

The Wednesday Word, August 12, 2026: Hands up all ye Self-Righteous - Part 1

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An old Anglican Bishop once remarked, "Everywhere the Apostle Paul went they had a riot. Everywhere I go they make cups of tea." I would suggest that if the Gospel is preached correctly the preacher may very well get fewer cups of tea, for if preached correctly, the Gospel will annoy and anger a certain group of church people... the self-righteous.

We need to guard against becoming self-righteous and it is only by the Gospel that we can be preserved from such a fate. But what do I mean by 'self-righteous'?

There are three types of self-righteous people which we want to consider.

The "Not sure that I'm really a sinner self righteous person"

The most easily distinguished group of self-righteous generally subscribe to the theory that they are indeed sinners, but quietly they are not sure that they have their facts straight on the matter.

The adherent to this class of self-righteousness is the person who, for the most part, is a religious individual who says their prayers, believes in right and wrong, is convinced they are as good as most people and, if the truth be known, perhaps a good deal better. All this business about people getting saved is a little irritating and to be told they are sinners whose only hope is an alien righteousness which belongs to and is found in someone else is, to say the least, somewhat irksome.

These people have not yet discovered their complete wreck, ruin and spiritual insolvency. They know nothing of their personal depravity, guilt, and consequent danger.

I remember once preaching a series on, "Righteousness in Christ Jesus Alone". I had just recently taken over as the Pastor at this particular church and had thought that, as the church was "Bible Believing", these messages would be an exercise in strengthening the saints in the faith. How wrong I was! After a number of weeks there was an uproar and revolt among many of the leading 'saints.' How dare I say that we were all sinners! How dare I judge them? Some of them left the church saying I had condemned and insulted them. Others stayed on and tried to convert me to having a more presentable message.

One of the horrors of sin is that it can take the message of the love and kindness of God towards us in Christ Jesus and treat it as a personal insult. Imagine the doctor diagnosing a terminal disease and the patient feeling affronted when he is told of his

condition and being even more offended when he is told he cannot possibly cure himself and that his only hope lies outside of himself in the work to be performed by another.

Type 2 The 'Trying Harder' Self –Righteous Sinner.

Back to my story! Eventually, as the Gospel was expounded week after week, God began to slowly change hearts. Some of my antagonists began to discover that their hearts were indeed evil, sinful and deceitful; The Lord began to graciously show them that, in themselves, there was nothing to commend them to Him. But the human heart is a remarkable thing. Even after having been touched by grace, it continues to harbor a measure of opposition to God. It is a wonderful thing to behold how self-righteous people will do their best to preserve their self-righteousness for as long as they are able. Some of my one-time opponents began to come to me saying things such as, "We accept we are not saved by our righteousness, but we are still going to try the best we can to get into Heaven." To rest in Christ alone seemed foolish and perhaps even dangerous to them. They still looked for something within themselves to recommend them to God.

As already mentioned, the Gospel exposes the sheer folly of self-righteousness: if our righteousness can save us then we don't need Christ's. Conversely, if Christ's righteousness alone can save, it is aggravated foolishness for us to attempt to contribute our righteousness to the equation.

So, I continued to reason with them that to trust in ourselves or in any religious ceremony, as a means to make us safer is madness. Did we expect to be accepted in Heaven, I reasoned, because of something we had done? If that was the case, then Christ Jesus was the biggest time waster in history. Look at Him there, hanging on the cross, suffering the torments of wrath and sin. Did He not know that we could save ourselves by being good church people?

Bit by bit as Christ was continually shown as the ONLY hope, these dear church folk began to see that there really is nothing we can bring to God to commend us but the doing and dying of Jesus Christ. They slowly began to see that the salvation of God does not stand on human works; rather it stands on the sacrificial and substitutionary death of Jesus.

And that's the Gospel Truth!

To Be Continued next time.