

1. One Problem: Righteousness
 - a. What is righteousness?
 - i. Just – right
 - ii. Scrutinized and approved as being right, acceptable to the standard of what is good and right
 1. Example: Entrance exam into college – approved by school as acceptable to their standard – righteous – passed the tests and the scrutiny
 - iii. Thus, it is to pass the scrutiny of the standard and be declared accepted
 1. This is a universal desire that every heart recognizes to some form: the desire to be found righteous, scrutinized, known, and accepted
 - b. Why is it a “problem”?
 - i. We lack righteousness!
 1. **In the beginning, when we were certain of God’s approval and we walked with him in the cool of the garden, we were scrutinized in our nakedness and unashamed.**
 2. **Yet, when we rejected God’s word and entrusted ourselves with righteousness, we sinned and knew guilt, shame, fear, and the discomfort of being truly known.** So, we covered ourselves up and hid from God, blamed each other, and began to lie to hide the truth of our unrighteousness.
 3. Why do we do this?
 - a. We, universally, all know the desire to be scrutinized and approved, to be declared righteous, not by our own hearts, but from someone else!
 - i. The ancient kingdoms sought for honor and righteousness through victory in battle, the east through family honor and the fear of shaming the family name, and we have psychologized this unrighteousness in the West as self-esteem, the **glory-suck of our heart’s desire to be scrutinized and approved.**
 - b. **We may look down on battle honor or the fear of shaming one’s family, but they would look down on our over-pursuit of money and the billions of dollars spent on psychotropic medications and plastic surgery.**
 - ii. **Because we were made for God’s righteousness, we all have a deep, innate, intense desire to be scrutinized (known) and approved”, i.e. righteous.**
 1. **When we rejected God’s provision and decided to be our own masters, to decide our own fate, to trust our own wisdom, to submit only to our own desires and thoughts and reason and reject the revealed word of the holy God, we began to feel this sense of unrighteousness, this desperate longing for scrutinized approval that is never satisfied.**
 2. This is the universal problem of unrighteousness.
 - c. How big of a problem is it?
 - i. Every person in every culture in every time struggles with it...**it’s a big problem.**
 - ii. The person that **doesn’t care** at all about being scrutinized and approved, is sociopathic, dangerous, evil. The people that do care are ruled by this because we can never measure up to the standards expected of ourselves or of others, and surely not of God.
 - iii. Thus scrutiny is avoided at all costs, relationships are hollowed out, we become self-protective or deceptively self-righteous, attempting to belittle and destroy others to make ourselves appear *more* righteous.
2. Two Attempts to Solve the Problem
 - a. APPROACH #1: DIY Righteousness (Do-It-Yourself)
 - i. DIY Righteousness is Comparative
 1. The Pharisee distances himself from others, elevating himself above others, thus the parable to **“those who treated others with contempt”**

- a. He separated himself from the others, probably closer to the altar, assuming that he is better than and worthy of being near to the innermost part of the Temple
 - b. Separatism: Sin is something that is outside of me, out there, not in me, and surely not evil
 - i. **If I can avoid this “outer” sin, then I will remain clean**
 - ii. Thus, I separate from those whom I feel would defile me
2. He prays “to himself” or “toward himself” or “with/by himself”
- a. a vague Greek preposition indicating separation with movement towards, or facing towards
 - b. This is a weird construction that usually involves bringing someone or something in close to oneself, only one other times used of internal dialogue or thought
 - i. Luke 24:21 – Peter “**marveled to himself**” at the empty tomb
 - ii. 2 Mac 11:13 – Lysias “**discussing to himself**” that the Hebrews could not be beaten – **likely functional meaning of “reasoning in himself”**
 - c. This shows us that this attitude is not merely externally arrogant, for he is not praying to impress others, but he is impressed in himself quietly, in his own heart
 - i. It is not merely the loud, the bold, or the wordily judgmental that befit the “Pharisee” in this parable
 - ii. It is the heart that feels and believes these things, regardless of their expression to others
3. He lists what differentiates him from others *as the grounds for what makes him acceptable to God*
- a. **He lists what laws of God that he has obeyed (don’t extort, they do, so I’m better, etc.)**
 - i. Robbery, adultery, injustice are sins in the Bible
 - ii. **He states that he is righteousness in regards to God’s revealed Word**
 - b. **But then, surprisingly, he adds something that isn’t in the law – fasting twice a week!**
 - i. This is NOT in the revealed Word of God
 - ii. **He sneaks in this personal preference, this personal “righteousness”, in with the revealed Word of God as if it were the same!**
 1. He has taken a neutral cultural act and elevated to a morally superior act
 2. If we do not entrust our acceptance to Jesus’ person and work, fully approved, then we will do this, too.
 - a. Worship style differences
 - b. We often use these neutral differences and impute moral superiority and inferiority to them
 - i. **It’s not that it’s just different, it’s less than**
 - ii. Less moved, less deep, less *righteous*
 - c. **Self-Righteousness NEEDS others to compare itself to, so that it can be “more” righteous than somebody else**
 - i. The easiest way to appease that hunger for honor is to shame somebody else and then compare yourself to them
 1. **“not like this tax collector!”**
 - a. This is why twitter flourishes and the media always reports on the shameful, negative, failures, etc.
 2. This only works in certain areas, however

3. Notice that the Pharisee chose those externals that he was particularly righteous in and avoided the ones that he was not
- ii. This comparison and the need to boast about our own righteousness is because we *know deep down* that we are not!
 1. Nobody boasts when they are secure in their own strength, they **don't feel a need to announce it and defend it.**
 2. The reason that we boast is because we have to prove it, not only to others (which is true), but also to God and to ourselves
- iii. We have a self-exaltation problem!
 1. In the 18th century there were 23 autobiographies written, in the 19th century there was 175, in the 20th century over 6,000 – an infatuation with self and the inner man as being the foundation of approval
 2. Not just a diary to reflect on external things, but an autobiography to share with others – view of me?
- ii. DIY Righteousness Rejects Any Concept of an Absolute and Utter Need for Salvation
 1. He just looks to God for teaching on how to avoid outer sin
 - a. He has no concept of needing to be saved from his own sin, or even that he has sin within himself at all
 - b. In fact, underneath all the God-talk and professed God-centeredness is a lot of Me-talk and Self-centeredness
 - i. **Look at the prayer: “I thank you, God, that I...”**
 - ii. **How's that for a thank you card?! “Thank you, now let's talk about me!”**
 2. Even though he is not perfect, he *surely* isn't **so evil that he needs rescued**, and thus requests no mercy from God (at the Temple, where sacrifices for sin are being made!)
 - a. This attitude, by far, is the attitude of our culture, and frankly, of many professing Christians in the Church – a rejection of *absolute inability*
 - i. The adoration of the ego, the exaltation of personal power and personality and subjective feeling as basis for approval
 - b. This Pharisee was a *good* man, but he is lost – unjustified
 - i. Remember the parable of the two sons – the good son was lost and the bad son was saved
 - ii. Jesus is teaching the same thing here, because salvation is not contingent upon our goodness, but upon our neediness
- b. APPROACH #2: MVP Righteousness (Mercy Vicariously Provided)
 - i. Scrutinized and Found Lacking
 1. Humiliated in Absolute Need of MERCY
 - a. Stood far away, **wouldn't come near to the altar**
 - i. He knew that he was not worthy to come near to the Lord because he **knew that God's scrutiny revealed no righteousness inside of him**, but merely a deep and abiding NEED for mercy
 - b. Beat his breast and cried out, **“wasn't even willing to lift his eyes to heaven”**
 2. **“THE sinner!”**
 - a. This is biblical repentant faith!
 - i. There is a clear definite article in the original that, for some reason, the translators felt was unnecessary to translate
 - b. He is not comparing himself to anyone else at all, unless it is to say that they are all righteous and he is the only one who is not
 - i. **If you are only thinking of sin externally, outerly, then you're one among many sinners (“we're all sinners”), but never THE sinner**

- ii. This man thinks of his sin only in terms of his own absolute need, he is utterly unconcerned about where others stand
 - iii. See 1 Timothy 1:15 – “I am the foremost sinner...so that by showing mercy to even me God might declare how great His mercy is in Jesus **Christ.**”
 - 3. He knew the law of God and the **scrutiny of God’s eyes and clearly understood that he had no righteousness to declare**
 - a. He knew how to repent not merely of his external sins, but of the heart from which robbery, adultery, injustice spring forth
 - b. Often the reason that we do the good things is be our own savior, our own god, **to control our own destiny and make our own “free choice” so that we are in control**
 - i. **We don’t want to owe God anything, but instead want him to owe us**
 - ii. We want to act as Master, writing off His Word as suggestions and entrusting ourselves to our own hearts instead
 - c. This is the root of the sinful heart: wanting to be in control and trusting our own desires, affections, works, and wisdom to accomplish righteousness
 - i. **It doesn’t matter if one is a good person (Pharisee) or a bad person** (tax collector), the root of the heart is the same: Self-Savior
 - ii. This tax collector gets it, and repents at the heart level, not merely the external level
 - ii. Needing VICARIOUS (Substitute in my place) Atonement
 - 1. **“Be merciful” is the word “Make atonement for my sin!”**
 - a. **Rather than the usual word for “mercy”, *eleeo* (10:47-48), this man uses the word, *hilaskomai*, which means “to make atonement for sins”**
 - i. **The “mercy seat” (*hilasterion*)** was the lid of the Ark of the Covenant, placed in the Holy of Holies, where God met with Man as provided in the Tabernacle and the Temple
 - ii. Inside the Ark of the Covenant was the LAW
 - 1. **You couldn’t approach God** w/o being scrutinized by the Law
 - 2. So, who could stand before God?
 - iii. The MERCY SEAT (*hilasterion*) made it possible when it was sprinkled with the blood of the sacrifice
 - 2. He knows that the only thing that will make him acceptable to God in the light of the scrutiny and deep inner need for mercy is *atonement for his sin*
 - a. This man is not asking God to lower his standards, to look past his sin
 - b. **He is asking God to atone for them, to satisfy the scrutiny of God’s wrath towards his unrighteousness**
 - iii. Asking for God’s Provision
 - 1. He believes that God actually does give mercy!
 - 2. **He is not merely guilty and feeling ashamed under God’s scrutiny and his great need, then running away in fear**
 - 3. He runs TOWARDS God and cries out for mercy, believing that at the place of **atonement he will find God’s great provision** for his need: a substitute for his sins, life for life
- 3. Jesus Was Scrutinized as *Our Sin* to Make Us Accepted by God
 - a. **Jesus was made sin on our behalf, that we might become...the righteousness of God** (2 Cor 5:21)
 - i. Romans 3:25-26 – God made Him the *hilasterion* **through faith in His blood...so that He might be both just and the justifier of the one with faith in Jesus**

- ii. You must know that God loves you so much that He made atonement for you of such a kind that now He can love you and accept you in spite of your sin *because Jesus atoned for your sins*
 - iii. This means that you are accepted NOW, not merely when you die, but NOW you are accepted **when you entrust yourself to Jesus Christ's work on your behalf and His word as Truth**
 - iv. You can be utterly sure that God loves you and accepts you because you are acceptable by the blood of Jesus, not because of your ability to desire rightly, walk uprightly, or do good things
 - v. You can be utterly sure that God sees you all the way down to the darkest of the corners of your heart, which are far darker than you can even fathom, AND He accepts you based upon the blood of Jesus NOW
- b. This is Christian righteousness: the alien righteousness of Jesus Christ *received* by faith
- i. You are declared righteous by God, not because you ARE righteous or actually MADE righteous, but because you have received the "alien" (Luther) righteousness of Christ by faith
 - 1. Jesus, the substitute for your sins is also the righteousness of God *for you*.
 - ii. By faith in Jesus **you can be sure of both God's sure scrutiny of you (he knows you deep down to the bottom) AND** of His acceptance of you
 - 1. Because of Jesus, God is for you, a friend and no longer an enemy, a near and delighted Father (reconciliation)
 - 2. Jesus loves you so much that He did all of this for you, so what have you fear about being scrutinized?
 - a. Let me see how deeply my sinful heart goes, for I am accepted in Jesus Christ!
 - b. **I am a sinner AND I am deeply and utterly accepted...because of Jesus's blood and righteousness**
- c. When you believe this, it changes the way that you live today
- i. HOPE!!
 - 1. There is absolute hope for a broken sinner, a freedom to come to God for mercy AND ALWAYS FIND IT in spite of your own lustful heart
 - 2. **Because you acceptance with God is not based upon your holiness, but upon Jesus', not upon your great faithfulness, but upon His blood to purchase you mercy.**
 - ii. Every command comes from a place of already being accepted by God in Jesus Christ and thus is not a threatening command, but a loving promise of God
 - iii. So, we do not obey God in order to gain His acceptance, but rather we are accepted by God solely because of the *hilasterion* of Jesus, so we obey with joy!
 - 1. When we **get this backwards, trying to be certain of God's approval by performing** obedient works, our obedience is grim and anxious and joyless
 - 2. When we believe that our righteousness is in Christ and that we are approved in Him, then our obedience is joyful, fearless, and winsome.

Conclusion: **In the light of your great need for mercy and God's great provision of grace**, humble yourselves and God will exalt you. Humble, broken-hearted joy is the way the Christian walks. There is always some DIY righteousness in **your heart, even if you understand the gospel, so don't go home today thanking God that you're not like the Pharisee, that legalist!** Instead, pursue this principle of your absolute **need for mercy and God's absolute provision of His mercy** vicariously provided all the way down in Jesus Christ. For, in Him and Him alone, you have been scrutinized all the way down to the bottom and have been approved all the way to the delight of God. Though you and I bring nothing but liabilities to the table of God, Jesus cleans us up and brings the feast. There is a vast pool of grace for you in Jesus. Plunge in!