

# The Conflicts of Unbelief – *John 7:1-24*

**Introduction** – Darkness does not dwell with light. Unbelief is uncomfortable around faith. And ultimately, those who reject Jesus for Who He is are intolerant of those who acknowledge Him as Lord. These are the conflicts of unbelief.

John has recorded five signs so far, four up in Galilee and only one down in Jerusalem. That sign was the one which caused hostility towards Jesus. He had healed on the Sabbath and the Jewish authorities wanted to kill Him (5:16). In Chapter 6, Jesus winnows followers in the thousands to just a handful with His refusal to be king on their terms and His scandalous words about eating His flesh and drinking His blood. In Chapter 7, the conflicts accelerate. But Christ and His message leans into the conflict. He is light come into darkness. He is life come into a world full of the stench of death. Keep these two phrases from the Prologue in mind: “*In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend/overcome it*” (1:4-5), and “*He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name*” (1:10-12). And so we find ourselves also confronted with the conflicts of unbelief. We would do well to learn from Jesus.

**“Show Yourself to the World!”: Conflicts with Family** (vv1-9) – From Chapter 6 to Chapter 7 some six months have gone by. Jesus had confined his movements to the province of Galilee and did not go to Judea because the Jewish elite sought to kill him (v1). But when the Feast of Tabernacles was coming near, His brothers challenged Jesus to go into Judea and show Himself to the world (v2-4). They did this because they didn’t believe in Him (v5). Jesus replied that it was not yet His time and that the world hated Him because He called out their works as evil (vv6-8). He remained in Galilee (v9).

**Brothers?** – Joseph and Mary had at least six other children (Matt 13:55-56). The four brothers were named James, Josés, Judah, and Simon. They were pious Jews, observing the Feast of Tabernacles here, but they did not believe the claims Jesus was making. Earlier, they had tried to take charge of Him when people said, “*He is out of His mind*” (Mark 3:21) and were probably embarrassed by the accusations leveled against Him as well as His response (Matt 12:24-27, 46-50). In our passage, they challenged Him that if He really meant what He said, He should go to Jerusalem and publicly show these great signs along with His claims.

It should be noted that after the resurrection, some if not all came to faith. This may have occurred with His appearance to James (1 Cor 15:7), and at Pentecost the brothers were found to be with the disciples (Acts 1:14). James is the author of the book of James and Judah the book of Jude. It should also be noted that Mary did not remain a virgin after giving birth to Jesus (Matt 1:25).

**The Feast of Tabernacles** – This was the most popular Feast in Jerusalem, an 8-day celebration where countless thousands road-tripped to Jerusalem and hung out in tents all over the city. The most religious people of the nation would most likely be there and so what better opportunity for Jesus to prove His claims and show His wares?

**“Show Yourself to the World!”** – Jesus would show Himself to the world, but His time had not come (v6). He would ride into Jerusalem the week of Passover and be lifted up on a cross (and His brothers would not participate in observing this). That “showing” would reveal the evil of the world and Jesus says, “*The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil*” (v7). Here is the antithesis: the enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman (Gen 3:15). This enmity is fixed by God and it is impossible to eradicate. The issue is authority – who will be God? We either will be under the authority of our Father in Heaven, an authority that originates outside the world, or we will want to be under the authority of our own whims and passions.

**Conflict All Around** (vv10-18) – Jesus does in fact go and “show” Himself, but not in the way His brothers were thinking. Rather than going up and performing great miracles, He goes into the temple and begins to teach (v14). Jesus places great importance on preaching and teaching. John tells us that there had been a lot of whispering about Jesus, hoping He would come, but not talking about it openly for fear of the Jewish authorities who were also looking for Him (vv11-13, note the difference between John’s use of “*the Jews*” and “*the people*”). The authorities do not want Jesus discussed publicly (cf. 9:22), and later Jesus will warn His disciples that this cancel-culture style will continue against them (15:18-20, 16:1-2).

Jesus goes into the temple and teaches – and they marvel at His teaching (v14-15). He had not studied in the rabbinical centers, and He apparently doesn’t appeal to the weight of the traditions. Rather, He appeals to the fact that His teaching is directly from “*(the One) who sent me*” (v16). Again, Jesus is challenging the origin and nature of authority (vv17-18).

**Authority and the Fear of God** – The people feared the authorities. Might they have turned to Jesus if there could be an open and free discussion? But there could not because the establishment would not allow it. Be careful when you are granted recognition and honor (or the circus and bread) by the world's authorities; it may stifle your faith (John 5:44). The cow-towing of the church to tyrannical authority has come upon us because we so much want to be considered relevant and we fear losing that. In discussions about secular education, materialistic scientism, traditional roles of husband and wife and family, critical race theory, and the like, we find ourselves quickly on the defensive because we fear man and not God (Matt 10:28). But “*The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate*” (Prov 8:13).

Jesus was not afraid and did not go on the defensive – “*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*” (v17). Obedience (and submission to the One who is Authority) is the great opener of eyes. Augustine, who yet for all his brilliance bucked against the gospel for years, said, “*Seek not to understand that you may believe, but believe that you may understand.*” The one who is willing to obey will know. The one who is not willing to obey will not know. An unbeliever does not believe because he does not wish to repent. And believers become soft, twisting the meaning of words and the Word, because they do not wish to obey at the cost of being shunned.

**Conflict about Keeping the Law** (vv19-23) – Remember, it was the Jewish authorities who wanted to kill Jesus, not the people. So, when Jesus says that they are seeking to kill Him, they think he is getting paranoid or “*has a demon*” (vv19-20). But what Jesus is really getting after is the Jewish elite (the Pharisees and those in authority) who charged Him with breaking the Sabbath. If they understood that an infant could be circumcised on the eighth day even if it fell on the Sabbath, how much more could a man be made whole with a healing on the Sabbath? Jesus was keeping the Sabbath. They were the ones not keeping God's law, for they were seeking to murder Him (Ex 20:13).

**Conflict from Judging by Appearances** (vv24) – Consider verse 25 carefully. Jesus is condemning their “*judging by appearances*” and that is exactly what our culture is doing today. Common sense would have told them healing a man on the Sabbath was not Sabbath-breaking, and “*righteous judgment,*” i.e. a faithful submission to the plain teaching of Scripture, just as much as common sense. But they were judging based on appearances and appeasing those in power. This is what tyrants do. They manipulate the moral system, disconnecting it from any transcendent authority in order to become the “transcendent” authority themselves.

Jesus would have none of it, and we must follow Jesus. He would be crucified for it, and He promised we would be persecuted as well. But we know where Creation came from. We know that God created man in His image in a binary way, no exceptions. We know the delegated authority and limits of civil, ecclesial, and familial governments. We know about the dignity of all human life. More importantly, we know that forgiveness of sins is offered to all who call on the name of Jesus, but that presupposes that we know what sin and lawlessness is and what God thinks of it. We know that Jesus reigns over heaven and earth with all authority. And we know that is good. We know that the darkness cannot and will not overcome His authority. And so, we call on all men everywhere to repent and believe that they may come to know as well.