

Right Teaching

HN 20/02/05 pm

Reading: John 7:10-31, Ephesians 4

Study Text: John 7:10-18

Psalms: 119:9-16, 112:115:1-7

Early in the 17th century Galileo's studies in astronomy and mathematics led him to conclude that the earth and planets actually revolved around the sun. His finding however, conflicted with the official teaching set down by the Church of Rome. He was brought before the inquisition for propagating false teaching and spent the last eight years of his life under house arrest.

To teach something contrary to popular opinion is fraught with danger. Even in science, the opinion of the majority of scientists has to be reckoned with. If you say my work agrees with what Professor so and so and his colleagues teach you will be accepted. But if your finding disagrees with what the Professors hold to be true, you will have difficulty in getting your work recognised.

It can be the same in the realm of theology. If a scholar convinces a few others of his idea it can become accepted teaching. His students may then be compelled to learn this accepted teaching.

In New Testament times certain Rabbis became established as teachers and those who wanted to learn theology had to go to them for indoctrination. Paul for example studied at the feet of Gamaliel, a Rabbi or teacher of the law (Acts 22:3).

But Jesus never studied in this way. He was not a man of letters as the Jews noted (7:15). So as he taught in the temple at Jerusalem they marvelled asking one another where Jesus got his teaching from. He was not quoting prominent Rabbis so they asked Jesus by what authority he taught.

Right time and place

His brothers went up with the clan at the start of the feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. Jesus did not go with them for it was not the right time according to the divine timetable. He went where his Father directed him and when he directed him. He walked according to the will, the perfect will of his heavenly Father.

After 3-4 days he went up to Jerusalem, getting there around the middle of the feast – the right time. The crowds would have reached a peak by this time and as we see there was considerable discussion about Jesus. He went up in secret (7:10), not meaning that he went in disguise or in the middle of the night – just that he did not go up in a party from his own town or district. He appeared in the temple and began to teach.

The Jews, here meaning the Jewish leaders, sought Jesus at the feast no doubt to arrest him, and indeed kill him. They had been after him since he healed that cripple man on the Sabbath (5:16). As a male Jew, Jesus was expected to attend the Jewish festivals in Jerusalem – at least one of the three each year. So they were asking around the place if anyone had seen Jesus. There was warrant out for his arrest we might say. To speak openly about Jesus was dangerous (7:13).

But still there was a lot of murmuring going on as people flocked to Jerusalem and heard stories about this man Jesus. Some had come to the conclusion that he was good while others disagreed. They thought that he was a deceiver. The Jewish leaders were probably behind a lot of bad reports circulating about Jesus.

Remember all the controversy surrounding the Lindy Chamberlain trial some years ago – the dingo and the missing baby. There was a lot of press and a lot of rumour. It was like we all had to make a judgment – was she guilty or not.

Pilgrims flocking to Jerusalem would have come with an open mind, but soon were forced to take sides. Were they for Jesus or against him? Was he good or was he a deceiver. I guess it is the same today. We all have to decide – is Jesus good, did he come down from heaven, does he speak the truth, does he really give life.

The people were coming to Jerusalem to worship God. They were at this feast of the Jews making sacrifices in atonement for their sin. Jesus was claiming to be sent from God, claiming he spoke the word of God. His claims could not be avoided by anyone who sought to worship God.

Is it any different today? Many people believe there is one Supreme Being, one God. They seek to worship God in some one way – with their gifts, their rituals, their sacrifices. Some say we can worship God how we like. But Jesus said ‘I have been sent by God, I speak the truth about God. You must believe me, you must believe in me for I am the only way to the Father’. How then can those who reject Jesus claim to be worshipping God? Is such worship valid? Is it accepted?

Right teaching

Jesus went up into the temple and taught(7:14). Even as a 12yr old boy Jesus questioned the teachers in the temple and they were amazed at his understanding. He was there on his Father’s business he said, just as he was now, some 20 years later.

Jesus had not studied in any of the rabbinic schools. He did not claim the authority of Gamaliel, Shammai or Hillel in his teaching. Nor did he claim his own authority. That would not have been acceptable to the Jews, though valid in the case of Jesus. Jesus claimed authority directly from his Father in heaven. *My doctrine is not my own, but His who sent me* (7:16).

Just what Jesus was teaching the people there in the temple we are not told. Maybe it was similar to his sermon on the mount, or maybe he spoke in parables, or maybe it was about him being the bread of life sent down from heaven. Whatever it was it was profound teaching; teaching like they had not heard before.

Where did he get such teaching they asked and he told them. It is the teaching, the truth that the Father has revealed to him. The prophets, including Moses, spoke the words that God gave them. 'Hear the word of the Lord' they would say. But Jesus declared 'you have heard it said...but I say unto you' (Matthew 5:21-22). Everything that he spoke was spoken with the authority of the Father who sent him.

His teaching was not man's teaching – that is why it was so different. He spoke as God the Son. *In the past God spoke through the prophets but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son* (Hebrews 1:2). No wonder his teaching is amazing. It is the truth directly from God. How wonderful, how precious the teaching of Jesus is; it is the doctrine of the Father in heaven. He speaks living words, words of life, to any person who will listen. Do you find His words full of life for you?

How tragic that the Jews looked to one another, to other men, rather than to God for knowledge, for wisdom and for truth. But it is the same today. It was not long ago that millions believed the words of Marx and tried to live by his teaching – but where are they now? And then there was Chairman Mao and his little red book. But who reads it now? And then there are the writings of Mohammed. Millions still follow his teaching but it will come to an end. One day they will be revealed for what they are – certainly not the words of God for they are words of death not life.

Words must always be tested against the character of the one declaring them. What are the motives of the person doing the teaching? We have become suspicious of results from medical experiments where a drug company has sponsored the research. We question the motives of the scientist. We question the teacher as to his motives. Personal ego may motivate a teacher – popularity and fame his aims.

The Jewish leaders had questionable motives for their teaching. They loved the power and authority accorded them as teachers of the law. Jesus said *he who speaks from himself seeks his own glory* (7:18). Jesus taught doctrine that God gave him. He gave the glory to the One who sent him. The incarnate Jesus was alert to the temptation to take glory to himself and establish himself as an earthly king. *He who seeks the glory of God is true and no unrighteousness is in him.*

Christians and Christian leaders must also be alert to this temptation. Too many fall into this trap of taking glory to themselves. It feels good of course to be praised by men, and the power associated with popularity can be intoxicating. When preachers become famous they often start building their own empire, not the kingdom of God. Who gets the glory from their teaching – that is the question.

Right listening

If anyone wills to do his will he shall know. The emphasis here is on the will – one must will or determine to do the will of God. It does not come naturally. It is not a matter of having an open mind, being ready to listen to anything and make up your own mind . It is a matter of the will, of submitting to God.

If you determine to listen to Jesus, if you will love him and want to know more about him then you will know. To him who has, more will be given. The more you love Jesus, the closer you walk to him the more you will know him.

‘Knowledge will never be sanctified in the heart and lead to true discernment of the divine character and origin of Christ’s teaching unless the willingness to do God’s will is present first of all’ (Hendrickson).

Jesus said I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth for you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and have revealed them to babes (Matthew 11:25). Do you submit your will to God, do you say not my will but yours be done. If so, great truths will be revealed to you.

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