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JESUS THE CONFRONTER

Luke 14:1-14

By

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Luke Lesson 68

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We live in a day where the doctrine of self-esteem is assumed to be a basic "Christian" belief. Not only Christian psychologists, but also many popular Bible teachers, emphasize that you must learn to love and accept yourself before you can truly love God and love others. Earlier in my ministry, I used to teach that you need "proper" self-esteem.

Then I read John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards, who both denounce self-love and self-esteem as being radically opposed to biblical humility. (See my message, "How John Calvin Led Me to Repent of Christian Psychology.") They helped me to see that I had drifted from the Bible, which clearly teaches self-denial, not self-esteem. For a number of years now I have taught a course titled, "Self-Confrontation," using the manual of that title by John Broger (published by the Biblical Counseling Foundation). The very title seems jarring in this day of feel-good-about-myself Christianity. People wonder, "Why would I want to confront myself? Am I not supposed to love myself and feel good about myself?" Self-confrontation seems like about as much fun as a root canal.

But the Word of God and Jesus in particular confront us continually with our sin. It's safe to say that if you are not using Scripture to confront your life, then you are not growing in Christ. Scripture is given for reproof and correction (2 Tim. 3:16). When Paul exhorted Timothy to preach the word, he went on to say, "Reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction" (2 Tim. 4:2). If a builder came on a construction site and found that it was littered with the remains of an old building, before he could begin construction he would have to clear away the rubble. Our lives are littered with the rubble of sin, and the Lord continually has to clean out the old life of sin so that He can build in the new life of holiness. So His Word constantly confronts us with areas where we need to judge our sin.

One of the main proponents of self-esteem says that one reason he follows Jesus is that Jesus is such a positive person. He

must have cut Luke 14 out of his Bible! Jesus was invited to dinner at the home of a leader of the Pharisees. He accepted the invitation, but He was hardly a polite dinner guest. It was on the Sabbath, and He no sooner had walked in the door than He saw, right in front of Him, a man suffering from dropsy. Dropsy, also called edema, is a swelling of the joints or the whole body, often due to a faulty heart or to diseased kidneys or liver. Jesus could have told the man, "Come back after sundown and I'll heal you," thus avoiding a confrontation with the Pharisees. But He didn't do that; He healed the man and then verbally confronted His critics.

As if that were not enough for one day, the Lord proceeded to rebuke the dinner guests who sought out the places of honor at the table. While everyone's jaws gaped open at that, He proceeded to rebuke the host for inviting the wrong guests to his dinner party. Then, when one of the guests tried to ease the tension by exclaiming, "Blessed is everyone who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God," Jesus told a parable to show that many of the Jews would be shut out of the kingdom and many Gentiles would be included (14:15-24). Jesus was very confrontational! If you hang out with Him for very long, you'll find that He confronts your sin. He does it out of love for a good reason:

Jesus confronts our sin so that we will
inherit rewards for all eternity.

Our text reveals three areas where Jesus confronts our sin. Before we look at these, let me point out that Jesus accepted dinner invitations from unbelievers, but He didn't just go and socialize. He went with a mission. He was always doing His Father's business. If you socialize with unbelievers, make sure that you go with the same sense of mission, prepared to speak out boldly for the Lord. Otherwise, you will end up compromising your faith or even being drawn back into the worldly behavior you once engaged in.

1. Jesus confronts our sin of religious hypocrisy (14:1-6).

Luke does not say and so we can't be sure, but there is some reason to believe that the Pharisees planted this man with dropsy there in front of Jesus to see whether He would violate their rules against healing on the Sabbath. Luke says, "they were watching

Him closely.” The verb has the nuance of lurking or lying in wait to catch someone in something. They were out to get Him.

Jesus didn’t disappoint them! He took up the challenge head-on, asking them, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?” This put them in a bind. If they said that healing is permitted, they conceded His point and they raised problems about their traditions, which had added to the Law of Moses. If they said that healing is not permitted, they came across as uncaring. Besides, if they had invited this man to be there, it cast questions on their motives for them to say, “No, healing is not permitted.” So they kept silent.

Note the simple manner Luke reports this miracle: Jesus took hold of the man, healed him, and sent him away. Normally, dropsy would take a few days to subside, but this man went from being bloated to instantly being normal. Luke doesn’t say anything about the man’s or the witnesses’ reaction. Then, Jesus followed up the miracle by asking them a rhetorical question to underscore His point: “Which one of you shall have a son or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?” Some manuscripts read “donkey” instead of “son,” but the evidence is clearly in favor of “son” as the original reading. Jesus is saying, “If your son, or for that matter, even your ox, falls into a well on the Sabbath, you wouldn’t hesitate to pull him (or it) out. Yet you want to let this man go on in his suffering!” In other words, they cared about their animals more than about this man. Jesus was exposing their lack of love and their religious hypocrisy.

There are far more characteristics of hypocrites than those listed here, but note these five from our text:

(1) Hypocrites study the Word for ammunition against others, but they don’t apply it to themselves. These men knew their Bibles. They knew the Law of Moses frontward and backward. They were the guardians of the faith, waiting to catch someone else in an error. Their aim in knowing the Word was not to confront themselves, but to have the ammo to use against others. They were watching Jesus closely, but they weren’t watching themselves closely. They were waiting for Him to violate their rules, so that they could pounce on Him. But they weren’t applying the Law to themselves.

I've seen husbands who use the Word like a club against their wives. "She doesn't submit to me as the head of the home." I say to them, "Did you know that the Bible never commands you to be the head of your wife?" They sputter, "What do you mean? Of course it does!" But it does not. The Bible instructs *wives* that their husbands are their head, but when it comes to the husband, the command is, "Love your wives even as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her" (Eph. 5:25). I'll ask these husbands, "How are you sacrificing your time and selfish interests to serve your wife and children?" These hypocritical husbands want to lord it over their wives and children, abusing the authority that the Lord gives to husbands to bless and protect their families. But they don't want to lay down their selfish ways in service of their wives and children, as Scripture confronts them. They are using the Word for ammo against others, not to confront their own sinful selfishness.

(2) *Hypocrites target and try to bring down anyone who confronts their sin with the Word.* Why did this Pharisee invite Jesus to dinner? What was his motive? From the evidence we have, I suggest that it was not to learn from Jesus. It was not to find out if possibly he was wrong and Jesus was right. He invited Jesus to dinner to try to set Him up and bring Him down. He and his cronies were watching Jesus to try to trip Him up.

I have had people in the church who are constantly critical of minor doctrinal differences that they hear in my sermons. They're always ready to pounce when I don't exactly agree with them. One matter that seems to be increasingly common is that they use the King James Bible and pounce on anyone who doesn't, accusing him of being liberal. Invariably, these people have no idea of the scholarly issues involved. They just sit in judgment on any preacher who doesn't use the original King James Bible. But if you were to ask his wife and children, "Is he a loving and gentle man at home?" you would see some sad expressions on their faces. The man is ignoring the second great commandment, but he's out to get the preacher on his pet doctrinal issues!

(3) *Hypocrites care more about their manmade rules than about people being right before God in their hearts.* These Pharisees couldn't care less about this hurting man. So what if he was suffering? Jesus was breaking their rules! Hypocrites usually care more about external

conformity than about inward righteousness. They aren't concerned about whether they please God in their thought-lives; they just want everyone to follow the rules about how you look and what you do. If Jesus had just observed their Sabbath rules, they would have been content to leave Him alone. But Jesus always dealt with heart issues, like having a pure thought life, being free from anger, and being forgiving from the heart toward those who have wronged you.

(4) *Hypocrites bend the rules for their own purposes, but they apply them rigidly to others.* These men would do what they had to do, Sabbath or no Sabbath. There were ways to get around the rules when you needed to. A Sabbath-day's journey could be extended if you knew how to do it, so that you could travel where you wanted to go. They would get their own son or ox out of a pit on the Sabbath. But, *no healing allowed on the Sabbath!* I wonder what Jesus' host would have done if Jesus had healed the host's wife or son on the Sabbath? Probably, that would have been allowed!

(5) *Hypocrites often ignore overwhelming evidence in order to persist in their sin.* Jesus powerfully and miraculously heals this man, but the Pharisees ignored that evidence. And, this wasn't the first time this sort of thing had happened! Jesus had cast a demon out of a man in the synagogue on the Sabbath, and the report of that had spread widely (4:31-37). He healed Simon's mother-in-law on the Sabbath (4:38-39). He healed the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath, but the Pharisees responded with rage (6:6-11). On the Sabbath He healed the woman bent over for 18 years, but the synagogue official was indignant (13:10-17). How much more evidence did they need to wake up and say, "Maybe we're wrong and Jesus is right?" This shows us how deeply entrenched this sin of religious hypocrisy is and how diligent we must be to root it out of ourselves when Jesus confronts it! If you're not careful, you can build a case to defend your point-of-view and ignore overwhelming biblical evidence that convicts you of your sin.

God's Word applies to all of us, especially to those of us who teach and preach. John Calvin said, "It would be better for the preacher to break his neck going into the pulpit than for him not to be the first to follow God" (cited by J. I. Packer in a message given at the Congress on Biblical Exposition). Richard Baxter exhorted

his fellow pastors, to “preach to yourselves the sermons which you study, before you preach them to others” (*The Reformed Pastor* [Banner of Truth], p. 61). John Owen put it, “a man preaches that sermon only well to others, which preaches itself in his own soul. . . . If the word does not dwell with power *in* us, it will not pass with power *from* us” (*Works*, XVI:76, cited by J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness* [Crossway Books], p. 286; I modernized Owen’s English). The point is, to avoid hypocrisy, we all must allow the Word to confront our sins and respond with repentance and obedience, not with hardness of heart.

2. Jesus confronts our sin of selfish pride (14:7-11).

In these verses Jesus turns the tables: instead of the Pharisees observing Jesus, Jesus observes the Pharisees. But His motives were totally different than theirs. He wasn’t watching them in order to trip them up, but to confront them with their sin and hypocrisy so that they could repent and be right before God.

Hypocrisy and pride are related sins. Those who keep up outward appearances to impress others are invariably self-focused and proud. These men did what they did to be noticed by others and to gain honor for themselves (Matt. 23:5-12). Jesus shows them that the way of pride leads to ultimate disgrace. The way of humility leads to ultimate reward. Verse 11 may apply to this life, although not necessarily. But if a proud man makes it through this life without being humbled, he is in for a rude awakening at the final judgment! There the proud, who have trusted in themselves and their own good deeds, will be brought low before God. The humble, who have recognized their own sin and have cried out to Jesus for mercy, will be exalted into His eternal presence.

When Jesus tells the dinner guests that they should seek out the lowest seats, He is not advocating a self-focused scheme as to how you can really end up in the first seat, namely by taking the worst seat. For a man to do that, he would still be operating out of pride, which is the very thing Jesus is confronting! Rather, the point is, “Every one before God ought to feel that the lowest place is the proper place for him” (Alfred Plummer, *The Gospel According to St. Luke* [Charles Scribner’s Sons], p. 356).

The more we grow in grace, the more we will grow in humility. Biblical humility is the recognition that everything good that we are and have comes as an undeserved gift from God. As Paul put it to the Corinthians, "And what do you have that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?" (1 Cor. 4:7). Biblical humility is a recognition that apart from Christ, I can do nothing (John 15:5), and so I do not trust in myself, but in the Lord. Biblical humility is always accompanied by a growing awareness of the depths of my own sinfulness, along with a growing appreciation for the abundant grace of God shown to me in Christ. The psalmist put it, "If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared" (Ps. 130:3-4). As the pioneer missionary, William Carey, had inscribed on his tombstone, "A wretched, poor and helpless worm, on Thy kind arms I fall."

Biblical humility runs completely counter to the predominant self-esteem teaching that has flooded the church. We are being told that at the root of our problems is the fact that we do not think highly enough of ourselves. For example, I have a brochure from a well-known Christian treatment program. It has glowing endorsements from several well-known Christian leaders. The brochure explains, "Part of [our] success is found in the unique ability to target and resolve problems of low self-esteem. At the core of all emotional problems and addictive disorders is low self-worth. It is never the only problem; but it is so major an issue that, if not dealt with adequately, one is kept from experiencing lasting, positive results."

Contrast that with John Calvin, who wrote (*The Institutes of the Christian Religion* [Westminster], 2:1:2):

Here, then, is what God's truth requires us to seek in examining ourselves: it requires the kind of knowledge that will strip us of all confidence in our own ability, deprive us of all occasion for boasting, and lead us to submission.... I am quite aware how much more pleasing is that principle which invites us to weigh our good traits rather than to look upon our miserable want and dishonor, which ought to overwhelm us with shame. There is, indeed, nothing that man's nature seeks more eagerly than to be flattered.... For since blind self-love

is innate in all mortals, they are most freely persuaded that nothing inheres in themselves that deserves to be considered hateful. Thus even with no outside support the utterly vain opinion generally obtains credence that man is abundantly sufficient of himself to lead a good and blessed life. But if any take a more modest attitude and concede something to God, so as not to appear to claim everything for themselves, they so divide the credit that the chief basis for boasting and confidence remains in themselves.

Nothing pleases man more than the sort of alluring talk that tickles the pride that itches in his very marrow. Therefore, in nearly every age, when anyone publicly extolled human nature in most favorable terms, he was listened to with applause.

He goes on to say that those who assent to such teaching are deceived and are driven to utter ruin. Throughout *The Institutes* and his other writings, Calvin extols humility as the chief virtue and pride as the main vice of the human race. It is amazing to me how we could have gotten so far off base in our day (and I used to teach it myself!) when Scripture so thoroughly confronts our pride and continually calls us to humble ourselves before God and others.

3. Jesus confronts our sin of using people rather than loving them (14:12-14).

Jesus doesn't stop with rebuking the guests for their sinful pride. He goes on to rebuke the host for his sin of using people rather than loving them. Jesus is not teaching that it is wrong to invite your friends and relatives to a dinner party. Rather, He is making the point that you are not being generous and loving if you only invite people who can return the favor, and especially if you invite the rich with the motive of the status or possible advancements they may be able to provide you in the future. That is just plain old selfishness. True ministry out of Christian love serves and gives without thought of return. It isn't manipulative, serving for what you can get out of it. As Christians, we should serve others out of love for God and others.

To go Jesus' way, you have to have your focus on eternity, not on the rewards of this life. You have to believe that God "is a re-

warder of those who seek Him" (Heb. 11:6). Often there are many blessings that come back on you in this life when you serve the Lord. But, often there are not any visible rewards here and now. You serve and no one notices. You give to help a needy person and you get ripped off, and the person never even says, "Thanks."

One test of whether your motives are right in your service for Christ is, "Are you hurt when you don't get the recognition you think you deserve?" Another test is, "What is your attitude toward the poor and the hurting?" If you're only willing to serve those who can pay you back or who might later be able to advance your cause, you're using people, not loving them. Jesus confronts our motives for service. Any selfish motives in serving Christ are sin.

Conclusion

We've all met people who don't take a shower often enough. They're difficult to be close to because of the stench. The same is true of people who don't use the Word of God daily to cleanse the crud of sin out of their lives. You must develop the habit of taking God's Word and letting it expose and scrub the dirt out of your heart. Don't read the Word with the thought, "My wife (or husband) really needs to apply this!" Don't think, "I wish my kids would take this verse to heart!" Read it and pray, "Lord, confront me with my sin and cleanse it out of my life. Expose my religious hypocrisy. Show me my selfish pride. Reveal how I use people rather than love them. Fill me with your holy love."

Charles Spurgeon wrote, "My own experience is a daily struggle with the evil within. I wish I could find in myself something friendly to grace, but, hitherto, I have searched my nature through, and have found everything in rebellion against God" (*C. H. Spurgeon Autobiography* [Banner of Truth], 1:229). If Spurgeon had to confront his sin daily, so do you and I! If we will do it, we will be repaid abundantly at the resurrection of the righteous.

Discussion Questions

1. Doesn't a person who often dumps on himself need more self-esteem? Why/why not? What verses support the self-esteem movement?
2. Proponents of self-esteem say that they're not advocating pride, but just a proper view of self. Why is their approach wrong?
3. Since hypocrisy is so subtle and deceiving, how can we guard ourselves against it?
4. Where is the biblical balance between spending our time with "key" people and "inviting the poor, crippled, lame and blind"?

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