

Chapter 15

John Responds To The Elders

BIBLE

In those days, John the Baptizer came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying¹ “Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved. How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you?”²

Then the earth shook and trembled. The foundations of heaven quaked and were shaken, because he was angry.³

He said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts. For that which is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.”⁴

“How long will you speak these things? Shall the words of your mouth be a mighty wind? ⁵You offspring of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.”⁶

“You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit! As your fathers did, so you do.”⁷ You received the law as it was ordained by angels, and didn’t keep it!⁸

COMMENTARY

¹ **Mathew 3:1**

² **Jeremiah 4:14** The “baptizer” washes away “evil thoughts” (wrong thinking) so that we may be “saved” (rescued from the human condition).

³ **2 Samuel 22:8**

⁴ **Luke 16:15** John: “If someone thinks that love and peace is a cliché that must have been left behind in the Sixties, that’s his problem. Love and peace are eternal.”

⁵ **Job 8:2** John could be very kind and thoughtful, and he promoted a message of peace and love. But when his pain and insecurity got the best of him, he was often angry and abusive, lashing out at anyone he felt threatened by.

⁶ **Matthew 12:34** John’s songs often sent a message to those whom he felt were not as aware or as intelligent as he was. “You don’t get me,” he bemoans in “And Your Bird Can Sing.” “Can you see me at all?” he asks in “Nowhere Man.”

⁷ **Acts 7:51** In “Baby You’re A Rich Man,” the overly cautious are “tuned to a natural E, happy to be that way.” A natural E is one of the easiest notes to play in music.

⁸ **Acts 7:53**

“So then, have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?⁹ Don't rejoice against me, my enemy. When I fall, I will arise. When I sit in darkness, Yahweh will be a light to me.¹⁰

“Show me your ways, Yahweh. Teach me your paths.¹¹ The proud have smeared a lie upon me. With my whole heart, I will keep your precepts.¹²

“I understand more than the aged, because I have kept your precepts.¹³ I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation.¹⁴

“Depart from me, you evildoers, that I may keep the commandments of my God.¹⁵ Don't think that I came to send peace on the earth. I didn't come to send peace, but a sword.¹⁶

“Why don't you understand my speech? Because you can't hear my word.¹⁷ So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will vomit you out of my mouth.¹⁸

“Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees, and to the writers who write oppressive decrees;¹⁹ to deprive the needy from justice, and to rob the poor among my people of their rights, that widows may be their plunder, and that they may make the fatherless their prey!”²⁰

⁹ **Galatians 4:16** In “Strawberry Fields Forever” no one has John's level of understanding : “No one I think is in my tree.”

¹⁰ **Micah 7:8**

¹¹ **Psalms 25:4**

¹² **Psalms 119:69**

¹³ **Psalms 119:100** Merle Steir, *Advertising Age* (1967): “Youth has won. Youth must *always* win. The new naturally replaces the old.”

¹⁴ **Psalms 119:99** Edmund Burke: “The arrogance of age must submit to be taught by youth.”

¹⁵ **Psalms 119:115**

¹⁶ **Matthew 10:34** John, like Jesus, certainly wanted peace on earth, but knew that this would not come about until there was a fundamental change within the heart of man. With their “sword,” these prophets sharply divided beliefs and attitudes into two groups; those that are empowering, and those that are not part of God's best plan.

¹⁷ **John 8:43** “You've heard every sound there is... but you can't hear me,” John laments in “And Your Bird Can Sing.”

¹⁸ **Revelation 3:16**

¹⁹ **Isaiah 10:1**

²⁰ **Isaiah 10:2** Martin Luther King, Jr.: “In any civilized society, it is every citizen's responsibility to obey just laws. But at the same time, it is every citizen's responsibility to disobey unjust laws.”

He said, “Woe to you lawyers also! For you load men with burdens that are difficult to carry, and you yourselves won’t even lift one finger to help carry those burdens.”²¹

“The proud and haughty man, ‘scoffer’ is his name; he works in the arrogance of pride.²² He is conceited, knowing nothing, but obsessed with arguments, disputes, and word battles, from which come envy, strife, insulting, evil suspicions.”²³

“Listen to me, you stout-hearted, who are far from righteousness.”²⁴ Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but don't consider the beam that is in your own eye?²⁵ But oh that God would speak, and open his lips against you.”²⁶

He said, “Most certainly I tell you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown.”²⁷ The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim release to the captives, recovering of sight to the blind, to deliver those who are crushed.”²⁸

“For this, I was appointed as a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles,”²⁹ although I was before a blasphemer, a persecutor, and insolent. However, I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.”³⁰

²¹ **Luke 11:46** John: “Our society is run by insane people for insane objectives.”

²² **Proverbs 21:24** The unconventional way that John was raised was crucial in forming the rebellious side of his personality and led him to question those in authority. His father left the family when John was a baby, and his mother Julia sent him to live with his aunt Mimi when he was five years old. Julia was killed in an auto pedestrian accident when he was 17, just as the two of them were starting to bond in a special way. John told an interviewer in 1980 that “the fact that I wasn't with my parents made me see that parents are not gods.”

²³ **1 Timothy 6:4** In “Nowhere Man,” the alienated “nowhere man” is “sitting in his nowhere land.”

²⁴ **Isaiah 46:12** “Nowhere man please listen,” John preaches in “Nowhere Man.”

²⁵ **Matthew 7:3** The close-minded “nowhere man” “just sees what he wants to see” in “Nowhere Man.”

²⁶ **Job 11:5**

²⁷ **Luke 4:24**

²⁸ **Luke 4:18**

²⁹ **2 Timothy 1:11**

³⁰ **1 Timothy 1:13** John is saving souls in “The Word”: “Now that I know what I feel must be right, I mean to show everybody the light.”

As he said these things, all his adversaries were disappointed, and all the multitude rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him.³¹

Then the king arose, and sat in the gate. They told to all the people, saying, "Behold, the king is sitting in the gate." All the people came before the king. Now Israel had fled every man to his tent.³²

The king said to the man of God, "Come home with me, and refresh yourself, and I will give you a reward."³³

The man of God said to the king, "Even if you gave me half of your house, I would not go in with you, neither would I eat bread nor drink water in this place."³⁴ Better is a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who doesn't know how to receive admonition anymore!"³⁵

When the multitudes heard it, they were astonished at his teaching.³⁶

Now Paul and his company set sail from Paphos, and came to Perga in Pamphylia. John departed from them and returned to Jerusalem.³⁷

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor.³⁸ It's also written in your law that the testimony of two people is valid.³⁹

³¹ **Luke 13:17** John's friend Pete Shotton: "Everyone was interested in John, because even as a kid he had a great awareness about everything going on about him. He had an amazingly quick wit, a great sense of humor, an ability to turn serious situations upside down on their head and transform them into surrealistic plays."

³² **2 Samuel 19:8**

³³ **1 Kings 13:7** [*John is "the man of God"*]

³⁴ **1 Kings 13:8** In late 1969, John protested Britain's involvement in the Vietnam War by returning his MBE award to the Queen.

³⁵ **Ecclesiastes 4:13** John, in a 1970 interview with Rolling Stone: "I always wondered, 'why has nobody discovered me?' Didn't they see that I'm cleverer than anybody in this school? That the teachers are stupid, too? That all they had was information that I didn't need. I was different. I was always different. Why didn't anybody notice me?"

³⁶ **Matthew 22:33** John: "I'm cynical about things that are taken for granted: society, politics, newspapers, government; but I'm not cynical about life, love, goodness, death."

³⁷ **Acts 13:13**

³⁸ **Ecclesiastes 4:9** Paul: "John and I were on fire every time we sat down to write."

³⁹ **John 8:17**