

## **“Gospel Enemy: Self-Righteousness”**

**Luke 18:9-14; 15:25-32; 7:36-48**

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**Main Idea:** Self-righteousness is like a virus; untreated, it can severely debilitate or kill our Christian life.

### **Key Ideas:**

1. **The Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14) – Two reasons why self-righteousness is an enemy of the gospel**
  - a. First: Self-righteousness causes one the trust in him- or herself instead of the gospel. The Pharisee boasted of all his outward observances and considered these worthy of the favor of God.
    - i. Non-believers expect to go to heaven because he or she has been good. Christians can do a similar thing. We can have consistent times in God’s word or in prayer and we consider ourselves worthy enough for God to bless us and to answer our prayers. We base favor with God on our works.
  - b. Second: Self-righteousness causes us to look down contemptuously on other people.
    - i. The Pharisee looked down on the tax collector for all the flagrant sins he did not do. Christians can do the same thing. We look at society (abortionists, homosexuals, murders, “sinners”, etc) or others in the church and we find something in ourselves that is superior. Consequently, we look down on those we have judged inferior and treat them with contempt.
    - ii. Self-righteousness denies that all that we are is a result of God’s grace.
2. **The Parable of the Prodigal son - the self-righteousness of the elder brother (Luke 15:25-32)**
  - a. The older brother’s self-righteousness caused him to accuse his father (v. 29). This is another danger of self-righteousness – it can lead us to accuse God of unfairness.
    - i. It’s the attitude in the midst of a trial that says, “After all I have done for God, this is the thanks I get”?
    - ii. It’s the woman whose father died when she was 18 and at age 50 said, “I’ve still got a bone to pick with God about the death of my father.”
  - b. We can accuse God of being unfair to us when we look to our own obedience and sacrificial service. “I have had faithful in my quiet times. I am faithful to come to church and to participate in care group. I give generously and serve sacrificially. Therefore, God owes me something.”
    - i. When God doesn’t “deliver” on what we think He owes us, our self-righteousness causes us to accuse God.

3. **Simon, the Pharisee, and the repentant woman (Luke 7:36-50)**

- a. A “sinful” woman who knew she was forgiven much lavished Jesus with gratitude and worship. She washed Jesus feet with her tears. She kissed his feet and wiped them with her hair. And she poured oil on his head. Jesus’ host, Simon, expressed none of the same kindnesses to Jesus.
- b. Like Simon, the self-righteous do not know how much they have been forgiven. The self-righteous sense no need for Jesus and no need for forgiveness. Therefore, the self-righteous have little reason to love Jesus.
- c. The opposite is also true – he who is forgiven much, loves much. Someone has said, *“Consciousness of one’s own sinfulness and the assurance of forgiveness are the foundations of our love for God.”*

4. **Cure for self-righteousness**

- a. The cure for self-righteousness is to realize how much we need to be forgiven. Instead of comparing ourselves with others, we need to compare ourselves to God. We need to cry out like the tax collector, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.”
- b. When we love much, because we have been forgiven much, we will obey much, not to earn God’s favor, but because we already have His favor.
- c. When we love much, because we have been forgiven much, we will serve much. We will pour out our very lives in sacrificial obedience and service to God.

**Fellowship Starters:**

1. Jerry Bridges taught us that one of the enemies of the gospel is trusting in our own righteousness. Have you expected God to answer your prayers or bless you because you have had consistent quiet times or served faithfully? If so, whose performance are you trusting?
2. Have you ever been tempted to find something in yourself that is superior to others around you and look down on them with contempt? If so, then whose grace and righteousness matters in your life?
3. In the midst of a trial have you ever been tempted to accuse God and say in your heart, “After all I have done for God, this is what I get”? How does believing God owes us something reveal self-righteousness?
4. Jerry Bridges taught us that the self-righteous sense little need for Jesus, little need for forgiveness and therefore, have little reason to love Jesus? Does that describe you? If so, what one thing can you do to cultivate a consciousness of your own sin and an assurance of God’s forgiveness?
5. How does a moment-by-moment trust in the righteousness of Christ slay the gospel enemy of self-righteousness?