



TALKS FOR GROWING CHRISTIANS TRANSCRIPT

John 7:14-18: The Lord Teaches During the Feast of Tabernacles

"Now about the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and taught. 15 And the Jews marveled, saying, "How does this Man know letters, having never studied?" 16 Jesus answered them and said, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. 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. 18 He 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."

Background Notes

"Now about the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and taught" (v14). The feast mentioned here would have been the Feast of Tabernacles, as we can see from verse 2. The Feast of Tabernacles was one of the Old Testament feasts of the Lord. It lasted for a whole week, according to Leviticus 23 and Deuteronomy 16. This particular occasion was in the last year of our Lord's public ministry, and therefore it was about six months before the Lord's death.

According to the law in Deuteronomy 16, all Jewish males were to go up to Jerusalem three times a year to celebrate certain Old Testament feasts, and one of these feasts was the Feast of Tabernacles. Deuteronomy 16:16: *"Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed."* So Jews from all over the Roman Empire and from as far east as Babylon would have been in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. Many in this crowd would have already heard about Jesus. In fact, many of them, specifically many of those from Judea and Galilee, would have heard Jesus preach before, and might even have seen certain of His miracles.

"Then the Jews sought Him at the feast, and said, "Where is He?"(v11). The Jewish religious leaders had actually been looking for Jesus and asking, "Where is He?" As we have mentioned before, the term Jew, as used by John, means the Jewish religious leaders who rejected Jesus as the Messiah. These leaders were in the crowd listening to Jesus. They asked, *"How does this Man know letters, having never studied?"(v15).* They weren't asking how the Lord learned to read and write, but rather, how did He have such a command of Scripture, and such spiritual authority?

Under what rabbi did He study? That was the normal procedure in those days. If you were a up-and-coming young Jewish teacher, you would study under one of the leading rabbis in one of the rabbinical schools in Israel. Remember, as a young man, the apostle Paul studied under Rabbi Gamaliel. Well, in verse 16 the Lord essentially said, "God is my Rabbi, or teacher. *"Jesus answered them and said, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me."* What better credentials could you have?

So we see that the crowd was quite a mixture of people, and it was a crowd of mixed opinions. *"And there was much complaining among the people concerning Him. Some said, 'He is good'; others said, 'No, on the contrary, He deceives the people'"*(v12). It was to this crowd that the Lord spoke in the temple area. Verse 14 says that Jesus went up into the temple and taught, and we understand this to mean the outer courts of the temple, not in the temple building itself. The Lord would have selected a position, maybe in one of the colonnaded porches surrounding the outer courts of the temple. He would have begun to teach his disciples and followers there, and the crowds gathered around to listen. This was the practice of the rabbis and teachers of the day.

It was in the middle of the feast, halfway through the week of the Feast of Tabernacles. Remember that the Lord had come up to this feast in secret: *"But when His brothers had gone up, then He also went up to the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret"*(v10). But now, in the middle of the week, the Lord appeared suddenly in the temple area and began to teach the multitudes.

The doctrinal points for this section of John 7 will be two biblical principles for Christian living, drawn from our Lord's teaching here.

1. Obedience is a key to correct doctrine.

In verse 17 the Lord 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."* Do you want to be correct in your doctrine? Do you want to be orthodox, from God's perspective? Do you want to interpret Scripture properly? Then you must be **willing to do His will**. That is, we must be **obedient** to what God has given us in Scripture.

The self-righteous Jews, who were part of the crowd the Lord was addressing, were not willing to submit to God's will. They would not undergo John's baptism of repentance, for example. They were more interested in keeping their manmade traditions than in obeying the Lord, and repenting of their sins and the sins of the nation. No wonder they misinterpreted Isaiah 53, and the other Messianic passages of the Old Testament.

What about us? Do we want to be correct in our doctrine? Are we willing to be obedient to that doctrine? Obedience is a key to correct doctrine.

For example, there's a lot of discussion within the church today as to whether women should be church leaders. Various interpretations have been given for the passages in the Bible dealing with the role of women, in order to open the doors for women to take leadership positions in the church. Now here is the point: if you start your interpretation of these passages with any sort of presuppositions, or with an unwillingness to obey these Scriptures if the interpretation turns out to be different than what you want it to be -- then don't expect to have correct doctrine! **Obedience** is the key to correct doctrine! Once again, *"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."*

In this illustration, the way to decide what the Bible teaches about women taking church leadership positions is to come to the Scriptures dealing with the role of women. We must come without any presuppositions, and without any theological axes to grind.

We must come without any traditional hang-ups on the one hand, or politically correct determinations on the other hand. And here is the main point: we must have a **willingness to obey** those Scriptures, regardless of whether we like the interpretation or not, or even completely understand it or not. This is a key to correct interpretation. Now I'm convinced that the Scriptures teach that women should not be in spiritual leadership positions in the church. Women have a very important role in the church, but it is not in spiritual leadership positions.

Remember, **obedience** is a key to correct doctrine.

2. Humility is a key to integrity.

Integrity is moral soundness, honesty, and uprightness. I think we can draw this principle from our Lord's teaching to the multitudes here in John 7. Humility is the key to integrity. *"He 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"*(v18). That was certainly true of our Lord. As the perfect Man, He didn't seek His own glory, but only the glory of His heavenly Father who sent Him. The Lord Jesus was "true, and no unrighteousness is in Him."

However, I believe the Lord was doing more here than just claiming this for Himself -- He was stating a biblical principle. It is a principle that we can apply, and we should apply to Christian living today. Humility is a key to integrity. Do you want to be morally sound, and true, and honest, and upright? Start with humility. Don't be self-seeking!

Integrity is such an important moral quality for Christian testimony. Just about every standard letter of reference form I have ever been asked to fill out has a place to rate the integrity of the person who is seeking a job or college entrance. Even unbelievers put a great emphasis on integrity.

Do you want to be a Christian who is known for integrity? Start with humility! Humility is a key to integrity. That principle is right here in verse 18. Try this little experiment to see how humble you are: strap on a small tape recorder, hide a microphone under your shirt, and record your conversations during the day. Now count the number of times you use the words "I" or "me" or "my." If we were to try this experiment, we might be surprised at how self-seeking we really are!

If we seek the glory of God and not our own glory, then we will be humble. Remember, humility is a key to integrity.

Practical Applications

1. Speak for God whenever you have an audience.

That's what Jesus did! He found an audience in the temple courts and He began to teach them. He probably started with a teaching about the Feast of Tabernacles.

Last week as I was driving back from Dubuque to Chicago, I picked up a talk show on the radio. The subject was hell, and people were calling in to give their thoughts and opinions about hell. You cannot believe the wild ideas that were being

called in! Suddenly I heard the voice of a Christian friend, Jeff Tichelar. He gave a great biblical explanation of hell, and even got the gospel into the talk show conversation! Jeff realized that here was a listening audience, and he took advantage of it. He called in and he spoke up for God and what God's Word teaches about hell.

Speak for God whenever you have an audience. Your audience may be only one person, but if that person is willing to listen, use that opportunity. Speak for God whenever you have an audience.

2. Let's watch out for the "god" of education.

"And the Jews marveled, saying, "How does this Man know letters, having never studied?"(v15). The Jewish leaders were hung up with the "god" of education. What rabbinic school did Jesus attend? Under what rabbi did He study? How could He be qualified to teach, having never studied under a rabbi?

Well, the Lord didn't fall into their way of thinking! Let's not fall into the trap of thinking that unless we are theologically trained and have several degrees after our names, we can't understand the Bible or teach the Bible! We can be thankful for the education and training we may have, but we should use it for the glory of God, and let it be subject to the word of God.

Let's watch out for the "god" of education!