

GRRRATE ATTITUDES AND HOW TO BREAK THEM

Attitudes and Emotions

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Tonight we begin a four-week series on attitudes and emotions. Tonight the focus is on great attitudes. The Grrrate attitudes and how to break them.

Reading from the psalms last week I came across that great phrase in Psalm 19:12 where David asks this question, “Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults.” It seems to me “secret faults” can include those areas of failure that are known but to me and God. Sometimes also secret faults can relate to those areas which are very glaring to someone else that I do that I am perfectly oblivious to myself.

This message this evening “Grrrate Attitudes” is one that calls for us to pray this Psalm. “Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults.” If we do not have this attitude when we look at the attitudes, which grate on us, it would be an easy message to poke someone in the ribs over and say, “Did you hear that?” Or if they’re not here to get them the tape and to say, “You need to hear this.” It is always easier for me to see the grate in another than in myself.

I am not a psychologist. When I speak on a theme such as this I am only comfortable if I can anchor it in scripture. It would be very tempting and easy for me to simply think through all the particular idiosyncrasies in other people that grate me. But unable to think about the idiosyncrasies in me that grate others. Therefore I could get carried away with some of the particular things which cause my anger buds to salivate. But rather than doing that I want to anchor the things that grate in the scripture. It struck me in thinking through the gospels that there were some things that obviously grated Jesus.

Five times in the gospel of Mark for example we are told that he was indignant or angry. He rebukes people on occasion and there are other occasions when he engages persons in dialogue where it is very obvious that he totally disagrees with the attitude that is coming across. And if you can use the word without attaching a sinful aspect to it, he was irritated with those attitudes. He perhaps was the only one who could be irritated and not sin.

I want to share with you some attitudes that obviously grated the Lord. If they grated him and he wanted to change them we might see what perhaps could be changed in us. I don’t do these in any order. Most of them flow chronologically in the Lord’s ministry but not necessarily so.

I should add that there are all kinds of other things that grate people that aren’t in this list. Maybe the grate attitudes I’m speaking of more particularly address the things that rub us wrong who are trying to live out our Christian experience. I’m not picking things that are great social injustices, which ought to grate our grain of conscious. But I’m talking about the little foxes that spoil the vines in life. The things that grated Jesus.

One thing that grated him was the closed mind

I’ll anchor this in the scripture in just a moment but for each attitude I want to attach to it also a phrase. A phrase that goes with the closed mind is this “My mind’s made up. Don’t confuse me with the facts.” Where does this come from in Jesus’ life? It comes out of Mark 6:1-6 where he comes to his hometown of Nazareth. They say of his teaching and of his deeds on that occasion,

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“Where does this man get all this wisdom and all these works.” They had a particular view of Jesus. And even though he presented them new evidences that would force them to redefine him namely his wisdom and his works they refused to admit new evidences, which would alter their view of Jesus. Therefore they are a classic demonstration of the person who has reached a supposition or a presupposition and has forever closed their mind on that subject and no amount of evidence, argumentation, or degree of persuasion will altar the opinion once it is reached.

So Jesus in that town shows his attitude the town by saying that a prophet is without honor in his own country and he was not able to do many mighty miracles in that place at all.

Same thing happens by the way to the Jerusalemites. In John 9:24 after Jesus had healed the man born blind they say, “This man is a sinner [referring to Jesus].” Unwilling to admit the evidence of his wonderworking power they had arrived at a decision, closed their mind and stuck to it.

There are some areas where it is healthy to have a closed mind. I have a closed mind on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The evidence is in. That evidence isn't going to be altered. I have a closed mind on the Ten Commandments and on the moral code. So having a closed mind in some areas of basic truth is not a bad thing at all. What is a bad thing is in our lives when we have closed our minds on areas that are unessential. For example direction in life. Maybe God is wanting to do something with us and we have closed our mind to some opportunities that he is creating and just have adopted the attitude “It won't work.”

Or maybe there are opinions we have and especially opinions we have about the patterns of other people that are around us and we have attitudes toward them, which do not change. We pigeon hole people around us and put them in a box and say, “That's all that person will ever be.”

The second attitude that grated the Lord was a put down attitude.

The phrase that goes with this is “You'll never amount to anything.” This again happens to Jesus. It happens at Nazareth. “Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son?” I think in this phrase Jesus' whole origin in terms of being born to the virgin Mary were never believed in Nazareth. This was the illegitimate child of Joseph and Mary. The townspeople never bought the story of the angel Gabriel and so forth.

In Jerusalem they didn't buy it either. They throw back to Jesus in John 8:41 “We're not illegitimate children.” I think there's a bite of nastiness in that as it's directed toward him.

Jesus knew what it was to have this pressure of expectation on him saying to him, “You won't amount to anything.” Negative expressions and attitudes never build another person up. The only thing that negative expressions build up is anger and resentment in the person that expresses them. I realize in normal human living one is going to slip out. But a steady stream of those coming at people is going to beat them down. Love builds up.

Proverbs 12:25 puts it so eloquently. “An anxious heart weighs a man down but a kind word cheers him up.” Put downs are really saying, I don't believe in you. If you don't believe in a person somebody else has got to believe in them if they're ever to be what God is calling them to

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be. We all come along in life because someone sooner or later put an arm around us and said, “I believe in you.”

Instead of doing put downs why don't we do put ups. Warm fuzzies. That's how romance begins. Not by put-downs but with put ups – warm fuzzies. That's how to keep the romance in life. Proverbs 16:24 “Pleasant words are a honeycomb sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.” We need others who will believe in us and say so positively.

If the language we are giving to any significant person in our life is more corrective than it is complimentary we are out o balance and we are destroying that relationship. If you have more criticism to give someone that you have praise to give them you are destroying that relationship and helping to participate in the destruction of that individual. You're destroying yourself in the process. That goes with any relationship.

A third grate attitude I find as I look at Jesus' ministry that irritated him is a judgmental attitude.

An attitude that says there's something wrong with you. Jesus got this from the scribes and the Pharisees. It finally culminated in Mark 12:15 where they asked him a lot of trick questions trying to find fault with him, sitting in judgment on him. He finally says to them, “Why are you trying to trap me?” It's interesting that the ideal person – Jesus – was criticized. If a perfect person can be criticized and he's the ideal then where does that leave us. So often the judgmental person is being judgmental because they have a mental ideal. The person they are criticizing doesn't live up to that mental ideal. The idealized person can be an idealized father. We do this with one another. We become discontent because somehow we think we don't have the ideal wife. Or the ideal husband. Or the ideal child. Or we don't have the ideal church. Or the ideal pastor.

When real “ideal” becomes idol. It is a manufactured synthetic kind of substance that prevents us from enjoying life as it is because we've got this person isn't what we think they should be. We sit in judgment on that person because they are not our ideal. If we could get rid of the ideal and take the person at what they are. Just as we hope others will extend grace to us.

The person who does away with the idea of the ideal can say I love you even if you're not perfect. The person who's in love with their idol can only say I cannot love you because you're not perfect and when you are perfect and conform to all my expectations I then will love you. It will be too late because nobody could ever match that set of demands.

If you are the ideal you still can't total, please everyone. Jesus proved that. That's one of the reasons why Paul in his letter to the Philippians says an incredible thing like this, “Do everything without complaining or arguing so that you may be blameless and pure, children of God, without fault in crooked and depraved generation in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life.”

I think the shine is directly related to the lack of complaining and arguing, which are manifestations of setting in judgment.

Ultimately the person who sets in judgment on other people becomes unable to see their own faults because whatever deficiency is always in the other person's life and it's their fault. That's

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why Jesus says “You pick out the speck but you have a log in your own eye because the judgmental person in the last analysis becomes unable to see themselves totally blinded to their own image.

The critic judgmental person will never be happy. Proverbs 17:1 expresses it in terms of the life that is lived without a judgmental nature. “Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting with strife.” Or Proverbs 15:17 “Better a meal of vegetables where there is love than a fattened calf where there is hatred.”

When I speak of being judgmental I’m not saying that we throw all good judgment away. I’m saying we take away the attitude that sits in condemnation of someone else and takes away the attitude that someone else has to be an ideal in order for us to give ourselves in a complete way to them.

A fourth grate attitude that bugged the Lord is the holier than thou attitude.

The holier than thou attitude says I’m right and you’re wrong and I’m better than you. That’s the attitude Jesus got when he was eating with sinners. The Pharisees said, “This man eats with sinners.” Luke talks about the Pharisee who went to pray and he looked at the publican and said, “I thank God that I am not as this man.” Holier than thou.

Have you noticed these kinds of attitudes tend to run together? If you tend to be judgmental you tend to be holier than thou. Just a fine shade of difference.

Sin is so pervasive that it slips into our holy moments. Sin it seems to me at its destructive best or worst is so insidious it affects even the person who tries most to be God’s man or God’s woman.

We ought not to compare ourselves to one another and look self-righteously down at somebody in the body of Christ or out of the body of Christ. That attitude really grated Jesus. He said to his disciples, “I am among you as one who serves.”

A fifth attitude is the attitude of misplaced priorities.

The phrase that goes with that is “But I’ve got to do this first.” Misplaced priorities. Mark 7 one of the big priorities for the Pharisees is to wash their hands before they eat. They criticized that Jesus and his disciples eat with unwashed hands. He says to them “You cleanse the outside of the cup and plate but inside they’re full of extortion. You make void of the word of God while you build the tradition of men. For you to say to your parents Korban [and by that he uses a device used in those days that was a neat way a person had to get around his parental obligations. When the parents were in need of financial assistance, if the child had sufficient financial help available to them and didn’t want to give it he could simply take it to the temple and say, “This is given to God. Korban.” Then he’d proceed to use it himself. It was technically given but it was a legal out to get around giving aid to his parents. Jesus says it’s clear the scripture says, “Honor your father and your mother.” Which in the Old Testament sense meant more than speaking well of them. It meant providing for them in their old age. There was no social security or pension system. Provide for your parents in their old age. The Pharisees were getting around this. Jesus says misdirecting their priorities. Taking external and nicky-piky things and putting them first

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and neglecting weightier matters. Noting dill and mint and cumin and neglecting justice and mercy and faith. It's so easy to be.

We need to ask in our own life how we may be grating other people perhaps we should rise each day and say, "What is the most important thing I need to do today?" When we have blocked in our mind what that is then we need to go to the second question. "What is the second most important thing I need to do today?" When we're done with that we need to say, "What is the third most important thing I need to do today."

If at least one of those three do not reflect a building of our relationship with God and with significant others in our life it will suggest that our own priorities are misplaced. We need to go back in our priorities of life and put first things first.

The sixth thing that grated Jesus was a negative orientation.

The phrase that goes with this is "The answer is No." The Pharisee lifestyle was one of no. It defined what you *couldn't* do. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 1:18-20 that in Jesus Christ we have an answer that is Yes. I would say that is a great attitude in which to live. Wherever we can we need to be saying Yes to life and Yes to people. If we have to say No we have to do it in such a way that we can offer an alternative which also gives a Yes.

A negative orientation not only says No, it keeps a general attitude with it that It's not going to work. Life will significantly change if your Yes can incredibly outnumber your No's. People that say No most of the time or all the time grate in relationships.

Seventh attitude that grated Jesus was indecision or apathy.

Phrases that go with that are "I can't make up my mind," or "I won't make up my mind," or "I don't care," or "I give up." We find that in the gospels in Matthew 11:16-19 where Jesus is talking about the Pharisees who are hard to please. They didn't accept John who came as an ascetic – fasting and mourning – and they didn't take him coming and eating with sinners and tax collectors. He said it's like the children playing their pantomime games in the market place. "They piped to you and you did not mourn, they played and you did not dance." You refused to be happy and you refused to be sad. Your life was dominated by indecision and by apathy.

Proverbs 3:27-28 says, "Do not withhold good from those who deserve it when it is in your power to act. Do not say to your neighbor come back later, I'll give it tomorrow, when you have it now with you." Decide.

There are obviously more major things that grate us and certainly grated the Lord. I have a whole list of them. He could be grated – I use the term advisedly because he would rebuke people or express sharp disagreement with them. He got after the disciples for their lack of faith, persistent lack of faith bothered him. On one occasion he got after them for being slow learners. That he had taught them a lesson – Mark 8:14-21 – and they hadn't made the transference to another situation.

He was upset with Peter for disagreeing with him. He did not like self-centeredness.

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He especially was hard on people who were bad examples. He said it'd be better if a millstone were hung around their neck and they were cast into the sea.

He was upset and rebuked harshness, people keeping kids from him.

He was upset with non-productivity. The one talent person who doesn't do anything is told to leave.

And he is especially upset with religious huxtorism – people who come to him saying “Lord, Lord,” but they've only used them for their own advantage. Or have sold in the temple, which was meant to be a place of holiness.

I've given a sampling of the grate attitudes. How do we break these great attitudes? Let me suggest some steps.

One I think is to become aware that we have them. That's one of the reasons for this message this evening. Not just so we could elbow the person next to us. This was a painful message for me to prepare. Honest admission is the foundational step. Do we have attitudes in our life that grate other people? Become aware that we have them.

Two, take responsibility for our need to change. We need to take responsibility for change without waiting for the other person that we think also needs to change. We need to change without placing all the responsibility for our happiness on someone else. If someone else is responsible for my happiness I will never be happy. God has never given them that ministry. I am under God the priest in my own life. Jesus said “No one can take my joy from me.” No body gave him that joy because joy doesn't come from another person. It comes from a sense of wellbeing with God and within. We must take responsibility for our own need to change.

Third, ask God for help. We become aware of our need to change. We take responsibility to change. We can't do it by ourselves. We must ask God “Please help me to change.”

Then a fourth thing we need to do is to seek forgiveness. I think sometimes the best way to get forgiveness is not to be verbal. If you really want forgiveness sometimes it's bet to go out and live it and show it but quit verbalizing it at that point. Seek forgiveness.

Fifth, get another person involved as a helper. Scripture says confess your sins one to another. And it says to us bear one another's burdens. There are times we need to get someone we look up to spiritually or on the friendship level or counselor level or pastoral level to help us. The best place to start obviously is with the person nearest us in relationship whether it's a spouse or a child or a parent. Get them involved as our helper in praying with us. It would be beneficial if in our relationships we can be authentic. Honesty is a great freeing thing in our lives.

Sixth, count on reverses and keep getting back up. Whenever you make a commitment to change you're not going to do everything instantly 100% right. It's going to be a journey back. So when there are reverses and you go back to one of the grating attitudes, instead of getting derailed at that point, ask the Lord to help, ask the other person to help get back up and keep going.

Seventh way to break the grate attitudes is to put *great* attitudes in their place. That leads us two weeks from tonight where we talk about great attitudes and how to make them.

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Lord, thank you for this evening. We thank you that you're speaking to our hearts. We're glad, Lord, that you're concerned about how we live. Words come tumbling into our life out of your lips that say, "I am come that you might have life and have it more abundantly." Phrases like "That your joy may be full." Phrases like, "My peace I leave with you. Not as the world gives, give I unto you." Words like "renewing our mind." Lord, it is the negative rub of life that so easily and effectively destroys our peace and our joy and our contentedness. We therefore pray first for ourselves that you would give us mirror to see ourselves. Those things that not only grate others but may grate you as well. Give us the honesty and the courage to make decisions to change. And give us the grace and the strength and the power of the Holy Spirit to be changed. Then for those in our life whose attitudes grate us, give us the power to reach out and help. Because that individual himself is hurting and needs your grace. Give us the power to overcome even those things, which would seriously impair our ability to live fully. Let it not happy. But lead us on into triumph and into victory. Lord, there are some who perhaps face difficulties and relational problems so great that it is totally outside anyone's power to put things together except you intervene by divine intervention and a miracle. We're so glad, Lord, that living for you does not just depend on what we can do but it depends mightily upon what you do for us. Where we have no strength or no ability to work on behalf of righteousness and for good we ask your Spirit to intervene and grant strength and power and change. We ask this, Lord Jesus, in your name, confident of your strength and your power. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.