

Whether it is of God

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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.

As we seek to appreciate the Lord Jesus, who He is and what He has done for us, there are many, many different aspects that we can ponder over to appreciate Him and to learn how to walk as He walked. He is our perfect example, the perfect Man, God Himself living His life in this world for us to see, to understand and to follow.

Today, I want to concentrate on this aspect, where 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."

Why is it so important to know "whether it is of God or *whether* I speak from Myself"?

Sometimes, we may approach the subject from this angle: It is important because God is so powerful – He is a Creator of all things, therefore what He says is the most important; so then, we must know whether it is from God.

If our concern is mainly that God is so powerful and He can do so many things, so we want to be associated with Him, then we place ourselves in danger because the powers of darkness are also very powerful; and many people want to be associated with them because they are very powerful and they can enable men to do many things which usually, they will not be able to do.

But we know that in this situation, the Lord Jesus was not concentrating on this aspect – because God is all-powerful, so whether it is of God or not is so important. He was concentrating on who God is – the moral perfection of God.

If you really want something good and meaningful in your life, you must make sure that it is from God, that it is consistent with the heart of God, it is in line with the will of God, it is what God intends in His creation of mankind.

We are concerned because God is good. That is the central thing that we need to take care of.

“Whether it is of God” or not, we see, is contrasted with “*whether* it is from Myself”. That means, the Lord Jesus is bringing across the important principle: What we do, what we say, is it really from God? Is it really consistent with God’s desire, His will, His character? Or is it not? And when it is not, it refers to all other things.

“From Myself” refers to us as fallible human beings, created beings; it does not have to refer just to yourself, by yourself.

It can be myself in association with the world, myself advised by the top advisors in this world, myself with all my great intelligence and all that the world can teach me. All that comes under “from Myself” instead of “of God”.

But we must understand the Lord Jesus is not saying that we should not speak from ourselves in the sense that whatever we say, we are just speaking like a parrot. We hear God say this in the Scriptures, we just repeat it. People say, “God has said this”, we say so.

The Lord Jesus is not referring to that kind. We must speak from ourselves in the right way. And that is, we must speak from ourselves in that we have come to believe in God, to appreciate Him, recognize that He is good, we are identified with Him: This is what we believe, this is what we are committed to, and because of that, we speak.

So you can say we speak from ourselves in the sense that it is our belief, it is our conviction, but it is of God because it comes from Him, it is in line with His will, it is what He wants to accomplish, it is morally good and perfect.

So this is the central issue that we need to appreciate when we come to consider who the Lord Jesus is.

The Lord Jesus is God Himself but here, He is trying to teach us how man should live. As a man, how do we live our life? What is the basis upon which we conduct ourselves?

So when He says, “whether it is of God or *whether* I speak from Myself”, the phrase “from Myself” here refers to Him if He were to act and speak apart from God and His enabling and God’s presence and God’s will and God’s character. If as a Man, He were to speak just as a man independent of God, then He would be speaking from Himself.

The Lord Jesus said, "I can do nothing from Myself; I can do nothing on My own initiative." But we know the Lord Jesus came into this world on His own initiative. He decided to come into this world to be a sacrifice for mankind. It was His choice. He was not compelled to come into this world. But He said, "I can do nothing on My own initiative" because He had chosen to submit to God, He had chosen to trust Him. He had chosen to abide in Him, to follow Him as the perfect Man, to help us understand this is the way to live our lives.

So why is it so very important "whether it is of God"? If it were not of God, there is no value because man's ways apart from God, contrary to the being of God, are useless, they are worthless. And it is worse than worthless because there will be a negative direction. If we do not follow God, we will follow the world, follow our own personal selfish inclinations, or follow the evil one.

Because God is perfect, if we reject what is perfect, what is left is not perfect. So it is important to know whether the teaching is of God because of the value and because we can then know whether it is worthwhile committing ourselves to that.

The Lord Jesus went into the temple, and *began to* teach. And they were astonished. And He said, "My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me."

Here, the Lord Jesus was not referring to one particular doctrine, one particular aspect of what He was talking about. He was referring to the totality of His teaching, the whole weight of the whole thrust of what He was communicating to the people. He says, "This is all from God. Everything I tell you, the whole meaning and direction of what I am saying is from God. It all comes from God." And that is because He is perfectly in line with God as the perfect Man and He is God who has come in the flesh.

So for the Lord Jesus, He is the image of God, He is the perfect representation and expression of God. For us, we are not. We are created beings. We learn, we develop to become like Him. We grow in our character, we grow in our understanding, we develop quality in our being to become like Him. But He sets us the perfect example of the right approach, the right attitude to take.

So then, if it is not of God, what would it be? In our lives, we know: If we do not follow God, we are going our own way. At the very heart of sin, man has each one turned to go his own way.

So sometimes, we may think that sin has to be something very evil. Some people say, "I have not sinned because I have not committed murder, I have not committed theft and so, I am not a sinner."

The underlying issue of sin has to do with the direction of our heart: where does it move towards? Are we moving towards what is morally good and perfect or are we moving in the opposite direction? When we do not submit to God, we do not choose His ways, we go our own way (it can be in any area of life, if we deliberately choose to go that way), then we will be turning in the direction of death, of sin, of unrighteousness because we do not have life in ourselves – there is no moral goodness in ourselves. The life must come from God. And so we must come to Him in order to develop that quality of our being.

So how do we seek to appreciate what is of God or not of God? Can we recognize whether something is of God or not?

When the Lord Jesus spoke to the people, was it possible for them to tell: "This is of God"? The answer must be, "Yes". It is possible for them to recognize it.

But not many would recognize it. It is possible but often missed. The Lord Jesus lived among them but all they saw was a carpenter, an uneducated man. But there were those who were able to recognize.

We can say that what can help us to appreciate whether it is of God or not has to do with two main aspects of things.

One has to do with the content. What does it contain? What is it talking about? What is the essence of the meaning, the nature of the issues involved?

If it is of God, it must be something good, morally good in its content. It must be something meaningful and helpful for eternity, for the quality of our lives, for the development of something of worth, something that is worthwhile for eternity. So, we need to evaluate and consider the content.

The second aspect, which can be even more important – but in terms of the totality, we need both – has to do with the spirit and the direction and the reality of it.

We can say the right things but with the wrong spirit. We can say the right things in content and yet, we can lead people astray. We can say the right things and yet, there is no spiritual reality in what we say.

So if it is of God, then we need to learn to appreciate that the spirit, direction and reality are very important in terms of transmitting what God wants to communicate.

So when we say that “God is love”, it is true, it is accurate. But if we say it in a frivolous way – “God is love” – we miscommunicate. We are not transmitting spiritual reality.

When we say “God is love” in a sarcastic way, we are actually going against what God wants to say. Or we say, “God is love”, but there is no reality in our lives, we are preoccupied with the world, this again misrepresents God.

So what is of God includes the heart of God, the reality in God, the life and the meaning in Him.

So would it be possible for the people to recognize what the Lord Jesus was teaching was of God? Certainly!

The content of what He said was beyond what men had thought of. The depth of His teaching, the reality, the meaning was so very deep and meaningful. The spirit with which He spoke is obvious: there was life and meaning and reality. The direction was for their well-being, their good. The purity of His heart came through.

So if their hearts were open, they would have been able to recognize: This is of God.

But then why is it people do not often speak in this kind of way like the Lord Jesus – what is of God?

What is the meaning of speaking from ourselves?

Very much of it has to do with the motive and the impact or the effect that it is likely to produce. When we speak from ourselves, there is a reason behind it. We are preoccupied with ourselves, we are interested in what we like, we concentrate on the things that we prefer and so the things we speak of come from ourselves and from the world. And therefore, the effect or the likely impact on people would be to draw them in the direction of self-life and of the world.

If we truly want to speak in the sense of the direction of “of God”, then we need to deal with these areas. What kind of motive do we have? What kind of effect do we want to produce in people? What kind of influence are we seeking to contribute in the lives of others?

At the heart of it, why do people speak from themselves rather than from God?

We can say, basically, it has to do with the focus.

What is your focus? Most people are focused on themselves and so they speak from themselves – their own ideas, their cleverness, the influence of the world, the things of the world, what they can learn and develop that can be impressive to others – and this can include our knowledge of spiritual things. And because we do not properly focus on God, even when we speak of spiritual things, it can still be from ourselves. The Pharisees were very knowledgeable about spiritual things but the whole spirit, the manner, the direction of what they were saying was from themselves.

So then, how can we take care to properly speak from God rather than from ourselves?

This has to do with, at the heart of it, what we give ourselves for.

Are we concerned about our own comfort, what we want, what we like? Or are we concentrating on what is really pleasing to God? Are we prepared to go through times of difficulty, to give up ourselves for what we know is meaningful to God? Do we truly value the pearl of great price, the pearl of great value, so that we are prepared to give up all other things in order to purchase it?

Are we prepared to be determined, to be undistracted, to concentrate on what is of true value? Or are there so many things in this world that can just draw us away from what is of true and ultimate value?

And at the end of it all, if we say we believe these things, we recognize this, we agree with all this that has been said, the question then would be: Will we be true to what we say? Will we be true to what we believe, to the commitment that we express?

Will we live out in accordance with what we honestly believe is the right path or will we give excuses along the way: "It is too difficult, it is impractical. I cannot live out such a life in this world. People will not understand"? Will we give these as reasons for not fulfilling what we believe? Will we follow the world as a result?

Bear in mind that this path is difficult. To be true to your commitment is a very difficult thing. We believe many things that are good and right and very important. But they are very difficult to fulfil and it is very easy to fail.

So what do we do when we fail?

Will we then say, "It is no use", we give up? Or will we continue to come to the Lord, knowing He died for us because we sinned, because we failed?

He knows that, He understands, He is prepared to forgive us, but only on the condition of true repentance. When we truly repent and we want to follow Him, we can come to Him for forgiveness: seventy times seven, He is still prepared to forgive us if we sincerely come to Him, we are desirous of walking with Him. He will help us and we can develop.

At the end of it all, it is our choice. It has to be real in us. It has to be something we want and we choose, we live by it and we know Him and He is real to us.

So then, as we come before the Lord, as we seek to know Him better, to appreciate Him, each one of us will have to learn to respond personally to Him because we recognize He is good and perfect.

Are we prepared to give up ourselves, so that we no longer live for ourselves, no longer speak from ourselves in the wrong kind of way, but learn to speak "of God" and speak from ourselves in union with God, in fellowship with Him, so that we can truly be His ambassadors, that what we say will honour Him, He will be pleased when He hears us speaking on His behalf?

So let us learn to come before Him to ask Him to help us to see these issues more clearly, to understand what it means to walk in the right path, as we appreciate Him and we learn to follow Him.