SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS—A SMOLDERING HEAP OF RUBBISH

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A SERMON
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BY C. H. SPURGEON
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"Which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou. These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day."
Isaiah 65:5

THE apostle Paul shall be our interpreter here. You remember how in the tenth chapter of his epistle to the Romans, he quotes from this chapter, and says, "Isaiah is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me. But to Israel he saith, all day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people."

Isaiah was very bold to speak the Gospel so plainly, when a legal spirit prevailed, and very bold to defy the enmity of his own nation by declaring that they would be rejected for their sins, while the far-off heathen would be brought in by sovereign grace. He was bold to denounce hypocrites to their faces, and to smite a proud nation with the threatenings of the Lord.

Perhaps it was for this boldness that he suffered a cruel death by the hands of Manasseh. The application of the passage to Israel is just thus. Year after year, God dealt with great patience towards His chosen people, but they seemed to be desperately set upon idolatry in one form or another.

Sometimes they worshipped JEHOVAH, but then they did it under figure and symbol, whereas He has expressly forbidden that even His own worship should be thus celebrated. He who said in the first commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," said also in the second, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them."

At other times, they altogether rejected JEHOVAH, and worshipped Baal and Ashtaroth, and whole troops of the gods of the heathen, and thus they provoked the Lord exceedingly. They also practiced necromancy, or pretended communion with the dead, and witchcraft and sorcery, and all manners of abominable rites, like the depraved nations around them.

When this open rebellion was given up, as it was after the captivity—for the Jews have never been guilty of idolatry since that day—they fell into another form of the same evil, namely, self-righteousness. So that when our Lord came, He found self-righteousness to be the crying sin of Israel—the Pharisees carrying it to such a pitch as to render it utterly ridiculous.

They reckoned that the touch of a common person polluted their sacredness, so that they needed to wash after walking down a street. When they traversed the ways, they took the edge of the pavement so that they might not brush against the garments of the passers-by, and even in the temple, in prayer, they stood by themselves lest they should be defiled.

Their whole spirit is expressed in the words of the text, "Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou." This God declares to be as obnoxious to Him as smoke in a man's nose. He could not bear it. He was no more able to tolerate their self-righteousness than to endure their idolatry. It is this last form of the evil of the Israelitish heart which I am going to speak about this morning, because it is a phase of evil which is now common among us.

Self-righteousness is rampant in our own day. There be many who come up to the courts of the Lord's house, and mingle amongst the followers of Christ who still say, "Stand by, for I am holier than thou."

Our sermon is meant to be a cannonade against self-righteousness—that righteousness which a man makes out of his own doings, his own feelings, his own alms, prayers, or sacraments—all such righteousness is to be utterly despised.

I. The first point is this—THE SIN OF SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS GROWS UP AMONG RELIGIOUS PEOPLE.

It is not always the sin of the outside world, for many outsiders do not pretend to any righteousness at all, and I fancy they think all the better of themselves for that. This is an idle plea which needs not many words to expose. "I make no profession," says one. This is about as honorable a confession as if a thief should boast when caught at picking pockets, "I do not make any pretense to be honest," or a liar when detected should turn round and cry, "I never professed to speak the truth."

Would you have men glory in not professing to be honest or true? Yet, surely, they do no worse than one who boasts that he does not profess to fear God. Such a man has gone to a considerable pitch of iniquity before he can brazen his face to make his glory in that which is his shame.

Among those who profess to be religious, self-righteousness very frequently comes in, because they have not truly received the religion of Jesus Christ. If they were true believers they would be humble and contrite, for self-righteousness and faith in Christ are diametrically opposed. He that is saved by grace finds no room for glorying in himself.

What says the apostle? "Where is boasting, then? It is excluded." The word is, it is shut out, it has the door shut in its face. A sinner washed in Jesus' blood, and clothed in Jesus' righteousness, glories only in the Lord. He has done once for all with that particular form of sin which glories in self. It is detestable in his sight. His cry is, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Many who mingle with Christians, and are religious in a certain sense because they practice the forms of religion, are wont to put the form into the place of the Spirit. With them, in baptism the washing in water is everything, but the burial with Christ which it sets forth is quite unknown. With them, the partaking of the bread and the wine are everything at the Lord's table, but the spiritual feeding upon the body and blood of Christ is not understood.

With them, the place of worship is everything, but the spirit of worship is lacking. The broken heart, the contrite spirit, the soul that trembles at God's Word, the heart that joys in the Lord, they are strangers to all this, though they can sit as God's people sit, though they can hear as God's people hear, and look as if they were all that saints should be.

These persons, too, even when they do not join the Christian church, but only worship or seem to worship with Christians, are very apt to think that they must be better than other people because they do so. They are not openly Sabbath-breakers. Is there not something in this? Yes, there is something in it, certainly, and we will not say a word against it.

But there is not everything in it, and certainly not enough in it to make a perfect righteousness of it. The bed is shorter than that a man may stretch himself on it, and the covering is too narrow for a man to wrap himself in. "Oh, but I have occupied a seat in an orthodox chapel for many years." Yes, that may be, and if you have not received the Gospel, those sermons which you have heard will rise up against you in judgment to your condemnation.

It is true you close your eyes in prayer, but if you never pray, do you not mock God with a pretense of doing it, and may it not turn out that your religiousness is only an impudent provoking of God to His face? Avoid the tendency to say, "We are certainly much better than the outside world, and if God is hard with us, He will be hard with a great many." Avoid this, I say, for it is the danger of outwardly religious people, who are not savingly converted, to dream that they are somewhat advantaged by a mere attendance on the means of grace.

Should an Egyptian rub his shoulders against an Israelite, would it turn him into an Israelite? Will living near a rich man make you rich? Because the Lord Jesus eats and drinks in your streets, are you, therefore, safe, even though you have never believed on Him? Be not deceived by such a notion.

Do you forget that cry of our Lord's, "Woe unto thee, Chorazin. Woe unto thee, Bethsaida"? Did He not proclaim woe to the very places where His voice was oftenest heard. and where His miracles were oftenest worked? Beware, I pray, you outwardly religious people, lest you fall into the sin of self-righteousness, and fancy that you are holy when you are not.

II. THIS IS A SIN WHICH FLOURISHES WHERE OTHER SINS ABOUND.

We read of these people that they did evil before the eyes of God, and chose that wherein He delighted not. They blasphemed God, and polluted themselves with unhallowed rites, communing with demons, and the powers of darkness, and pretending to speak with departed spirits. And yet for all that, they said, "Stand by thyself, I am holier than thou."

Self-righteousness is never more ridiculous than in persons whose conduct would not bear scrutiny for a moment. See the Pharisee with his phylactery, and his broad-hemmed garment standing there in conscious perfection! Look at him and feel disgust, for the wretched hypocrite has been secretly devouring a widow's house, and his heart is full of ravening and wickedness.

In his greediness and lust, he makes clean the outside of his cup and platter, but within he is full of extortion and excess. Hear how the devil derides him. "Ah, ah," he laughs with satanic glee, "the outside may be as you will. What care I, while the inside is foul!" It is dreadful that any man should be self-righteous, but it is monstrous that men of openly evil lives should dare to set up such a pretense.

Such persons know, if they will but think, that they are trying to palm off a barefaced lie. Yet it is common enough in spiritual things for those who are naked, and poor, and miserable, to declare that they are rich and increased in goods. How are they able to keep up this imposture upon their own consciences?

Is it not a part of their spiritual madness? The very blindness which makes them choose sin prevents their seeing how sinful it is, and enables them to fancy that all is well. As men who wear spectacles of colored glass find all things tinted with their own hue, so does a self-righteous heart impart a tint to actions, till the worse appears the better, and sin glitters like righteousness.

Moreover, self-righteous men, like foxes, have many tricks and schemes. They condemn in other people what they consider to be very excusable in themselves. They would cry out against others for a tenth part of the sin which they allow in themselves. Certain constitutional tendencies, and necessities of circumstances, and various surroundings all serve as ample apologies.

Besides this, if it be admitted that they are wrong upon some points, yet in other directions they are beyond rebuke. If they drink, they do not swear, and if they swear, they do not steal. They make a great deal out of negatives. If they steal, they are not greedy and miserly, but spend their gains freely. If they practice fornication, yet they do not commit adultery. If they talk filthily, yet they boast they do not lie.

They would be counted good because they are not universally bad. They do not break every hedge, and therefore they plead that they are not trespassers. As if a debtor for a hundred pounds should claim to be excused because he does not owe two hundred. Or as if a highwayman should say, "I did not stop all the travelers on the road. I only robbed one or two, and therefore I ought not to be punished."

If a man should willfully break the windows of your shop, I warrant you, you would not take it as an excuse if he pleaded, "I did not break them all. I only smashed one sheet of plate glass." Pleas which would not be mentioned in a human court are thought good enough to offer to God. O the folly of our race!

Besides, these people will make righteousness this way—they plead that if they do wrong, yet there are some points in which they are splendid fellows. "You should see how grandly I acted on such an occasion. You will think me almost a saint, and quite a hero, if you will but fix your eye on that one particular virtue. Drink, sir? No, I never touch a drop."

I am glad you do not, but still, if you live in lying, or in pride, your abstinence is a short piece of stuff to make a garment out of. The mere fact that you are not a drunkard is so far good, but it goes a very little way towards the perfect righteousness which God's law demands.

Some one thing in which the unconverted man may excel is put in to make up for his deficiencies in a hundred other ways. By hook or by crook, a man will make out that he is not so bad as he seems to be—the inventiveness of self-esteem is extraordinary.

Those who come with the language of repentance, but without the spirit of it, are sometimes the most self-righteous of all, for they say, "I am all right because I am not self-righteous." They make a self-righteousness out of the supposed absence of self-righteousness. "Thank God," say they, "we are not as other men are, nor even as these self-righteous people." Hypocrites all the way through.

Have you ever heard of the monk who said he was a very great sinner, that he had broken all the ten commandments, that he was as bad as Judas, and deserved to be hanged as well as he, and when his confessor began to go over the commandments, he said about each one of them, "Holy father, I have not broken that, I have kept that." He was a sinner in the gross, but not in detail. A sinner by name, but not in reality—so he said—and hosts of people virtually say the same.

Hear them, "Yes, sir, of course I am a sinner. We are all sinners." But if you bring one fault home to them, straightway they bristle up. Who are you that you should speak evil of them? They have done nothing amiss—they are most excellent people—and you will go a long way to find anybody better than they are and so on.

Oh, this horrible self-righteousness. It is not merely to be found in the man who attends his church regularly, and reads his prayers daily, it is found in the man who will not go to his church nor say his prayers. The harlot has her self-righteousness. The thief, the drunkard, the profane still have their self-justifications. Yes, and it may be seen even in Atheists who have cast off all fear of God, and then stand in an elevation of self-esteem which hardly any other man can match.

Hear him, "I have proved my freedom of thought and nobility of mind. I am the model man. As for these Christians, they are cants and hypocrites. And believers in Christ are either fools or knaves. No man has any honest and rational convictions but myself. I can improve upon the Bible and criticize the life of Christ. Stand by thyself. I am holier than you." This weed of self-righteousness will grow on any dunghill. No heap of rubbish is too rotten for the accursed toadstool of proud self to grow upon.

III. As self-righteousness grows among sins to our surprise, so IT IS IN ITSELF A GREAT SIN.

One is almost startled to find self-esteem placed after such a list of sins as this chapter records. To the Jew, the eating of swine's flesh and broth of all abominable things was a great pollution, but self-righteousness is classed with it—it is even placed with necromancy and witchcraft.

Drunkenness and swearing are sins in rags, but self-righteousness is sin in a respectable black coat. It is an aristocratic sin, and does not like to be put down with the common ruck. And if we even call it sin, yet many will plead that it is only so in a very refined sense.

But God does not think so. He classes it with the very worst, and He does so because it is one of the worst. For a man to be self-righteous is in itself a sin of sins. For, first, it is blasphemy. Perhaps you do not see that. Follow me, then.

God is holy. Here comes this base imposter and boasts, "And I am holy too." Is not that a ludicrous and contemptible form of blasphemy? It is profanity in its very essence. The cherubim are crying, "Holy, holy, holy, LORD God of hosts: heaven and earth are full of the majesty of thy glory," and amid it all there is heard this squeaking pretender, whining, "And I am holy too."

O wretched egotist, you do at once lie and blaspheme! The heavens are not pure in His sight. He charged His angels with folly, and do you, that are born of woman, and defiled from head to foot, dare to talk about righteousness? Righteousness, indeed! when you are but a mass of sin.

More, this self-righteousness is idolatry, for the man who counts himself to be righteous by his own works worships himself. Practically, the object of his adoration is his own dear, delectable, excellent self. All his confidence is in himself. His boasting is in himself.

And though he may sing psalms to God with his voice, yet his heart is really singing hymns to himself, and he is saying to himself, "You have done well, my soul. There is something great and bright in you. You deserve much of your Creator. You shall surely enter heaven on your own terms. At your

worst, you have never been so bad as your fellow men—at your best you are a right noble being and a brilliant reward is your due." What is this but idolatry in its worst form?

Then, again, it is profanity, for it gives God the distinct lie. The Lord declares that no man is righteous. He says that He looked from heaven and surveyed the sons of men, and He saw that, "There is none righteous, no, not one." To this divine assertion, self-righteousness gives a flat contradiction, for it claims to be itself holy.

God declares that we have gone astray, and altogether become unprofitable, and He proves that He believes this, for He sets Christ to bleed and die for the world of sinners, as it is written, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way, and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

But He could not lay our iniquity upon Jesus if we had none, nor impute transgression to Christ if there were no sin in us, and thus the self-righteous man virtually declares that God is false, and speaks not the strict truth, since he claims to be an exception to the rule. He testifies that God's "No, not one," is false, for he himself is one righteous person, and therefore there may be others.

Though God says that by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified in His sight, yet this man says, "By the works of the law I shall be justified," and so he profanes the Word of the Most High, and questions the truth of God, which is as the apple of JEHOVAH'S eye. It is clear beyond all question that self-righteousness is in itself a great, God-defying sin. May the Lord deliver us from it, and by the Holy Spirit work in us a humble, lowly faith in Jesus Christ, the Lord.

IV. In the fourth place, we would remark that SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS IS THE FRUIT OF MAN'S OWN THOUGHTS.

Look at the second verse of the chapter, "I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts." Those who have high thoughts of themselves do not walk according to God's commandments, but according to their own notions. If any man thinks himself to be righteous in himself, he has never derived that idea from God's *law*.

Read the ten commands, understand their spirituality, and know that they concern not only overt deeds, but thoughts and imaginations, and you will see that the law condemns us all without exception. It proves our guilt, reveals our proneness to evil, pronounces a curse upon us, and gives us over to condemnation. It pays us no respect, but shuts us up in hopeless despair.

A man who is self-righteous, therefore, did not derive his self-esteem from a true consideration of the law. No Jew that stood at Sinai and saw the mountain on a smoke, and heard the words which sounded forth with noise as of tempest and trumpet, dared to stand there and say, "I am righteous." But crouching away, moving further and further from the burning mount, the best Israelite besought that these words might not be spoken to him any more, for he could not endure the terror of that thrice holy law.

A Pharisee stands on an elevation raised by his own fancy, for the law would pull him down, and never for a moment set him up. His proud notions come not from the law, and certainly not from *the Gospel*, for the Gospel knows no man after the flesh as righteous, but it regards all men as sinners, and comes to them with pardon. It treats men as lost and comes to save them.

If there be a man in the world who is pure and perfect by nature, the Gospel has nothing to say to him, for it was not intended to meet such a case. Its medicines are not for those upon whom the sickness of sin has never come, for, "The whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick." Our great Lord came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Jesus is the sinner's friend. Christ came to wash away stains, not to flatter men into a notion of their spotlessness. He came to heal the sick, not to applaud the vigorous. To such as are righteous in themselves, there is not a single syllable of promise in the entire Gospel—why should there be, for they need it not? Self-righteousness is a child which neither law nor Gospel will own—it is born in the house of folly, and it is nursed by human fancy.

Self-righteous people are not much inclined to search *the Scriptures*—they do not read them with an understanding heart, so as to get the meaning—they rather make the Bible say their own meaning, and twist it to support their own pleasing dream. Like a battery of ordinance of the strongest kind, both law and Gospel fire into the sinner's righteousness and sink it, like a riddled hulk, into the deeps of the sea.

"But cannot a man arrive at a religion by his own unaided thoughts?" says one. A great many have tried it, but the very idea is absurd. Facts about God and man are to be learned, and not invented. Suppose a man were to think out the science of botany, but never went to see the flowers? He would deliver strange botanical lectures, misleading and absurd, for no cogitation upon what a flower ought to be would ever enable a man to guess at what flowers really are.

Suppose a man who never looked at the stars were to despise the telescope and depend on his thoughts for his astronomy? Would he not make strange work of it? We have heard of the German who excogitated a camel out of his inward consciousness, and there are many people of the same order of learned ignorance and profound folly.

Such do not look at what the Gospel is, but they have their own notions of what it ought to be. They do not look at what revelation declares, but at what their own precious thoughts can manufacture. Half the people in the world make their own theology, and are either too idle or too proud to be guided by the infallible Scripture.

As many a vintner composes his own wine, so do these concoct their own doctrine, and by this means they arrive at a high opinion of their own goodness. Like the spider, they make their web out of their own bowels. They are righteous, and by no means the sort of persons which the Word of God declares them to be. He whose foundation is his own dream is certain to be deceived.

Listen, O man, and learn wisdom. God's thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are His ways your ways, and in the day when He comes to deal with your fancied righteousness, He will make short work of it, and you will have to cry, "We all do fade as a leaf, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags, and our iniquities like the wind have carried us away."

The sooner that happens the better, for if it comes not until you get into the next world, it will be dreadful then to be found naked where you never can be clothed, to have your fancied riches melt into a poverty from which you never can recover, to be made a bankrupt where you thought yourself wealthy, and in a world where you never can begin again.

Woe to those who make eternal shipwreck while they dream that they are steering straight to the desired haven. God save you from setting up to furnish yourselves with inspiration. You are not oracles, and should never dream of being so. Search the Scriptures to know the facts of your case, and then you will recoil from the very idea of the righteousness of unrenewed man. Your glory will become your shame. Your spangled robes will turn to worthless rags, and you will accept, with humble gratitude, the righteousness which is of God by faith.

V. This leads us on to our fifth remark which is this—SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS HAS THIS VICE ABOUT IT, THAT IT ALWAYS LEADS TO DESPISING OTHERS.

That is the pith of the text. They said, "Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou." The self-righteous think thus of one another—one sinner dreads pollution from another, one rebel is alarmed lest he should be made disloyal by another. Think of a wretch condemned to die for his sin, and yet afraid that a fellow criminal might soil his innocence. To what a pitch of madness does pride lift itself! "Do not come near me; I am holy," cries the man steeped in sin. Oh, the absurdity of self-righteousness! This pride is loathsome to the last degree.

This pride is seen to be still more loathsome when the proud self-deceiver bids the lowly penitent man stand off. The repenting publican has his eyes opened to his real state, and he goes up to the temple and prays, "God be merciful to me a sinner." He does not dare look up. He is so broken-hearted. But yonder Pharisee is bold to thank God for his own surpassing virtues.

See how he gathers up his garment for fear the fringe of his raiment should touch the ground whereon the publican has set his polluting foot. Why, sirs, that publican was one of God's jewels, and

this abominable Pharisee was a mere dunghill, reeking with offensive self-conceit. He did not know it, but his self-righteousness made him despise the very man of whom God has said, "To this man will I look, and with him will I dwell; even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word."

"Oh," says one of my free-thinking, but self-righteous hearers, "I hate such cant. Confessing sin is all nonsense. I cannot endure to hear such talk." We are well aware of that, good sir, but this weighs not with us. We know you very well, and recognize in you an old acquaintance of some nineteen hundred years standing. Proud Pharisees never can endure penitent publicans, nor their Savior either.

They are always saying of the Lord's ministers that which they once said of Himself, "This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them." They find fault with the great Advocate and His clients, with the great Physician and His patients, but the Redeemer's kingdom waits not their patronage, and fears not their opposition. If you reject the banquet of mercy, and will not come to it, there are others who shall, and your refusal shall bring on your own head the contempt you now reserve for others.

Yes, and this self-righteous spirit dares to pour its bitterness upon the most gracious men. If you want a thorough-paced persecutor find a self-righteous man. I tell you there is no venom in the heart of dissolute, debauched men against Christianity that is at all comparable to the poison of asps which lies in the heart of the self-righteous man.

Who was it in Jerusalem that hunted down the saints? It was not some son of Belial who railed at them. I daresay that many a Jerusalem rioter said, "What matters it? They have their ways and I have mine—let the men alone."

But there was one man in Jerusalem who above most others thought that verily he had kept all the commandments of God from his youth up, and was utterly blameless, and he hated the Christians because they preached a doctrine which struck at his self-esteem. Therefore, he despised men who were a hundred times better than himself. He dragged them into the synagogue and scourged them, to compel them to blaspheme.

And when he had done all he could in his own country to worry them, he obtained letters from the high priest that he might go to Damascus to hunt them even in strange cities. He verily thought he did God service when he breathed out threatenings and bloodshed against God's own children.

Yes, it is so, and must be so. They that are born after the flesh persecute them that are born after the Spirit. Ishmael, the child of Hagar, the bondwoman, which comes from Sinai, in Arabia, hates the Isaac that is born of the free woman, according to promise. There is a deadly feud between these two, and this is a part of the sin of self-righteousness, that it sets itself so bitterly against Christ and His people, and is the direst opponent that the Gospel has among men.

We see the self-righteous spirit at times display itself in the papers when they touch on religious subjects. One of them lately condemned the hymn—

"Sinner, nothing do, either great or small,
Jesus did it, did it all, long, long ago."

This is shocking doctrine, so they say, for it denies salvation by good works! Of course, editors of papers are good judges, for they are so exceedingly careful of our morality, and so studious never to insert anything that could injure our purity. That precious, plain-spoken bit of Gospel verse is too much for our pious friend, the editor, and he is afraid that it will hurt our morals.

Self-righteousness is always afraid of the Gospel, lest the uncompromising truth should unmask its self-deceit. Why, sirs, the doctrine of justification by faith alone is the essence of Protestantism, and the soul of the Gospel. That Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and that salvation is not by works of righteousness which we have done, but by the sovereign grace of God who passes by transgression, iniquity, and sin, is the great truth for which Reformers protested and martyrs died. Let those who gainsay it look to themselves.

VI. But I must pass on to observe that SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS IS MOST ABOMINABLE IN THE SIGHT OF GOD.

What does He compare it to? He says, "It is a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day." At the bottom of the garden, we gather together the dead leaves, and all the rubbish of the garden, and the heap is lighted, and it keeps on burning and smoldering all the day—and if you go and stand in the eye of the wind, your eyes will smart, your nose will be offended, and you will feel that you cannot bear it. As you see the refuse burning, smoking, smoldering all the day, it will tell you what the Lord thinks of man's righteousness.

This is His opinion of those who say," Stand by, I am holier than thou." Their boasted righteousness is a burning heap of rubbish, pouring forth a thick smoke most obnoxious to Him. We do not wonder that He thus scorns and abhors proud, self-righteousness, for God is a God of truth, and truth cannot bear a lie, and self-righteousness is a mass of lies.

He who is of perfect nature cannot bear mere pretense. It is so among men in common matters. You introduce a man of real learning to a person who has purchased for himself a sham degree, and who boasts that he is a classical scholar. Mark his disgust when the pretender quotes a Latin author, and in the very first sentence gives false quantities.

The truly learned man says, "He is a disgrace to his title. Let me get away from him. He pretends to be a doctor, and yet he makes all these blunders." He who possesses the reality is indignant with the counterfeit. Now, God is truly holy, and cannot, therefore, bear that these men should talk about a holiness which they have no claim to, and vaunt themselves, and brag within themselves of a thing that is not theirs. The true God, therefore, calls them a smoke in His nose.

Moreover, self-righteousness is such a proud thing. God is always provoked with pride. It is one of the evils which His soul hates. He daily fits His arrow upon His string to fetch down the proud in heart. The self-righteous man is proud in himself, and proud with a contemptuous sneer at others, and therefore the Lord abhors him.

Self-righteousness also denies the wisdom of God's plan, and is utterly opposed to it. God's present plan of working in the world goes upon the theory that we are guilty—being guilty, He provides a Savior for us, and sends us a Gospel full of grace. His whole system is a gigantic blunder if we are or can be righteous in and of ourselves. The work of the Holy Spirit is needless if we can be of ourselves fit for heaven. The whole character of this gracious dispensation is a mistake if man is not guilty.

The man who says, "I am righteous," virtually casts a slur upon a work which is meant to be the highest display of the divine love and wisdom. He is like the Greek to whom the cross of Christ was "foolishness." I venture to say that self-righteousness in effect makes Christ Himself to be a superfluity, and this, my brethren, is the unkindest cut of all. This is a stab at the heart of the great Father.

Did Jesus come down from heaven and take our nature because we were sinners, and in that nature did He give Himself as a sacrifice that He might put away sin, and was all this a mistake? Calvary, are you a blunder? Bleeding Savior, were You an amiable enthusiast, putting away sin which did not exist, and filling a fountain for the removal of stains which are not to be found?

Yet self-righteousness involves all this. If one sinner has a right to be self-righteous, so has another. And then it comes to this—that God should deal with us all on quite another theory, and instead of His dear Son coming to the world to die for us as sinners, we might all go to heaven without an atonement or a Savior. Do you think God can bear such a slur upon Christ, such a trampling on the precious blood of His own Son? Can even long-suffering bear this?

I may be speaking to some who have not before considered what their self-righteousness means, but I hope they see it now. Get rid of it, my dear friends. Put off your ornaments of fancied virtue, and put the dust and ashes of confession on your heads. Go home and tear your finery to pieces, and put on the robe of heavenly righteousness, otherwise you will be as long as you live nothing but that smoking heap of weeds at the bottom of the garden.

And whereas you think you are a bright and shining light, God's thoughts will be the reverse, for He will count you to be a mere smother of smoke in His nose, a fire that smolders all the day.

VII. The last point, and one of the most practical is this, that SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS MOST EFFECTUALLY BARS A MAN FROM ALL HOPE OF SALVATION.

We cannot be saved unless we become truly holy, but my brethren, no man ever becomes truly holy who is content with a false holiness. If he says, "I am holy," he never will be holy. The student who enters college as a wise man will probably remain a fool. You never can win wisdom till you confess your folly.

The man who says, "I am rich," but is under a delusion which makes him call counters gold, will never be rich—it is a first necessity that he be able to estimate his true estate. So that self-righteousness shuts a man out from real righteousness most effectually.

It also prevents the heart from repentance. How can you repent if you have never sinned? How can you mourn your failure to obey while you conceive that you have kept the law? It shuts you out, too, from faith. You never will believe in Jesus Christ while you believe in yourself. "How can ye believe," said Christ, "that receive honour one of another?" If you can save yourself, you do not want a Savior, and consequently you will never trust in the Savior of sinners.

Man, whilst you are righteous, Christ and your heart will never agree. He brings you water, but you are not thirsty. He brings you the bread of life, but you are not hungry. He has made a raiment of needlework for you, but you are not naked. He comes to enrich you, but you are not poor. He comes to give you pardon, but you are not guilty. He comes to give you everlasting life, but you are not dead. What is there, then, in Christ for you? Just nothing, and so you will never have Christ.

All the entreaties of God, even such as are described in this chapter, when He stretches out His hands all the day, will never make a self-righteous man come to Him. The prodigal did not say, "I will arise, and go unto my father" while he could fill his belly with the husks that the swine ate. Soul poverty and destitution bring a man to God. But God may call as long as He wills—man never will come as long as he can be independent of his heavenly Father. So that self-righteousness is the ruin of all who harbor it.

Let me warn you who have heard the Gospel continually, that if you are self-righteous, the privileges which you enjoy will be all neutralized and cease to be privileges. For if you do not come to Jesus when He stretches out His hands, He will call others who are not now a people, and He will be found of those that sought Him not.

You are first now in point of privilege, but the first shall be last, while those outside that have not heard the Gospel shall hear it and be saved, and so the last shall be first. God will turn the tables upon you—the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, while many shall come from the east and from the west, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God.

Beware, you who are self-righteous, lest, because you put yourselves to be the head, God should make you the tail, for then all your Sabbath privileges, and Gospel hearings, will be like millstones about your necks, to sink you low as the lowest hell.

What is the remedy for all this? The remedy is just this. God says, "*Behold me*." That is to say, He bids you cease from doting upon your own fancied beauties, and worshipping your own foolish image. Look first to the holy God and tremble. Can you, of yourself, ever be like Him—pure, spotless, glorious? Can you ever hope to deserve anything from Him? Look to Him and despair.

Then comes the second, "*Behold me*." See Christ Jesus on the cross dying, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God. As you see Him dying, your self-righteousness will die.

You will say, "He would never have suffered thus for me unless I had sin to repent of. God would never have put Him to this grief for me unless I had been sadly guilty. I should never have wanted such a Savior if I had not been a great transgressor. In the heights and depths of dying love, I read the heights and depths of my accursed sin. In the infinity of the atonement, I read the boundless blackness of my

guilt, and lie humble before God. At the same time, in that perfect righteousness divine, which has put away sin, I see the hope of a sinner, and as a sinner I look to Christ for everything."

If you do this, it is well. God blesses you. May every one here be enabled to do this immediately, and unto God shall be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ISAIAH 65

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—551, 554, 530

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