

## Right Judging

HN 26/02/05 pm

Reading: Leviticus 12, Romans 14

Study Text: John 7:19-24

Psalms: 106:1-6, 106:7-10, 119:161-166, 70<sup>2nd</sup>

Jesus was in Jerusalem. He was in the temple teaching. The place was crowded with Jews who had come for the feast of Tabernacles. Jesus had come up around the middle of this week long feast. He knew that the Jews were out to arrest him and kill him but still he went up and started to teach. He went up as directed by his heavenly Father. He did not fear men as he walked in the will of his Father.

The Jews celebrating the feast can be categorized into the three groups as we see in this chapter. 'The Jews' generally means the leaders – Pharisees and Sadducees. Then there were those who lived in Jerusalem – they knew of the plot to kill Jesus (7:25). Then there was the people who came from outside – they did not know of the plot (7:20).

All were caught up in making some judgment about Jesus. He was known for the miracles he had done and also for his unique and powerful teaching. In the passage before us he directs his teaching at the Jews who were trying to kill him. They were men who revered Moses the lawgiver. They thought that God was pleased with their attempts to keep the law. But Jesus exposed them.

Why were they seeking to kill Jesus? It went back to the day when he healed a man who had been a cripple for 38 years – Jesus healed him on the Sabbath. This is recorded back in ch.5. Chapter 7 sort of picks up on this conflict. In fact, some scholars think that this chapter should follow on ch.5.

Jesus questioned the moral judgment being made by the Jews – they claimed to uphold the law yet wanted to murder him. He questioned their legal judgment – who were they to be declare that circumcision was permitted on the Sabbath but healing not.

## Right Moral Judgment

The Jews had *zeal for God, but not according to knowledge* said Paul the former Pharisee (Romans 10:2). The Jews knew the Law of Moses like the back of their hand – or thought they did. They had no hesitation in condemning Jesus for healing a man of the Sabbath. He broke the Sabbath according to their interpretation of the law. They judged him worthy of death. They sought to kill him.

But what about the rest of the commandments? What about the command that says 'do not murder'. In their zeal to uphold the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment they were actually ready to break the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment. Something was not right here. In keeping one command you

are breaking another. How can that be? This is exactly what Jesus was pointing out to them.

They were very zealous but their zeal was not according to knowledge. It was blind zeal. It was zeal based upon pride and self-righteousness. God gave the law through Moses that his chosen people might live – that they might live as the people of God in the land God gave them and that they would bring glory to God. These Jews did not know what it meant to live. They sought to kill Jesus for healing a man on the Sabbath.

‘Oh to see ourselves as others see us’ – so the proverb goes. We might go further and say ‘Oh to see ourselves as God sees us’. It is all too easy, in our zeal for the kingdom of God, to actually bring condemnation upon ourselves – from the very law we are seeking to enforce. You don’t know about this you say? Stop a moment and think about how you discipline your children. Stop and think about how you treat others. Has there never been a time when you have been quick to condemn when you in fact do the same thing. Has there never been a time when in anger you have said or done something which you regret.

And in the church also we see such things. What begins as zeal for the law of God can soon turn into a personal vendetta – so much so that the original concern may be forgotten in the deluge of personal attacks and recriminations.

I may have told you the story about the man who was always criticizing people at church about their dress, about their children’s behaviour, and every other thing. It was his ministry, his duty, so he thought. Until one day someone dared to speak to him about something. He was not seen in the church again.

Paul had to deal with the problem of food laws in many churches. It was a big issue which had the potential to split churches. The Jews had strict (kosher) food laws. Gentile converts did not have such laws but some were actually vegetarian. Part of church fellowship was eating together – Oh the problems Paul faced. It became a theological issue; some claiming believers could not eat meat and others that they could (Romans 14). He also had to deal with the differences about days – *one person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike* (Romans 14:5). Does it matter what your brother eats or what your sister observes about days?

Well yes it does – but to no one else except your brother and the Lord. Your brother or sister is the Lord’s servant – *who are you to judge another* (James 4:12). *The kingdom of God is not about eating or drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit* (Romans 14:17). Is that what the Jews believed – hardly! Is that what you believe?

The Jews were quick to judge Jesus guilty of breaking the Sabbath. They condemned him to death. But was their judgment right? Would they not have had blood on their hands if they had killed him as they planned? In upholding one commandment they would have broken another. Clearly something was wrong. And it was not the law – it was their judgment. Beware – *if you judge the law you are not a doer of the law but a judge...and there is one lawgiver* (James 4).

Of course the Jews had added hundreds of regulations to the Sabbath commandment in an effort not to break it – or in an effort to get around it! They did this to other commands also. Remember the rule that they had about ‘Corban’ – giving to the Lord what should have been given to their parents (Mark 7:9). But we don’t do that do we! We don’t see that in the church today do we? What would Jesus say about some of our traditions?

## **Right Legal Judgment**

We moved somewhat from moral judgment to legal judgment when we considered how the Jews sat above the law, judging the law. This is another dangerous field to enter as Jesus goes on to point out to the Jews.

Before doing so Jesus got a response from the people who were listening but were not really aware of what was going on. They were not aware that the Jews wanted to kill Jesus. They were taken aback when they heard Jesus say this. They knew Jesus was a controversial figure and that the Jews did not approve of him – but to want to kill him! They were horrified. Jesus must be mad – *you have a demon* they said to him. Little did they know of the plotting going on in the religious councils. ‘People are usually slow to catch on to the plots of religious leaders for whom they have high respect’ (Hendrickson).

The Law of Moses stated that a baby boy must be circumcised eight days after birth (Leviticus 12:3) – although Jesus reminded them that it was not Moses in fact but the fathers, viz. Abraham, to whom God first gave circumcision. But what if the eighth day fell on the Sabbath? Could a baby be circumcised on the Sabbath? The surgical removal of the foreskin must be called work.

The Jews judged that circumcision was permissible on the Sabbath. They could not break the Law of Moses regarding circumcision. But by doing this work on the Sabbath they ‘must admit the whole principle that there is some work which may be done on the Sabbath’ (Ryle).

If so said Jesus why are you angry with me for healing a man on the Sabbath. *I made a man completely well on the Sabbath* (7:23). Jesus was not saying that the Sabbath should not be observed or that the Jewish regulations were too harsh. He was saying that they did not understand what the Sabbath meant. Sometimes it is necessary to do work on the Sabbath – they allowed circumcision and indeed allowed for their donkey to be pulled out of a pit on the Sabbath (Luke 14:5). How then could they judge Jesus for healing a man – a man who had been crippled for 38 years? Was this not a work of mercy, a necessary work for this poor man?

Jesus accused them of judging by appearances and not by righteousness and truth. Jesus exposed them for their hypocrisy. In their self-righteousness and misinformed zeal they showed no concern, no love, for a man, a poor man for whom Jesus had compassion. Jesus gave this man life, new life on the Sabbath, while the Jews thought only of death for Jesus because he broke the Sabbath.

Beware of judging by appearances. Things are not always as they appear to be. Our knowledge is so limited and our hearts so corrupt. Paul said *from now on we regard no one according to the flesh* (II Corinthians 5:16). Saul the Pharisee was once compelled by the law to put believers in prison, but Paul the apostle of Christ Jesus was now compelled by the love of Christ – *because we judge thus that if one died for all then, then all died; and he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and rose again*. In Jesus Christ Paul made right judgments and so can you.

*Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon*