

## The Lord Teaches During the Feast of Tabernacles

### John 7:14-18

John 7:14-18 - *“Now about the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and taught. <sup>15</sup> And the Jews marveled, saying, “How does this Man know letters, having never studied?”*

*<sup>16</sup> Jesus answered them and said, “My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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).* John 7:2 says that “the feast” mentioned here was the Feast of Tabernacles. 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 autumn of 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 16:16, all Jewish males were required to go up to Jerusalem to celebrate three of the Old Testament feasts, and one of these feasts was the Feast of Tabernacles. *“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 as far east as Babylon would have been in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. Many of those people would already have heard about Jesus. In fact, many of them, especially those from Judea and Galilee, would have heard Jesus preach before, and might even have seen certain of His miracles.

Verse 14 says that Jesus went up into the Temple and taught. 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 then crowds would have gathered around to listen. This was the normal practice of the rabbis and teachers of the day.

This teaching took place *“about the middle of the feast”* - halfway through the week of the Feast of Tabernacles. The Lord had come up to this feast quietly, almost 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 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 this mixture of people to whom the Lord spoke in the Temple area.

The Jewish religious leaders were in the crowd that was listening to Jesus. They had actually been looking for Jesus, asking, “*Where is He?*” (v11). As we’ve mentioned before, the term “the Jews,” as used by John, usually meant the Jewish religious leaders who rejected Jesus as Messiah.

The Jewish leaders were amazed at Jesus’ teaching, and 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 they wondered how He had such a command of Scripture and such spiritual authority? Under what rabbi had He studied?

In those days, the normal procedure for an up-and-coming young Jewish teacher was to study under one of the leading rabbis in one of the rabbinical schools in Israel. For example, as a young man the apostle Paul studied in Jerusalem under Rabbi Gamaliel. Well, in verse 16 the Lord said, “*My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me.*” In essence He said, “God is my Rabbi! My doctrine is the teaching of the One who sent Me.” What better credentials could anyone have?

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

## Doctrinal / Teaching Points

### 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.*” In other words, Jesus said: “Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God, or whether I speak on my own.”

Do you want to be correct in your doctrine? Do you want to interpret Scripture properly? Do you want to know true orthodox doctrine, from God’s perspective? 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 Jewish leaders 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 observing 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. They were not willing to do God’s will.

What about us? Do we want to be correct in our doctrine? Are we willing to be obedient to that doctrine? Obedience to God's will 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 put forward for the passages in the Bible dealing with the role of women, with the goal of opening 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 – then don't expect to discern what is correct doctrine. If you start your interpretation of a passage with an unwillingness to obey the teaching, if the interpretation turns out to be different than what you want it to be - then don't expect to have correct doctrine!

The way to decide what the Bible teaches about women in Church leadership positions is to carefully study the Scriptures that touch on the role of women. We must come these passages 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**, whether we like the interpretation or not, or whether we completely understand the reasons why the doctrine is taught. Being willing to obey is key to correct interpretation. I'm convinced the Scriptures teach that although women have a many very important roles in the church, they should not hold positions of spiritual leadership.

**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."* 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 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 *"is 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's a principle we can and 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? Don't seek honor and glory for yourself! Start with humility.

Integrity is an extremely important moral quality for an effective 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 college entrance or a job. 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 to discover how self-important and 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 possibly started with a teaching about the Feast of Tabernacles.

Last week as I was driving 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 the people in that radio audience expressed! Suddenly I heard the voice of a Christian friend. 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, spoke up for God, and told the radio audience what God’s Word really teaches about hell!

So 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 placed way too much importance on the “god” of education. What rabbinic school did Jesus attend? Under what rabbi did He study? How could He be qualified to teach, since He had never studied under a rabbi? Well, the Lord didn’t fall into their categories or their way of thinking!

Let’s not fall into the trap of thinking that we can’t really understand the Bible, and we can’t possibly teach the Bible unless we are theologically trained and have several degrees after our names. Many excellent preachers and teachers have studied God’s Word on their own, with no formal education or training in a Bible college or seminary, using commentaries or online teaching.

We can be thankful if we’ve had the opportunity to get education and training we may have, but we must bring very careful to bring everything we study under the subjection of the Word of God. And we should use our education and learning for the glory of God.

Let’s not allow education to become a “god” in our lives. Watch out for the “god” of education.