

# Heart and knowledge

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Let us turn to **John 7: 14-17**

## **John 7: 14-17**

- 14 But when it was now the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and *began to teach*.
- 15 The Jews then were astonished, saying, "How has this man become learned, having never been educated?"
- 16 So Jesus answered them and said, "My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me.
- 17 If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or *whether* I speak from Myself.

We have here the incident where the Lord Jesus came into the midst of the people and during this time of the feast, He appeared in the temple and He began to teach.

It was an important time for the Jews and when the Lord Jesus appeared and began to teach, they were astonished. He spoke with authority, He spoke with understanding. There was revelation, there was meaning. They could understand that there was something very important, meaningful and right in what He was saying. And yet, they were very surprised: "How is it He has become learned, having never been educated?"

In the context, different people had different opinions of the Lord Jesus: “Who is this man? Why does He speak in this way? Can we trust him? Is He from God?” So there were various questions they had in mind.

The Lord Jesus answered them and He said, “My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me.” So what He was telling them is: “You are not to assess Me as you would other people in this world – ‘How clever is He, how capable, how knowledgeable, where has He acquired this knowledge, how has He become so able?’ What I am saying to you is not of this world, not from natural learning, but it is from Him who sent Me, that is, it is from God.”

So how would they know that what He was saying was from God? The Lord Jesus said, “My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me.” But then they would ask, “How do we know that what You are saying is from God?”

And so the Lord Jesus explained in **verse 17**, “If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or *whether* I speak from Myself.”

Why is it the Lord Jesus answered in this way? It is a very meaningful and interesting answer.

Why did not the Lord Jesus say, “It is very difficult for you to understand My teaching: Those who are too young – children – they will not be able to understand; those who are too old, they also cannot quite understand; those who are not educated, it will be very difficult for them; perhaps those who have gone to study religious studies, maybe they can understand but perhaps, they may need special tuition; under certain special occasions, you may be able to see the teaching that I am giving to you”?

But the Lord Jesus said none of these. The words that He said were applicable to everyone, whether children, adults, educated, uneducated, rich or poor, sick or well: All of them could know. And there is one condition: This is the condition which if you fulfil, you will know and if you do not fulfil, you will not know but you may think you know.

We look at the Pharisees. They seemed to know many things. They seemed to understand God's ways. They were able to teach many things that seemed to be very good and right but in reality, they did not really know God. They could not really recognize the Lord Jesus as having come from God. They were opposed to Him, they were angry with Him. They were not really listening to God.

The Lord Jesus said, "If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or *whether* I speak from Myself. If you want to know whether I am sent from God, if you want to know whether what I say comes from God, then ask yourself, are you truly willing to do His will?"

Then of course, there will be those who say, "But how do I know His will?" – Just as the man said, "And who is my neighbour?" (He wanted to justify himself: God says, 'Love your neighbour'; the man said, "And who is my neighbour?" The Lord Jesus said, "Your neighbour is anyone in this world. You are to have that kind of attitude towards them just as is shown by the example of the good Samaritan – the kind of attitude of heart, the direction, the values that you hold.")

So we may say, "I do not know the will of God. How do I know? So how can I say I am willing or not willing to do His will?"

Well, the answer is very obvious if only we are willing to face it. If we are prepared to be honest, if we are willing to be humble, if we are willing to do what is right, we will know because God created us in His image.

God created us so that in our heart, in our conscience, we can know, we can recognize the direction. That is why the Gentiles, they did not have the Law given by Moses, but they had the law of God written in their hearts. They knew, they understood what was the right path. When they did what was wrong, their conscience accused them. When they did what was right, their conscience justified them. They could recognize, they could know what was the right path.

The fact that God gave the Law through Moses to the Jews does not mean that only the Jews knew the will of God. That is not true. Every moral being created by God knows the will of God in terms of the whole direction of life. What does God require of you but to love what is good, to love righteousness, to love kindness, to walk humbly with our God? These are aspects that all of us know. You do not need special revelation to recognize that. Even a little child knows that.

If you ask a boy, "Do you want to be a good boy?"

He says, "Yes".

"Do you know that it is good and right to be a good boy?"

"Yes."

But will he be a good boy? No. In real life situations, he can recognize this is the right path but in practical situations of life, he seeks and chooses the selfish way.

The same thing applies when we grow up as a teenager, as a young adult and as we grow older. The same principle still applies.

“Do you know what is right?”

“Yes.”

“Do you know what is a good path?”

“Yes.”

“Will you live like that?”

“No” - usually, they will not say that. “Yes, yes, I want to live like that. I try very hard to live like that.” But in reality, we do not.

Why? Because basically, we still want to go our own way because it is more pleasant. It is very easy to love the darkness rather than the light because in the darkness, we can choose to do whatever we like and it is not very obvious. We do not want it to be recognized that the path we take is wrong.

But if we truly want to do what is right, we will come to God. We are not afraid for His light to shine upon us, to understand the true state of our heart so that we can be corrected if we have gone wrong, we can find forgiveness; we can be transformed. That is the only way by which we can find true life.

The Lord Jesus said, “If anyone is willing to do His will...” It is helpful for us to recognize that when the Lord Jesus said that, He is not saying that you are willing to do His will in the sense: “If You speak to me, I will listen. If You hold me by the hand, I will follow You” - passively accepting what God wants to tell us. “I am willing to do. You teach me, You show the way, You lead me; I will just go along.”

He is not talking about that. As far as I understand, in the context and usage of the word, the context in which it is used, "If any man is willing", the meaning of "willing" here is not a passive thing. It is an active thing. It can also be translated as: "If any man chooses to do the will of God", "If any man wills to do the will of God", "If any man is determined to do the will of God". It has that resolve; there is that purpose to want to do the will of God. It has to do with a commitment, a recognition, a preparedness, to walk in that path.

It is also not just a desire - "I would like to be good. I would like to do the will of God. I would like to follow the path of righteousness." That is not enough. "If any man is willing to do His will" has the emphasis, the direction: "If any man is prepared to be committed to this path, is determined to walk in God's ways, then he will know of the teaching..." You will receive revelation from God. God will help you to recognize, to understand.

If our commitment is not there, if our preparedness is not there, then it is very easy for the evil one to deceive us: It is very easy for the evil one to tell you, "You are doing the will of God. You are walking in God's ways. You are pleasing to Him. Just do what you find enjoyable as long as you profess that you love God, as long as you keep the company of Christians, you do Christian things, you will be all right."

But there are many, many Christians who do that but deep in their hearts, they are not satisfied; they are miserable, they are troubled, they do not really know God. And they often wonder, "What is God's will? I do not really know."

God has created us such that we can know Him and He wants to reveal Himself to us, He wants to teach us. But this is the critical thing: are we truly willing to do His will?

Whether you are a child or whether an adult, whether an old man and even if you have dementia, you still can make this choice. The choice remains. The moral choice in our life remains. It is a question of whether you want to do it or not.

The state of our body is the state of our body; it is not the state of our heart.

Our spirit is different from our body. But the problem is that our spirit can be very easily affected by our body. When our body is tired, we tend to lose our will to do what is difficult. When we cannot think so clearly with our brain, we may not exercise our spirit as we ought to. When emotionally we are drawn in a certain direction, we may choose to just give in to that because that is much easier.

But in reality, the apostle Paul tells us we can be renewed in our inner man, our spirit, even as our outer man decays and degenerates. Even as we grow and there are things that do not function so well in the body, we can still continue to choose the right path and to be developed in our spirit, so that there will develop something of real quality in our hearts.

But it is true the state of our physical body can have very great effects on us if we allow it. If over the years, our choices have been made based on how we feel, if over the years we give in to the desires of our body, what is convenient, what is pleasant, then as our body deteriorates, so will our spirit, because the body will control the spirit – we will give in to that.

So when the Lord Jesus says, “If any man wills to do His will”, the will of God, He is talking about your moral choice, your inner man, your spirit.

And that applies to all moral beings, whatever your physical state may be. You can make that choice. It is up to you – where you want to go, how you want to live your life.

So if we truly want to do the will of God, we will know of the teaching. When we listen to the Lord Jesus, we will know He comes from God. How do we know that?

Is it by reasoning of the brain? Is it by special experiences that we have? No. Here, the Lord Jesus refers to knowing of the teaching – “he will know of the teaching”. He is not referring to an intellectual grasp by itself; He is not referring to any special event that we go through. He is referring to a spiritual reality. It has to do with a heart identification with the meaning and reality of what is communicated.

When the Lord Jesus says, “Blessed are the pure in heart”, different people will receive it differently. Those whose hearts are preoccupied with themselves may very readily dismiss it and say, “That is of no significance.” But those who love what is good, who desire to do the will of God, when they hear what the Lord Jesus says, their heart recognizes: “This is right, this is from God. I want it; I want to follow this path.” We will know. It is a reality in the heart that we can recognize. So we will know that it is from God.

So too when the apostle Paul preaches, it comes from God through his heart, the spiritual reality and meaning of the direction of God’s call. So when we listen to that, we can recognize that there is that reality. We can know it is from God. So it is possible for the people to know that the Lord Jesus was from God if only their hearts were moving in the right direction.

Of course, it is not just the heart desiring to do the will of God. It also has to do with the preparedness to work at it day by day, to seek God to ask Him to teach us, to reveal to us and as we understand, to live by it. And the more we live by it, the more the reality will grow, the more we will understand, the more it takes place in our hearts.

So then, as we seek the Lord, as we seek to appreciate who He is, let us remember that we are not just coming to a historical figure – the Lord Jesus walking on earth two thousand years ago, today we are learning what He did. We are coming before our Saviour who is alive today and we are appreciating how He lived on earth to teach us how we should live, and how He died on the cross so that we could find forgiveness for our sins, we could receive His life, we could walk in God's ways.

Let us ask Him to help us know Him, appreciate Him, not just by recognition of principles and specific events of life but to know Him as our Lord, our Saviour, the One who is morally perfect and good, who loves us, who cares for us, who wants to help us, but He will also be our Judge: If we reject the path of righteousness, we choose to go our own way, we want to dwell in darkness, then there will be the consequence. There will be the judgment, there will be the punishment; there will be the imprisonment. He came to set us free, but whether we are free or not will depend on whether we choose to identify with Him, to walk with Him in His ways.

Let us come before the Lord and ask Him to help us think through these issues for ourselves, so that we may truly benefit from what He has done for us, that for the rest of our time on earth, we may continue to grow and develop to be like Him in His moral goodness in His being, that we too can be the lights of the world, shining in this world to help others to find true meaning in life.