

Title: **SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS**
Text: Luke 18:9-14
Subject: *The Parable of The Pharisee and The Publican*
Date: Sunday Evening — August 29, 2004
Tape # Y-41a
Readings: *Ron Wood and Bobbie Estes*
Introduction:

(Luke 18:9-14) “And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: (10) Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. (11) 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. (12) I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. (13) 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. (14) 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.”

**What a
Crime!**

**What a
Privilege!**

**What a
Waste!**

**What a
Prayer!**

**What a
Blessing!**

I cannot imagine a subject more disgustingly repugnant than the subject of my sermon tonight. I have come here to talk to you, as plainly as I can, about **SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS**. This is obviously the subject of the parable before us. Luke gives us an inspired introduction to the parable in verse 9. — “*And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in*

themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.” That which our Lord here denounces is self-righteousness.

ALL SELF-RIGHTEOUS

All men, by nature, are self-righteous. It is the family disease of all the sons of Adam. From the heights to the depths of society, we all think more highly of ourselves than we should. **We secretly flatter ourselves** that we are not so bad as some, and that we have something that will recommend us to the favor of God. The wise man said, *“Most men will proclaim everyone his own goodness.”* **We forget the plain testimony of Holy Scripture.** — *“In many things we offend all”* (James 3:2). — *“There is not a man upon the earth, that doeth good and sinneth not”* (Eccles. 7:10). — *“What is man that he should be clean, or he that is born of woman that he should be righteous”* (Job 15:14). — *“They are all under sin; as it is written, there is none righteous, no not one”* (Rom. 3:9-10).

Ever since man became a sinner, he has been self-righteous. When man had a perfect righteousness before God, he did not glory in it nor cherish it; but ever since man has fallen and lost all righteousness, he has pretended to b righteous! Immediately after his fall, Adam wrapped himself in his apron of fig leaves and began to defend himself by blaming his troubles on God who gave to him the woman, and the woman for giving him the fruit.

As it was with Adam, so it is with all men; we justify ourselves before God and men. Self-righteousness, is born within us; and while we can, to a degree, control lust, lies, and murder, our self-righteousness will not allow us to confess our sins and come to God for mercy as guilty sinners. Millions of sermons have been preached against self-righteousness, but it remains the number one sin which keeps men from coming to Christ.

One old preacher said, a long time ago, “I scarcely ever preach a sermon without condemning self-righteousness, yet I find I cannot preach it down. Men still boast of who they are, what they have done, what they have not done, and mistake the road to heaven to be one paved by their own works and merit.” God help us!

TO CHRIST’S DISCIPLES

This parable was first addressed to the disciples of our Lord. Perhaps you wonder why I am preaching to you on this subject of self-righteousness. I

know that if you were asked about the ground of your hope and the foundation of your salvation, you would confess that you trust in the merits of Christ. But **I fear that some of you who now hear my voice make Christ only half a Savior.**

You would never be so bold as to say that you do not need him at all. But, then, you are highly offended when I tell you that your hearts are as black, and vile, and corrupt as hell itself. Why is that? Is it not because you trust in yourselves, that you are righteous? I plead with you for your very soul's sake, be honest. You think, "I know I am not as good as I should be, but then I am not so bad as some people. I go to church regularly. I read my Bible. I say my prayers. I am sober, honest, and moral." — Are you not self-righteous?

ONE CURE

There is only one true cure for self-righteousness, and that is self-knowledge. All the descendants of Adam are sinners, destitute of righteousness, and filled with unrighteousness. Out of your "*heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.*" The same is true of my own.

By nature we are all enemies to righteousness. And we have no power to make ourselves righteous. **No matter how righteous you may be in the eyes of men, or in your own eyes, you have no righteousness, unless you have the righteousness of Christ.** If it were possible for men to gain righteousness for themselves, then Christ is dead in vain.

Once let the eyes of our understanding be opened by the Spirit of God, and all self-righteousness must fade away. We will talk no more of our own goodness, when we behold his goodness. Once let us see what there is in our hearts, and what the holy law of God requires, and self-conceit will die. Oh, if we can but get a sight of the thrice holy Jehovah, we will cry with Isaiah, "*Woe is me!*" We will lay our hands upon our mouths, and cry with the leper, "*Unclean, unclean!*"

Everyone who goes to the house of worship is set forth in this parable. You either come like the self-righteous Pharisee, or you come like the self-abased Publican. May God the Holy Spirit direct the words of his servant this hour, to the awakening of the self-righteous, to the comfort of those

who labor and are heavy laden with sin, and to the edification of all, for the glory of Christ.

Proposition: The purpose of our Lord in this parable is to show the folly and danger of self-righteousness.

OUTWARDLY THE SAME

Before we look into the message of our parable, I want you to see that there is one point at which the Pharisee and the Publican agree. There is one thing that they had in common. They both “*went up into the temple to pray.*” They both set their faces in the same way. Outwardly they both walked in the same path. They entered the same house. So far as we can see, there was no difference whatever in their outward religious behavior.

I am reminded of the first men who worshipped God, Cain and Abel. There was a mighty gulf between them. God accepted the one and rejected the other. The difference between these two men was in their heart. Cain had a heart full of pride. Because he trusted in himself that he was righteous God rejected him. Abel had a heart full of shame because of sin. Because he trusted Christ as the Lord his Righteousness God accepted him. Which are you, the proud, self-righteous Pharisee, or the broken, self-abasing Publican?

Divisions: In this text our Lord points out four great differences between the Pharisee and the Publican. I want to simply set them before you.

1. There was a difference in their character.
2. There was a difference in their behavior.
3. There was a difference in their prayers.
4. There was a difference in their end.

THEIR CHARACTER

- I. Our Lord begins this parable by pointing out that — **There was a difference in the character of these two men.** — “*The one a Pharisee, the other a Publican.*”

It would be impossible to imagine a more striking contrast in the opinion of the Jewish nation during the time of our Lord’s earthly ministry. In the minds of those ancient Jews, the Pharisee represented the epitome of

morality and righteousness. And the Publican was looked upon with more disgust than a harlot or a drunkard. Publicans represented the depths of sin and degradation.

A. One of these men was a Pharisee.

1. The Pharisees were **the most ancient sect of the Jews.**
2. They were **thoroughly orthodox** in their doctrine.
 - a. They believed in the inspiration of Scripture.
 - b. They believed in the Messiah.
 - c. They believed in election, predestination, and limited atonement.
 - d. They believed in the resurrection of the dead.
 - e. They even believed in the future punishment of the wicked, and eternal bliss of the righteous.
3. The Pharisees were **very strict in their observance of the law and the traditions of the church.**
 - a. They prayed three times in the day.
 - b. They fasted twice a week.
 - c. They gave tithes of everything they possessed.
 - d. They strictly observed the ceremonies of the law.
 - e. They were meticulous in their observance of the Sabbath day. — They wouldn't think of missing a church service.
4. **But everything the Pharisees did was to be seen of men.**
 - a. They stood in corners of the streets and made long prayers, so that men coming from both directions could see and hear them.
 - b. Our Lord tells us that they "*made broad the borders of their phylacteries.*" — That is to say, they sewed pieces of parchment on their long robes, which had Scripture texts written on them, so that all men could see how much they loved the law of God.

NOTE: If they were living today, they would have their shirt pockets stuffed with tracts, carry large Bibles everywhere they go, put bumper stickers on their car saying, "Jesus saves!" or "Honk if you love Jesus!" and write "I love Jesus" on park benches and overpasses, march in the streets to protest abortion and pornography, and to have the Ten Commandments hung in all public buildings. — The Pharisees were the most religious people in the world, and everyone knew it.

- c. All of their religious exercises were designed to win the applause of men.

5. There are many today, perhaps some of you, like these Pharisees.

- a. You keep up the outward duties of religion, so that you may either gain or keep the respect of men.
- b. They suppose that, by their religious works, they make God their debtor.
- c. They despise all other men, thinking themselves holier than others, who do not observe their traditions. They say, “*Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou.*”

NOTE: This is far different from the true believer. Those who trust Christ for righteousness know that they are, in themselves, poor, miserable, and guilty. They freely admit that others are much better than they. They despise no one (Phil. 3:3).

(Philippians 3:3) “For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”

B. The other man in the parable was a Publican.

To the Jews, nothing was more offensive than a Publican.

1. The Publicans were Jews who collected taxes for the Roman government.
2. They usually exacted much more than was due from their countrymen, so as to amass wealth for themselves.
3. They were looked upon both by the Jews and the Romans as disgraceful and contemptible.
4. The Jews could make no more vile accusation of Christ’s character than to say that he was the friend of Publicans and sinners.

THEIR BEHAVIOR

II. Now, in the second place, we see that — There was a difference in the behavior of these two worshippers.

A. Look at the proud Pharisee. — “*The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself.*”

The Pharisee went up as close as he could get to the holy place and stood in some conspicuous place so that he could be seen by all.

1. He stood in fixed formal posture.
2. He stood apart from the other worshippers, lest he should be defiled, or be thought to be “*as other men are.*”
3. He stood with great boldness and confidence, as though God were indebted to him.
4. He stood and prayed with himself.
 - a. His prayer was altogether centered in himself.
 - He sought nothing but his own glory.
 - He stood before God, being confident of his own righteousness.
 - He stood by himself, with no respect to Christ the Mediator.
 - Though he addressed God, he praised his own self.
 - b. We see nothing of humility in this man. He had no inclination even to bow his head before his Creator, much less his heart.

B. Now, look at the Publican. — “*The Publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast.*”

1. The Publican **stood afar off** in the outer court, as one who was unworthy to enter the presence of him whose name is Holy.
 - a. This was a testimony of the sense he had of his state and condition before God. He was an unworthy sinner, far off from God, and deserving to be separated from God forever.
 - b. This was also a display of his reverence for God.
2. This Publican was **not even willing to look up** toward heaven.

J. C. Ryle said, “He felt the remembrance of his sins so grievous, and the burden of them so intolerable, that, like a child who has offended its father, he dare not look his Almighty Maker in the face.”

- a. The guilt of his sins lay so heavily upon him that he could not look up to heaven.
 - b. A sense of sin made him blush with shame.
 - c. Sorrow caused his heart to bow in brokenness and contrition before the throne of God.
 - d. He was possessed with a fear of God’s well-deserved wrath.
 - e. This poor sinner knew he was unworthy of any favor from God.
3. In sorrow, self-abasement, and godly fear, the Publican “**smote upon his breast.**”

He was so overcome by the sinfulness of his heart that he could not control his feelings. He remembered his many sins. He recalled the mercies he had received, and his neglect of them. He knew the life he had led and the God he had despised. And these things came crushing upon his heart like an intolerable burden.

- a. He beat upon his breast, pointing to his heart as the fountain of his sins.
- b. He beat upon his breast, expressing his sorrow and repentance of sin.
- c. He beat upon his breast, showing his abhorrence of sin.

Some might be shocked at such a scene. As for me, I would to God, that some poor sinner might so feel the weight of his sins that he could not control himself. I am shocked by the apathy and indifference many have toward the gospel. While they sit in your place in house of God, when they bother to come to the place of worship, they yawn and sleep, clip their nails, or look out the window daydreaming, or you plan next week's activities. Are there any poor, helpless, bankrupt sinners listening here. I tell you that you stand before a Holy God. Will you not cry out for mercy!

THEIR PRAYERS

III. Third, our Lord shows us a marked difference in the prayers of these two men.

A. Look first at the Pharisee's pretentious prayer.

We can hardly call it a prayer. While he does address it to God, and acknowledges God's right to some gratitude upon his part, this proud hypocrite was wrong in everything he said. — *“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.”*

1. **There are several things that are obviously missing in the Pharisee's prayer.**
 - a. There is no confession of sin.
 - b. There is no expression of desire for the glory of God.
 - c. There is no praise to God.
 - d. There is no hint of need before God.

This man was perfectly self-satisfied and self-sufficient. He recites complacently what he is not, and proudly speaks of what he is.

2. **He gives thanks to God, but only in order to exalt himself.**

3. **Proudly, he denies being like other men.**

- a. He was indeed like all other men. He was a sinner in Adam, he was a sinner by nature, and he was a sinner in heart, just like all other men.
- b. He goes on and denies particular sins, of which the Pharisees were guilty.
 - (1.) They were guilty of extortion, devouring widows houses under religious pretense.
 - (2.) They were unjust, being aptly represented by our Lord, as unjust stewards.
 - (3.) And they were adulterers; our Lord called them an adulterous generation.
 - (4.) Even as he made this prayer, this Pharisee was guilty of all these things before God.
 - He was robbing God of his glory.
 - He was unjustly claiming a right to God's favor.
 - He was guilty of spiritual adultery, the worst adultery of all.

4. Even if he had obeyed the letter of the law perfectly, he was wrong to suppose that the literal fulfillment of the law would merit God's favor. — *“By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight.”*

5. The Pharisee **judged himself by the wrong standard.** — He compared himself with other men.

6. **And he proved himself to be the child of the devil by accusing his brother.**

There is no soul in such a dangerous position as the religious hypocrite. No man is in such a hopeless condition as the Pharisee, who has no deep feeling of his own sinfulness. No heart is more hard to reach than that which is dead in self-righteous religion.

B. **Now I want you to listen to the Publican's prayer.** — *“He smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.”*

This prayer was most instructive, though it was very short.

1. **There was a personal, sincere, and full confession of sin.**
 - a. This publican did not confess anyone else's sins, but his own.
 - b. This publican made no excuse for his sin.
 - c. And this man confessed that he was the greatest sinner who ever lived. If you could read his prayer in its original you would see that he is saying, "God, be merciful to me the sinner."
 - He confessed his sinful nature and his sinful deeds.
 - He speaks as though he were the only sinner in the world.
 - He confesses that God would be perfectly just to punish him in hell forever.

2. **This man made his suit for mercy at the throne of the sovereign God.**
 - a. God was the one who was offended, and God alone could forgive.
 - b. He pleads with God whose prerogative it is to have mercy.
 - c. He made no promise of reformation, he simply pleaded for mercy.
 - d. He came with nothing to offer, simply pleading for mercy.

3. **This Publican pleaded for mercy with faith in Christ.**

You may be thinking, "Now, pastor, how do you get that out of the text?" I will show you. The word that is here translated "be merciful to" is found only one other time in the New Testament in Hebrews 2:17. And there it is applied to the Lord Jesus Christ, our High Priest. "*Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.*" The word "merciful" means propitiuous, or reconciling.

- a. He prayed that God would show him mercy through the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ, typified under the law.
- b. He knew that God could show mercy only by the blood sacrifice of Christ.
- c. God forgives sin only when the satisfactory payment has been made.
- d. This sinner confessed his entire dependence upon Christ, the Mediator whom God provides, knowing that God must pardon sin in a way that is consistent with his justice. Here is a sinner's plea, —

*“For thy name’s sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great”
(Ps. 25:11).*

THEIR END

IV. *Fourth, I want you to see that **the Pharisee and the Publican were different in their end.** — “I tell you this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”*

- A. The proud Pharisee, though he was righteous in his own eyes, was rejected by God.
- B. The poor Publican was justified by faith in Jesus Christ alone.
- C. Our Lord makes a general application of this subject.
 - 1. All who exalt themselves in self-righteousness shall be abased by God.
 - 2. All who humble themselves in repentance, will be exalted with Christ.

Application:

- That which our Lord condemns more severely than any other crime is self-righteousness.
- I would rather stand before God in the day of judgment as a man guilty of lying, theft, adultery, and murder, than stand before him as a man guilty of self-righteousness.
- Self-righteousness shall be punished with greater severity in eternal damnation than any other offense.

Our Lord spoke this parable to all who trust in themselves and despise others. Who are these people? Turn back to Luke 16:15, and hear the way the Lord Jesus describes them.

(Luke 16:15) “And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.”

If you will turn back to the prophecy of Isaiah (65:1-7), I will show you exactly what God thinks of self-righteousness and what he says about all who trust in themselves that they are righteous, while despising others.

(Isaiah 65:1-7) “I am sought of *them that* asked not *for me*; I am found of *them that* sought me not: I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation *that* was not called by my name. (2) I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way *that was* not good, after their own thoughts; (3) A people that provoketh me to anger continually to my face; that sacrificeth in gardens, and burneth incense upon altars of brick; (4) Which remain among the graves, and lodge in the monuments, which eat swine’s flesh, and broth of abominable *things is in* their vessels; (5) Which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou. These *are* a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day. (6) Behold, *it is* written before me: I will not keep silence, but will recompense, even recompense into their bosom, (7) Your iniquities, and the iniquities of your fathers together, saith the LORD, which have burned incense upon the mountains, and blasphemed me upon the hills: therefore will I measure their former work into their bosom.”

A BOLD PROPHECY

The apostle Paul tells us, in Romans 10, that Isaiah was very bold in making this prophecy. It required the boldness of firm conviction and divine anointing for the servant of God to speak for God in the day when the people who claimed to worship God were wholly given over to idolatry, superstition, and will worship. It required boldness for the man of God to expose the self-righteousness of his own nation, declaring them to be a people who, because of the delusions of their perverse religion and the depravity of their hearts, were a people — “*Which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to m; for I am holier than thou.*” Then he adds this word from God concerning the people to whom he preached — “*These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day.*”

Thus the prophet of God boldly delivered the word of the Lord. In a day when the people were wholly given over to legality, he preached the gospel. When his nation was filled with pride and self-righteousness, proudly presuming that they were alone the people of God, he boldly denounced them as hypocrites. When they thought they had God in their pocket, God’s prophet boldly affirmed God’s electing grace and announced his rejection of the Jewish nation. Perhaps it was his boldness that provoked Manasseh’s wrath which resulted in Isaiah being cruelly put to death, being sawn asunder by the king’s order.

The sins of Israel were open and undeniable. They pretended to worship the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but did so in total violation of the first and second commandments. **They mixed the worship of other gods with the worship of Jehovah.** They used icons, images, and symbols in the worship of God. These things were expressly forbidden by God even in the Old Testament.

(Exodus 20:3-4) “Thou shalt have no other gods before me. (4) Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness *of any thing* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth:”

The Jews worshipped the Lord, or at least pretended to, upon ornate altars of brick, altars of their own making, in places of their on choosing. Again, they did so in direct violation of Holy Scripture.

(Exodus 20:24-26) “An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee. (25) And if thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it. (26) Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto mine altar, that thy nakedness be not discovered thereon.”

The Jews even practiced necromancy, pretending that they communed with the dead. They practiced witchcraft and sorcery, incorporating magic into their worship!

To top it all off, they were guilty of horrid self-righteousness. They carried their self-righteousness to such a pitch that they vainly and proudly imagined that if they even rubbed up against someone else on the streets they would be polluted and defiled. Therefore, the Lord God here declared them to be to him as smoke in a man’s nose, abhorrent and intolerable.

Truly, Isaiah’s bold prophecy is as applicable to our day as it was to his. There are many today who pretend to worship the Lord God must be honestly exposed for that self-righteousness that says, “*Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou.*” Multitudes today, who have spent this day in the house of God, have spent the day as “*a smoke in (God’s) nose.*”

It has been my purpose in this message to expose and condemn self-righteousness. We must constantly guard against it. **Self-righteousness is at its heart the idea that we can make ourselves righteous, that we obtain righteousness by something we do, because of who we are, who we are related to, what we experience, or what we feel. Self-righteousness is trust in ourselves** (Luke 18:9).

Self-righteousness is **a refuge of lies** by which men and women deceive their own hearts, **a bed that is too short** for a man to stretch himself upon it, and **a covering too narrow** to wrap yourself in. **It is in God's eyes the most offensive, obnoxious, and loathsome of all of all evils in this world. Yet, it is that which is most appealing to our flesh, that by which we are most likely to be deceived.** Unless God delivers us from the horrible snare of self-righteousness, we will perish forever under his wrath.

SEVEN STATEMENTS

Let me make seven statements about self-righteousness, and I'll wrap my message up. Some of them will be biting and painful, I know. Some of them will be very offensive to some of you. But they must be made. I must be faithful in my generation, as Isaiah was in his, and boldly expose the self-righteousness by which Satan would destroy your soul.

1. **Self-righteousness grows and flourishes best in religious soil.**

This is an enemy found within our own walls. It is not something we have to look for in the dark alleys of the profane. Oh, no. Self-righteousness is perfectly at home in the assembly of God's saints and in the practice of religious duties.

(Isaiah 1:10-15) "Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorra. (11) To what purpose *is* the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. (12) When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? (13) Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; *it is* iniquity, even the solemn meeting. (14) Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear *them*. (15)

And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.”

(Luke 16:15) “And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.”

Self-righteousness is not an evil found only among the unregenerate and unbelieving of the world. It is **an evil with which believers constantly struggle**. It is like a huge cob-web on our souls that we simply cannot pull off.

You can mark this down as a rule by which to determine whether or not our behavior is self-righteous. **Anything done to be seen of and to call the attention of others to ourselves is abhorrently self-righteous!** Listen to what our Savior says about the matter.

(Matthew 6:1-6) “Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. (2) Therefore when thou doest *thine* alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. (3) But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: (4) That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly. (5) And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites *are*: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. (6) But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.”

If I understand this passage correctly, most of what is done in the name of religion is self-righteousness.

- Most of our Public Prayers —In Restaurants (Matt. 15:1-20) — In Church (*The Man at Hillcrest*)
- Most of our Works of Charity
- Most of our Preaching
- Most Church Attendance

Self-righteousness grows and flourishes in religious soil; but you will find it outside the church too.

2. **Self-righteousness is as common among the base and profane of the world as well.**

This sin abounds where you might least expect it. Nothing is more ridiculous than to hear men and women who are openly vile talk about morality, social values, and ethical uprightness. Yet, we should not be surprised by this. The Scriptures give us examples of such things and warn us that the time would come when men would call good evil and evil good.

3. **Self-righteousness makes men and women harsh, hard, and judgmental regarding others.**

(Luke 18:9) “And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and **despised others.**”

4. **Self-righteousness will not bow to the authority of the Word of God alone.** — It must have traditions, customs, religious rules and laws, denominational authority, creeds, and confessions and historic backing.

- 2 Timothy 3:16
- Pharaoh
- The Pharisees (Matt. 15:7-9)

5. **Self-righteousness will never acknowledge and confess sin.** — Believers confess their sins in bitterness of soul. Self-righteousness talks about sin in terms of weaknesses and makes excuses for it. Utter, personal depravity, self-righteousness will never acknowledge.

- Psalm 51:1-5
- 1 John 1:9

6. **Self-righteousness will not trust Christ alone.**

Our only hope of righteousness is Christ, “*THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS*” (Jer. 23:6; 1 Cor. 1:30-31).

(Jeremiah 23:6) “In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this *is* his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

(1 Corinthians 1:30-31) “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: (31) That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.”

Self-righteousness makes the obedience, righteousness, and sin-atonement sacrifice of Christ of non-effect (Gal. 2:20-21).

(Galatians 2:20-21) “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and 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. (21) I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness *come* by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.”

But self-righteousness will not submit to the righteousness of God (Rom. 9:31-10:4).

(Romans 9:31-33) “But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. (32) Wherefore? Because *they sought it* not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone; (33) As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.”

(Romans 10:1-4) “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. (2) For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. (3) For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. (4) For Christ *is* the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.”

7. Self-righteousness most effectually bars a sinner from God’s grace and God’s salvation.

Your sin will not keep you from Christ; but your righteousness will. None are too bad to be saved, but multitudes are too good!

MY CONFESSION AND MY HOPE

Here is my confession. — “*I know that in me, that is, in my flesh dwelleth no good thing.*” From the soul of my foot to the crown of my head, there is no goodness in me, but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores.

(Isaiah 64:6) “But we are all as an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses *are* as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.”

Here is my hope — Jehovah-tsidkenu!

(1 Corinthians 1:30-31) “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: (31) That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.”

(Jeremiah 23:6) “In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this *is* his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

(Jeremiah 33:16) “In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this *is the name* wherewith she shall be called, The LORD our righteousness.”

“Not what these hands have done
Can save this guilty soul;
Not what this toiling flesh has borne,
Can make my spirit whole.

Not what I feel or do,
Can give me peace with God;
Not all my prayers, or sighs, or tears,
Can ease my awful load.

Thy work alone, my Saviour,
Can ease this weight of sin;
Thy blood alone, O Lamb of God,
Can give me peace within.

Thy love to me, O God,

Not mine, O Lord, to Thee,
Can rid me of this dark unrest,
And set my spirit free.

No other work save Thine,
No meaner blood will do;
No strength save that which is divine,
Can bear me safely through.

Thy grace alone, O God,
To me can pardon speak;
Thy power alone, O Son of God,
Can this sore bondage break.

I bless the Christ of God,
I rest on love divine;
And with unfaltering lip and heart
I call the Saviour mine.”

-Horatius Bonar (1808-1889)