

# Warnings And Unpopular Messages

Luke 13-14 NIV

In the Teacher's Commentary that I frequently use, the study guide from Luke 12 through chapter 16 is labeled 'Life's Illusions.' Included in the chapters labeled 'Life Illusions' is a section called 'the games that people play.' From chapter 13 through 14, Jesus deals with formalism, tradition, name-droppers, rumormongers, entrapment, pride, selfishness, and excuses.

**"Games People Play"** is a 1968 song written, composed and performed by singer/song-writer Joe South. The song began with the chorus:

The games people play, every night every day, never saying what they mean, never meaning what they say. The lyrics protest against various forms of hate, inhumanity and intolerance--both interpersonal and social.

When the kids were growing up, there were a few board games that some liked to play. My favorite was called Billionaire (after all, it's all about Dave, not family time). Eventually, I was the only one who wanted to play this game. I rarely lost.

Much of the following comes from The Teacher's Commentary.

There's something about any win/lose game that can make for frustration and even humiliation. Eric Berne, in *Games People Play* (Dell), suggests that we all play games with each other; we all try to win. We manipulate other people to make them serve

our ends. The desire to "win," to feel ourselves better than others, or to gain a benefit at someone else's expense is all a part of the distortion that sin has stamped on the human personality. It's *natural* to play such interpersonal games, even for the believer.

But it is totally contrary to the way of life of the disciple.

Luke illustrated, in the experiences and conversations of Jesus, some of the strategies that people use to gain advantage. And he showed why these are contradictory to the life of discipleship. In probing the inner motives of men, Jesus probes our lives too. He helps us discover hidden patterns in our lives that might hold us back from full experience of the disciple's abundant life.

**Formalism (Luke 13:10-21).** The first of the manipulation games is formalism. Teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath, Jesus saw a woman who had been oppressed for 18 years. Bent almost double and unable to straighten up, Jesus called out to her and lay hands on her. Immediately, the woman stood upright and praised God. And the president of the synagogue was *annoyed!*

In fact, he was so upset that he announced: **"There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath."** (Luke 13:14)

Immediately, Jesus labeled his response hypocrisy: an "Outward show." This man was so caught up in the forms and traditions that he lost sight of people! But the same

man would think nothing of untying an ox on the Sabbath, and leading it to drink (v. 15).

Jesus' illustration cut through the pretense to reveal the emptiness of formalism. His words "humiliated" the leaders, and then Jesus went on to warn. In the kingdom of God, many birds will come roost on the tree that faith produces. Don't mistake them for fruit! In the kingdom, formalism, the notion that outward show and form is the reality, can, like yeast in flour, leaven all. Beware the leaven of the Pharisees.

**Name-droppers (Luke 13:22-30).** The next manipulation game is name-dropping. Jesus warned against people who associate with Him without commitment. There would come a day, Jesus warned, when such people would find themselves outside wanting in. Then they will cry out, **"Sir, open the door for us."** (13:25) But when the door is not opened they will protest, **"We ate and drank with You, and You taught in our streets"** (13:26). Jesus will reject them: **"I don't know you or where you come from."** (13:27) *It is origin, not association that counts!* Spend all the time in church you want. But, association with believers won't make you a Christian. You must have the life that comes from God.

**Weaknesses (Luke 13:31-35).** Our next game is, 'Find the weakness.' Have you ever heard the phrase, 'did they get your goat'? Or, did they find where your goat was tied? Meaning that your opponent found a weakness. Growing up, I never liked to be

teased. Dad used this phrase to teach me that if I didn't want to be teased, don't let the teasers know, or they would continue to tease.

The Pharisees, who hated Jesus and were plotting to kill Him, now warned him of impending danger from Herod. We know that some of the leaders believed Jesus, Nicodemus being one. Were they the ones that warned him? If not, this warning was a ruse. Would Jesus take the bait?

The Pharisees would have been delighted if Herod *had* killed Jesus. But even the rumor might help them. Rumors make people worry. A lie here or there might upset a person you don't like. It might produce uncertainty, or even fear. If a weakness shows up in a person's character, you have something to use against him. You have a prop for your own pride; ammunition for belittling remarks. "Did you hear how Jesus just fell apart when He heard that Herod put a hit on him?" That's what they hoped for.

But it didn't work. Jesus was not afraid. He knew far more than His enemies about His suffering, and He never flinched or drew back. But Jesus took no special pride in His courage. Instead, His heart was touched with compassion for the very men who hated Him and tried to break His spirit. Jesus mourned over the Jerusalem that had rejected him, and would soon crucify Him, and in turn would itself be destroyed (vv. 34-35).

***Entrapment (Luke 14:1-6).*** Entrapment is the next game. We have a concept in our legal code called *entrapment*. It protects a person from being solicited by law enforcement officers to commit a crime, for which he can then be arrested. Crimes must

be committed on the initiation of the criminal, not the police.

But entrapment is one of the games human beings often play with one another. We set up a trap, into which we hope they will fall.

The Pharisees, knowing Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, invited Him to the home of one of their most respected members (v. 1). Right across the table from Him they seated a man afflicted with dropsy. And they watched.

Jesus brought the issue into the open. "***Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?***" (14:3) Then, when the Pharisees would not answer, Jesus healed the man and let him go. Again Christ shamed His critics, pointing out that even an ox fallen into a pit would be lifted out on the Sabbath.

This is a bad game to play. Like "find the weakness," it is designed to embarrass another person. It is far worse when we bring in an innocent third party to use against our foe. How had the dropsied man felt? Had the Pharisees cared whether he was helped or not? Hardly! The man was merely a pawn, a way to get at Jesus.

When we see others as pawns, and try to use them for our own advantage, we soon begin to treat others as unfeelingly as did the Pharisees.

***Upstage (Luke 14:7-14).*** The next game is the, 'me first game.' Me first! Look at me! Jesus observed behavior at a feast that illustrates this game, one motivated by pride and selfishness. The point in this game is to make sure that everyone sees and admires you. Jesus noted men competing for better

seats at a banquet, for seating in those days was ordered, with the most important guests ranked nearest the head of the table.

After pointing out the danger of pushing yourself into a high seat where you might be embarrassed if your host then reseated you lower down, Jesus noted that anyone constantly trying to gain the spotlight and exalt himself will ultimately be humbled.

How empty we are when we act from motives of "what will others think?" How meaningless is the approval of men, when only God can accurately evaluate. Only His approval counts in the long run.

Jesus suggested to His host that he might better invite the poor and the homeless to his banquet—not friends who would repay in kind. How much better to reach out in love to those who no one knows but God. It is not the spotlight, but the knowledge that God will more than repay acts of love, that should motivate us (v. 14).

***Choice (Luke 14:15-33).*** Then Jesus told a story to those who were too busy with their games and personal concerns to respond to the feast of life God has prepared. In Jesus' story the invitation had been extended (v. 16). Many had been invited, even the game players, whose emptiness Jesus had exposed. Jesus came to save us all, even the most sinful. Yet in Jesus' story the invited guests began to make excuses. Each was simply too busy with profit and pleasures.

Whatever the excuse, saying no to the divine invitation is rejection. A person who fails to respond to Jesus' invitation to life has rejected Him. Salvation is a yes or no issue, there is no room for maybe.

Tragically, people of every age judge themselves too busy or too involved in their games to respond. But this will not keep God's house from being filled. The Gospel invitation goes out to the whole world, and all who will receive it will be welcomed. For those who will not, the doors will remain closed and they will be excluded from Christ's great welcoming feast.

Jesus then turned to the crowd and said, "And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." (14:27). The crowd also *had* to choose.

**Warnings and unpopular messages:** we don't like to be told what to do, do we? From an early age, we don't like to be told that we are wrong, or that our behavior needs corrected. Remember the song, 'Sign'? "Sign, sign, everywhere a sign, blocking the scenery, breaking my mind. Do this, don't do that. Can't you read the sign?" Is it possible that we see so many warning signs that we often ignore warnings? One web site offered 11,650 various warning signs: everything from blank road signs to a kangaroo crossing sign from Queensland, Australia.

While thinking about this message, I read a story about a group of boys on a winter outing who ignored their counselors warning to stay off the ice. As a result, thin ice claimed seven lives: four of the lives were rescuers, including the counselor who shouted the warning.

Could something like this possibly happen to us if we play games and ignore the warning signs. It would be a shame, a tragedy if one of us here today didn't make it to heaven. It would be even a greater

tragedy if that one that didn't make it took several others with them, just because they were playing games and ignored the warning signs.

It is said today that hells fire and brimstone messages are not popular: that they drive people away from church. If you want to reach the seekers and unchurched, keep your messages positive and uplifting.

Okay. Here is a positive and uplifting message: I am positive that there is a devil, because the Bible says so. He and the powers of darkness are determined to destroy individuals, families, and churches, and his best tactic is to convince people that he doesn't exist.

The uplifting part is that if individuals, families, and churches recognize his games and pay attention to the warning signs, Jesus will do the uplifting when he returns.

**<sup>16</sup>For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup>After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. <sup>18</sup>Therefore encourage each other with these words. (1Thessolians 4:16-18)**

It may not be a popular message, but speaking the truth of God's word means more to me than being popular. A day is coming when great and small alike are going to be brought to their knees. Have you warned your family and friends? Chances are, your warning will be ignored. But you still need to warn them. Maybe one will listen.

A day has been coming, and is now here: a day when people will be lulled into false security. The promise of peace and building a new world should be taken as a warning, not as security.

Peter warned us, "...you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. <sup>4</sup>They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." <sup>5</sup>But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. <sup>6</sup>By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. <sup>7</sup>By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the Day of Judgment and destruction of ungodly men." (2 Peter 3:3-7)

The day is here. It's not a popular message. Nevertheless, it's true.

Don't fall into the trap and play the game of formalism, where tradition or procedures are more important than people. We must avoid every game that people play for personal advantage. Many call themselves Christian who are not. Using others or pushing others aside to take the limelight: playing the excuse game. All of the games people play could cost you and those you love dearly, if you don't heed the warning signs and take seriously the unpopular message.