

[Three Tracts by Oliver Hovis]

1. THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS PHARISEE

By **Oliver J. Hovis** (1917-1981)

“Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (Luke 18: 10-14).

The Pharisees, the Jewish religious leaders during the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ were a strict sect. They were knit together and took an obligation to remain true to the principles of Pharisaism (See Judges 2:11). They were correct, moral, zealous and self-denying, but they were also self-righteous and destitute of the sense of sin and need (See Luke 7:39).

The Pharisees were the foremost persecutors of our Lord Jesus Christ and the object of His unsparing denunciation (Matt. 23:13-29 and Luke 11:42-43). In our text, Luke 18, our Lord spoke to a group of people that trusted in themselves for righteousness and despised others. He said, “Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, the other a publican (tax collector). The Pharisee stood and prayed thus *with himself* (notice our Lord did not say he prayed to *God!*): God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week. I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.”

One who is self-righteous, you see, can never see his need of God’s mercy and grace to keep him from glorying in himself. He never sees his sin. Self-righteousness will never let a person ask God to forgive his sins, thus trying to disannul the prayer that Christ taught His apostles which includes the words, “And forgive us our sins” (Luke 11:4).

A self-righteous person never sees himself as a Hell-deserving sinner. He is so loving and kind that he thinks it is an awful thing for God to save one and leave another. He will take sides with a Pharaoh or an Esau or a Judas against the great God Jehovah and cry, “Unfair! Unfair!” But the Lord said concerning Pharaoh, “For this purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth” (Rom. 9:17).

The self-righteous person never sees his depraved nature (Rom. 8:7-8) unless it is revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. And since he never sees his total depravity in the light of God's Word, he never sees his need of God's righteousness in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The self-righteous man will constantly talk about all he does for what he calls "the cause of Christ," but it is actually done for self-glorification. He may attend church, give a tithe, pass out tracts by the hundreds, give up certain bad habits and material possessions — he may refuse to attend such worldly affairs as movies and ball games. Sometimes he will get a fleshly conviction about owning a refrigerator or some household appliance, and will say that he is going to give it up so that missionaries on the foreign fields can have the money. But usually he backslides before he does. (I have seen this happen!)

Thus I have tried to give you a little picture of a self-righteous person in action. Now, my friend, it is Christ or Hell — which will it be? The publican in the parable mentioned earlier saw his depravity and asked God to be merciful to him a sinner. Christ said he went down to his house justified, which means that he was cleared of all his sin and it could never be brought against him again. He went down to his house clothed in the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:23-28).

How about you? Oh, turn from your ways, if you are trusting in your "good works" to save you. Such works will only damn you. Works have a wonderful place (Read Rom. 4:4), but works must be the *result* of salvation, not the way to salvation. May you be enabled to turn to Christ and Him alone. This is not pleasing to the flesh but it is your greatest need. Christ alone saves — and He can save an old self-righteous Pharisee!

May God bless you.

2. GOD'S GRACE TO THE SINNER

"For by grace are ye saved" Ephesians 2:8.

GRACE is a gift from God through Christ Jesus that is wrought upon the sinner by God's Holy Spirit. The word, grace, carries with it the meaning of God showing mercy to Hell-deserving, ill-deserving, filthy, unthankful, depraved sinners!

Man by nature fights against God and Christ and the Holy Spirit, thereby fighting against his own conversion. Man in his natural heart will not have Christ on any terms. He says within himself, "I will not have Christ to rule over me. I am

going to live my own life and do as I please.” But Christ must become your Lord before He becomes your Saviour. We must bow before the Lordship of Christ Jesus before we can thank Him for His Saviourship. For He is King over His subjects, and being King means that He rules and reigns over all. All of man’s good works will not merit him one particle of God’s grace, although works are good in their place.

Paul on the road to Damascus was a Christ-rejecter, seeking to persecute the followers of Christ, but the Lord struck him to the ground and saved him by grace (Eph. 2:8-9). Paul was not seeking salvation in Christ—this was his last thought that day. He never dreamed he would ever bow to the Lordship of Christ. But that is exactly what he did! In the dust of the road he cried, “*Lord! What wilt Thou have me to do?*”

The Philippian jailer beat Paul and Silas until their backs were a bloody mass, put them in stocks without any food and locked them in a cell. But when God shook the prison by His mighty power, the jailer fell trembling at the feet of Paul and Silas and cried, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Paul answered and said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Read Acts 16:23-31). Paul perceived by the jailer’s trembling and the question he asked that God was manifesting His grace to this sinner.

Have you believed in Christ for everything? Don’t depend on your church membership or any good works that you have performed. Have you bowed to the Lordship of Christ and then thanked Him for His Saviourship? They are twins; they rise and fall together. So with repentance and faith.

Can you honestly say, “Christ is mine and I am His. If there is no Heaven or Hell, I will trust Him anyway.” Do you find a little crying in your heart saying, “Lord, give me a new heart”? Brother, sister, that is the germ of the new heart already there. The natural heart will not say this. Look to Christ. Don’t look anywhere else. Just look to HIM always.

If you follow Christ, it may not please people, not even those who profess His holy Name. But all that matters is that Christ is yours and you are His. May the Lord have all the glory for any blessing these few words bring.

— **Oliver J. Hovis** (died 1981)

3. ***“THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS”*** (Jer.23:6)

ONE of the most hated truths of God’s Word is the imputed righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Webster’s Dictionary we find that the word “impute” means “to give to another person the credit or blame.”

The imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ strips a person who is trusting in his own righteousness for salvation, takes away all the security he has and leaves him with no foundation to stand on. This truth knocks the props from under such a person, because “Salvation is of the Lord” (Jonah 2:9). For anyone to deny or disbelieve the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ and trust in his own righteousness means the difference between Heaven and Hell.

In the third chapter of Genesis we find that Eve disobeyed God’s command and Adam was a partaker in this disobedience. Their eyes were then opened to the fact that they were naked (guilty, depraved sinners) before God. Immediately they sewed fig leaves together to make aprons for themselves. They were made to see that they did not possess any righteousness of their own—so they attempted to cover their spiritual nakedness with their own hands, that is, by works.

Can a depraved sinner come to Christ for salvation by his own will and choice? He may attend church and become religious, but will he seek Christ as Lord and Saviour? In Eph. 2:1 we find these words: “And you hath He (God) quickened (brought to life) who were dead in trespasses and sins.” The apostle Paul was writing to believers in the church at Ephesus and explaining to them how God had dealt with them before they were saved. In their natural state, the Ephesians were “dead” spiritually as are ALL men. The individuals whom God intends to save He “quickens” from their spiritual death, thus giving them the ability and desire to seek Christ as their Lord and Saviour.

We don’t mean that if a man is “dead spiritually” he is also dead to the extent that he can’t possess human kindness, rear a family, work out great mathematical problems, be industrious, etc. Such qualities, however, have nothing to do with meriting salvation. Man by nature is spiritually dead and he cannot move one half inch toward Christ. God’s Word says so. A spiritually dead man can no more move toward Christ for salvation than a corpse can move out of its casket. Hear the words of Christ: “No man can come to Me except the Father which sent Me draw him” (John 6:44).

The fig leaf aprons Adam and Eve made to cover their sinfulness were not acceptable in God’s sight. In order for Adam and Eve to get back in communion with a holy God, they must be clothed from God’s own hands. “And so, unto

Adam and also to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins and clothed them” (Gen. 3:21). The first sinners required a divinely provided garment that they might be made fit for God’s presence, thus all sinners must be clothed in the righteousness of Christ before they can be clean and undefiled before God.

In Romans 3:23 we find the natural condition of man: “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” In the next three verses (24-26) we find what God does to a believer. “Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation (appeasement) through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time His righteousness; that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.”

Here is God’s consistency with His own law and holiness, in freely justifying a sinner who believes in Christ. “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth” (Romans 10:4). “Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith (in Christ) without the deeds of the law” (Rom. 3:27-28).

In closing, we would add that the imputed righteousness of Christ does not give a believer a license to sin. Never! “Shall we sin, because we are not under the law but under grace? God forbid. Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” (Rom. 6: 15-16).

A true believer can say, as Paul said in Galatians 2:20, “The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” May God use these few thoughts for His glory. Amen.

(This article by our late brother and friend *OLIVER J. HOVIS*, of Rock Hill SC, is slightly edited by W. Fulton)

Is Christ precious to you? (1 Peter 2:7)

A SUFFERING CHRIST IS PRECIOUS TO SUFFERING SOULS.

A BROKEN CHRIST IS PRECIOUS TO BROKEN SOULS.

A DYING CHRIST IS PRECIOUS TO DYING SOULS.

***A RISEN CHRIST IS PRECIOUS TO SOULS THAT ARE RISEN IN HIM TO
WALK IN NEWNESS
OF LIFE.***

A JUSTIFYING CHRIST IS PRECIOUS TO JUSTIFIED SOULS.