

Set Apart 4: Humble Confidence

Objectives: Our value comes from the work of Christ and not from our own accomplishments. We want to learn how pride and our focus on our performance can minimize the importance of the Gospel in our own lives. We want to learn how to confess these things to God so we can be empowered to walk in the Holy Spirit.

Launch

Martin Luther, the German leader of the Reformation, was asked when exactly he came to faith. His response was "in cloaca," which sounds rather spiritual until you translate it from Latin – it means sitting 'on the toilet.' Now, Luther was a man with 'issues', crudeness among them, but many scholars believe that he was using a metaphor for humbling oneself, one popular for the middle ages: sitting on the toilet." And if you think about it, it's a darn good metaphor for humility: there is no pretense, no facade, no pride, no image management – you are what you are, totally naked before God. The toilet is ground zero for humanity.
- *Jesus Without Religion, IVP (2007)*

To yourself, try answering the following questions from the now-defunct reality show 'The Moment of Truth'. As you answer them, imagine that you are in front of your friends, family, and twenty million viewers and that a lie detector will let everyone know if you are lying. (You can add or substitute your own questions)

1. Would you be upset if you were one of the last people in your group of friends to get married?
2. Do you think that you are smarter than your parents?
3. Have you ever spied on your neighbor?
4. Do you have fantasies that you'd never admit to anyone?
5. Do you look at pornography online?
6. Have you ever made fun of your friends behind their backs?
7. Do you really care about starving children in Africa?

- How would you feel if the truth about you was exposed to people you care about?

Explore

In chapter 3 of Philippians, Paul writes about the danger of placing more importance of the law or works ahead of Christ. He even shares about his own story of failing to find righteousness in the law.

Read Philippians 3:1-6

- What are your observations?
- What do you think Paul means by 'put no confidence in your flesh'? (v 1-3, don't value your own works and abilities over the work of Christ)
- Why do you think Paul chooses to share his spiritual resume? (v 4-6, to share he has much reason to have confidence in himself as anyone)
- What are some things you would put on your spiritual resume? What are the things that you feel score points for you with God and other Christians? (ex. showing up to small group tonight. You could have them write out a list before discussing. If they think it is weird to be writing out what they could boast about let them know you are doing it to help them engage with the next set of verses.)

Read Philippians 3:7-11

- How does Paul shift his thoughts and why is it so significant? (v 7-8, Paul's real value and resume is the work of Christ)
- Here Paul says he has something not from obedience to the law, but through faith in Christ. What is that something? (v 9, righteousness)
- How would you define righteousness? (perfect, holy, clean, etc.)
- Why is righteousness important? (it is tied to our salvation, it is required to have a relationship with a perfect God)

- How do we attain it? (faith in Christ)
- If this is true, why do we often depend on our spiritual resume?

We will return to some of these questions, but let's take a look at how we can tend to minimize the Gospel and move toward performance and pride.

Performance

Performance moves us away from truth by trying to be seen as better than we are.

- How or why do you find yourself falling into performing for God? In other words, "If I do this, God will like me more."
- In what ways do you try to keep up appearances or spend energy on image management?
- What could your concern about image management say about how you deal with sin in your life?
- When you feel you are not measuring up to the standards of the Christian life, do you...? (They can also add other actions)
 - Put on the appearance that you are?
 - Feel jealous of those who appear to be?
 - Criticize those who appear to be? (This could be outward criticism or just personally wanting to knock them down by looking for other faults)
 - Make excuses?
 - Try Harder?
 - Confess to God?

Pride

Pride detours us from truth in actually believing we are better than we are.

- In what ways do you fantasize about people seeing you as better than you really are? (First, let them answer on their own. Then read each of these questions and then let people comment on which ones stick out to them.)
 - *In discussions, do you feel that your ideas and thoughts are better than others'? Y/N*

- *Is it hard for you to hear about an area where you are failing? Y/N*
- *Is it impossible for you to live with people misunderstanding or wrongly judging you? Y/N*

- Why do you think you would find yourself responding 'yes' to any of these questions?

Apply

Read 2 Corinthians 3:17 *"The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom"*

Performance and pride both lead us away from the Holy Spirit and away from freedom.

- How have you experienced this?

When being led away, it is important to remind ourselves that Christ's gospel removes the weight of performance and rags of pride to clothe us in his righteousness.

Read:

- **2 Corinthians 5:21**
- **Romans 3: 21-22**
- **Philippians 3:8-9**

- How does it feel to be declared righteous by God?
- How is this better than being praised by people? (God is a greater giver than people, people's praise can be conditional and will wear off)
- What are areas in your life that you want to fix for God's approval rather than confess your need for God's grace? (Point out that this could be an indicator of areas you are not confessing to God)
- What might it take for you to honestly say, and have your life reflect, "I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord..."? (need to more fully embrace Christ through growing in the Gospel by believing it through seeing God's holiness, our sin, and Christ's righteousness to us in the cross.)

To humble oneself is to get completely naked before God. Not just confessing a sin, but getting to the root of the sin (the sin beneath the sin), putting aside our facades, our attempts to justify, and our instincts to perform and embracing the full truth about

who and what we are before God. “Oh, Lord, I am such a liar. I stretch the truth to protect myself. I exaggerate so people will think more highly of me. I generate excuses for my failures. I act as if I’m doing fine when I’m not. . . .”

Brute, blunt honesty about who we are: while this is the essence of humbling ourselves, it’s actually a two-step process. First we wallow in the honest truth about ourselves, but then we must wallow in God’s grace—this too is the truth about us. “Thank you, God. Thank you that I can never earn your favor but you have given it to me freely in Christ. Thank you that you cannot love me any more nor any less. Thank you that I’m a liar saved by your kindness and mercy. . . .”

- **Would you join me in wallowing?** (Spend some time in prayerful honest confession of sin and prayerful honest praise to the Lord for His righteousness to you. Take prayer requests, but this will probably work best for people to pray for themselves rather than pray for each other.)
- **How will remembering that your righteousness comes from the work of Christ help satisfy your thirst the way God intended?**
- **What’s a next step we can take as a group to help encourage us to take focus away from ourselves and toward the work of Christ?** (Remember that being overly critical is still looking toward performance. Encouragement should be towards having an atmosphere of confession and remembering the work of Christ and.)