

The Wednesday Word, September 2, 2026: Hands up all ye Self-righteous - Part 3

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In the previous 2 Wednesday Words I told you about a church I once pastored and how some of its members subtly opposed the Gospel, They hadn't grasped the truth of righteousness in Christ alone.

They didn't know there really is nothing we can bring to God to commend us but the doing and dying of Jesus Christ. This brings us to the 3rd type of self-righteous sinner.

They are the 'Trusting in Repentance', Self-Righteous Sinners.

Self-righteousness is not always as obvious as the types I encountered in that church. At times self-righteousness was very subtle and quietly hidden. This is one of the reasons why the Gospel needs to continually be preached to the believer. I discovered that certain self-righteous church people can be very hard to spot. Here's the way they thought. They said, *"We cannot boast of anything, we confess we are sinners; Lord, we thank you that you have put away our sin because we have confessed it and have repented of it."*

This is a much more dangerous group to belong to than either of the first two we mentioned in previous weeks. They seem closer to the truth but look closely at what they are saying. They are still fatally flawed in their thinking for they are continuing to hold on to something other than Christ alone. They are looking for forgiveness based upon their repentance! What an imperfect and faulty foundation they have poured for themselves.

What I am saying may seem odd to you, but, if it does, let me ask, do you for one moment think or imagine that your repentance is perfect? What about, for example, the sins you have forgotten? They have been somehow deleted from your memory, but they are still there! You haven't yet repented of them because you can't remember them. And what about the sins you committed that you didn't even know were sins! You also need to repent of those things, but how can you since you didn't know they were sins? Although repentance is a vital truth, it makes a wretched foundation of quicksand. The only foundation that will hold in the Day of Judgment is the solid rock of Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

"When He shall come with trumpet sound;
Oh may I then in Him be found;
Dressed in His righteousness alone;
Faultless to stand before the throne.
On Christ the solid rock I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand."

To trust in a foundation of repentance is to be no better off than a good Muslim. Many Muslims believe that it is necessary to repent and, if they repent, Allah accepts them. But the Gospel teaches us no one is ever accepted because they repent. Although true saving

faith and repentance are inseparable, we are accepted only because a sinless man, Jesus Christ the God-Man, lived for us, died for us and rose again for us. And yes, of course the kindness of God leads us to repentance, but our repentance is not something we should trust as our ground of acceptance before God. Our repentance is, at best, very flawed. As the great preacher John Berridge used to say,

*“My repentance needs to be repented of,
My tears need washing,
And the very washing of my tears
Needs still to be washed over again with the blood of my Redeemer.”*

It is very hard for the self-righteous to let go of anything and everything he can point to within himself as his trust and hope. If the truth be known, it is very easy for any of us to slip away from the Gospel and almost unknowingly trust something we have done as the ground of salvation. But the Bible knows nothing of self-salvation. Spurgeon says, *“There is no comfort in the Bible for those who would save themselves. There are plenty of good words for sinners, and for those that are righteous in Christ; but for your ‘good’ people, not a word of comfort.”* The truth is this; Hell is full of ‘good’ people! They were so ‘good’ that they were satisfied with a righteousness, which was totally inadequate for Heaven. It is only in Christ alone and His accomplishments on our behalf that we can rest.

Only in Christ can the required perfect and flawless righteousness be found. Let’s stay honest before God.

Let’s abandon all self-righteousness and self-confidence and cast ourselves wholly upon Christ for our acceptance and right standing in heaven. Let’s side with the following sentiment from the great hymn writer, William Cowper:

“My God, how perfect are thy ways!
But mine polluted are;
Sin twines itself about my praise,
And slides into my prayer.
When I would speak what thou hast done
To save me from my sin,
I cannot make thy mercies known
But self-applause creeps in.
This heart, a fountain of vile thoughts,
How does it overflow!
While self upon the surface floats,
Still bubbling from below.
Let others in the gaudy dress
Of fancied merit shine,
The Lord shall be my righteousness,
The Lord for ever mine.”

And that’s the Gospel Truth!