

• *John – accepted by the people but rejected by the religious*

1. Religious people are often stubborn in rejecting God's good news no matter who brings it

• *John, they said, was too serious!*

• *Jesus, they said, enjoyed life too much and was too friendly!*

2. The truth was, religious people do not really like to change their mind and admit they are wrong.

• *The real offence was the challenge to repentance over sin*

When the people heard Jesus speak of the greatness of John ^{☞1}, they 'justified God' – they declared the goodness and righteousness of God. Hundreds of them had been baptised by John the Baptist. It was the specially religious Pharisees who disliked John.

☞1 7:28

1. Religious people are often stubborn in rejecting God's good news no matter who brings it. John had prepared the way for Jesus. Many of the ordinary people had believed in God's Word through John, and they had accepted John's baptism as a sign of their repentance and readiness for God to work in their lives ^{☞1}. Yet the Pharisees and experts in the Mosaic law had refused to be baptised by John ^{☞2} Jesus says these religious experts were like children in their moaning and complaining ^{☞3}. First of all someone plays the flute. But the other children respond 'No, we do not want that joyful happy music.' So instead someone sings a 'dirge' – a funeral song. But they do not like that either! John came. He was called to be a very serious person. He was not famous for loving good food and wine. Far from it. He lived in the wilderness and ate locusts and wild honey. The Pharisees said, 'He is insane, a religious fanatic, an eccentric.' Shortly afterwards Jesus came. He was quite different. The first miracle He did was to create hundreds of litres of diluted wine for a wedding festival! He ate with sinners and drank the diluted wine that was used in those days. He chatted freely with tax collectors and was friendly to sinners. But the religious leaders did not like that either! When someone is determined to pick a quarrel they will be critical no matter what you do! The religious leaders of Jesus' day rejected John because he did not seem to be very fun-loving. Then they rejected Jesus because He enjoyed life too much and was too friendly! Actually it was not really the seriousness of John or the friendliness of Jesus that offended the Pharisees and the law-experts, it was something else.

☞1 7:29

☞2 7:30

☞3 7:31-32

2. The truth was, religious people do not really like to change their mind and admit they are wrong. What the Pharisees and lawyers did not like was John's message and Jesus' message about repentance over sin. It was Jesus' particular preaching of salvation that really offended them. They did not like the teaching that everyone, even religious people, need new birth and salvation. Unbelief has a negative mentality. When the children in the market-place said to the other children 'Come and dance with us' they were sulky and unresponsive. When the children in the market-place said to the other children 'Come and let's play at having a funeral!' they still were sour and apathetic. Unbelief is never satisfied. Yet the real problem is that the unbelieving leaders of the days of John and Jesus did not like the message of repentance. Both John and Jesus were calling upon the entire nation to repent and turn to God. 'Change your mind! Admit you are wrong! Admit that this worldly ambition of

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yours is doing you no good,' said John and Jesus to the Pharisees. But the Pharisees would not receive such a message. It did not matter who came. It could be stern John; it could be sociable Jesus. Either way they were offended at the message. Religious people find it hard to change their minds. Their religion is a kind of shield and protection to them – against God! They feel that somehow it will keep them safe. The most difficult thing in the world for religious people is to admit that they need a Saviour to deliver them from sin. Their excuses keep changing! One minute they are saying the gospel is too hard. The next minute they are saying it is too easy! One minute they want to be secular people. The next minute they are thinking that maybe eastern religion has the answer. They can never make up their minds, except that they have made up their minds not to have Jesus! Their excuses change but their unbelief does not change. Yet what is on offer from Jesus is unchanging forgiveness and the power of God's Holy Spirit.

3. True wisdom is to be found in the message of John and Jesus. 'Yet wisdom is shown to be right by all her children', says Jesus ^{□1}. The rightness of God's way of salvation is demonstrated by all those who accept it. This changeable, restless, obstinate refusal to submit to the message of John and Jesus never produces any peace of heart. It is always restless, dissatisfied. But true wisdom will prove itself to anyone who submits to it. True wisdom is to be found in the message of John and Jesus. It begins with an appeal to change our minds, to admit that we are in spiritual need. This was the teaching of John. The people were so interested in a political Saviour, in a mighty soldier who would remove the Roman occupying forces. John said 'You've got the wrong idea altogether. The Saviour who is coming saves you from your own sinfulness. He brings forgiveness of sins. Then He pours out His Holy Spirit upon you.' Those who will accept the message of John and of Jesus will prove for themselves that God's way of salvation is true, and will declare its truthfulness to everyone else. If the Pharisees and lawyers reject the purpose of God for their lives ^{□2}, the 'child of wisdom' does the exact opposite. The 'child of wisdom' – the true believer – accepts God's plan, discovers that it is everything that it claims to be and boldly tells everyone that he or she has found God's plan to be right and true.

□1 7:35

□2 7:30

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