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Presentation Transcript
Preaching To the Choir, Part 2 – Entitlement
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Our title today is *Entitlement*. This presentation is the second one in our series, *Preaching to the Choir*. When we hear discussion about the attitudes or behaviors we're covering in this series, we don't want to admit to them. We defend ourselves against them by thinking of others we know who have them. Hence, the title to the series – *Preaching to the Choir*. And yes, I know sarcasm is the lowest form of humor, but hey, if it helps keep the point in mind....

When I looked up the word *entitlement* in the dictionary, it said: "An entitlement is the right to a particular privilege or benefit granted by law or custom." You have a legal entitlement to speak to a lawyer if you're ever arrested, for example. But that definition leaves out a vital part of the direction of this presentation. Today we're talking about confirming upon *ourselves* privileges or benefits – not by social custom or law, but because we want them for one reason or another. So a better definition might be: Self-entitlement is when an individual magically perceives himself as deserving of unearned privileges. These are the people, who despite all evidence to the contrary, believe life owes them something – a reward, a measure of success, certain relationships, a particular standard of living. I should have, perhaps, entitled this one *Self-Entitlement*, but hey, it's a bit late.

So we're going to identify some attitudes about self-entitlement – four of them, to be exact. Here's the first one: *I come first because I'm more important*. We see people cutting lines, or expecting us to bend our schedules to fit theirs, or tossing trash out of their car windows. What I want is more important than what society, or what you, want. We see people who believe we should be more interested in their lives than they are in ours – or even than we are interested in our own. We see people who believe we should act just the way *they* like.

I had a client, some time back, who had a girlfriend who was not motivated to better herself educationally. And he was putting lots of pressure on her to go back to school to have a career. Of course, she left him after a while. He commented that he ran into resistance with so many people, he was starting to wonder if he was doing something to cause it. And that's the first step

in getting past this problem, isn't it? He's starting to realize what he's doing isn't working. I said, "I think most people believe each person is responsible for their own education, career and personal goals." And he said, "I'm fine with that for everyone, except for the people in *my* life. If she can't get on the ball, I'm not going to have her around." In other words, he felt entitled to control the lives of significant people in his life. And maybe that's the reason he has so few of them. In his case, we can easily see narcissism causing him to believe he's entitled to control the lives of others. He knows best. He's smarter. He's more educated. He just knows better than they do what to do with their lives.

He also told me that he had very little patience with people who are late, or didn't keep appointments. So today, since 1999 – which, as we speak, is 19 years down the road, when I started counseling people – he has the worst record for showing up on time in keeping appointments than any other client I've ever had. So the standard applies to others, but he's *entitled* to show up if and when he wants. He's conferred that upon himself. You might wonder how I deal with him. Well, it is really simple, actually. If he shows up 15 minutes late, I still quit on time. If he doesn't show up without letting me know 24 hours in advance, I charge him the full price of the session. I made sure I got his credit card records on file, so I can do that. He resents it, but he *is* doing better being on time now, because he gets dinged financially every time he doesn't. Of course, I'm very polite and apologetic about it. I really don't like to have to do it, but it's in his own best interest that I do. Do you know how I think he got this way? He told me that his parents favored him above his siblings from as far back as he could recall until this present day. He was taught, inadvertently, that he was superior to others. I'm sure his mother – who I found out actually is a psychologist – would be horror-struck if she realized that this has happened, because of the way she treated him.

You know, we talk about *spoiling* our children, well, his parents spoiled him. They have ruined him. He's going to have to do a lot of work to get rid of that problem. He's having to rethink everything he believes to come out from under it. When I worked with him, even though he is highly educated and 35 years old – he's actually a scientist – it feels like working with some of the self-absorbed teenagers I have seen in the past. All the spoiling has delayed his maturity.

Okay, here's another one. I call this *oppressed by equality*.

I was talking to a man of 30 or so, who wanted to become a fitness trainer. He took a rather easy course on it and expected to get a job at a gym, making money equivalent to the gym manager. When this didn't happen, he decided to start his own business and was surprised and angered when his new clients would quit after just a few sessions. He could talk a good talk, but when it got down to actually coaching people, he didn't have enough experience. He seemed to think that he deserved to be well compensated, even though he hadn't paid his due. So he was equal to the people on the bottom of the pile – we could call it – of physical fitness trainers and he didn't like that. That was oppressive to him – to be considered equal with the people at the bottom. As I got to know him, I learned that he had a history of starting jobs and quitting them, because they were

“too hard.” Being equal to others at the bottom of the ladder was his lot, because he didn’t like to work. He believed he deserved to be at the top, though he could not prove he deserved to be there. In fact, the evidence indicated contrary to it. He underrated the skills of his peers, while he overrated his own. We can imagine how his peers reacted to him. I wasn’t surprised, some time later, to learn that he was complaining about being frozen out by those he worked with.

Another attitude to think about is *justified anger*. Perhaps the greatest example of this is the current backlash to President Trump. I’m not picking sides here. This isn’t really about President Trump. It’s about the *reaction* that people had to him. Like him or not, the response from the left was nothing short of a tantrum. I mean, there were people who hated Barak Obama just as much as the people now hate President Trump, but they didn’t pitch a tantrum. Something has happened in between. Now, maybe some of them did, but most didn’t. So something has happened in society or there’s a difference in the people that are against Trump, as opposed to the ones that were against Obama. We see leftist leadership encouraging people to harass government officials in public because they’re part of the government that’s run by Donald Trump. We saw that somebody – a leftist – shot a government official on a softball field early on. Sending fake pipe bombs – that occurred recently – to known proponents of the other side – the left side. This was done by a Trump supporter. So, just to let you know, I understand the left is not the only faction with this problem, there it is.

The attitude for whoever does all of this seems to be “What I want isn’t happening, and that’s so terrible it justifies violence.” What do we call that? Well, that’s clearly an anti-social sentiment. You find *anti-social* – that word – mostly in the DSM for the list of mental illness. Underlying the rage is the belief that being treated equally is unfair. You know, “we all got to vote, but, because we didn’t win, we’re justified to be violent.”

I talked to quite a few clients who told me they were going to move to Canada if Trump won. Of course, he did and none of them moved. They were all still on my docket for a while there. And also, none of them lost their Medicaid as they *knew* they would. So, when people justify their anger and think that they have a right to it, because they didn’t get what they wanted, that’s part of this self-entitlement thing – “I deserve to get what I want. If I don’t, I’m going to be upset about it, and I might even hurt people.”

The next one that we can think about is *self-pity*. The primary slogan here is, “It’s not fair.” Well, we all know that life is not fair – at least, hopefully, we do – but some people think it’s okay for life to be unfair to others, but not to them. This way of expressing self-entitlement is not the powerful, aggressive, dominant approach, but rather the attention-seeking, manipulative way of approaching the problem. That’s all founded on the same self-centered belief that they deserve what they have not earned. And if you find yourself around this kind of entitlement, you’ll find it draining. People tend to shy away from this type of personality, because it’s so draining.

There's four – there are probably hundreds – of reasons why people are self-entitling, but there are four that may well be the four primary ones.

So let's think a little bit about the biblical position on self-entitlement. Let's think about three things here. The first one is to *love all equally*. Since self-entitlement puts self ahead of others, we can think about that primary principle as expressed in Galatians 5:14.

Galatians 5:14 – *For the whole law is fulfilled in one word – you shall love your neighbor as yourself.*

Now Western culture, which is based on the Bible, is a society of reciprocity – helping each other, working together, working out trade agreements, defense pacts, trade back and forth so that the good things from each that we have to offer can be shared with others, and so on. So we work together for the benefit of all. That's one of the basic Christian tenets – you shall love your neighbor *as yourself*.

When people step out of this norm, but bulk of society looks at them and wonders, “What's wrong with them?” That used to be the bulk of society. I think, probably, right now, it's about half and half. We're kind of on that tipping point. Self-entitlement is an isolating attitude, even among other self-entitled individuals, eventually, because everyone thinks *they* should be at the top and not everyone can be. So long-term relationships only work when everyone is treated fairly. So there's a lot of relational breakup in that kind of thinking. So *love all equally* is the position of Judeo-Christian culture.

Jesus said – and let's move on to the next one, by the way, which is *care for the poor*. Jesus said that He and His Father work, and they want us to work, too, if we're physically able. Feeling entitled to something without working for it is a failed belief. Some people, because of illness or accident or mental deficits, are not able to earn a living in our society. Jesus talked a lot about our duty to help these people. People in this situation – who are helped by others – feel grateful and thankful. And many of them feel embarrassed to be helped.

One year, at the Winter Family Weekend in Ohio, I helped serve Christmas dinner to people who needed something to eat. They came down there because they couldn't afford to feed their family Christmas dinner. So the Y...was it the YMCA? – I can't remember who did it – sponsored the event. And I noticed that most of these people who were there would not make eye contact with me. They were embarrassed to be there. They *wanted* to be independent. They *wanted* to work and have money so that they could buy their own food for their family, but at that time, for whatever reason, they just weren't able.

So those who are self-entitled don't feel embarrassed or thankful about it. But most of the poor people you run into in this country *do* feel that way. It's just a few that think they're entitled to it. We might be tempted to lay this on the people we see at intersections asking for money, but you

know, at least, they're trying to take care of themselves and be somewhat independent, even if, in some cases, it's just to get money for drugs. But it's still hard work that they're doing out there. You know, it gets hot in the summer time here and cold in the winter, and they're still out there. I wouldn't want to be doing that. I mean, that's kind of a mixed bag.

Another scripture we need to look at is Paul's talk to the church. He makes a distinction for us. It's in 2 Thessalonians 3:10.

2 Thessalonians 3:10 – *For even when we were you, he said – talking to these congregations – we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. They could get up and around plenty enough to gossip and other people down, but they couldn't find their way to work. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.* So he's not talking to people who are deficient, as far as being able to make a living. He's talking to people that are able, but aren't willing.

So the biblical position is that working for a living is a good thing. And that's also proven over and over again in psychological studies – that people who work are much happier than those that don't. Work is a good thing. It's good for us to work. And when a person is able to do that, but not willing, that's a bad thing. I think it's even a bad thing for those who are willing, but not able, because there's something they *want* to do, but they can't because of a disability of some sort. But when a person is *able* to do work, but not willing, that's a bad thing. It means they feel entitled to what they have not earned.

In Jesus' day, there were no welfare programs. Being a beggar was a terrible, terrible life. Anyone who could work would work rather than begging. Some people even sold themselves into slavery rather than beg. So that ought to give you an idea about the people Jesus was talking about taking care of. They were people who were *unable* to earn their own living, because of disabilities or whatever sort, and there was no social program to take care of them – except that people would, out of the kindness of their hearts, give them money. So the people He encountered were not like many of the people we find begging today at the street corners. You know, those corners are almost like property that people own. There are monetary amounts associated with those corners. You know, if you're on this corner, you can make X number of dollars a year. And some of those amounts are way, way, way, way above minimum wage. The beggars Jesus encountered were not like many that we find begging today. Many of them, today, beg because they can make more money doing that than they can working a job. And there are able-bodied others who feel entitled to something for which they do not work. All thieves, embezzlers, con-artists, dishonest politicians would probably fall into that category. I think there are probably very few dishonest politicians. They may start out honest, but, if you want to stay a politician, you have to play ball with the rest. And so you get pulled into things like that. It's an evil system.

You know, one of the things I had to learn as I got older was, when I helped people with things that they could not do for themselves, they appreciated it. And when I helped people with people they *could* do for themselves, they didn't appreciate it. So I think we should make a distinction there. If somebody can do something for themselves, it's really a good thing to let them do it. Now, maybe they *can* do it, but they have so many other things to do, they're burdened. Well, they we can help them with that, but I think it fits right in there with the biblical stand on helping others. When they need help, it's good to help them. Helping people when they *don't* need it teaches learned helplessness, which is another *Preaching To the Choir* topic to be covered down the road.

Here's something else the Bible says about this attitude. It tells us it's going to get worse. In 2 Timothy 3, Paul is talking to this younger minister, Timothy, and he said:

2 Timothy 3:1-5 – *But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self – we've talked of narcissism already, right? – lovers of money – people who are greedy – proud, arrogant – think they're better than others – abusive – willing to be violent with people if they can't have what they want – disobedient to parents, ungrateful – that goes right in with people that allow others to help them when they don't need the help; they're not grateful for it – unholy, heartless – people who have no empathy – unappeasable – people that you know, didn't get the right guy elected, so they're going to tantrum, and they're going to destroy property, and they're going to kill others, and you can't appease them, because they're right – slanderous – you know, we can think of things that have been said about President Trump's wife and his children – a slanderous thing – it's not true – if it's slander, then it's not true – so slanderous, people without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.* You know, it's easy to talk about how good God is, and to say that we have faith in God, but then hard to trust Him. What does Paul say to Timothy about this? *Avoid such people.*

So I want to back up to the beginning of this chapter – chapter 3.

V-1 – *But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty.* Why? Because people are going to be like he described.

Well, we're looking at it. And we have for a long time. But I think this election just brought it to the fore – brought it out in the open.

So how does a person overcome this? Now we're talking to the choir, right? Hopefully, we can all see ourselves in some of these things. So how do we overcome them? Well, the first thing – and probably the most important thing – is to *take responsibility for ourselves*. You know, we can look at 2 Timothy 3, and ask over and over, "How am I like this?" In other words, we should fight for equality, not superiority. Love your neighbor *as yourself*. Be fair to everybody. Be fair

to yourself, but everybody else also. If it doesn't work for everybody, then it's not going to work for anybody in the long run. That's just a maxim of how life works, so we need to be fair to everyone.

One of my favorite clients was a woman who overcame this very attitude. One day she came to her session 15 minutes late, and she apologized for being late. She forgot she said. And I said, "When I saw that you were late, I realized I failed to send you your weekly reminder yesterday, so I'm sorry, too." And she said, "You shouldn't apologize." And I said, "No? Why not?" She said, "Because I'm an adult." She said, "I have a calendar. And I got your message, so I'm supposed to show up on time. Whether you sent the message or not, it's what we agreed on." So the reason she's climbing out of mental illness was her willingness to take responsibility for her own actions.

Years ago, I was listening to a woman who was complaining about her ex-husband – how he had disappointed her, and how bitter she was, etcetera. Never mind that she went against parents, her friends, her minister, and her counselor to select him for her life-mate. She had plenty of warning. When I asked her how it was she selected him, she was instantly offended – took no responsibility at all for the choice she made. Didn't get to know him well enough, didn't spend enough time with him ahead of time, made a mistake, and now it's everybody else's fault.

When people can't make the connection between their actions and what happens next, they are doomed to a life of unnecessary trouble and, eventually, loneliness. So, take responsibility.

What else can we do? Well, most of us live in a world, some of the time, where we believe things that aren't really true. So we need to *dispute those unprovable thoughts*. Now, this is hard. It's a tough one. This kind of thinking is usually imbedded early. Nevertheless, the solution is to change old thought patterns. Like Paul tells us, we are to become a new person. So start doing that. Ask God to help you think according to His revealed truth, rather than your own magical thinking or the thinking of others who have imbedded that in your mind. The "not fair" thing would be a good example. Where's the proof that life is supposed to be fair and that things are fair? If we think that, without any evidence, who made us God to decide what's fair? And then we need to dispute the notion, with all the scriptures that tell us life, at best, is hard, and for good reason. It's not supposed to be easy. It's not supposed to be fair.

Here's another scripture to read about this. Since it's so hard to detect these ideas that we have, John said, in 1 John 4:1:

1 John 4:1- *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.*

We have attitudes extant in our society today that are passed from person to person. So we don't need to be a chump or a pawn and allow them into our minds without testing them against what

the scripture says. When you think you should have things you didn't work for, ask for the proof that that's true. Well, there isn't any. Because somebody else gets it, and you don't, is not proof. Where is it written that *you*, more than others, should have anything? Or, even that you have the same as other people should have? That's just not how it works – totally out-of-touch with reality. Just because we think something, doesn't make it true. Where's the proof? Test the spirits. The thoughts that are bandied about and passed from one person to another in our society, do they appeal to the baser nature, or do they come from God? And, if they appeal to the baser nature, why are some people spreading them around and using them to get what they want out of life? We need to think about that stuff.

The third thing, I think, that we can do to overcome this kind of thinking: There's nothing better to help us appreciate what we have, and to realize the benefit of working for it, than to *help others who have less or can't work*. So it's highly recommended to help the poor at a shelter where you can get face to face with them. And, as you meet them, keep track of the ones who you think could function successfully in today's job market. You know that the idea that people are just there because they're lazy? Well, some very few of them are that, but most of them can't make it. So helping them is a really good thing to do. Or, helping people in the congregation who are sick or disadvantaged in some way. You know, it strips away the false notion and puts things in perspective. No, things happen that are not fair. And they can happen to me, just as well as anyone else.

I know from the work I do, I am *so* thankful for the things I've learned from God, the Bible, and a life in the church. And I don't mean that I'm better than other people, and I know more about living God's way. I just know that, without Him in my life, I would be as clueless as a lot of the people I help. And that's the difference. So, I wouldn't know that if I weren't trying to help them. So, helping others is always a good thing – for *us* as well as for them. Life is hard. And that's mostly, in my case, due to my own mistakes. But it would be immeasurably more difficult without God's involvement and teaching.

Okay, that's it for today. Rather than thinking about others, I hope you can do some soul searching and find the self-entitling thoughts that you have. We can all do that.

Don't forget to comment on the Website.

Until next time, this is Bill Jacobs, for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families and the Church of God.