

Self-Righteousness

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Good morning to all of you! Glad we were able to make it up here to Moses Lake.

Actually, I'm glad we were able to stop in Moses Lake. We have one of those Toyota Camry's that's been all over the news—the accelerator sticks. It's been worrying my wife to death. There was a little blurb the other day on the news. You go on the internet and watch a video. They kind of told you how to shut these things down if the accelerator stuck to the floor. The one option they did mention though was that if there was nothing in front of you, you could just keep going; let it run out of gas! (Laughter!)

So I can see us whizzing through downtown Moses Lake seventy—seventy-five miles an hour. Next stop: Canada. (Laughter!) So I can see this now. You get to the border crossing and you're whizzing through the border crossing and you got your hands up in the air, a terrified look on your face, your wife sitting beside you screaming her lungs out, and the border guard says, "Hey, Harry! We just had another Toyota go through." (Laughter!)

But we made it. The accelerator didn't stick. We were able to stop.

Well, as you know, in Pacific Church of God we telegraph our messages ahead of time over the internet to those that have the internet. So you already know what I'm going to be talking about. I'm going to be talking about self-righteousness.

This must be kind of a tough topic to cover. Years ago I remember asking a couple of ministers if they'd give a—because I kind of thought it was a problem. I thought maybe it was a problem with me. And I asked the minister; and said, "Well, how about giving us a sermon on self-righteousness?" And they never did. I don't know whether it maybe was too close to home. I don't know.

We need to define what we're talking about and I need to define and let you know what I'm talking about when I'm referring to self-righteousness.

If I can see here in the dim light—the Online Dictionary says that "self-righteousness is piously sure of one's own righteousness, moralistic." Scripturally it has to do with being legalistic also. It's "exhibiting pious self-assurance usually in the kind of self-righteous remarks we make towards other people or about other people and in our behaviors." And the Online Dictionary also says, "Thinking oneself more virtuous than others." Webster says, "It's confidence of one's own righteousness, especially when smugly, moralistically are intolerant of the opinions and behaviors of others." That sounds kind of familiar—ha-ha.

Some of the synonyms are—and I don't mean to make anybody squirm but if some of these kind of get close to home, well—just kidding; just kidding! Some of the synonyms

for self-righteousness are: sanctimonious, smug, pious, superior, holier than thou, priggish, pharisaical—all of those things. Poor Pharisees—they get picked on all the time.

Scripturally Strong's even has very few words for self-righteousness. They just say that it's being unjust. Some of the things John was talking about—lack of integrity or maybe a self-imposed integrity, self-promotion, all of that. It basically says that something is just wrong and it's morally evil. And as we get into this, I'm sure you'll be able to see that. You'll agree with that also.

The Greek just means that it's the opposite of righteousness. And that's referring to what God deems as righteous, what is morally correct, what is spiritually correct. Never what we think is right. The ISBE—if you have one of those—I can't remember the page number, but you can look it up under the article "Self-righteousness"—it says, "It's the belief that one is morally upright and has earned salvation (or maybe made points with God) because of strict adherence to moral and religious laws." Or I might add: strict adherence to a belief system, which sometimes we get caught up in.

By the time I get done I hope that you can see that all these definitions will be consolidated in this one term, this one idea of self-righteousness. And what I've done is typically in order to keep things condensed, because this is kind of like pulling a string from a ball of yarn and you pull it and it just keeps coming. Like most good Bible topics should. So what I've done is I've broken it down into outline format and I actually have five points.

So the First Point is—and I think this is a very important one—The First Point is:

Whether we realize it or admit it, we all suffer or have suffered from some self-righteousness to some degree or another.

I'd like to turn over to Romans 10. Over in Romans 10 verses 1 through 3, Paul says:

Romans 10:1. *Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel [the Jews] is that they may be saved. (NKJ)*

Verse 2:

Romans 10:2. *For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. (NKJ)*

Verse 3:

Romans 10:3. *For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. (NKJ)*

Again, that whole topic—the righteousness of God—is pretty huge! If you want to go to a good Bible dictionary, there'd be lots and lots of stuff there to study because it's throughout our Bible, as we understand.

So we can read these verses in a context and we can extrapolate a couple of principles right here and the way that this topic, this whole subject applies to us, each one of us.

The first one is well-meaning people, as it says here, as Paul points out can be ignorant. It just means they don't really understand what God's doing. They're very sincere; they just can't put it all together.

And none of us really do entirely. Sometimes we think we—and I'll touch on this later; it's one of my points—sometimes we think we have all the answers, but we really don't. So people will fall into that. And, as we also know, we all have our own areas of strength. Everybody is at a different level in their growth and their conversion process.

So part of the point here is—and this is part of what I'm trying to achieve here is—that we understand that we don't—because we're all affected by this to some degree—we don't want to be judgmental with other people because sometimes we can see this problem with other folks. Rarely can we see it in ourselves. We can see it in other folks, but we don't want to be too hasty and too judgmental.

The second thing here is that Paul defines self-righteousness as our own righteousness. He's talking about an entire nation here, but the definition applies in principle to all of us, even as individuals. We all have these notions of what self-righteousness is. Some of the concepts we generally have is arrogance, someone's that very conceited, kind of nose up-in-the-air, maybe a little flamboyant.

I think we all have these images maybe from a movie or something we've seen, a self-righteous character. Usually—I don't know why—but usually it always seemed like to me, it's always a preacher or a minister or an evangelist or somebody. They have this kind of an attitude and very self-righteous and that's the picture that most of us get in our mind. Another thing is—and again, using that illustration—we see those things and sometimes it very obvious, but sometimes it can be very subtle. So the point there is that the volume of activity as far as this subject goes doesn't necessarily mean or doesn't always describe what I'm talking about when I'm mentioning self-righteousness.

Someone said one time that self-righteousness is kind of like the flu. It has different strains. And I think that's true. It's not just a simple—it's like saying that we're all very uncomplicated, very easy to understand, and that's just not true. We're all pretty complex. And John said that we're not necessarily the great, the most intelligent, the most talented of the world, but we're still complex human beings. That's just the way God made us. So again, the point here is that we all need to realize that we have this problem of self-righteousness to some degree or another.

And that's what John was talking about in the sermonette. That's part of what God is doing. He's changing us from our righteousness really to His righteousness. Correct? Trying to get us, mold us into His character, into the character of Jesus Christ, our Model, our Example, which we should be following. So right now, we're a mixture of self-righteousness and God's righteousness because we're in the process. We've been called into the process.

Just as a couple of reference Scriptures:

Romans 3 verse 10 where Paul points out—again in Romans—he's pointing out that none are righteous. In the context there, of course, he's talking to the Jews and the Gentiles in Rome, because what he was trying to point out to them that they were all in the same boat. None of them were righteous. They couldn't claim any righteousness because one party was claiming it against the other. They were using it as kind of a debate. "I'm more righteous than you are," which is very typical of the Jewish approach because they had the Law, they had all those things.

And over in Matthew 5 in verse 6, it says that "We're blessed if we hunger and thirst after righteousness"—God's righteousness! Not our own righteousness. As John pointed out in his sermonette, that's what we need to be striving for.

And we won't turn there, but if we took Galatians 5 and we took Romans 7 and looked in the context there where Paul talked about what he wanted to do, but he wasn't able to do it. He went back and forth. He knew in practice there was a spiritual battle going on in his life all the time, all the time!

In Galatians, the first part of Galatians, just a reference Scripture, it says Paul admitted that he was more zealous than all the Pharisees when he was a Pharisee in the way that he was brought up and the things that he learned. He had a ton of self-righteousness that he had to jettison whenever God called him, whenever God blinded him, called him, changed his heart from one of self-righteousness to one that could be worked with and one that could move towards God's righteousness and away from all of that self-righteousness that he had learned.

So here the point here is on this First Point is:

If we look at all those Scriptures, we're actually somewhere in between in this whole process. So we all have this to some degree.

That inescapable fact ought to elicit from us a certain amount of humility as we understand then. Self-righteousness can creep into our lives; it can creep into our thinking; and it's a sneaky rascal! So it really is. To use the vernacular: It's a bad dude! And once it gets a hold of us, it's very hard as I'll point out as we go through for us to get shed of that. So we need to be careful and we need to be focused spiritually.

The Second Point:

The self-righteous are blind to their own condition.

Self-righteous are blind to their condition and probably the classic example of this is over in Luke 18. You already know where I'm headed. Luke 18 verses 9 through 14, this is the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector in Luke 18. Verse 9:

Luke 18:9. *Also He spoke this parable (NKJ)*

Teaching a lesson that's true to life! That's what all the purpose of the parable was.

Luke 18:9b. *to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:*

10) *"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.*

11) *"The Pharisee stood and prayed thus [within] himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners [or greedy], unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.*

12) *'I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.'* 13) *"And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me (NKJ)*

And Christ says, ending His parable, verse 14:

Luke 18:14. *"I tell you, this man went down to his house justified (NKJ)*

He had a heart that God could work with, as John was pointing out in the sermonette. He could come to repentance; he could come to forgiveness.

Luke 18:14b. *rather than the other; (NKJ)*

Whose heart was what? It was hardened because of the sin of self-righteousness as it is a sin as I'll point out as we go along here

Luke 18:14 cont. *for everyone who exalts himself [self-righteous] will be [abased], and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (NKJ)*

In verse 9 back there, it said that those that trusted in themselves because they were self-righteous and despised others; these two just always seem to go together. Don't they? Because if we're constantly critical of others—as the self-righteous often are and feel very smug about that—the point is in that comparison as they compare themselves to other people, they can see their own problem. So they really are blind. This parable is a good lesson. It's teaching a lesson that is true to life about this whole subject of being self-righteous.

And in verse 14, Christ showed that the Pharisee was committing the greater sin because he had that attitude of how good he was. And self-righteousness is a sin. It separates us; it gets between us and God. It is such an insidious and pervasive sin a lot of times we can't see it when it's there. It just sneaks up on us. Satan deceives the whole world. We never get affected by that though, do we? We never get deceived. We never get fooled, but we can very easily slip into this kind of an attitude.

Matthew 23, again you know where I'm going here. This is where Christ soundly condemned the Pharisees. Matthew 23 and I'm not going to try to cover the entire context here. We had a sermon about this not too long ago. Just a few verses here to kind of get the flavor of how Christ condemns this particular attitude—self-righteous attitude—He exposes it and He condemns it.

Actually when I read down through there—I don't know whether we have any numerologists among us—I counted the "Woe's." I got eight of them. Blind—I got five of them. Hypocrites—I got eight. Let's see—that adds up to twenty-one or three times seven. I have no idea what that means, if it means anything at all! One time I did a study of numbers, but I have no idea.

But what we should realize by going through this and looking at all the examples in God's Word that we can review this topic, that we can study this topic and look at it especially as maybe a mirror for ourselves, this whole attitude, this whole approach of self-righteousness has a whole host of bedfellows. John talked a little bit about some of those, alluded to some of those—hypocrisy, pride, arrogance, all those things. And all of those are right here in this chapter in Matthew 23.

So Matthew 23, let's jump down to verse 23.

Matthew 23:23. *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, [you] hypocrites! (NKJ)*

That's interesting right there because, like John pointed out, only God can see into the heart. And Christ knew exactly what the problem with these folks was. They were so full of themselves, so full of their ideas, their religion, their righteousness, they couldn't see anything. And He soundly condemned it.

He goes on:

Matthew 23:23b. *For you pay tithe of mint and anise [or dill] and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. (NKJ)*

It's interesting that He points out there right off the bat that they took such great pride in tithing. Have you ever seen anybody do that in the Church?

Unfortunately, when I first came into the Church, I got invited over to people's home. My wife and I had a D and R. We were separated. If you don't know that long sordid story, well, we'll tell you about it sometime. But anyhow, I was invited over to someone's house and everyone was sitting around here. I am just as green as you can possibly be. And people were talking about how much they tithed. I'm not sure. Looking back maybe it was a complaint. I'm not sure. But they were telling each other how much they had given and all that. That's something that we shouldn't do. They shouldn't have done it to me or to anyone else for that matter. Again the point's well-made there.

Verse 24:

Matthew 23:24. *"Blind guides, (KJV)*

They were blind guides:

Matthew 23:24b. *who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! (NKJ)*

Vine's says that *swallowing a gnat*, the Pharisees were so—gnats were unclean food. So over the fermenting wine and the eggs and everything would be in the wine, so they would use a piece of gauze or something over and strain that out so they wouldn't swallow a gnat. I could go off on a whole path here, but I won't do that.

Verse 25, we'll continue.

Matthew 23:25. *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, (NKJ)*

All for show! Everything they did was for show.

Matthew 23:25b. *but inside they are full of extortion [or greed] and self-indulgence. (NKJ)*

My New King James in the margin says "unrighteous." Not self-indulgent, they were full of self-righteousness, their own righteousness—unrighteous as the Greek would have it.

Verse 28, jumping down to verse 28:

Matthew 23:28. *"Even so you also (NKJ)*

And He's referencing the tombs that were mentioned in verse 27.

Matthew 23:28b. *outwardly appear righteous (NKJ)*

Just what they wanted!

Matthew 23:28 cont. *to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. (NKJ)*

So the point here is these people really believed that they were righteous by all these physical things they were doing. They made an entire religion out of it. In fact, they made an idol out of it.

One reference that I had said that they had, just in regard to Sabbath-keeping, they have fifteen hundred and twenty-one do's and don'ts—fifteen hundred and twenty-one! Now you know whenever you try to do something physically and feel very self-righteous about that, what that usually engenders is competition between one another. Nobody, nobody could keep those fifteen hundred and twenty-one things on the Sabbath. Nobody could do that, but they could compete, right? "I did a thousand of them. Boy, aren't I righteous!" "I'm more righteous than you. I did eleven hundred." You know on and on it goes. There's no end to this. But what they couldn't see—and again here's my point—the self-righteous are blind to their condition. What they couldn't see was their own problem.

So the point for us is:

We need to be careful that we don't get hung up on things. The mint, the anise, and the cumin can evolve into a self-righteous attitude or self-righteous approach.

Third Point:

The Third Point is the self-righteous person has a distorted view of the world.

I probably need to explain what I mean there. Back when we were first being called, when we were first learning God's truth, of course, we had all those Scriptures about coming out of the world, about not being friends with the world, and on and on it goes. And we had to learn that at the time.

But in a sense, some people have—I'll speak for myself—as we matured, we understand that what God really wanted us to do was come out of the world's systems. Not be part of the world systems. If we looked over in Revelation 18 where God says, "Come out of her My people," it's talking about a religious system, but that also extends—and we can easily extrapolate that—to the society around because the society of the world today, anywhere we go, and that false religion support one another. Right? God says, "Come out of that. Don't be a part of that."

And let's go over to 1 John.

And I don't mean to say that at some point maybe in early conversion we didn't get some things wrong. We were a little zealous about some things, but that still doesn't mean that we should go and isolate ourselves from the world as I'm going to point out here.

Over in 1 John 5—and here's the things that we understand, we should have come to understand by this point. And I'm sure everyone here—I don't see—well, I see a couple babies—but the rest of us gray heads or no heads—I mean no hairs—I mean. I'll pay for that. 1 John 5 verse 19 and 20:

1 John 5:19. *We know that we are of God, (NKJ)*

That's what we understand at this point.

1 John 5:19b. *and the whole world lies under the sway [or the control] of the wicked one [which is Satan]. (NKJ)*

Verse 20:

1 John 5:20. *And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. (NKJ)*

And you know if we remember—have studied in the book of 1, 2, 3 John, you know what John was fighting. He was fighting people that would come in there and try to inject other beliefs. They had their own form of righteousness that was trying to infiltrate the Church at

that point. Over in 1 John 4 verse 3, he talks about the spirit of antichrist, which just means that it opposed or it's against Christ. And that's the problem that John was fighting.

So again, the point here midway in this point is that:

We know, once we've been called, been given understanding, our position in regard to our relationship with the world.

We know and we fully understand that the world is under the control of Satan and it is opposed to Christ. Again as a reference, 1 Peter 5 verse 8 where it tells us to "Be sober, be vigilant; our adversary the devil," we understand all that. And we deal with that on a day-to-day basis. At least I hope we do! And also in 1 Peter in 4:17, "Judgment is now on the house of God," we understand all of that.

So the point being that we have a responsibility to faithfully follow God, to follow Christ. What we know and understand, we should be doing. No matter where we're at in our conversion. We need to be doing that.

But at the same time, we're faced with the dilemma of being in the world. Let's turn over to 1 Corinthians 5, 1 Corinthians 5. I really like the letters to the Corinthians because there's so much in there. If we look at their society and we think about our society today, and we kind of complain. "Oh, woe is me! I have all these things to resist. I have all these things to overcome." If you look back at that Greco-Roman world and its liberal attitudes and approach, which we have adopted in our modern times to a large extent, they didn't have Hollywood. They didn't have the porn shops and all that. They had the real thing! And it was actually affecting the Church. And Paul had to deal with that continually.

But in verse 5, he makes something perfectly clear here and something that we should get too. In 1 Corinthians 5 verses 9 through 11, it says:

1 Corinthians 5:9. *I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people.* (NKJ)

And, of course, what he's talking about is there in the fellowship keeping company in that respect as Brethren. And we could go on in the context here and show that.

But verse 10:

1 Corinthians 5:10. *Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.* (NKJ)

You'd need to disappear! And God doesn't want us to do that. We put those Scriptures together with Romans 13 where Paul taught that we should have respect for authority, what he's pointing out there is that we have a responsibility as Christians in our relationship with the world. Paul clearly taught that.

Let's go over to John 17 chapter. We read at the Passover, John 17. Put a little more emphasis on this.

Yes, we're stuck in the world, but if we looked again, as a thought and as a reference, as we looked at the opening verses of James, it tells us to "count it all joy when we fall into different trials, because the working or the testing of our faith works patience." (James 1:2 paraphrased.) That's how we learn.

But here in John 17, verses that we review at the Passover, Christ speaking verse 6:

John 17:6. *"I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. (NKJ)*

Jumping down to verse 11

John 17:11. *"Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. (NKJ)*

Verse 15:

John 17:15. *"I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. (NKJ)*

We have a responsibility in that ourselves. Like John pointed out, we need to be focused; we need to be looking to God; and we need to be doing our part to that, but God does a huge part. And He says He's going to be with us. He's not going to leave us. He's going to help us. He's going to protect us. He's going to give us what we need. But we're still going to have to deal with it like adults. We need to deal with it.

Verse 16:

John 17:16. *"They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. (NKJ)*

And that should be our goal—to be in the world, but not of the world!

My son recently was accepted to an apprenticeship as a craftsman. He hasn't actually started yet, but anyhow I gave him a little bit of advice as he accepted that position. I told him, I says, "Learn from these folks. You have a lot to learn. But don't learn their ways." He knew exactly what I was talking about.

And that's what we have to. And the point of that little story is that's what we to deal with all the time. We can function in the world without being a part of the world, not learning and practicing the world's ways. And sometimes that's a battle.

Verse 16:

John 17:16. *"They are not of the world, (NKJ)*

I've already read that. Verse 17:

John 17:17. *"Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. (NKJ)*

That's what we live by. That's what we're supposed to use. That's our ammunition in this battle. How we're supposed to live and we should hunger and thirst after that—more of it, as John was pointing out.

Verse 18:

John 17:18. *"As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. (NKJ)*

And that's our job. That's where we're at. That's where we find ourselves as God's people. We're part of the world.

Matthew 5, a little bit more reinforcement here. And again, you probably still know where I'm going here. Matthew 5, actually we're going to read verses 14 through 16 of Matthew 5.

Up in the previous context, verse 13, where it talks about being the salt of the earth and the lesson there is "the salt loses its flavor" by how? Just like salt does if we put salt in a glass of water, it will become diluted. It will blend in. And what Christ is teaching with that parable and that example is to not blend in with the world, to be the salt of the earth.

So verse 14 though of Matthew 5:

Matthew 5:14. *"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. (NKJ)*

The Greek, in this context, uses light as a witness—that is of God. We can't do that. We'd be a pretty lousy witness if we actually weren't living God's way of life. Maybe they couldn't even tell we were a witness.

John referred to John the Baptist in another place in John 5 verse 35. He called John the Baptist "a light and a witness." Also in Acts 1—and again, these are just references—some of the last words that Christ spoke to His disciples after they received the Holy Spirit, He said that "You're going to be my witnesses in Judaea, in Jerusalem and in all the world"—the whole world! It was going to extend from there. It started in Judah. It started in Jerusalem and expanded out. That's what the whole book of Acts is about.

So again, the point there is:

In order to be a witness, in order to testify, we have to be seen.

Verse 15:

Self-righteousness

Matthew 5:15. *"Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. (NKJ)*

One of the interesting things about light: it's useless; it's meaningless without an eye to see it. Isn't it? It doesn't mean a thing. Although it's pretty bad in here—no offense!

Verse 16:

Matthew 5:16. *"Let your light so shine before men, (NKJ)*

Can't do that if we're off in the woods or off in the mountains bunkered in somewhere. You just can't do that. I've known people who have done that and thought they were pretty righteous by doing that. You may know of some of those folks too.

Matthew 5:16b. *that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (NKJ)*

So the point here again is that:

We have a heavy responsibility to reflect God's righteousness in our walk through this physical life. We only get one shot!

It's always kind of disturbed me when as a Church, we've kind of looked down on the world, kind of had this attitude. And I have to speak for myself because I fall into this myself. A kind of view of the world where "I'm saved; you're not. I'm the called; I'm the elect. You're not." Remember all the times that we've run down other religions and done other things like that? Kind of an "us versus them" kind of an attitude.

None of these Scriptures say to do that. Not a one of them! We shouldn't take that approach at all. It's a self-righteous approach. It's a self-righteous view of the world. And it can be, if we allow it to, if we're not careful, if we're not close to God, if we don't have that right kind of a heart, we can easily fall into that.

So Christ and the apostles clearly taught we have a responsibility. Actually, as God's people, we have a responsibility to one another. We have a responsibility to follow God's way of life. And we have a responsibility to the world. That's clearly taught in Scripture. God says—where? In Psalm 119:172, "All Your commandments are righteous." That's all of them! Love God first. Love your neighbor. Not just in the Church. Sometimes we've kind of lost track of that.

Fourth Point:

Actually the point I just talked about, sometimes it's turn inward their own Churches—the self-righteous. Here's the point:

The self-righteous tend to look down on others in the Church.

Can it get a little closer to home? A little bit maybe. We have all these folks out there competing with one another. Remember the one about, "I left Worldwide before you did"? That's kind of a self-righteous superior attitude. And it really is. And again, I speak for myself. We kind of slipped into that for a bit, but we need to be spiritually mature, more converted and move away from that. We shouldn't be doing that.

The other one was, "My group's doing the work. My group's got more truth than your group." That's really a good one—ha-ha. That's just tinged with self-righteousness. "We have the most and the best ministers." "You'll only make it to the place of safety if you're in my group with my minister." On and on that list goes!

So over in Isaiah 64 verse 6, this is a reference again. God says through the prophet Isaiah that we're all like "unclean things"—us compared to God. And "all our righteousness is like filthy rags." In other words, all the efforts that we put forth at being righteous are worthless to God. So we don't need to get a swollen head; we don't need to think that we're better than someone else, even among Brethren.

Let's turn over to 1 John 5 where it says:

I John 5:17. *All unrighteousness is sin,* (NKJ)

That's a reference too, by the way.

I John 5:17. *All unrighteousness is sin,* (NKJ)

There's a double whammy on that. This is a sin. As I'll point out pretty quick, it becomes an extremely serious sin.

If we look at those things, we might get the idea in thinking about our own people, the people of God, we might get the attitude or the idea that if we had that self-righteous attitude maybe that's not pleasing to God. Not all groups have that kind of an attitude. That's for sure. And, hopefully, we don't have that kind of an attitude. It's not pleasing to God at all.

Again, another reference Scripture, James has a pretty good answer I think for this problem. James 1 verses 19 and 20, again you don't need to turn there—unless you want to. It says:

James 1:19. *[Wherefore], my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath [or anger]:* (NKJ)

I see a two-to-one ratio there. I don't know if you picked that up. But that's usually the way it works. We hear what we want to hear; we hastily react to it; we start an argument or maybe get into a disagreement and it escalates into anger. And that's how things come between members, between groups. That's basically how it happens by not following that Scripture, by not being slow to those things.

Verse 20, kind of nails it, of James 1:

Self-righteousness

James 1:20. *For the wrath [or the anger] of man does not produce the righteousness of God. (NKJ)*

It does not! So if we get in that situation where there's anger, its part of a division and all of that, there is a problem. Maybe it's a problem. We need to be able to look at ourselves and see and be able to admit, "Maybe I'm the problem. Maybe I have the problem."

So again if we see in that Scripture that our anger did not produce the righteousness of God, then the flipside of that coin is that it produces unrighteousness.

So I hope we kind of see where self-righteousness enters in here. It's an attitude of "I'm right and you're wrong!" to put it very basically. The self-righteous have to be right. They get easily offended if someone tells them they're wrong. And sometimes they can't even entertain the possibility that they could be wrong. It's like—if you kind of get this picture in your mind—it's kind of like a glass cage comes down. You can see out of it and people can see in it, but nothing can get through. And that's kind of the way it is when someone gets in that kind of an attitude. That kind of a self-righteous thing where, "I'm right," it doesn't matter whether it's on any point, all the points or anything. And again we all don't have it all. But if we get stuck on one thing, we get very self-righteous, get on our high horse and nothing can get through that. Nothing can get through that!

Let's turn over to James 4, kind of puts a little more emphasis on this. James 4 verse 1, it starts right out. James 1:4:

James 4:1. *Where do wars [quarrels] and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure? (NKJ)*

A better translation is *appetite*. I kind of like the Cassirer translation of this and I'd like to read verses 1 and 2 out of the Cassirer.

James 4:1. *How is it that there are conflicts, that there are quarrels among you? (CAS)*

And there's no doubt here that James is addressing the Church. He's not talking to the world at large. He's talking to the Church. He's talking to the diaspora. We have there in verse 1 *the twelve tribes*. In verse 2, he's talking to the Brethren.

But continuing in verse 1:

James 4:1b. *Surely what they spring from is this: that the appetites (CAS)*

Appetites for what? For power, for control, a superior attitude over other people, over other groups. That's what an appetite can be.

James 4:1 cont. *which are active [alive and well] in the various parts of your bodies are on the warpath [or the groups are on the warpath]. (CAS)*

I know I kind of broke that all up there trying to emphasize the point because these things are pretty clear here.

In verse 2:

James 4:2. *An appetite arises in you and you are incapable of satisfying it. (CAS)*

And that's very clear too because if we have this carnal self-righteous attitude, it just goes on and on. You can't satisfy it.

Continuing the verse:

James 4:2b. *And so it is that you resort to murder (CAS)*

And that could very easily be referring to slander, character assassination. That goes on a lot.

James 4:2 cont. *that you give vent to feelings of envy. You are still not in a position to reach your goal, (CAS)*

And most of those goals are self-serving, self-righteous and God's not going to bless that. You're not going to reach those goals.

James 4:2 cont. *and so get involved in quarreling and controversy. (CAS)*

And there's lots and lots of that to go around. In fact, when you look at those two verses there, you don't see any of God's righteousness there. See a lot of self-righteousness that James is describing.

So the point for this point is that so many times we've seen these squabbles; we've seen these self-righteous attitudes, the arrogance of both leaders and members of the Church, but God said that He's not going to allow that. He's going to sort that out eventually. He's going to sort out, in fact, this whole process as pointed out recently by Harold Lee. If we think back to that sermon and the scattering and all that, God is sorting out all of us. He's sorting through His people. And it could be. Here's the thought; here's the thought—could be—maybe the self-righteous, the ones that are being sorted out have a terminal case of self-righteousness.

Point Number Five—you see all these kind of build on previous points, if I'm doing any kind of a job at all.

Point Five:

The self-righteous think they have all the answers.

They think they have all the answers.

Donald Rumsfeld said one time—I don't remember whether this was a senate hearing or what it was—he made a statement under questioning. He says, "There's some things we know we know. There are some things we know we don't know. And there are some things we *know* we don't know." All he said was, "We don't know everything." That's all he was saying. And we're kind of in the same situation. We can't say that we know everything. And I'm talking spiritually or any other wise. We just can't say that.

I knew a minister one time. In my thinking and I'm sure my wife's thinking, we've heard him many times. We've heard him. We've fellowshiped with him—very respected. He admitted one of the last sermons he gave—he was seventy-five years old—he said when he was a young minister, he was taught and he believed that he knew just about everything there was to know about God, about the Bible, about all that. He said but since then he's realized that he knows hardly anything and he never will know it all—never will! And that's kind of the same position that we're in.

We should understand, know, respond to what we do know. And just keep trying, just keep learning, just keep growing. And don't get in the position where we are a know-it-all and we just think we have all the answers because we don't.

1 Corinthians chapter 3—go back to those poor Corinthians again. 1 Corinthians chapter 3 verse 18 through 21:

1 Corinthians 3:18. *Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you [seems] to be wise in this [world], let him become a fool that he may become wise.*

19) For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He [takes] the wise in their own craftiness;

20) and again, "The Lord [knows] the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."

21) Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours: (KJV)

Again, Paul writing to those people, they were influenced by the philosophy, by the degradation of the world around them, all those things, all the intelligent. And he was just warning them. He was telling them, "Don't be enamored by that. Don't be taken in by that." Because that in itself can make us think we know a lot. In fact, we know so much that maybe we're a little righteous. That's what Paul's trying to tell them not to do that.

And actually a reference over in Job 5—you don't need to turn there. You may remember some of these. But in Job 5 verse 9 and 10 where Job is talking about God, he's pointing to God as the superior Intelligent, as the Creator, as the One that does know everything. Job was about to the point where he realized he didn't know anything. And he was a pretty righteous man. And in physical respects, he was pretty righteous.

In verse 9 of Job 5:

Job 5:9. *He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted. (NIV)*

That always reminds me of Romans 1 where man saw the creation, but just didn't get it. Just couldn't see it. Just couldn't understand.

Verse 10:

Job 5:10. *He bestows rain on the earth; he sends water upon the countryside.*
(NIV)

Wouldn't men like to control the weather? Might misuse it? They might.

Verse 14, jumping down to verse 14:

Job 5:14. *Darkness comes upon them in the daytime;* (NIV)

Talking about mankind in general both then and now.

Job 5:14. *Darkness comes upon them in the daytime; at noon they grope as in the night.* (NIV)

Man's track record is the more he thinks he knows, the farther away from the light, from God he gets.

Okay, let's turn it over back in Corinthians over to chapter 8.

And again, we don't want to get an attitude or take the approach that we know everything. In fact, we know very little.

1 Corinthians chapter 8 verses 1 and 2 and we know what the context is here. This is talking about meat offered to idols. And I'm sure we've probably heard this explanation many, many times, but Paul has two groups of people here—those that are mature older Christians and those that are newer maybe weak in the faith. They don't have good understanding. And the problem was the meat being offered to idols, they thought that it might not be good to eat. They couldn't eat that because it had been presented to an idol and all that and then sold in the marketplace. I think we're all fairly familiar with the story.

But the point Paul was trying to make here, and the reason that he went on to say some of the things he did after that, is because those members that had that knowledge, that had that understanding that the meat was okay to eat—if it was clean, it was okay to eat—because idols were meaningless. They were just idols; they were dumb idols; they were things; they didn't mean anything. But some people didn't understand that. And so Paul's trying to teach them here that they needed an ingredient. They needed God's love to override that knowledge. In other words, they couldn't misuse that knowledge and maybe tell somebody, "Oh, its okay to eat. You don't need to worry about it," and damage their conscience and maybe hurt them in other ways. And Paul's trying to point out: Don't misuse that.

So let's go to in chapter 1—I'm sorry. In 1 Corinthians 8, let's go to verse 1.

1 Corinthians 8:1. *Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up,* (NKJ)

If it's apart from God! If it's misused!

1 Corinthians 8:1b. *but love edifies.* (NKJ)

Verse 2:

1 Corinthians 8:2. *And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.* (NKJ)

And the point again that Paul's trying to make here that the conversion process that we've all been called into is an ongoing process. If we're going to use the things that God gives us—the knowledge that God gives us and it's precious—we ought to be really thankful for this calling, be really thanking for the truth, the understanding that we have. And not ever, ever misuse that. And realize that people are at different levels.

And so if a situation comes up where we shouldn't offend someone, even though we know that we could, we shouldn't do that. Love should override that. That *agape* love—that has to come from God. That doesn't come from inside of us. We have to use that. But that's the point that Paul was making there.

Let's go over to 1 Timothy 6. 1 Timothy 6 verses 3 and 5, I'd like to read this out of the New International, verses 3 through 5. Again breaking in on the context here of what Paul is trying to point out to Timothy. Verse 3:

1 Timothy 6:3. *If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching,* (NIV)

And what is godly teaching? It's teaching God's righteousness.

1 Timothy 6:4. *he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions* (NIV)

And you could throw self-righteousness right in the mix there.

Verse 5:

1 Timothy 6:5. *and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that [ungodliness] is a means to financial gain.* (NIV)

Sounds like to me that Paul was warning Timothy in his ministry that he was going to have to beware of self-righteous people that had this kind of an attitude. Why would he warn him about somebody that had God's righteousness? He wouldn't do that! Wouldn't be any need to do that.

Let's go over to 2 Timothy—just a little bit more. If you're getting like me, you've been here a thousand times. "In the last days perilous times come." But let's read a little more carefully here. In 2 Timothy 3 verses 1 through 5:

2 Timothy 3:1. *But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come:*
2) *For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,*
3) *unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good,*
4) *traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,*
5) *having a form of godliness but denying its power.* (NKJ)

There's no power in self-righteousness.

2 Timothy 3:5b. *And from such people turn away!* (NKJ)

The English Standard Version has it a little bit different.

Verse 2, beginning in verse 2:

2 Timothy 3:2. *For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud arrogant,* (ESV)

Some of the characteristics and qualities of the self-righteous!

2 Timothy 3:3. *No real love, unappeasable,* (ESV)

No way they can't be right! That's an attitude.

2 Timothy 3:3b. *slanderers, without self-control,* (ESV)

And on and on it goes.

When you put all the Scriptures together—again and this is talking about an attitude of being self-righteous to the point where we think we have all the answers—if we put all these Scriptures together, what's being taught, if we look at all the problems that the apostles had, look at all the problems that Christ had—Christ had a problem with that? Certainly, He did. Paul had a problem with it. John had a problem with it. James had a problem with it. Jude had a problem with it. It's all the way through, if you look at it. Again, it's like one of those threads that you pull that just keeps coming.

It's like one time I pulled up a thread in the carpet and the carpet fooled me. I grabbed the thread in the carpet. Well, kind of unraveled the carpet! Wasn't very good carpet was it?

That's the way this subject can go. But when you look at these things, it's like a stew of human problems with self-righteousness being the spoon stirring.

Someone came to me recently or actually I ran into them and they were having some problems. They said one of the reasons that there were so many problems and troubles

between the Brethren was that we were all judgmental. And I kind of agreed to that up to a point.

But you know what? If I had to concoct a recipe for division, the main ingredient would be self-righteousness because it works every time. And if I had to put together a recipe for unity, it would be humility! See how that works! Because the one will cause the one thing and the other will cause the other thing. So this again, this is a bad thing this self-righteousness.

I heard one time that—again getting back to some of the thoughts and concepts, the ideas in the Church that we have everything; we have all the knowledge and everything. I heard someone describe what a Christian was one time—someone in the Church. He said, "Well, a Christian's someone that keeps Sabbath, keeps the Holy Days, doesn't eat unclean food, doesn't use euphemisms, doesn't keep Christmas, doesn't keep Easter." Not a one of those things is going to save us! Right? Not a one of those things! And don't get the wrong idea—we're obligated to do those things. We're obligated to keep and understand and do what we know. But none of those things if we try to make us feel righteous by doing those things, then we've got kind of a wrong approach. We need to mature a little bit.

Now you know—and correct me if I'm wrong—don't the Laodiceans say they have need of nothing? They got everything they need. They've got the right Church; they've got the right minister; they've got everything! Maybe that's one way of looking at that. They tithe; they do all that stuff.

Okay so the point here on this Point—

This is the last point. I only had five.

Knowledge, whether it's what we know or think we know, won't save us all by itself!

1 Corinthians 13 tells us that. Knowledge cannot save us; won't do it. There must be love. There has to be love. That's the application of God's knowledge. Correct? That's how it comes through. That's how we manifest it in our lives. And it can't come from us. That comes from seeking God's righteousness, living God's way. And God's righteousness is His character, are His qualities.

It's even like John was mentioning in the sermonette, it's a heart that can be reached so their hearts can then be touched, and it's the hearts that living and growing. It's a circumcised heart spiritually that doing the things that we need to be doing. And that's going towards God's righteousness—not our own.

So just wrapping it up: In just this little handful of points that I've used, I hope we can see how sinister and evil a sin this self-righteousness is. If we took Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 and put that altogether, the huge problem of Satan that he uses to deceive the whole world is that self-righteous, that self-centered approach that he has! So we should understand that. Again to sort of summarize: We can understand that so we should be

resisting Satan. We should be resisting that attitude and living by God's Word, by what He taught us.

It's one of those situations as someone described one time that the truth and the knowledge that God gives us is a package and it's a complete package. We can't pick and choose. It's not multiple choice! We can't pick and choose the things we want to do. We need to be doing it all as much as we can. That's how we get to that brand of God's righteousness—not our own brand of righteousness, which is self-righteousness. Christ emphasized that and amplified actually the teaching and obedience tempered by love.

Let's go over to the very last Scripture. Let's turn over to John 13, John 13. Christ is leaving His disciples with some parting words here. We read these words at Passover with the thought in our minds of being the epitome of applying God's righteousness in our lives. Verse 34 of John 13:

John 13:34. *"A new commandment (NKJ)*

And we know looking back on Leviticus 19 that it's not really new but it's amplified here with a spiritual intent.

John 13:34b. *I give to you, (NKJ)*

John 13:34. *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. (NKJ)*

In other words, He lived a perfect righteous life as an example for us to follow. For all mankind really, eventually! That's the kind of righteousness that we want, that we should be striving for.

Verse 35:

John 13:35. *"By this (NKJ)*

And that righteousness is the gold standard, if you want to look at it that way.

John 13:35b. *all will know (NKJ)*

And somehow there He's saying that it has to be visible. It has to be visible in and through us.

John 13:35 cont. *that you are My disciples, (NKJ)*

All of us striving to live God's way of life!

John 13:35 cont. *if (NKJ)*

And here's this huge *if* the last part of verse 35. And that means there's no bickering; there's no arguing; there's no right-wrong; no self-righteous approach. The *if* here is:

John 13:35 cont. *you have love for one another.*" (NKJ)

I actually did a two-part on this down in Prosser because I think it kind of leads to something else. And I may do if I get an opportunity to come back up here, if I can get the Camry to stop.

But hopefully what I'm getting across here in this message is: We're going to be into the Passover before we know it. We see it coming up very quickly and the one thing that we always emphasize and the one thing that we always do before the Passover is to self-examine ourselves.

And when we're doing that, when we're doing that in light of some of the things I said about being self-righteous, about feeling superior, we need to be *self-convicting* not other-convicting. We need to look and see if this self-righteousness affects us because it does sometimes collectively.

But what we want to be striving for is God's righteousness in every part of our life!