

## The Wednesday Word, Dec. 10, 2008: The Gospel and the Self-Righteous, Part 2

God's problem with us is not our sin it's our righteousness!

Without realizing it, we often look for something to recommend us to God other than Christ alone. And much modern preaching helps us to do just that. Recently I watched a well know speaker, on Christian TV, urge the faithful to be financially generous with God. Had he left it there it would have been fine, but this preacher then challenged his listeners saying, "Don't you want to see the favor of God on your life? Plant a financial seed and you'll release the favor of the Almighty on all that you do." In other words, "Do something and you'll get favor" But this is wrong---entirely wrong! Favor is another word for grace---they are one and the same. Grace believers believe, therefore, that there is nothing we can do, and that includes giving, which can earn God's favor. If we can do something to earn His grace, the gospel is demolished; grace is replaced with works and the believer has something to boast about other than the Cross.

Let's say it again, God's problem with us is not our sin it's our righteousness. We so easily get caught up in the sin of trying to establish a basis of acceptance before God other than Christ alone. We refuse to rely entirely on the finished work for our justification before God. This is another reason why we need to be continually confronted by the gospel for the gospel will dismantle and strip away everything other than Christ alone!

On this matter, my friend Keith Lamb says,

"The problem God has with us is not our sin. We want to rid ourselves of sins. It is our righteousness that gets in the way. As long as I can recommend myself to God in any area I am unacceptable for the purposes of God. But when I finally decide to agree with God and confess that no good thing is in me, then I am in a position for God to do something for me and through me."

(Keith lamb: The Lord's Freedman p55).

Self-righteousness comes easily for many of us and, if we do not continually apply the gospel to our thinking we can effortlessly fall into its trap and be found to be closet Pharisees!

Pharisaism---what a curse! It is a matter of interest to discover that, according to the online Jewish Encyclopedia and other sources, there were several categories among the ancient Pharisees and when we examine them we discover that self-righteous Phariseism is still alive and well and living in our churches.

But this modern day Pharisaism has learned how to cover its tracks. In fact pharisaical self-righteousness can be so insidious that we might actually be involved with one or more of its forms without even knowing. Let's look then at some of the distinct types of Pharisaism and pray that the Lord will deliver us from their snare. May Christ alone be embraced as all our righteousness.

### 1. The Shechem Pharisee

This was the gentleman who was meticulous in his observance of the law, not because it was in his heart to honor God, but rather because he hoped that others would see just how good he was.

What about you? What about me? We look good, we are involved with the church, but our hearts can often be far from God! Furthermore, the Shechem Pharisee wanted to look good because he wanted to get something out of being perceived as a good guy! The Shechem Pharisee takes his name from events that transpired in Genesis 34. Shechem, the Hivite prince, became circumcised, not because he wanted to worship the one true God, but rather because in becoming circumcised, he thought he would get Dinah as his wife. He's still around today. I've met him in the business people who get involved with church just to meet potential clients. These people talk a great talk, they say all the right words, but life is all about them and their advancement and not about the Lord Jesus.

Motives are so very important! Some years ago a young boy crawled out over the frozen lake and pulled his friend, who had fallen through the ice, to safety. He became an instant hero and when being interviewed by the press was asked, "Were you not scared?" "Yes", he replied, "I was scared, but I couldn't let him drown for he was wearing my skates." Just like the Shechem Pharisee, the kid's motives were selfish.

So what about you? Why are you involved in church? Is it because God has been rich in mercy towards you or is it that you have your own agenda?

## 2. The Wait a Little Pharisee.

He was the one who could always produce an entirely good reason for putting off doing a good deed.

In today's church, these are the ones who always have a good reason as to why we don't, for example, spend more money on evangelizing and missions. He is a hearer of the word, but not a doer. Rather than being honest about his condition, he again hides behind a veneer of righteous words and can pose as a master of sensible caution and prudence. Have you met him yet? He may be in leadership, he may have a large voice in a small committee, but mark it down, he is always the one to tell us why things can't be done; and, on top of that, he has developed the knack of sounding pious and holy while doing so. He mistakenly thinks that his caution has made him more righteous than the rest of us and views God as being One as restrained and guarded as he.

## 3. The Bleeding Pharisee

This was a very interesting specimen. He was also known as 'The self-inflicting Pharisee'. In Bible times women had a very low status. No Pharisee, for example, could talk to his wife or sister in public. But the Bleeding Pharisee wouldn't even so much as look at a woman on the street. And----- wait for it-----to avoid looking at women he walked around with his eyes closed and thus kept walking into walls and sides of buildings! He bruised and wounded himself needlessly and thus was given the name of the Bleeding Pharisee!

The truth is, some people take things too far! There is a great truth about separation from the world, but some folk take it to the extreme! Some pastors, for example, won't allow women to wear makeup or to wear nice clothes. It seems they insist that the womenfolk buy their outfits at frumpyclothes.com.

The problem with this is that these, and other standards, are imposed as the proof of righteousness. According to this thinking, God accepts us because of how we dress and do our hair. Of course these churches never express things as precisely as this, but in effect that's what is being said! In churches like these there is, therefore, no need for the gospel, no need for the blood and no need for Christ's righteousness. After all, in their minds, keeping up certain standards provides all the righteousness they need! Invariably the Bleeding Pharisee walks around with a sour expression and judgmental attitude! He's not the type of fellow you'd want to have at your dinner party.

#### 4. The Mortar or Humble Pharisee

This guy was so humble and pious that he wouldn't so much as lift his feet when he walked. These gentlemen still attend our meetings today. They act as if they are such self-effacing brothers and sisters. They are so sweet that they'd give you diabetes. They are always talking in terms of the purity of heart, "Oh Brother I see such a pure heart in you; Praise the Lord for you brother!"

People who keep talking about me having a pure heart give me the creeps! It's just not real! Christ alone was the only one who had a pure heart and we need to continually look to Him as our perfect righteousness. And yes, Jesus did say that the pure in heart were blessed, but any man who thinks he has a pure heart has deceived himself. Looking to our heart and reckoning it as pure is a self-righteousness which flies in the face of the gospel! At the back of it, the 'Humble Pharisee' wants us to be impressed with him and to believe that he is a wonderful brother. Rather than setting out to show that Jesus is wonderful, he would rob God of His glory and point people to himself!

#### 5. The Timid and Fearing Pharisee

This Gentleman walked around in dread and fear of divine punishment. He saw God in terms of terror and judgment. All that he did, he did out of fear!

He is sometimes found in our churches today obsessing on the Lake of Fire and the idea that God is out to get us if we don't shape up! Again, he has the disease of self-righteousness because he thinks that by shaping up and doing everything in an exacting manner he can find favor with God.

By the way, I believe in the Lake of Fire as well as the next man, but I also believe that the blood of Christ has doused its flames for God's elect. The timid and fearing Pharisee, however, lives in fear that if he doesn't do things perfectly, God will get Him. He's continually looking over his shoulder. But, looking over your shoulder like that gives you a pain in the neck and makes you one. Listen to me; God is not out to get us! The blood of the Lord Jesus has exhausted His wrath. The fearful saint ought to rest in Christ's redemption and stop trying to impress God with his own perfection.

#### 6. The Ever Reckoning or Compounding Pharisee

This guy was also known as, "Tell me another duty and I will do it Pharisee." He believed that every good deed he did put God a little deeper into his debt and every failure put him a little deeper into arrears with God!

This is one of the subtlest forms of Pharisaism and perhaps the easiest to fall into! It is self-righteous legalism at its worst. This kind of Pharisee thinks that he can earn God's approval and acceptance by performance. The problem with this thinking is that, if you can get God's favor by

doing something then you deserve the honor! You have robbed Christ Jesus for he alones deserves the glory! He alone is our acceptance before the Father.

Of course no Christian would dare talk like that ----we know better! Don't we? We would never in our wildest dreams imagine ourselves as rivals of Christ. However, many of us fill our lives with practices which we, sometimes subconsciously, think will secure God's favor. Have you ever, for example, gone though a period when it was 'hard work' to read the Bible? In fact it was such a chore that you stopped. You felt far from God. And then, remember, just when you felt at your lowest point, you were called upon to pray at the end of a fellowship time. You froze! In your heart you felt like a stranger to God; you felt that your prayers would ricochet off the ceiling. But let's fast-forward three months. Now you are back reading the Bible each day and enjoying it and someone calls upon you to pray. This time it's easy. Heaven, you feel, is open to your requests! Why? Because you are making the effort!

But what's wrong with that? Everything! It's self-righteousness----you feel that your performance (or lack of it) can open or shut heaven. But if you think like that, Christ is no longer needed! You have fallen from grace! You don't need a mediator...all you need is good works! You don't need a High Priest, all you need is a quiet time. And this same self-righteous spirit works itself out into every avenue of Christian life from attending services, doing evangelism and going to prayer meetings.

Mark this down! The Lord God almighty wants you to know that all your sin is wiped away by the work of someone else, the Lord Jesus Christ! Your record of sin has been removed and Christ has become your righteousness. Of course it is right and proper to do good works, to read the Bible and to pray and evangelize, but these things can never make you any more righteous than you already are in Christ. Furthermore, not doing them cannot diminish the righteous that is already credited to your account!

So let me ask you! Have you read your Bible for an hour each day this week? You haven't? Does God now love you less? NO!!!!

Did you pray for an hour each day this week? "Well actually brother yes I did!" Good for you! Does that mean that God now loves you more? NO!!!

Inside us all there's a secret lurking self righteous Pharisee going about looking for opportunities to establish his own righteousness. Serve him an eviction notice through the gospel! As we meditate on the gospel and its applications we will be delivered from all forms of Pharisaism.

And that is the Gospel Truth!