

Conflict in heart direction

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Let us turn to **John 7: 17-27**.

John 7: 17-27

- 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.
- 18 "He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.
- 19 "Did not Moses give you the Law, and *yet* none of you carries out the Law? Why do you seek to kill Me?"
- 20 The crowd answered, "You have a demon! Who seeks to kill You?"
- 21 Jesus answered them, "I did one deed, and you all marvel.
- 22 "For this reason Moses has given you circumcision (not because it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and on *the* Sabbath you circumcise a man.
- 23 "If a man receives circumcision on *the* Sabbath so that the Law of Moses will not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made an entire man well on the Sabbath?"
- 24 "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."
- 25 So some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, "Is this not the man whom they are seeking to kill?"
- 26 "Look, He is speaking publicly, and they are saying nothing to Him. The rulers do not really know that this is the Christ, do they?"
- 27 "However, we know where this man is from; but whenever the Christ may come, no one knows where He is from."

Today, I want to concentrate on what is the nature of the conflict between the Lord Jesus and the Jews. Why did the Jews seek to kill Him? The Lord Jesus asked the question: "Why do you seek to kill Me?"

There was a conflict between Him and the Jews. What was the nature of the conflict?

From the context, we can say primarily, basically, it was because the Jews were more concerned about outward appearance and associations than spiritual meaning and reality while the Lord Jesus concentrated on what was truly good and meaningful.

Verse 24, we see the Lord Jesus made this remark: "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment." So, this tells us that their emphasis was wrong. They were not concentrating on meaning, righteousness, moral goodness. They were concentrating on appearance.

Why is that so? Why should they concentrate on appearance rather than on what is truly righteous?

When we ponder about it, we will realize that this is very much associated with the intention of their heart. There was something wrong within them in their emphasis and direction, what they were seeking for. We see that the Lord Jesus explains in **verse 17 and 18** the underlying reason why the Jews behaved as they did.

He 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." The implication here then, is that the Jews were not truly willing to do the will of God. That is why they did not know the Lord Jesus: that He was speaking from God.

And so He goes on to explain why is it the Jews behaved that way: "He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him."

This is the contrast between the Jews and the Lord Jesus. This is the source of the conflict.

The Jews, on the one hand, were seeking their own glory. So they spoke from themselves whatever was convenient to them, whatever was regarded as advantageous to them, whatever would bring about glory to themselves. They were seeking their own glory, so they concentrated on appearance.

The Lord Jesus, on the other hand, was seeking the glory of the One who sent Him. He was concentrating on the glory of God, the One who was morally and spiritually perfect. He was concentrating on moral righteousness.

And so, when the Lord Jesus spoke, it would reveal the failures, the sins, the wrong attitudes of the Jews. They certainly would not want to listen to what He had to say in that kind of direction.

“He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory”: and if you want true glory that is of eternal, lasting value, you will know that there is a very great price for that glory. That kind of glory - true, lasting, meaningful glory - it is very, very costly.

But people want to have glory in an easy way. So what do they do? - Concentrate on appearance. If you concentrate on appearance, you can do almost anything without having to change the quality of your heart.

So too, we can see the world around us: it is very easy for people to continue their wrong desires if outwardly they can show as if they were generous, they were kind, they were great, they were concerned; they may do many things that appear to be very good, but the heart is not right.

God told Samuel: "Men look at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart." So if you want glory from men, you can concentrate on appearance. Many will be impressed. But if you want true glory from God, it is no use concentrating on appearance. God sees the heart; He knows why you do the things that you do: Are they motivated by what is truly good, or are they in reality self-centred? If they are self-centred, there will be no true glory.

We all know what a good actor is. There are many who win Academy Awards for acting. What is the meaning of these awards? These awards tell you that these people are very capable at pretending to be something or somebody such that it is very convincing: When you look at that movie, that play, it seems as if that person being portrayed is in reality the person portraying it. The acting is so good, it is so real. But in reality, a person who acts as a hero, as someone very good, may actually be someone very cruel, self-centred, arrogant and proud. But people enjoy watching this.

If we want true glory, we have to seek for the glory that comes from God. And the true glory that comes from God does not come about by our seeking to want to be great in the eyes of men or to be greater than other people so that we can say, "I am better than others." It is the opposite of that.

The true glory that comes from God comes about when we give up ourselves to concentrate on what is truly good.

We seek the glory of God in that we know that God is worthy of glory, God is good; and so, we want to do things that will honour Him, that will bring joy to Him, that He would approve, that will be meaningful to Him.

And we are very glad when people can develop that kind of quality that God appreciates. In that sense, we will not be seeking to be greater than others. If others can be greater than us in the sense of moral quality of beauty and meaning, we will rejoice, we will be glad because that is good.

So when we seek for true glory from God, our concentration is not on ourselves but on God and on what is truly good. And we concentrate on meaning, not the outward appearance of things. Once the meaning is clear and deep, it is real, of course it will manifest itself in the appropriate ways. We will seek God for wisdom to understand how to manifest the glory of God in the different situations that we go through.

This is the meaning of letting our light shine in this world. This is the meaning of being the salt of the earth. It is not by pretending to be somebody we are not; it is not by trying to show something that seems good when it is not, but by being the real thing: the life, the meaning, the reality that comes from God.

And bear in mind that if we want to live like that, we may end up in many situations laughed at by others, regarded as a fool, considered someone worthless, incapable and nothing to be proud about. That is because in following the Lord, we do not concentrate on trying to impress others, but we concentrate on being what we ought to be, and motivated by that, we should be prepared to go through whatever would be helpful, good and meaningful.

That is the reason why the Lord Jesus was prepared to leave heaven, the glory of heaven, to come into this world to be born in a manger, to be laughed at by others, to be seen just as a carpenter, and to be mocked and crucified.

In contrast, the Pharisees wanted glory. The way they dressed, the way they talked, the way they prayed were meant to impress the people.

But the Lord Jesus said the Pharisee who prayed apparently such a beautiful prayer would be condemned, while the Publican or the tax-collector who prayed in sincerity, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!" would be forgiven.

So God looks at the heart and it is very easy for us to concentrate on the outward appearance.

If we want to follow the Lord Jesus, if we want to be faithful to Him, we want to live our lives in a manner that will truly count, we have to deal with this.

What motivates us? What is it that we want to achieve? Are we seeking great things for ourselves? Or are we seeking for what is good for mankind, we are seeking for what is good in the eyes of God, that has eternal, long-lasting value, regardless of how others may treat us, how they may respond to us, what they may say about us?

Notice the crowd said: "You have a demon!" What a terrible thing to say! God, the Almighty perfect God, the Lord Jesus Christ dwelling in our midst as the perfect Man, being described as having a demon. "Who seeks to kill You?" – as if He was not telling the truth.

He said, "Why do you seek to kill Me?" and they said, "Who seeks to kill You? You are imagining things. Just out of fear, You are saying these things." They ridiculed Him.

But they were saying things to protect themselves: just whatever was suitable for their own ends.

This will be the outcome if we do not concentrate on what is of true value in life, if we do not follow the example of the Lord Jesus.

So as we come before the Lord, it is good for us to reflect on who the Lord Jesus is.

Do we want to follow Him or are we seeking our own glory, proud of what we can do, what we can accomplish, wanting honour from others, wanting to be better than others?

Do we just seek to be good, to be faithful, to be true to the Lord so that at the end of it all, we can be satisfied that we have become what we ought to be, that in our own hearts, we can have the satisfaction of knowing we have been true to ourselves, what we believe and what we should be committed to, and the Lord can then meaningfully say, "Well done, good and faithful slave" or "good and faithful servant", or even more so, "good and faithful friend"?

Can God say that to us when He meets us in heaven? The choice is ours - how we will live our lives now.

Let us then come before the Lord and ask Him to help us ponder over our lives, to consider what is truly worth living for. And let us ask Him to help us to be what we ought to be.

If there is any aspect in our lives that is not right, let us confess and ask Him to forgive us: He is kind and gracious; He is willing to forgive if we are truly repentant. If we have been walking in the right path and we want to go deeper, the Lord is pleased; let us ask Him to help us to be more determined and perseverant even as we face difficulties and opposition. Even as the evil one seeks to draw us away from God, let us ask the Lord to protect us and keep us, and let us take our stand together with the Lord.