

# Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

“. . . Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

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## WHAT IS SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS?

by Lee Moses

On one occasion, Jesus told a parable to address “*certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others*” (Luke 18:9). Self-righteousness is clearly a sin. And just as self-righteousness was a problem in Jesus’ time, it remains a problem today. However, the term has acquired a much broader sense as people use it as a favorite pejorative to levy against any with whom they disagree religiously. Atheists use it to refer to all who believe the Bible is a Divine standard. “Progressives” (cf. 2 John 9) and other sinners use it to refer to those who try to call people out of sin.

In debate, it is necessary that the opponents define their terms. Otherwise, they will often end up in a “verbal dispute,” where the opponents are not actually debating the facts, but simply reflecting their different understandings of terms being used. This is why those who use the term “self-righteousness” should confine their usage of the term to a precise definition. Or, to put it another way, “If you’re going to insult me, please do it correctly.”

“Righteousness” simply means that one’s conduct is upright according to a standard. The righteousness God commends demands that one’s conduct is upright according to **His** standard, which from the day of Pentecost has been the Gospel, the New Testament of Jesus Christ (John 12:48; Romans 2:16). So what is self-righteousness? Let us consider whether various usages of the term use it correctly.

### Is self-righteousness the belief that one way is better than another?

In today’s politically correct climate, it is common to hear such sentiments as “We’ll just agree to disagree,” or, “What’s right for you may not be right for me.” Public schools indoctrinate children from a young age with the doctrines of pluralism and multiculturalism, which effectively say, “No one way is better than another.”

As such, it is not altogether surprising the tumult that arises when a dissenting voice speaks out, saying, “No this is wrong, and here is what’s right.” Instead of examining whether their beliefs and practices could be improved, they assault the dissenter as “self-righteous.” Because he believes he has a way better than the way they are currently following, they demonize him.

But one way **is** better than any other.

The Lord has always made clear that He only provides one singular way (Genesis 18:19; Judges 2:22; 2 Kings 21:22). If the Lord provides a way, is it not **better** than any other way that man could fathom? “*Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein*” (Jeremiah 6:16; emphasis LM).

Contrary to the good way of the Lord are the varying ways of man: “*The way of the LORD is strength to the upright: but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity*” (Proverbs 10:29;

compare with 14:12). “*O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps*” (Jeremiah 10:23). There is only one narrow way to acceptability to God and eternal life in heaven (Matthew 7:13-14; John 14:6). Surely it is not self-righteousness to observe that God’s way is better than any man’s way.

### Is self-righteousness the understanding that one must live a certain way to have the hope of heaven?

Even many religious people claim that anyone who believes this is self-righteous—“What, do you think you are going to **earn** your way to heaven, you self-righteous works salvationist!?” The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE)* defines self-righteousness as “A term that has come to designate moral living as a way of salvation; or as a ground for neglecting the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.”<sup>1</sup> The two possible definitions in this sentence are very different from one another, and the second will be discussed later. As to the first, designating any way as “a way of salvation” is erroneously to deny that there is only **one** Divine way (see previous point). And it is certainly incorrect to affirm that moral living **in and of itself** can produce salvation. However, moral living is a necessary **component** of salvation.

This might be a good time further to emphasize that there is a distinct difference between righteousness and self-righteousness. The most basic definition of righteousness pertains to right-**doing**. The Greek word commonly translated *righteousness*, has as a definition “the quality or character-

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(continued from page one)

istic of upright behavior.”<sup>22</sup> When Paul (and the psalmist) noted, “*There is none righteous, no, not one,*” it was because of the wickedness that people **did** (Romans 3:10ff; Psalm 14). Moses exhorted the Israelites to **do** what God instructed, that they might be righteous: “*And it shall be **our righteousness**, if we observe **to do** all these commandments before the LORD our God, as he hath commanded us*” (Deuteronomy 6:25; emphasis LM). That was not only true under the Old Testament; it remains true under the New: “*Little children, let no man deceive you: he that **doeth** righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous*” (1 John 3:7; emph. LM). Friend, that is not **self-righteousness**, that is simply righteousness. And while **self-righteousness** may be condemned, God commands and commends **righteousness** in the strongest terms.

No, the understanding that one must live a certain way to have the hope of heaven is not self-righteousness.

**Is self-righteousness a concern about the prominence of sin?**

Non-Christians are generally not all that opposed to Christianity when professed Christians remain in their church buildings, singing happy songs and praying happy prayers. However, when non-Christians perceive that Christians are speaking out against sin, they become hotly indignant (compare with 1 Kings 22:8; Amos 5:10). They may even misuse a verse or two of Scripture to scold the self-righteousness they perceive in Christians: “Let him that is without sin cast the first stone!” “Judge not, you self-righteous prude!” Of course, they ignore the reality of their own judging and stone-casting; but just the same, they assault those concerned with sin as self-righteous.

Our world is growing increasingly immoral (compare with 2 Timothy 3:13). Numerous television programs glorify sexual intercourse outside of marriage. Shows such as *Cougar Town* and *Two and a Half Men* take it to a whole new level of repulsiveness. Girls are being sexualized at a young age. A video has recently been widely circulated across the internet of **seven-year-old** girls performing a dance routine clad in very skimpy outfits, such as one might expect in the Victoria’s Secret fashion show, and simulating sex moves onstage in their routine. There is a “dating service” advertising on television whose sole function is to hook up married persons (from different marriages) for an adulterous affair. Should not Christians be deeply concerned about such immorality and tolerance for immorality in their midst? As the psalmist lamented,

*Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law....Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy*

*law....I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; because they kept not thy word (Psalm 119:53, 136, 158).*

We likewise ought to be gripped with horror, having rivers of waters pouring from our eyes at the wickedness around us. Is that self-righteous, or righteous? The Holy Spirit inspired the following description of Lot in Sodom: “[God] delivered **just** Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For **that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;**)” (2 Peter 2:7-8; emph. LM). God says it is righteous, not self-righteous, to be vexed with the filthy conduct of the wicked.

Christians are not only to be inwardly concerned with wickedness, they are to speak out against it. As Christians are commanded to “*walk as children of light*” (Ephesians 5:8), the Scripture expounds, “*But all things that are reprovèd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light*” (verse 13). To be light, one must reprove sin, making it manifest. Christians are to “*have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them*” (verse 11). Although one may have committed sins in the past, this does not preclude him from calling others to repentance once he has repented himself (Matthew 7:5; Acts 3:19). Others will not like it when Christians shine as lights, making manifest the wicked deeds of the wicked world (John 3:20; 7:7). However, the world’s contempt for Christian care and concern makes it neither unrighteous nor self-righteous.

**Is self-righteousness a rejection of God’s provisions for righteousness?**

Scripture clearly defines self-righteousness when it speaks of Jesus

rebuking those individuals who “trusted in themselves that they were righteous” (Luke 18:9). Paul would later say of his Israelite counterparts,

*Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. 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 (Romans 10:1-3).*

God has provided the **pattern** of righteousness, the Gospel (1:16-17; 6:17). God has provided the **propitiation** of righteousness, the willing death of Jesus Christ His Son (3:25-26; 5:9; 1 John 2:2). God has provided the **pronouncement** of righteousness, His own Divine decree that a formerly sinful man or woman is “justified” (Rom. 8:33; 1 John 1:9).

Whenever one refuses to submit to God's provisions for righteousness, he “trusts in himself that he is righteous.” Again revisiting the *ISBE*'s definition of *self-righteousness*: “A term that has come to designate moral living as a way of salvation; **or as a ground for neglecting the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.**” Anything which a person considers sufficient of himself, to the neglect of God's pattern, propitiation, or pronouncement of righteousness, is self-righteousness. To delude oneself that he has no need of God is self-righteous. To ignore and refuse to address one's sins is self-righteousness. To seek forgiveness by a pattern other than the Gospel (which demands hearing, faith, repentance, confession of Christ's Deity, immersion in water, and subsequent holy living) is self-righteousness.

Sadly, this true self-righteousness abounds, yet those guilty of it persist in accusing others of it while refusing to see it in themselves. “*There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness*” (Proverbs 30:12). Such people who so readily hurl the wrongful accusation against others need not only to correct their inaccurate use of the word—they especially need to purge themselves of their self-righteousness by submitting themselves to the righteousness of God.

<sup>1</sup>William Owen Carver, “Self-Righteousness,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. James Orr, et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), 4:2715.

<sup>2</sup>*dikaiousunē*, in in Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 248.

## PERSISTENCE

by Bob Howton

The heights by great men reached and kept, were not attained by sudden flight,

but they while their companions slept, were toiling upward in the night.

Longfellow: The ladder of St. Augustine

Most of us have heard the old country adage which states, “A big shot is nothing more than a little shot who kept on shooting.” The worthiness and commonality of such a statement is forever posted in a Proverb from the Bible. “*For a just man falleth seven times and riseth up again*” (Proverbs 24:16) The lessons in this concise statement are manifold. First of all, it's not exclusively the self-willed man who falls. The just, or righteous, falls also. The overriding difference in the two men is their outlook on life. The earthy man will give up quicker than one who has his hope settled in the Master of oceans and skies. So, the righteous man falls, but he gets up and tries

again. His will to accomplish whatever goals he has set for himself is sufficient to spur him on, even in the face of a disappointing fall. He gets up and tries again, and again, and again. There are multiple things to be gleaned from this short Proverb. (1) The consideration here is of a “just” man. (2) Although he is righteous (just), he is subject to falling, just like other men. (3) The man falls, and falls, and falls again for seven times. (Being righteous does not guarantee success every time!) (4) Although down for seven times, the inspired writer says he “riseth up again.” He is persistent!

Some people suffer more than others as they have their sojourning though life and its trials. The real truth, which is plainly visible for all to see, is that man has a choice as to how he will face his trials and disillusion. One of the best examples of this is to be found in the comprehensive assessment of man's fortune made by the prophet Job. He said, “*Man that is born of woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth as a flower, and is cut down: He fleeth*

also as a shadow and continueth not” (Job 14:1). According to Biblical record, Job did not fall upon the ground and begin a never-ending complaint against God. Instead, the Bible says of this righteous man, *“In all this, Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly”* (1:22). Did you ever hear someone say, as they faced some tragedy, *“Why does God place such trials upon me?”* The truth is, God set nature in order at the ‘beginning’ and He does not step in and rearrange the natural course of things to suit Himself, or anyone. *“... God cannot be tempted by evil, neither tempteth He any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lusts, and enticed”* (James 1:13-14).

Peter gives a proper course to follow when things don’t go the way we would like them to go. *“Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf”* (1 Peter 4:16). I take this to mean that one should be persistent in facing the trials of life, and the inevitable troubles which are sure to come. Don’t just try once, or twice, but be persistent in right doing. Why should I, or any man give consideration to such an idea? *“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory... for the things which are not seen are eternal”* (2 Corinthians 4:17-18 ). *“And when the Chief Shepherds shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away”* (1 Peter 5:4). Sounds like something for which a fellow should be **persistent**, doesn’t it? The God of Heaven be thanked!

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### GOD’S AUTHORIZED WORSHIP

#### - COLOSSIANS 3:17

1. **LORD’S SUPPER** - The New Testament and early church history record that Christians met on the first day of every week (Sunday) to worship God and remember Christ (Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 11:23-34; 16: 1-2).
2. **PRAYERS** - (Acts 2:42; Philippians 4:6-7; I Thessalonians 5:17-18).
3. **SINGING** - God’s word authorizes only vocal music and specifically singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12). The New Testament shows no use of mechanical instruments of music in worship to God by the church Christ established. Church history notes no such use for nearly 700 years after the New Testament was completed. It is an innovation of men, not of God.
4. **GIVING** - Free-willed, cheerful, generous, and every week (Acts 20:35; I Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8 & 9).
5. **PREACHING OF THE WORD** - The gospel of Christ, not men’s doctrines nor entertainment, saves and strengthens us (Acts 2:42; 20:7; Romans 10:17; I Corinthians 1:18-23).

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