

GOD, I THANK THEE, THAT I AM NOT AS OTHER MEN ARE

While mowing the lawn a few weeks ago, I was praying and thinking about our church family and what the Lord would have me preach on after concluding the series on “Love in the Life of the Believer.” Two thoughts came to mind. First, the thought occurred to me that there are many words in the Bible that we do *not* use in our day-to-day conversations so we might not always understand what they mean. The second thought was this—I don’t know if you’ve been taught what they mean because I don’t know what you were taught *before* I came here! Those two thoughts impressed upon my heart the need to start looking at some of these Bible terms and rather than assuming you know what they mean, teach you what God’s Word says about them.

The first one we are going to look at is the concept of “righteous” and “righteousness.” Why is it important to know what these words mean?

Romans 3:10 “As it is written, There is **none righteous**, no, not one:”

Isaiah 64:6 “But we are all as an unclean thing, and **all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags...**”

Romans 10:3 “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.**”

Matthew 5:20 “For I say unto you, That except **your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees**, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

Romans 10:3 declares that we can be ignorant of God’s righteousness and go about trying to establish our own; Matthew 5:20 says our righteousness must be greater than the righteousness of the Pharisees if we are to get into heaven at all! Understanding what these words mean, then, can literally be the difference between life in heaven with God—or life in hell without Him!

This morning we are going to focus on the idea of “self-righteousness” and we have a well-known example of that in Luke 18:9-14.

1. The definition of righteous

“Righteous” comes from the Greek word *dikaios* and is used in reference to men, God, Jesus, and sometimes things. When used of men, it carries two ideas.

A. Righteous in regards to obeying the laws of men

A righteous man is honest, law-abiding, and upright. Stated another way, he does what is right—he is faultless and guiltless. Can someone obey the laws of the **land** perfectly? Sure; someone can always pay their bills and taxes and obey all the traffic rules and signs—even if a policeman is not watching!

Consider this, though—if a person keeps the laws of **men** perfectly, does that make them a perfect **person**? It doesn’t, does it? If a man is a perfect driver, but cusses under his breath because of all the “idiots” he has to share the road with and is jealous of his neighbor’s car and his neighbor’s wife, is he a perfect person? He’s not, is he? In other words, we can be righteous regarding the laws of the land, but not be righteous—guiltless and faultless—in God’s sight.

A second way “righteous” is used of men is

B. Righteous in regards to obeying the laws of God

Notice what Paul says of his background in Philippians 3.

Philippians 3:5-6 “Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; ⁶Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the **righteousness which is in the law, blameless.**”

So how do we explain the seeming contradiction between God saying “there is **none** righteous, no, not one” and Paul being “blameless”—innocent and guiltless—when it came to “righteousness which in the law.”

The same way we explained that a perfect driver doesn't make a perfect *person*! Paul perfectly kept the laws of God—the outward “letter of the law”—but that did not make him a perfect person. In fact, what is interesting about this is that he was **saved**—he was born again and became a child of God—**after** he was “blameless” in keeping the law! How do we know that? Because the first part of the verse says that he was so zealous of the rules of the law that he was “persecuting the church”—hunting down the followers of Jesus—in an effort to get them to stop following Him! In other words, Paul was a keeper of the law—but was against Christ—and needed to be saved because He was not right with God!

Consider next...

2. The description of self-righteousness (vs 9-12)

So, what is the meaning of “righteous” here in Luke 18:9? As we go through the parable, you will see that it is not being blameless or upright concerning the **laws of men** because none are mentioned. The parable does refer to keeping God's laws, but this commandment-keeping was not a good thing because it was done for the *wrong* reasons. To be **self-righteous** is an attempt to be right with God by our own efforts. Notice how Jesus describes them. First, they have an...

A. Inaccurate view of others (v 9, 11)

Jesus describes this self-righteous Pharisee as one who despised others. The word “others” in verse 9 is interesting in that it carries the idea of “the rest.” He didn't just despise other people—he despised **all** of the other people that remained; the rest; everyone else.

We see this disdain and disgust toward others in verse 11, too.

--“God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are...”

--“...or even as this publican...”

Self-righteous people have an inaccurate view of others; they despise them because they think they are better than them. They think that they themselves are someone that God would **want**—and that God does not feel the same about others. Why did the Pharisee think this way?

Because he had an B. Inflated view of self (vs 11-12)

--This Pharisee—and all self-righteous people—have an eye problem. They see *others* wrong—and they see *themselves* wrong. They also have an “I”—as in me, myself, and I—problem.

--v 11 “God, I thank thee...” is a good start. He is praying—and he is thanking God. But what is he thankful for? First, He is thankful for what he **doesn't** do.

--He is not an extortioner—a swindler

--He is not unjust and he is not an adulterer

--In v 12 we see that he is thankful for what he **does do**.

--“I fast twice in the week...” The law of Moses—contained in the first 5 books of the Bible—required one fast per **year** and that was in conjunction with the day of Atonement. This guy is super spiritual—he fasts twice per **week**. If you calculate that out, he fasts roughly 103 times more per year than he has to!

--“I give tithes of all that I possess.” What does that mean? That means one-tenth of everything that came to him went to God. Jesus pointed out the exactness in which some Pharisees tithed: **Matthew 23:23** “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for **ye pay tithe** of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and **not to leave the other undone**.”

Think of that for a moment. The Pharisees were so precise in the “exactness” of their tithing, that they even tithed on spices! In Mt 23:23 Jesus does not say this is bad and that they should **stop** it; in fact, He says they should keep it up! “Don't leave it undone—but don't forget the more important matters of the law either!”

This self-righteous Pharisee had an inaccurate view of others, an inflated view of self, and lastly an...

C. Inferior view of God (vs 11-12)

Why do I say that? There are several indicators here in the text that show the Pharisee has a low view of God.

Why do you suppose the Pharisee *told* God about the things he didn't do—and the things he did do?

--Because he felt God didn't know or needed to be reminded!

Is there *anything* about us that God doesn't know? Is there anything about us that God forgets? We have a low view of God if we think there are things God doesn't know about us!

I believe a second reason he told God about the things he didn't do—and the things he did do—was because he believed God would be **impressed**! Is that not one of the main reasons we tell someone our accomplishments—to impress them and make them think that they should appreciate us and look up to us?

Yet a third reason I believe he told God all his self-perceived qualities was his thinking that God would feel **obligated** to accept him. Although it doesn't say that in the text, I don't believe I'm going out on a limb to suggest his attitude was this—'God will certainly welcome me into heaven based on all I do for Him!' That, my friends, is a low view of God!

God is the Creator—we are the created.

We are obligated to Him—He is not obligated to us.

We owe Him everything—He owes us nothing.

Was Jesus against the Pharisee because of what he **did**? Not entirely. God disapproved of him looking down on others, but He certainly is not against praying...or being outwardly good...or fasting...or being generous in what we give to God. Jesus did not teach the parable just for the benefit of those that originally heard it, though—it is a message for **us** today. It is to all those who "trust in themselves that they are righteous."

Are there self-righteous people who this applies to today? There certainly are! There are thousands—if not millions—of people throughout the world that attempt to please God for the **wrong** reasons.

--They were baptized as an infant...and went to catechism as a teen...and attend church regularly

--They give...and pray...and read their Bibles...and serve on committees...and do work on buildings or grounds.

--They try to be nice to others...and pay their taxes...and stay out of trouble with the law.

They do all this—and more—for one reason: in hopes that God will allow them entrance into heaven!

What about **you**? Why do you try to please God? Do you do right in hopes that God will accept you into heaven? Entrance into heaven is not dependent on what **we do**—it is dependent upon God's mercy. The rest of the parable bears this out, but here are a couple of other verses that show us that as well:

Titus 3:5 "Not by works of righteousness **which we have done**, but according to **His mercy** He saved us..."

Eph 2:8-9 "For by **grace** are ye saved through faith; and **that not of yourselves**: it is the **gift of God**:⁹ **Not of works**, lest any man should boast." If we could work our way to heaven, there would be bragging in heaven. And if there is bragging in heaven, heaven ceases to be heaven!

Jesus not only describes self-righteousness in this parable, He also tells us why He is so against it: because of...

3. The danger of self-righteousness (v 14)

What is the danger of self-righteousness? In a nutshell, the danger of self-righteousness is that it keeps us out of heaven! We know from verse 10 that two men went into the temple to pray. In verses 11-12 we see the actions and attitudes of the Pharisee; in verse 13 we see the actions and attitude of the publican; the tax collector. In verse 14 we have Jesus' assessment—His view and verdict—regarding both men.

Verse 14 says, “I tell you, **this** man went down to his house justified rather than the other...” One man went home justified—meaning he was forgiven and considered righteous—the other was not.

So who is “this man” Jesus is referring to in verse 14? The man He described in verse 13—the publican; the tax collector—NOT the outwardly religious, but inwardly proud, Pharisee.

What happened to the Pharisee? He did **not** go home justified—he was **not extended mercy** and forgiveness—and if he continued in his self-righteous attitude the remainder of his life, he would be shut out of heaven in the next life. Instead of “Well done, thou good and faithful servant” he would hear “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mt 25:41).

What would the Pharisee’s response be to these words of judgment from Christ? Jesus tells us the response of others who had the same self-righteous attitude.

Matthew 7:22-23 “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? ²³ And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

What is the danger of trusting in yourself to make you right with God? An eternity separated from Him! If you don’t want His mercy and forgiveness in *this* life, He will not give it to you in the **next**!

Jesus doesn’t just describe self-righteousness and tell us the dangers of it; He also teaches us...

4. The deliverance from self-righteousness (v 13-14)

What is the remedy for trusting in ourselves? How can we be delivered from the danger of self-righteousness? Jesus gives us the answers to these questions, too, doesn’t He?

First... A. Have the right view of ourselves (v 13a)

Notice verse 13: “And the publican, standing afar off...”

- He did not make his way up front; he stayed in the back because he knew he was sinful
- He did not lift his eyes up to heaven; instead he held his head in shame
- He did not to tell God of his accomplishments; instead he smote upon his breast

B. Have the right view of God (v 13b)

Notice the last part of verse 13: “God be merciful to me a sinner.” That was his prayer—7 words. What can we learn about his view of God in those 7 words?

- That it is God’s heaven and God decides who gets in—not us.
- That mercy from God was required to get in—not works from himself.
- That God is merciful and gives mercy or he wouldn’t have asked for it in the first place.

We can also learn about his view of God when we consider what he left out of his prayer.

- God is not interested in our comparison with others. The Pharisee did that, the publican did not.
- God is not interested in hearing the good we have done. The Pharisee did that, the publican did not.

Good reminders to us, aren’t they? When we stand before God it will be us and God—**no one** else. We are not judged in comparison to *others*—we are judged according to the standard of God’s law. And because we are sinful, we need to ask for mercy—just like the publican did. “Nothing in my hand I bring...”

What is the result of having the right view of ourselves and the right view of God? We will...

C. Humble ourselves (v 14c)

Notice the last part of 14 “he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” God wants us to humble **ourselves**, doesn’t He? He **can** humble us—and *will* humble us if we insist on remaining proud—but His desire is that we humble **ourselves**.

Have you done that? When we **humble ourselves** and come to Him as a sinner recognizing our need for mercy and forgiveness, **God accepts us** and will take us to heaven where we will be exalted.

If we refuse to humble ourselves and trust that we are right with God **based on our works**, we will be abased—brought low.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:

1. First and foremost, are you are saved? How are you trying to get to heaven? You need Christ!
2. Child of God, let's not forget that we can still become proud and self-righteous after we are saved. We need the grace of God and mercy of God not only to be saved, but also to live and serve Him. Are you trusting what you do to keep you right with God—or are you trusting in what He has already done?