind this text. The bad are not always so bad, nor the good so good as they appear. A potsherd may be covered over with gilding and look bright outside. A nugget of gold may be covered with dirt, and look worthless rubbish. One man’s work may look good at first, and yet turn out, by and by, to have been done from the basest of motives. Another man’s work may look very questionable at first, and yet at last may prove Christ-like and truly godly. From rashly “judging by appearances may the Lord deliver us!”¹²

Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God,
be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Tim. 1:17)

¹¹ Ibid, p. 317.

¹² J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 2 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), pp. 29.