



**KING'S  
CHURCH**  
EDINBURGH

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# What would Jesus say about self-righteousness?

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## Luke 18: 9-14

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Each of us is naturally inclined towards self-righteousness. Our society runs on the principle that you must earn your way through life. To be accepted, you must behave a certain way, or meet a certain standard. When we apply this way of thinking to how we relate to God, however, we run into major problems because no matter how hard we try, we're not perfect, and He is (Mark 10:18).

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Jesus says 3 things about self-righteousness through our passage:

**1. Self-righteousness makes you focus on yourself instead of God**

- This can lead to **pride** or **despair**.

**2. Self-righteousness is that it loves to compare itself to other people**

- Looking down on others
- Insecurity and worrying about how you measure up to others

**3. Self-righteousness makes you value your external behaviour more than the motives of your heart.**

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Self-righteousness is a major temptation for all of us today, just as it was for Jesus' original listeners in the Gospel of Luke. It was also a defining issue for the church 500 years ago, when the notion that we could earn God's love through good works was challenged by Martin Luther.

Martin Luther started out aspiring to be like the Pharisee in Luke 18, only to find that despite his endless striving, he was no better than a tax collector.

The Catholic church at the time taught that you could only receive God's grace by doing good things and performing religious rituals. Through these, you may someday become a good enough person to be saved. Luther became a monk in an effort to appease God, but soon came to hate God, who he saw as an exacting tyrant setting people up to fail.

Through reading the Bible, Martin Luther came to understand that his salvation was not dependent on his own efforts at all, but on Jesus who lived the perfect life that Luther had not, and then died the death on the cross that Luther deserved, paying the full price for all his wrongdoing. Luther's standing before God, he found, wasn't a position to be earned, but received through faith.

**Martin Luther:** *"God doesn't love us because of our worth. We are of worth because He loves us."*

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## Questions:

- Do you think you are naturally inclined towards 'self-improvement' in general?
- Are you tempted towards trying to earn God's love and favour?
- Why does the tax collector end the story justified by God?
- Why is it unhelpful to focus on what you can do rather than what God has done for you?
- How does self-righteousness lead you into comparing yourself to other people?
- Do you ever slip into seeing spiritual disciplines like praying or reading the Bible as opportunities to earn points with God?
- Did you identify with anything in the story of Martin Luther?
- How does having a correct doctrine of righteousness help us to see God in the right way?
- Do you think the way God sees you fluctuates from day to day? Do you live your

Christian life like the old game with the flower ('He loves me, he loves me not')?

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