
As we start Chapter 7 we have to understand that it comes on the heels of a very important discussion Jesus had with those who were following Him. This was a discussion where Jesus revealed to them critical truths about where they are to find and experience eternal life; an eternity that starts here and now and continues forever. Jesus spoke these truths knowing that what He had to say was going to drive an inseparable wedge between those who really believed and those who just were along for the ride. As a result, many of His followers walked away in unbelief and refused to follow Jesus any further.

Jesus told His followers that to experience eternal life they had to abandon all their religious presuppositions about who they think God is and what they believe God should do for them; and, instead, listen to and believe what the Son says and let His Words be authoritative in their lives. For example, they believed that when the Messiah came He was going to bring war and that He would conquer the Romans and set the land and the people free from foreign occupation. They refused to believe Jesus when He spoke of the scriptures in the *Psalms*, *Isaiah*, and *Daniel* that say the Messiah must first suffer and die for the sins of all mankind before He comes to rule and reign on this earth.

In addition to not accepting the authority of the scriptures, they did not understand the justice of God, which was the reason why the Messiah first had to suffer and die. You see, it was man who sinned; and this sin caused a separation in the fellowship that God and man once had. Therefore, man had to pay the penalty for this sin—it is what the justice of God demanded. However, God, in His mercy, did not require this payment from us, but He sent His Son to the earth as a man to take the full punishment for all the sin of every man, woman, and child who ever lived and ever will live. But the Jews could not comprehend this kind of sacrifice—God becoming man; it was all too much for them to believe. They were

used to the traditional sacrificial system of the day with the offering of the blood of animals as a means to deal with sin. They could not begin to conceive how Jesus could literally become their sin offering, their peace offering, and their drink offering thereby restoring the fellowship that man can have with God.

He also told them that in order to experience eternal life here and now, they had to abandon all the practical, emotional, and psychological means by which they survive and cope with the trauma and difficulties of this life. Instead, they must trust in Him and rely on His Word believing that the intangible truths of the Word of God are more real and necessary to their survival than the food they eat and the water they drink.

He then described a person who truly believes—and does not just say they believe—as the person who always lets the Word of God be their absolute priority and the ultimate authority in their life.

This was an intense message and many chose to abandon Jesus at this point. Despite the miracles they saw and despite their participation in the supernatural when they ate of the miraculous fish and loaves, they literally just turned around and walked away. You see, what Jesus taught did not fit into their own personal religious paradigm, or the paradigm of the entire religious community. They thought, “How could this one man be teaching something that is different from what everyone else has taught for centuries, and think that He is right; preposterous!” Sadly, their wrong belief about the Word of God trapped them in a hardened cage of unbelief.

We can read their story, shake our heads and think: “how could they!” until we stop and realize that Jesus was also talking to us and asking us to: 1) abandon our own notions about who He is and what He wants from our lives; 2) abandon our

own coping mechanisms and rely only on Him; and 3) abandon our belief that just because religion has been done a certain way for centuries that it is the right way.

When you think about the text in this manner everything Jesus says starts to become personal and becomes more than just words on a page. It starts to turn His spot light of truth toward the secret places in our souls and point out the areas where we are relying on something other than Him for our life. It challenges us to consider whether or not we are going to be like those followers and simply walk away or if we are going to abandon ourselves to His love and let Him have His way in our lives. With that as the background, let's pick up in John chapter 7.

John 7:1-13

After this, Jesus traveled around Galilee. He wanted to stay out of Judea, where the Jewish leaders were plotting his death. But soon it was time for the Jewish Festival of Shelters, and Jesus' brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, where your followers can see your miracles! You can't become famous if you hide like this! If you can do such wonderful things, show yourself to the world!" For even his brothers didn't believe in him.

Jesus replied, "Now is not the right time for me to go, but you can go anytime. The world can't hate you, but it does hate me because I accuse it of doing evil. You go on. I'm not going to this festival, because my time has not yet come." After saying these things, Jesus remained in Galilee.

Even though many disciples abandoned Jesus, He still stayed in the area of Galilee teaching from town to town. He tended to stay in Galilee because the Jews in Judea were plotting to kill Him. You might be wondering why they would want

to kill Jesus. If you remember, the last 2 times Jesus was in Jerusalem He had dramatic encounters with the religious leaders. The first time He was there, Jesus made a whip from ropes and literally drove out all of the merchants and money changers from the Temple grounds claiming that the Temple was His father's house and it was to be a holy place and not some crazy market. The Temple area was not to be used to support the corruption of the religious leaders and their "system" of profiteering off the people who came to Jerusalem for these annual festivals. It is interesting that even though Jesus turned over tables scattering money all over the place and drove out the animals and the traders, the religious leaders did nothing about it—they did not even try to arrest Him.

It is clear they were pretty afraid for Jesus talked and acted with an authority that they had never seen before. So they waited until sunset and under the cloak of darkness they sent one of their own, a Pharisee named Nicodemus, to engage Jesus. Nicodemus started the conversation by saying that the miracles Jesus did validated that God was with Him and they were able to see that, but before he could say another word, Jesus interrupted him and said that he must be born again if he ever hopes to see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus was obviously confused by such statement. Jesus told Nicodemus that the Holy Spirit can give a person new life from heaven—literally God will place within a person a new nature that comes from God (separate and distinct from the old sinful nature) and that this new nature will be indwelt by the Spirit of God (this is what it means to be born again).

Jesus continued and told the man that if he is willing to believe that Jesus was sent from God and is the only provision of the Father for the condition of sin that corrupts all men, that he will not perish, will not fall under judgment, but will be given eternal life. Sadly, this man, this representative of both the people and all the

religious leaders, walked away in unbelief because we are told he loved his darkness more than the light.

Then in His second trip to Jerusalem, Jesus healed a man who had been an invalid for 38 years. Jesus just walked up to him and said a few words and instantly this man was healed. Jesus then told the man to take up the mat he had been laying on and walk out of that place and never return. In so doing, Jesus communicated a key principle to us. When we receive new life in Christ, that new nature which brings healing to our brokenness, we are never to go back to living by our old sinful nature or even make concessions for its demands by “leaving our mat on the ground” just in case. Rather, we are to continually walk in the newness of life that is now ours.

This miracle was done in the midst of a very public place so there was no denying it; but the religious leaders objected to the healing of this man because it was a Sabbath day and they said no work was to be done on the Sabbath. Their hearts were so hardened by their adherence to their religious system that they were blind to the fact that the supernatural had just invaded the natural world. Come one, this man was broken and now he was walking. This was a miracle and God had to be in their midst for only God can truly heal. It is shocking, but they could not even take joy in the fact that this man who had been captive for 38 years by his sickness was now free. Instead, they confronted Jesus in their anger because He violated the Sabbath and purposely ignored their religious system, culture, rules and requirements.

In response, Jesus claimed that His Father set His agenda and if His Father was working then He also had to work—Sabbath or no Sabbath—for He only does what He sees His Father doing. Of course, this infuriated the religious leaders and it was for this blasphemous statement that they wanted to kill Jesus.

John 5:18

So the Jewish leaders tried all the more to kill him. In addition to disobeying the Sabbath rules, he had spoken of God as his Father, thereby making himself equal with God.

So this is the back drop as to why Jesus stayed in Galilee. Now, just for the record, Jesus was not avoiding Judea because He was afraid of these religious leaders, but because He only did what He knew His Father was telling Him to do. In ***John 5:30*** Jesus said: “I do nothing without consulting the Father.” That is why He told His brothers: “now is not my time.” We must remember that Jesus always stayed in continual fellowship with the Father and always only did what the Father wanted Him to do.

This festival Jesus’ brothers referred to was the feast of booths or the feast of tabernacles. It was one of the big three celebrations where everyone was required by law to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. This festival was in autumn and was essentially a week long harvest celebration. But during this event everyone stayed in a little man-made booth or hut as a way to commemorate how their ancestors lived during the 40-year journey through the wilderness to the Promised Land after God delivered them from captivity in Egypt. The huts symbolized god’s shelter and protection. But since everyone was going to be in town during this week, it was fully expected that Jesus would go.

Now I want you to notice something about this little interchange with Jesus’ brothers. Not only are we told that they did not believe, but we find them intentionally harassing Jesus. When Jesus started His ministry and began to preach

His message of Salvation, declaring that He was the only way to the Father and was the very source of eternal life, His family started to freak. They were not huge supporters of His ministry; in fact, they were embarrassed by it. In *Mark 3:21* we are told that they thought He had gone off the deep.

Mark 3:21

When his family heard what was happening, they tried to take him home with them. “He’s out of his mind,” they said.

I am sure that many of you have experienced similar push back from your family and friends as you have made a decision to follow Jesus with your life. They get very worried for you as if you have lost your mind and they want you to stop all the silliness and just come back and be the person you were before, doing the things you did before. It does not matter how sad, depressed, and broken you were, they just want you to come back; they are uncomfortable with all this God talk. Often they get very aggressive and hostile about it. The funny thing is that it is not like you are doing anything illegal or harmful to yourself, if anything, you are doing exactly the opposite; but they don’t like it. So why do people (especially family members) react with such hostility?

Remember, Jesus said that we must be born again, or we must be given new life from heaven. The reason He said this is because our souls have been corrupted by sin and are always hostile to God. In fact, *Romans 8* and *Galatians 5* tell us that this inner-nature is an enemy of God and always wants to do things that are in opposition to God. Thus, left to ourselves we would always run away and reject God—loving our darkness and rejecting the light. The point is that it is innate in

our base nature to have this hostility toward submitting our lives to God. That explains the reaction of His brothers and perhaps certain people in your life.

This is also the reason why God sends His Holy Spirit to the earth to fight against our sinful nature. If it was not for the Spirit of God convincing us of our need for God and His love for us, we would all remain hopelessly lost. Thank goodness that the Father desires all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (*1 Timothy 2:4*). Thank goodness He sends His Holy Spirit to convince us that despite what we see, think, or feel, God does love us and wants to be in relationship with us in a very real and intimate way.

Now at times this hostility of family members and friends even comes from fellow believers. It is usually from those who are not experiencing God in the way you are. They know the promises of God, but to them living out these promises seem impossible. So they have settled with the notion that maybe what God has promised is for the next life and not this one. They consider themselves to be “good Christians” but are unwilling to consider that because they are not experiencing the promises of God, maybe something is very wrong with their fundamental belief system. Maybe they are not choosing to let the Word of God be their absolute priority or the ultimate authority over their lives. Sadly, they are likely never to admit it. They would rather try and bring you down and try and make you be like them so they can still feel good about themselves. It’s sad, but it is all too common.

Notice the absolute sarcasm in His brothers’ words. “Leave here and go to Judea, where your followers can see your miracles! You can’t become famous if you hide like this! If you can do such wonderful things, show yourself to the world!”

They are just being flat out antagonistic and even mean. I don't know if it is jealousy, sibling rivalry, or what, but they were definitely mocking Jesus. The funny thing is Jesus did not just take it and He was not going to be manipulated in any way shape or form. In fact, He kind of stuck it back to them by putting His spot light of truth right on their heart. Jesus first told them that it was not yet His time, in other words, the Father had not yet given Him permission to go. This was a way of saying that He did nothing on His own authority, only the authority of the Father. Clearly His brothers would not have taken to well to what they would have considered to be an outlandish and arrogant claim.

Then Jesus said that they can go to Jerusalem anytime for the world cannot hate them. Please understand what He was communicating with this statement. He was saying that they did not follow God and did not even care about the will of God. They were living to please themselves and others. As such, it did not matter if they went to this religious event or that religious event, for it would have no meaning in their life; to them it was just religion. It did not even matter that they were obeying the Biblical commandment to participate in this festival because their hearts were in the wrong place. To them it was not about humbling themselves and honoring God, they were merely doing what they were "required" to do.

Jesus then said that because He convicts the world of sin and evil, those in the world naturally hate him. However, because they have no problem with sin and evil; and, because their nature is the same as the world's nature, the world essentially embraces them. Therefore, they have nothing to worry about; they were free to go anytime they wanted.

Wow, that must have stung. Let me tell you by experience, the spot light of truth is not a happy place, but it is a good place. I know that many of you have been confronted by God in a similar manner. It is hard, it does not feel good, but it is

exactly what you need. If you let the light do its job it will expel the darkness and lead you to experiencing eternal life here and now. But if you resist the light and walk away, like Jesus' brothers you will just go on doing your religious stuff, thinking you are ok with God, and never get to experience eternal life now.

This passage should cause us all to stop for a moment and consider whether or not we are involved in religious undertakings because it is what we think "good" Christians are to do or because we really want to be in a relationship with God. We must not be deceived. Jesus essentially told His brothers that God does not give any "extra credit" for hard work and good effort. You are either doing what your Father in heaven wants you to do or you are not. You are aligned with His will or you are not. And if not, your religious deeds do not matter and they make no true substantive difference in your life, for your base nature remains unchanged; it is still in the likeness of the world and not the likeness of God.

John 7:10-13

But after his brothers left for the festival, Jesus also went, though secretly, staying out of public view. The Jewish leaders tried to find him at the festival and kept asking if anyone had seen him. There was a lot of grumbling about him among the crowds. Some argued, "He's a good man," but others said, "He's nothing but a fraud who deceives the people." But no one had the courage to speak favorably about him in public, for they were afraid of getting in trouble with the Jewish leaders.

Fear has always been a powerful ally to those who are in control. In fact, people whose authority is based on control usually thrive on it. In this case the fear of

public reprisal. These so called “men of God”—the religious leaders—had the keys to the kingdom, so to speak, and literally were willing to lock anyone out of temple worship if they did not conform to their ways. This was a powerful threat hanging over the heads of the common worshiper, for how could they complete their duty to God if the priests excluded them from the Temple.

It is so sad but these worshipers had to fear the very ones they were supposed to be able to trust. Can you imagine what an oppressive atmosphere there must have been in Jerusalem? They could not even talk about the amazing miracles Jesus did for fear that someone might turn them.

Even today fear of public reprisal is the same tool that many leaders use to keep out those whom they consider as not conforming to their ways, their customs and their traditions. Again, many of us have experienced this reality and it is not fun. As we have told others that *it is possible* to live by the Spirit of God according to our new nature and not according to our old sinful nature, they have scoffed saying that it is impossible; we will always just be sinners. As we have said that it is not necessary to follow the long standing notions of obedience, duty, and religious tradition, but we can be free in the Lord living only to do what He tells us to do, people have gotten angry and acted as if we are teaching some heresy. They have said horrible things about us to others, without even knowing us, talking to us, or even really understanding the Biblical authority upon which we base our teaching. They just perceive it as a threat to the religious system to which they have always been beholden. But we should not be surprised. If we are teaching the same message that Jesus taught, then we should expect to receive the same response as He received.

John 7:14-18

Then, midway through the festival, Jesus went up to the Temple and began to teach. The Jewish leaders were surprised when they heard him. "How does he know so much when he hasn't been trained?" they asked.

So Jesus told them, "My message is not my own; it comes from God who sent me. Anyone who wants to do the will of God will know whether my teaching is from God or is merely my own. Those who speak for themselves want glory only for themselves, but a person who seeks to honor the one who sent him speaks truth, not lies.

I think this part of the passage is actually funny. These Jewish leaders have no concept of where true authority comes from. They believe authority is derived from having gone to a certain rabbinical school, a seminary, or by having some initials behind your name. But Jesus makes it clear in no uncertain terms that He speaks with the ultimate authority—God's authority! God sent Him and His teachings are those of the Father and they do not derive from any self interest or corruption; they are truth.

If you do not get what Jesus is doing, He is comparing Himself publically to each of the religious leaders. He is saying that their hearts are not toward God but they prefer the honor that comes from others. So they do not really seek the truth; as a result, they do not speak the truth. Don't you think this passage should go in a chapter in that book: "How to win friends and influence people." I doubt Jesus had many converts that day. But His point is so important: true spiritual authority is not based on a person's position or title, but it always comes down to three fundamental things:

1) Whether or not the person seeks the truth. As we studied last week, we can have confidence in a person whose very food for survival is the Word of God; for from that person the character and nature of God will be clearly evident to all. This is a person who lets the scriptures be their absolute priority and the ultimate authority in their lives. As a result, they know the Word, they live the Word and the Word is their very life and they can be trusted for they are spiritually stable.

2) Whether they speak based on the authority of scripture; regardless of whose feathers will get ruffled. Too often we are so careful not to cause any waves or to rustle anyone's feathers because we don't want someone's feelings to get hurt and we don't want them to get mad at us. While that may be good intentioned, it is not living in truth; and, therefore, it is not love. Love always speaks the truth; it does not dance around the truth, distort the truth, or compromise the truth. And please note that truth is not merely the opinion of someone who stands up on a platform and claims authority. *John 17:7* says: "thy Word is truth." The Word of God is to be our basis for all that we do and all that we say; and we are to always speak the truth in love.

3) Whether they seek their own interests and their own glory or only the glory and honor that comes from God.

These are the fundamental criteria by which we decide when we are safe to yield to any form of spiritual authority. Remember, position, title or degrees do not, in and of themselves, provide spiritual legitimacy; that can only come from God.

John 7:19-24

"Did not Moses give you the Law, and yet none of you carries out the Law? Why do you seek to kill Me?" The crowd answered, "You have a demon! Who

seeks to kill You?" Jesus answered them, "I did one deed, and you all marvel. "For this reason Moses has given you circumcision (not because it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and on the Sabbath you circumcise a man. "If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath so that the Law of Moses will not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made an entire man well on the Sabbath? "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."

Notice the cheap shot. They cannot really argue based on the authority of scripture so they make it personal and call Him demon possessed. I don't know, maybe they were hoping to get Him to defend Himself and come across looking ridiculous. But that was a huge mistake; once again the tables are turned over and they are left looking ridiculous.

I know that a casual read of these verses just might confuse you. Why in the world does Jesus talk about circumcision; after all this has been a lesson in true authority? Well, a little cultural mediation is necessary to appreciate what was going on. In actuality, Jesus made a very poignant point using their own religious language and traditions to demonstrate that these so called leaders have totally missed the bus and can't even see what is right in front of their faces.

In the same way that circumcision is a sign or a symbol of a deeper spiritual truth, so is Jesus' healing—and it should be very obvious to everyone. They knew that circumcision was not just about the rendering of the flesh from the body, but it was about a person being set apart for the Lord. It signified a person's identity in the family of God and the fact that true life is found only in God. ***Genesis 17:13-14*** says: "All must be circumcised. Your bodies will thus bear the mark of my everlasting covenant. Anyone who refused to be circumcised will be cut off from

the covenant family for violating the covenant.” And *Genesis 17:12* says that the circumcision must be performed on the 8th day.

On the surface, circumcision was symbolic of their national and personal identity; but it also pointed forward as a prophetic symbol to what happens when a person believes in Jesus and receives His new nature. It symbolizes the rendering of our old fleshly nature from its control over our souls. It was a word picture of our being chosen by God, set apart by Him to belong exclusively to Him, free from the compulsion and demands of our old nature. And because it was performed on the 8th day, in Biblical numerology it further signified the new life that is given to us in the Spirit—our resurrection from the dead so to speak. See *Romans 2:29*; *Philippians 3:3*; and *Colossians 2:11*.

But the point Jesus made is that they considered this covenant so important that, if necessary, they were even willing to violate the Sabbath to ensure a baby is circumcised on the 8th day. In other words, they were clearly able to understand that circumcision carried with it such deep meaning and truth that it had to be prioritized even above one of the ten-commandments; therefore, they should have been able to discern the obvious truths that were right in front of their faces. Namely, only God can perform a supernatural healing. Thus, if Jesus healed a man who had been hopelessly sick for 38 years—whether it was the Sabbath or not—then God must be in their midst. And if God was in their midst, then they need to surrender their spiritual pride, stop seeking to kill Him, and choose to prioritize His words over their own religious traditions.

I want you to not miss the fact that Jesus publically points out their hypocrisy. He did not take them into a back room to rebuke them in private. Rather, they made the fight public so He leaves it public and points out that they are so fixated

on adhering to the 4th commandment to honor the Sabbath that they are willing to break the 6th commandment about not murdering.

Clearly, their entire way of thinking does not make sense and it is based not on the wisdom that comes from God much less basic common sense. But what is happening is that they are showing their true colors. This is a fascinating dynamic that often takes place in the religious systems of even our day. These so called men of God really do not care about the truth; all the religious stuff is just pretense that serves their own interests. They care about being right in their own eyes, about preserving what others think of them, preserving their position and their power, and ensuring that no one, absolutely no one is a threat to their system of control that they know and love. This is all about pride and their unwillingness to have even the slightest amount of humility to accept what is so obvious and clear. God is in their midst.

Now, this text goes on for quite a while and we will have to finish it up next week. But in closing let's step back from this story a bit and consider whether we might be a lot like these people in the way we view our own life and the system of control and authority that we try and preserve. This applies to both those who are believers and those who have never placed their faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus has made it clear by His willingness to die that He loves you. He made it clear by His resurrection that He wants you to experience new life. He says that He is willing to give you a new nature that is holy and clean, a nature that is separate and distinct from your old sinful nature. He sent His Spirit so that you can live every day by His power and His wisdom and no longer by your own power and wisdom. He has sent people into your life who have embraced these truths, so despite your knee jerk resistance to God's Word you can know that *it is possible* to experience God in a very real way.

Therefore, the question becomes are you willing to let the tables in your temple be overturned? Are you willing to let go of your definitions of who God is and what you believe God requires of you? Are you willing to let Jesus and His Word be authoritative over your life?

It is only through Him Jesus that you can experience true peace, true joy, and a love that is not selfish; in other words, you can experience eternity now. I invite you tonight to no longer ignore the obvious, no longer stand in spiritual pride, but choose to believe. I invite you to let go of your own authority and surrender to His love for your life. As Jesus said:

John 7:24

Think through this and you will see that I am right.

Let's Pray.