**Real Confidence**

What’s the difference between confidence and cockiness? Well, most athletes say that if you can back it up its confidence. If you can’t it is cockiness. Well, when it comes to our relationship with God we can’t back it up. We can’t be what He demands. But, Christ can. Christ did. So, might I suggest, as did the apostle Paul, that we get off ourselves and on to Christ? That we replace any notion of self-esteem with what Pastor and author, Dan Matzat, would call “Christ Esteem.” Christ then becomes the source of our confidence. And that’s a load off our souls!

At one time Paul based his confidence on his own self-esteem. Maybe you’ve heard the phrase “if you’ve got it flaunt it.” Well, Paul told the Philippians that if anyone could flaunt it he could. If anyone could base their confidence on their own self-esteem he could. Look at Paul’s flauntable traits: He was circumcised on the 8th day in accordance with Jewish Law. He was from the tribe of Benjamin. He was a Hebrew of Hebrews. He was a keeper, or at least a promoter of the Law as a Pharisee. He was blameless under the Law – not! But, at one time he thought so.

But, instead of flaunting it, he counted all these things as loss. He’d rather simply know Jesus. Instead of flaunting it he called all these traits rubbish. He just wanted Jesus. Instead of basing his confidence on his own self-esteem he just wanted Christ-esteem.

So, Pauls’ word of advice to us is if you want real confidence get off yourself and on to Christ. Replace self-esteem with Christ esteem. If anyone could flaunt it Jesus could. I mean he really does have it. He too was circumcised on the 8th day. He too is an Israelite of the tribe of Judah, which by the way was the tribe from which came the Messiah. He is more than a Hebrew of Hebrews. He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And he really is blameless under the Law. If anyone could really flaunt it Christ could.

But, Christ didn’t. Here’s what Paul said earlier in this letter about what Christ did instead. *“Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”* He traded his divine self-esteem to being esteemed not. But why? Paul tells us why in 2 Cor. 5:21: *“But God made him (Jesus) who had no sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God.”*

Sounds like a paradox – God/ Man, God/servant, God/died, but that’s how we see and know God. God reveals Himself by hiding in Christ. God heals His people by suffering in Christ. God’s power is seen in weakness. And God gives life by dying. God found us through His suffering on the cross. Therefore we find God in His suffering. We find confidence, real confidence, in God’s divine humility. We find confidence, real confidence, by sharing in God’s divine humility. Paul said in verses 10-11, *“That I may know him and the power of his resurrection and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”*

Confidence comes from sharing in Christ’s death and resurrection. But, how do we do that? Well, if you’re baptized it’s already a done deal. Paul wrote in Romans 6:3-5, *“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”*

Base your confidence, therefore, on your baptism. Get your confidence on by remembering your baptism. There you received the *Favor Dei –* God’s unconditional love. There you received the righteousness of Christ. There you were declared righteous for the sake of Christ. God said so. Do you remember when you were a kid and you complained to your parents about something you had to do and asked them why and they said, “Because I said so.” End of story. Their declaration was the final word. Well God has the final word on our spiritual status as well. It’s kind of like a courtroom situation. Whatever the judge says is final. You could be guiltier than a fox in a chicken coup, but if the judge says you’re innocent then you’re innocent – at least in his eyes. And his eyes are all that count in that moment.

In a similar way picture yourself in a courtroom with God standing there as judge. Next to you is standing another person – Jesus. You know why you are there. You are guilty as sin. You await the just verdict. God points to you and says “Innocent!” And you think, “What!!? I’m not innocent. Look at all the things I’ve done, all the thoughts I’ve had, all the hurtful things I’ve said. I’m not innocent.” Yes you are. God said so. You are declared innocent only because Christ was declared guilty in your place. In so doing we are declared righteous for Christ’s sake. We are righteous. God said so. End of story. Now there’s a confidence booster!

**[TESTIMONY Here]**

That’s the righteousness Paul refers to in our Philippians text – the righteousness of Christ which comes through faith. But, remember, faith is the antithesis of work. So if you want real confidence, don’t work at it. Simply receive it through faith. I often asked my students in the classroom which of these two statements about faith sounds more appropriate: “It doesn’t matter what you believe in as long as you believe.” Or: “Faith is only as valid as it’s object.” Having faith is important. But what we believe in, the object of our faith is more important still.” The first statement makes faith an end in itself. And the only righteousness that kind of faith grabs onto is its own. And that’s not going to cut it. The second statement acknowledges the importance of faith. But even more important is its object. In this case the object is Jesus and His righteousness. Confidence then comes not simply from faith, but faith in Christ and His righteousness.

So, if you want real self-esteem, get rid of the self and substitute Christ. After all he substituted himself for us. Besides, all we bring to the table is sin and death. And what Christ brings to the table is righteousness and life. Now, watch the tables get turned. Martin Luther wrote, *“Christ is full of grace, life, and salvation. The soul is full of sins, death and damnation. Now let faith come between them and sins, death, and damnation will be Christ’s, while grace, life, and salvation will be the souls.”* That’s the divine exchange! We get Christ’s grace, life, and salvation. So, let’s substitute self-esteem for Christ-esteem.

Keep your eyes on Jesus. Perhaps some of you are familiar with the faith alone, grace alone, and Scripture alone emphasis of the Reformation – Sola fide, sola gratia, sola scriptura – what I refer to as Luther’s sola system. Well, one sola that often gets overlooked is solus Christus – Christ alone. He is the source of our identity and the source of real confidence. Even when we fail, God still sees us through Christ and sees us with His Son’s righteousness. Now, that’s a confidence booster! We can take life head on, not with self-esteem but Christ esteem. After all, nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.