

Clearing the Stereotype:
You Christians Are Sheltered
A Study of Luke 5:27-32

Big Idea: It's not us versus them; it's us reaching them.

Related Scriptures: Matthew 5:13-16; 9:9-13; Mark 2:14-17; John 17:13-19;
1 Corinthians 5:9-13; Colossians 4:5-6; Titus 2:9-10

Introduction:

1. Good morning. First off, I want to give you some encouraging news for which I am very thankful. And it's not just that the Cardinals are playing in the Super Bowl today.

I'd like to report that eighty-six people expressed an interest in being a part of our newly forming Hospitality Team! If you are among the eighty-six, I'll be in touch with you soon. And we'll be seeing some more changes around here shortly.

2. You may have heard that our New Year's resolution at Moon Valley is to ► seek seven. We're asking God to use each and every one of us to help seven people move a little farther down the road toward a relationship with Christ in 2009.

But there is an obstacle in that road, and we need to ► clear the way. There is a six-headed stereotype that stands between our seven and Christ.

- "You Christians are hypocritical."
- "You Christians are too focused on getting converts."
- "You Christians are antihomosexual."
- "You Christians are sheltered."
- "You Christians are too political."
- "You Christians are judgmental."

This is the prevailing image unbelievers have of us as Christians.¹ It hinders their progress toward Christ. It makes them feel like they don't belong with us. And they're never going to believe unless they first feel like they belong. They check us out before they check Christ out. They come to community before they come to Christ.

We need to clear the way.

¹ David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007).

3. Two Sundays ago, I talked about clearing ► the stereotype: “You Christians are too focused on getting converts.”
4. Last Sunday, I talked about clearing ► the stereotype: “You Christians are judgmental.”
5. That brings us to today’s decapitation. I want to try to lop off another head on the six-headed stereotype. This time ► it’s, “You Christians are sheltered.” I’m going to let a few people explain this in their own words.
 - a. One unbeliever ► says, “Christians enjoy being in their own community. The more they seclude themselves, the less they can function in the real world. So many Christians are caught in the Christian ‘bubble.’”²
 - b. Another unbeliever ► says, “Christianity stifles curiosity. People become unwilling to face their doubts and questions. It makes people brain-dead.”³
 - c. A Christian explains it ► this way:

*So many Christians are caught up in the Christian subculture and are completely closed off from the world. ► We go to church on Wednesdays, Sundays, and sometimes on Saturdays. We attend small group on Tuesday night and serve on the Sunday school advisory board, the financial committee, and the welcoming committee. We go to barbeques with our Christian friends and plan group outings. We are closed off from the world. ► Even if we wanted to reach out to nonChristians, we don’t have time and we don’t know how.*⁴

6. Do ► we live in a Christian bubble? Are we somehow closed off, isolated, secluded, and out of touch with the rest of the world?

And if so, is it so bad? Aren’t we Christians supposed to be set apart? What about the biblical idea that bad company corrupts good morals? Aren’t there some things, and even some people, from whom we should shelter ourselves? And what about our kids? Isn’t it our responsibility as parents to shelter them from bad things that could ensnare them?

7. The biblical text we’re studying this morning sheds some light on being sheltered. It certainly doesn’t teach us everything there is to know about this complicated topic. But it does give us some insight about an important underlying component.

² Ibid, 121.

³ Ibid, 123.

⁴ Ibid, 130.

The text presents us with a useful contrast. A contrast between some people who are sheltered and one person who is not. The people who are sheltered are called Pharisees and scribes. The one who is not is Jesus. So we can look at the Pharisees and scribes and see something to avoid. And we can look to Jesus to see something to pursue.

The story is recounted for us in ► Luke 5:27-32. In a nutshell, Jesus asks a tax collector named Levi to follow Him. Levi follows and then throws a party for Jesus. And the Pharisees and scribes get upset about it. Let's read the biblical account and then we'll consider the contrast more closely.

► ^{NAU} Luke 5:27 After that He [Jesus] went out and noticed a tax collector named Levi sitting in the tax booth, and He said to him, "Follow Me." ► 28 And he left everything behind, and got up and *began* to follow Him. ► 29 And Levi gave a big reception for Him in his house; and there was a great crowd of tax collectors and other *people* who were reclining *at the table* with them. ► 30 The Pharisees and their scribes *began* grumbling at His disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners?" ► 31 And Jesus answered and said to them, "*It is* not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. 32 I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

- I. Let's ► first consider the Pharisees and scribes in this story. They are a good example of sheltered people. If anybody ever lived in a religious bubble, they certainly did. In fact, the name, "Pharisees" means "separatists."⁵ They deliberately separated or sheltered themselves from those who did not belong to their sect. The scribes are often paired with Pharisees in the Bible. The scribes were professional students and defenders of the Law contained in the Old Testament.⁶ So we've got separatists and professional Bible defenders.

Our story highlights an aspect of these people that isn't good. In the Pharisees and the scribes, God is giving us an example of something to avoid.

- A. But first, let's consider some things about the Pharisees and scribes that are good, or at least perfectly normal. These people aren't all bad. We have some things in common.
1. For example, the Pharisees were a Jewish sect. Therefore, they revere the God of Israel, the God of the Bible. We have that in common.
 2. They were also students of the Bible.⁷ In fact, they were very serious about obeying the Old Testament law as they understood it.⁸ Nothing wrong with that.

⁵ *Easton's Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Pharisees."

⁶ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, rev.ed., s.v. "scribes," by Frank E. Hirsch (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1988), hereinafter referred to as ISBE.

⁷ ISBE, s.v. "Pharisees," by J.E.H. Thomson.

3. They also valued learning and character above wealth and social rank.⁹ That's noble.
4. And they were patriotic. They were loyal to the nation of Israel and wanted to preserve it. And they were very concerned about what they perceived to be the morally corrupting influences on their nation. One could argue that they went well beyond patriotism to look down upon others. But patriotism itself isn't bad.
5. And they had a godly reputation. If you were looking for the God people who took their religion very seriously, everybody knew who they were. It was the Pharisees and scribes. Nothing wrong with a godly reputation.
6. And our text shows that they didn't like tax collectors. That's normal. Who can blame them for that?

And when we understand a little more about the tax collectors in that day, the bad blood is even more understandable.¹⁰ You see, tax collectors were subcontracted and authorized by the Roman government to inspect goods and collect certain tolls from the people using roads and bridges. For example, if you were a Jew traveling on a road, pulling a cart with some produce for your family, you would be stopped by a tax collector. He would inspect your produce and collect a toll.

Now, nobody likes to be taxed. But, what made it worse is that the Jews already resented the Romans for taking over their land of Israel—the land God had promised to them. So Roman taxes added insult to injury. One scholar explains, “The tax itself was looked upon as an inherent religious wrong, as well as civil imposition, and by many the payment of it was considered a sinful act of disloyalty to God.”¹¹

And what made it even worse is that there was no standard rate of taxation. So the tax collector could charge pretty much whatever he wanted. The tax collector was required to pay a fixed amount to the Roman government, but he could keep for himself whatever money he was able to collect over and above the fixed amount. The arrangement was ripe for abuse. The tax collector could charge you five coins, give three to the Roman government, and keep two for himself. Not surprisingly, the people of Israel viewed tax collectors as extortioners, and most of them probably were.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ ISBE, s.v. “tax,” by Louis Matthews Sweet.

¹¹ Ibid.

So Jewish folks generally detested tax collectors. And a special hatred was reserved for the tax collectors who also happened to be Jewish. A Jewish tax collector was viewed not only as an extortioner, but also as a traitor. A traitor who had betrayed not only his own country, but also God Himself. A traitor who sold God and country down the river to line his own pockets.

This is significant because the featured tax collector in our story, Levi, was a Jew. One of those betrayers of God and country.

So it's not hard to understand why the Pharisees and scribes were pretty upset about Jesus palling around with these corrupting betrayers of God and country.

B. So what's wrong with Pharisees and scribes here?

Well, if I were to sum it up, I'd say the problem is an attitude. It's an us-versus-them attitude. Us godly people versus them ungodly people. Us versus them.

1. Look at ► Verse 30. It says,

^{NAU} Luke 5:30 The Pharisees and their scribes *began* grumbling at His disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners?"

The term ► "sinners" is used here not so much to describe people who do wrong; rather, it describes outsiders, people who don't belong, irreligious people who do not fit in with those who scrupulously observe the Old Testament Law.¹²

And the ► question, "Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners?" is not really a question. It's not really seeking an answer; it's making a statement. And the statement goes something like this: "You should know better than to pal around with tax collectors and sinners. You should not be associating with these low-lives. They are morally reprehensible. You defile yourselves by eating and drinking with them. It's us versus them. They are the enemy."¹³

2. It's important to remember that this is an attitude. I'm not suggesting that we should never stand in opposition to evil. But this Pharisaical attitude is different. This us-versus-them attitude is soaked with self-righteousness and insecurity. It is quick to quarantine the pagans as potential viruses that might

¹² W. Bauer, F.W. Danker, W.F. Arndt, and F.W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed., s.v. "ἁμαρτωλός," (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), hereinafter abbreviated BDAG.

¹³ It's interesting that the Pharisees didn't approach Jesus directly. They tried to pick off some of the Jewish followers rather than challenge the leader.

infect us. It circles the wagons to keep the sinners out of the camp. It shoots at anything—people or ideas—that might be a threat to its own way of life. And it doesn't take a shine to questions, doubts, or detractors.

I'm afraid this us-versus-them attitude is correlated with some ostensibly Christian movements that have not exactly cleared the way for unbelievers to move closer to Christ. Movements such as the Inquisition. And the Crusades. And the persecution of Galileo as an enemy of the church for arguing that the earth is not the immovable center of the universe. And we could certainly argue about putting the Moral Majority on the list.

3. But the us-versus-them mentality is not just about big, historic movements. It can show up in casual conversations at Moon Valley. And it has. And it will not endear your seven. Let me give you just one example.

At various times, I've heard comments like, "I don't see how anybody with half a brain could believe in evolution." I'm sure I've made comments like that myself.

And I regret it.

Not because I believe in Darwinian evolution as the explanation of our origins. I don't. But because I had an us-versus-them attitude that made evolutionists the enemy. I drew a line in the sand because I simply assumed that all evolutionary ideas would contradict the Bible and undermine my faith.¹⁴ In that way, I played right into the stereotype of the sheltered Christian bonehead.

When I say something like, "I don't see how anybody with half a brain could believe in evolution," I fortify the stereotype: "You Christians are sheltered."

Because the truth is, if you could count all the brains on both sides of the creation-evolution debate, it's not even close. There are more brains on the evolution side hands down. And they are just as smart. Maybe smarter. I'm not saying they're right, I'm just saying it's definitely not about who's got the brains. So the "half-a-brain" slur is a boomerang that comes right back to smack me square in the head. And it leaves a mark: "sheltered."

I'm not an expert. I'm not a scientist. But I've read numerous books, thousands of pages on the theories of our origins. I've studied the Bible. I've been to seminars, both Christian and secular. I've sat under teaching from theologians to evolutionary biologists. And I've considered the arguments of

¹⁴ I certainly wasn't alone. One famous preacher and author says, "Evangelicals who accept an old-earth interpretation of Genesis . . . have already embarked on a process that invariably overthrows faith" (John MacArthur, *The Battle for the Beginning*, W Publishing Group, 2001, from the jacket.) Notice even the title of the book implies an enemy.

smart, godly, Bible-believing scientists who hold all kinds of different positions on evolution.

Based on all that, here's what I'm prepared to say about our origins: God was involved. The Bible is true. And evolutionists are not the enemy. And neither is modern science. *Exactly* how God created humans and *exactly* how long it took are open to reasonable debate. I'm not convinced that the Bible completely settles the issue one way or another. And to pretend that it does in an effort to somehow protect our faith strikes me as sheltered.

4. To shake the sheltered stereotype, I think it's good to carefully read and consider opinions that oppose our own.

I'll always remember my final oral exams in seminary. I sat before the entire seminary faculty and was peppered with questions. I remember one professor asked me, "Bob, do you believe in the premillennial return of Christ?" I thought to myself, "Oh, good. That's easy because that's pretty much the party line at this seminary." I thought it was us premillennialists versus them heretics. So I said, "Yes sir, I do." Then, the professor smiled and said, "Okay, Bob. Please give me what you consider to be the three best arguments *against* your own position, and support them from the Bible." Gulp. Good lesson in not being sheltered.

- II. Now, ► let's take a look at Jesus. He's the contrast to the sheltered bubble people. I want you to see that Jesus does not espouse the us-versus-them attitude. On the contrary, He embodies an us-reaching-them attitude. As such, the ► big idea of my sermon is this: It's not us versus them; it's us *reaching* them.

- A. Let's look at Jesus. First He does a seemingly small thing, but it's enormously important. He notices people. Verse ► 27 says,

^{NAU} Luke 5:27 . . . He . . . noticed a tax collector named Levi . . .

The Greek word for ► "noticed" is *thay-AH-o-mai*. It doesn't represent a casual observation. It means "to have an intent look at something, to take something in with one's eyes, with implication that one is especially impressed."¹⁵ It is also used of perceiving something above and beyond what is seen with the eyes.¹⁶ It's seeing something deeper.

The Pharisees and scribes saw superficially. They saw Levi as a betrayer of God and country, an enemy to be shunned. Jesus was not naïve; He also saw the betrayal. And He didn't condone it.

¹⁵ BDAG, s.v. "θεάομαι."

¹⁶ Ibid.

But He noticed something else. He saw Levi for what he could be: a forgiven follower. Jesus noticed.

The us-versus-them perspective can look right through people as if they were not even there. The us-reaching-them perspective notices what people could be.

It's not a coincidence that Jesus used the very same word for "notice," *thay-AH-o-mai*, in ► John 4:35 when He said to His disciples,

^{NAU} John 4:35 "... look on [*thay-AH-o-mai*] the fields, that they are white for harvest."

Jesus sees from a different perspective. An us-reaching-them perspective. And it makes all the difference.

B. In ► Verse 27, Jesus says to Levi,

^{NAU} Luke 5:27 "... "Follow Me."

Jesus invites Levi to belong. He doesn't say, "Hey Buddy, you need to clean up your act before you can join us because I'm against everything you stand for. We don't need any bad apples in the bunch."

No, He doesn't say that. He just says, "Follow me."

By the way, when your adolescent children try to use this sermon to justify hanging out with their unbelieving friends, a pretty good question to consider is: Who are they following? Who's leading who? When our kids were younger, if we sensed our kids were following Christ, we loosened the reins. When they weren't, we tightened them up.

C. Jesus says, "Follow me," and Verse ► 28 says of Levi,

^{NAU} Luke 5:28 And he left everything behind, and got up and *began* to follow Him.

By the way, Levi, otherwise known as Matthew, became one of the twelve apostles. And he wrote the gospel that bears his name. Jesus notices—He sees that God can do amazing things in the life of any person. Even in the life of a betrayer of God and country.

D. And when you see people that way, you want to reach them. You want to reach them more than you want to shun them or defeat them or fix them. Verse ► 29 says,

^{NAU} Luke 5:29 And Levi gave a big reception for Him in his house; and there was a great crowd of tax collectors and other *people* who were reclining *at the table* with them.

Now, this was a big ol' pagan party. It's hard for us to imagine how scandalous this would have been for the bubble people. Today, I suppose it would be like Jesus going to a party at Hooters. You know, Hooters, the restaurants with the waitresses. Buxom waitresses with tight tank tops and orange hot pants. Scandalous!

Don't get me wrong. I'm not making light of the objectification of women or lustful gawking. Neither was Jesus condoning the extortion or betrayal of the tax collectors. He was simply trying to reach them.

And Jesus seems perfectly willing to scandalize the bubble people in order to seek and save the lost.

- E. Predictably, the Pharisees and scribes grumbled, and they asked the accusatory question: "Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners?"

Jesus stepped in and answered the question. Verse ► 31 begins,

^{NAU} Luke 5:31 And Jesus answered and said to them, "*It is* not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. 32 I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

Here Jesus acknowledges their us-versus-them attitude and He even uses us-versus-them language. Us ► "well" people versus them "sick" people. Us ► "righteous" people versus them "sinners."

At first blush, it almost seems like Jesus might be affirming the reality of "us" people versus the "them" people, and that He came to fix the "them" people—the "sick" and the "sinners"—but not the "us" people—the "well" and the "righteous" because the "us" people don't need fixing. And I even wonder if the Pharisees and scribes almost felt complimented. Almost.

Ever had a comment directed at you and, in that moment, you couldn't quite figure out if it was a compliment or not?

After a while, I'll bet it dawned on them. This was not a compliment. The point is that only those who recognize their spiritual need can be treated. The truth is, everybody is "sick." Everybody is a "sinner." No one is righteous, not even one.¹⁷ When it comes to who needs Jesus more, there is no "us" and "them." We are them. We are all

¹⁷ Romans 3:10.

people who desperately need the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace is our only hope.

In effect, Jesus was answering the accusatory question, saying, “It’s not about us opposing them. It’s not about us shunning them. I’m not on a mission to seek and destroy. I’m on a mission to seek and save. It’s not about us versus them. It’s about us reaching them.”

F. I’m ► wondering how a new ministry would fly at Moon Valley. I’m wondering about a ministry to Hooters. How would a ministry to Hooters go down?

Relax. This is not a proposal; it’s a story.¹⁸ The story of a little Baptist church that reached out to the workers at a Hooters restaurant in Houston. A little church that dared not to be sheltered.

It all started as a gas station, where an associate pastor of the church “went out” and “noticed” a person. The pastor explained: “I met a waitress while we were both pumping gas at the Shell station. We started talking. She mentioned that she was exhausted after waiting tables, and it made it hard for her to come to church.”

The pastor gave the young woman his card and invited her to call if she ever felt the need. Two days later, the call came. But not from the waitress. Instead, it came from the manager of the restaurant where the waitress worked: the manager of Hooters. The manager heard about the pastor’s offer to help. And taking him up on it, he invited the entire church staff and their spouses to dinner. At Hooters.

As a part of the invitation, the manager said, “We’re just looking for answers like anyone else.”

The pastor explained, “I didn’t know if he said it flippantly or not, but I said, ‘We’ll be there.’ . . . a few evenings later, we were there. As I recall, most of us sat with our heads down trying not to look up, but we survived that first meal.”

And the pastor kept coming back for meals, bringing his Bible along. The workers started talking to him about concerns in their lives, asking spiritual questions, and giving him prayer requests. And a Bible study was started. At Hooters.

And the church served the people. The Hooters people. One church member accompanied one waitress to the hospital to wait while her father was in surgery. The church organized a baby shower for one of the waitresses. Some older women in the church regularly baked cookies for the waitresses, and, in commenting on these older women, the pastor said, “I don’t know if they saw the waitresses as granddaughters, or

¹⁸ George Henson, “Church adopts Hooters, both adopt Hurricane Ike victims,” Associated Baptist Press, 07 January 2009.

if some of them thought, 'That was me fifty years ago, and I wished someone would have reached out to me.'

He said, 'As you get to know these girls, you realize: 'They are just like me. They're hoping to find their way. They are real people with real needs.'

And the Hooters people began to feel like they belonged. Some began to come to church. Some went with the church people to go Christmas caroling. The pastor explained, 'You could tell they hadn't gone Christmas caroling before, because they all showed up in high heels.'

The church even partnered with the Hooters people to serve the community. The church was a sponsor of the Hooters charity golf tournament. They worked together on Habitat for Humanity building projects. And they partnered to help feed the victims of Hurricane Ike on Oak Island, where the only building left standing was a church.

In the wake of their joint effort to feed the people of hurricane-ravaged Oak Island, a Hooters marketing director said something remarkable. She said: 'I could not believe everyone's generosity. It just really came from God.'

And the Pastor said, 'If she can see that God can plan this, maybe she can start to see God has a plan for her own life.'

You see, it's not us versus them. It's us reaching them.