

Active Love of God II: Being Accepted, and Being an Acceptor

Hebrews 2: 9-18

Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers – v11 quoted

Understanding the Depths of His Love

In our preceding lesson, we ended with the woman who interrupted Jesus' dinner with Simon the Pharisee to put ointment on his feet. This woman had not just a bad reputation, but an occupation and lifestyle that were socially unacceptable. She was a social pariah, someone to be not only shunned, but judged for the damage she did to society.

When the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is – that she is a sinner." – Luke 7:39

What is interesting about Simon's comments is that he was more than willing to allow the woman **into his home** (why would he let *someone like that* in his house in the first place?), but still kept her at a distance **from his life**. Simon may have allowed this to show Jesus how compassionate he was, but when the truth was to come out, Simon could not be associated with this woman. For Simon, the benefit of association could only be one way: for him, there was obviously some benefit for her being in his presence, but not the other way around

She Is a _____

We are like Simon in many ways, not only in our judging of others, but also in our judging of ourselves. In Simon's judgment of the woman, he implied that there was sufficient reason for Jesus to love her more than the woman. After all, Simon was a Pharisee. Religiously devout, keeper of the Law, even socially conscious. Simon was open to having dinner with this rogue rabbi whom others judged, so he would be seen as more progressive.

Not only was she a _____, but Simon was a _____. Simon placed labels on both himself and the woman, and determined that one label was better than another, and more acceptable.

What labels do you give yourself?

What labels do you give to others?

While preparing for last week's message, I was stuck, having a hard time weaving the parts into a whole, and not hearing a whole lot from God. Into this frustration came a homeless man. I didn't judge him because of his appearance – didn't have to. He told me what his state was. In fact, he sat down next to me, and talked non-stop for about an hour. My initial label for this man? Nuisance. He was getting in the

way of me “*doing work for God*”... how dare he! I politely listened to him, waiting for his pause so I could get back to not knowing where to go with the message, when I realized that not only was he talking about God the whole time, but he was talking about my message. After about 45 minutes, he asked me what I was doing, and I told him. Apparently, it wasn't enough, and he continued talking, driving home points that God had been giving me, enough for me to know that God was in the whole thing.

Jesus replied to Simon's thoughts by engaging him in a story about two people with the same label, **debtor**. The only difference between the two was that one owed more than another. Jesus' question to Simon was simple, and it underscored what Simon didn't see: his own blindness to his own condition.

Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him 500 denarii and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back so he cancelled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more? – Luke 7:41-42

For the moneylender, the amount of money was not at issue. Both debts were equally cancelled because neither debtor had the ability to pay. Neither could say that their state was better than the other

How much did (or do) you owe Jesus, and is it more or less than the person next to you?

Does it matter if neither of you have the ability to repay?

Jesus' story challenged Simon, and challenges us to shed the labels that we have placed on ourselves, and see ourselves in the same state as those around us

Us and Them No More

Simon made the distinction between the sinner and the saint; the righteous and reprehensible, between us and them. He identified with Jesus as fellow rabbi and sought to distance both he and Jesus from the likes of the woman. How surprising that Jesus would place Simon and the woman in the same category. Even more that he would accept both the same. For Jesus, there was no line between us and them. As such, Jesus challenged Simon to see how much the woman had been forgiven, and in the same manner, how much he had been forgiven.

We will never understand the depths of His love for us until we understand our lack of ability to pay even the smallest amount in the eyes of man. What Jesus does for the social pariah is no different than He does for the winner of the nicest person contest.

Not “Forgive and Forget”

God's active love is not only found in forgiveness, but in acceptance. Acceptance is not at a distance, but means identifying with the other person.

Which one will love him more...

“love” translated in Greek is ἀγαπήσει: meaning to love, be full of good-will and exhibit the same. In other words, this love not only has the best of the other in mind, but seeks opportunity to

demonstrate it. It is Love in Action. The woman who **knew** she had been forgiven of much, could not just sit back and take the forgiveness for granted, she had to respond with her expression of love. She knew that Jesus' forgiveness was not an act meant to drive her away, but to bring her close, so she did just that, in Simon's house.

Jesus' Heart of Acceptance

To understand Jesus' love we have to see how He sees us, not just individually, but in relation to Himself.

Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family [common origin; same one]. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. He says "I will declare Your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing Your praises... Here am I and the children God has given Me". – Hebrews 2:11-13

Jesus' action of forgiveness and salvation is not to drive a wedge between Him and the world, but rather to provide not only a bridge, but a consistent relationship with those being saved. As Christians, we have understood the concept of building bridges for people to enter the kingdom of God, but we still have problems accepting those who cross the bridge (or those who are preparing to cross it) **as if we never had to cross it**. Jesus, however saw those who were in process, on their way, becoming holy as being in the same family, same origin of the same stock as Himself.

Showing Love and Acceptance... To Whom?

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. – John 13:34-35

Simon had this principle down, he thought. Love those you love, those in your circle, those like you. After all, Jesus was not speaking to the masses, but to His disciples. Wouldn't it make sense, that if we are loving to those in the church, that people outside will see that "there is something real there" and want to be a part? **Was this what Jesus was advocating, a closed loop love that you have to be a member to receive?** Was this what Jesus demonstrated? (Notice, that with the woman, Jesus never negated Simon's assertion. He just offered her what she needed).

Who represents "one another"?

You have heard that it was said "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy". But I tell you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore as your Heavenly Father is perfect – Matthew 5:43-48

Jesus demonstrated through His life and ministry that "one another" meant more than just the close knit club that hung around with Him, but it meant those who had not yet entered the kingdom, those

that were by all rights enemies. Those that didn't fit the socially acceptable framework or didn't deserve love. The way to show that you are a disciple of Jesus is to demonstrate the same attitude Jesus has toward us – to see us all as one, and to not be ashamed to call us brothers. Similarly, we need to have that same love for those outside of our circle.

Summary

Jesus loved and accepted people, and calls us to do the same. People who are loved truly and completely will respond to that love. If you want to see people respond to the love of God, accept them first, not just as prospects, but as family. If you have a hard time doing this, spend some time thinking about how much Jesus forgave for you, and the fact that you had no ability to pay. Allow Jesus' love to cause you to realize just how much He accepts you, and that will flow in your acceptance of others.