

# SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS THE GREATEST SIN

---

LUKE 18:9 • TV082B

A television broadcast sermon delivered

SUNDAY, JANUARY 7<sup>TH</sup>, 1979

By

**HENRY T. MAHAN**

---

Transcribed, edited and published

APRIL 30<sup>TH</sup>, 2017

**HENRY T. MAHAN TAPE LIBRARY**

Zebulon Baptist Church

6088 Zebulon Highway

Pikeville, KY 41501

PH: 606-631-9053

---

## **Luke 18:9**

*“And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.”*

Last week I brought you a message on the subject, “**The Hope of Righteousness or Waiting for Righteousness**, the hope of the believer, righteousness by faith and Christ’s righteousness.

Now, this morning I’m going to bring a second message, really a series of messages on righteousness. And my subject today is: “**SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS YOUR GREATEST ENEMY.**”

Now, I’m not selling sermons or tapes. We have to charge for them because equipment and tapes and supplies are quite expensive and all of you are aware of that.

But these two messages are on the same cassette tape and they’re available if you would like to have them and they only cost \$3.00 for both messages on the same tape. And you write in. The one on Righteousness, Christ’s Righteousness was preached last Sunday morning.

## SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS THE GREATEST SIN

---

LUKE 18:9 • HENRY T. MAHAN

And today I'm going to bring a message on: **“YOUR GREATEST ENEMY, SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS.”**

Now, I want you to turn with me to the **18 chapter of Luke** and let me read just one verse of Scripture, **verse 9**: *“And He (that's Christ we're talking about) spake this parable unto certain who trusted in themselves that they were righteous.”*

Now that's my Scriptural text. That's my foundation. Our Lord spoke to these people and He spoke a story, a parable to them, and He said: “These people to whom He was speaking were people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous.”

Now, we are going to find out what this story was in a moment but I want to make two or three opening comments:

First of all: You actually meet people in this world who deny the existence of God, not a lot of them. There are very few people who really, really, deny that Jesus Christ was born and lived in this earth, upon this earth, and died on a cross, and even rose again.

Secondly: And there are very few people who will really deny that the Bible is an inspired Book. They may argue about divine inspiration or a verbal inspiration or a literal or figurative language. But they will tell you the Bible, at least, contains the Word of God.

Thirdly: Most people believe that there's a heaven and a hell and a judgment to face and an eternity to spend.

In fact, most people, most people to whom you speak, the people you work with, your family, and your neighborhood; they have a religion, they have some religious principles and convictions.

They wouldn't call themselves unbelievers. They would be upset if you referred to them as unbelievers. They have some kind of religious principles and convictions. They have some kind of religious hope, nearly everybody does.

But what is that hope? Well let me tell you this; if you ask the average, the present-day religionist, you ask them “what is your hope for salvation;” and he will reply something like this:

He'll say: “Well; I'm a member of the Baptist church or I'm a member of the Methodist Church or I'm a member of the Catholic Church. That's my hope. I go to church on Sunday. I attend the place of worship.”

“I'm usually there and my attendance record is pretty good.” Or, you hear something like this: “I made a profession of faith many years ago. I joined the church and I've been trying to live a good Christian life.”

## SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS THE GREATEST SIN

LUKE 18:9 • HENRY T. MAHAN

---

Or, they'll answer something like this: "I'm no worse than anybody else. I've live a pretty good life. I pay my debts and I'm good to my family and I mind my own business and I think everything will be all right with me."

Or somebody will say: "Well, I read the Bible and I pray and I go to church." And another says: "Well, I was sprinkled when I was an infant or I was baptized or I made a profession of religion."

All of these different answers, do you know what this is? This is establishing our righteousness. In other words, it's self-righteousness. And it's the subtle way of Satan to deceive you and to deceive everybody he can.

It's a false assurance. It's a false refuge. It's a false comfort and one old write said: "It's a soul destroying snare and trap employed by Satan to oppose the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."

This was the sin of the Pharisees. They said: "*We be not sinners.*" This was the sin of Saul of Tarsus; he said: "*Concerning the law I was blameless.*"

This was the sin of Israel. Paul wrote in **Romans chapter 10**: "*They're going about to establish their own righteousness.*" And this is the sin that is condemning more people than all the sins of the flesh combined and that's the sin of self-righteousness.

Do you know one of the rarest things that you will ever encounter? It's a man who will plainly declare when you ask him this question: "What is your hope of salvation, what is your hope of redemption and what is your hope for eternal life?"

This is the rarest individual you will ever encounter; it's the man who answers something like this: "I'm such a great sinner. My sins are ever before me. If God almighty shows mercy to me it'll have to be through the merits of His Son for I have no merits of my own."

It will have to be by the righteousness of His Son for I have no righteousness. "*My righteousness's are filthy rags.*" If God almighty saves me it'll have to be by the sacrifice of His Son.

**"My only hope, my only plea  
Is that when Jesus Christ died on that cross  
He died for me."**

Now, that's rare. When you ask someone, what is your hope for salvation, what is your hope for eternal life; it's rare that they ever mention Christ.

They'll tell you about an experience that they had. They'll tell you about a dream that they had. They'll tell you about a profession they made. They'll tell you about works they've done.

## SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS THE GREATEST SIN

---

LUKE 18:9 • HENRY T. MAHAN

They'll tell you about church membership they hold. They'll tell you about tithes that they paid. They'll tell you about journeys that they've made. They'll tell you about alms that they've given.

They'll tell you about all of these things, but rarely will you ever find an individual who will base his hope for mercy on Christ and his hope for cleansing on the blood and his hope for grace on the mercy of God, rarely, you just rarely find it.

Now, I know you're familiar with Scriptures like these. They are in the Bible and you know they're in the Bible but the average religionist has not experienced them.

Listen: *"As in Adam all died."* We know that's there but we've never experienced that. *"In Adam all died. In Christ we are made alive."* That's the Gospel right there, representation and substitution.

When Adam stood we stood. When Adam sinned we sinned. When he fell, we fell. When he died, we died, enemies of God, separated from God's presence.

When Christ came to earth we stood in Him, we lived in Him, and we met the law in Him. We died in Him. We were buried in Him, risen in Him, and seated with Him. *"As we have borne the image of the earthy, (Adam) so we shall bear the image of the heavenly, (Christ)."*

We know those Scriptures but why doesn't someone answer that when you ask, "What is your hope?" Listen to this Scripture: *"All we like sheep have gone astray. We've turned everyone to his own way and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."*

*"He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him. By His stripes we're healed."* Who would like to hear that some time when I ask a man: "What is your hope for eternal life?"

Instead of him telling me about an experience he had; tell me about an experience through which Christ went. Instead of him telling me about a decision he made and the works he's done; tell me about the cross and the blood. That's what Isaiah said. We read those things.

How about this one: *"Not by works of righteousness which we've done but according to his mercy hath he saved us with the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost."*

How about this verse? *"By the disobedience of one we were made sinners. By the obedience of one shall we be made righteous."* What about this in **1 Peter 1:18**: *"For as much as you know you were not redeemed with corruptible things such as silver and gold from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers but with the precious blood of Christ as a lamb without blemish or spot."*

## SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS THE GREATEST SIN

---

LUKE 18:9 • HENRY T. MAHAN

I'll tell you what's wrong; the true remedy for sin will not be sought until the disease of sin has been diagnosed. The true remedy for sin, the true cleansing fountain, the true atonement, will not be sought diligently and earnestly by any sinner, until he needs it.

The lost are going to be found; they're going to be found. Sinners are going to be saved. The broken heart is going to be healed. The mourner is going to be comforted. The hungry and the thirsty are going to be filled.

But here's our problem; men don't need mercy, they're not sinners; just ask them. Listen to this verse of Scripture in **Job 33:27**: *He looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not.*" You'll have to pull a fellow's fingernail out to get him to say that in this generation.

"Well, I'm not as bad as so and so. I may not be the best fellow in the world but I'm not the worst. But now listen to God's language: *"If any man say I have sinned and perverted that which is right; it profiteth me not. He will deliver his soul from going down into the pit and his life shall see the light."*

Listen to these verses of scriptures with which you are so familiar. You could quote them to me: **1 John 1:8 -10**; listen: *"If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truths not in us. But if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. But if we say we have not sinned we make him a liar and his Word is not in us."*

The reason men do not seek mercy is they do not feel their need of mercy. The reason men are not aware of the grace of God is because they are not aware of their guilt before God.

David's Psalm of repentance is strange language to most of us. Listen to **David in Psalm 51:1**: *"Have mercy upon me O God according to thy tender mercies, according to thy loving kindness, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity. Cleanse me from my sins. I acknowledge my transgressions. My sin is ever before me."*

No sir; that's not our language but that's Scriptural language and that's the language of everybody with whom God dealt in mercy and grace. And that's the language of everybody whom the Lord came to save.

He said: *"The sacrifices of God are a broken heart and a contrite spirit and the Lord saveth such as be of a broken heart and a contrite spirit."*

And the great sin that keeps men from God today is not the sin of drunkenness. You can drive all over the cities in this United States and close all the taverns and put all the boot-leggers out of business and people will still go to hell because the self-righteousness is keeping them from God.

It's not the gambling den. It's not the picture show. It's not the dance hall. It's not these things. These are not the sins that are keeping men from God. No man is too great a sinner to be saved.

## SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS THE GREATEST SIN

LUKE 18:9 • HENRY T. MAHAN

---

But there are some folks too good to be saved. That's right! There's some folks too good to be saved.

You follow our Lord in His ministry on this earth and you tell me the people with whom He dealt. He said: *"The Son of man has come to seek and to save the lost. Christ died for the ungodly."* He dealt with sinners. His harshest words were for the moral, religious, self-righteous Pharisees. He called them *"a generation of vipers (snakes)."*

He called them hypocrites. He said, *"They may clean the outside of the cup and the inside is full of dead men's bones."* He called them, *"Whited sepulcher's; they appear beautiful on the outside but on the inside they were full of extortion and excess."*

And our Lord's kindest words were to the Publicans and the harlots and the sinners. He came to save them. He came to die for sinners. *"He's able to save to the uttermost them that come to God by him."* He said, *"Though your sins be as scarlet I'll make them white as snow. Though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool."*

The thing that is keeping you from God is your goodness not your sin!

But you have no sin, therefore, you need no Saviour, therefore you have no Saviour. And therefore, you'll stand before God someday and be judged not by your standard of holiness but by His perfect holy standard which is His almighty, eternal, immutable, infinite glory, and you will come short of that.

And our Lord spake a parable to these folks and this parable reads like it was spoken yesterday. You turn to **Luke 18: verses 9-14**. This is for our day. It's so full of instruction and so full of meaning for our day that it might have been spoken this morning.

Our Lord Jesus Christ might have given us this this morning for this generation for false religion and self-righteousness keeps the sinner apart from the Saviour. That's the reason they don't tell them is because they don't need Him.

But now you listen to this; here it is, I'll give you about five or six points so you can remember the story.

**First of all:** We see this: *"Our Lord spake this parable to certain who trusted in themselves that they were righteous."*

He said, "That two men went to church, that is two men went up to the temple to pray." Now, both of these men went to the temple. Both of these men, from all other appearances went to the temple to engage in religious activities. That sounds like us going to church on Sunday morning.

You get out here in Huntington, Ashland, Beckley, Parkersburg, or some of these cities and you see all these folks on Sunday morning in their cars. They are all going to church. There are churches all over the place and they are going to church.

## SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS THE GREATEST SIN

---

LUKE 18:9 • HENRY T. MAHAN

Well, these two fellows went to church. Both of them believed in God, both of them. Both of them walked the same road. They came in the same front door. Both of them went into the House of God.

Both of them engaged in the form of prayer and both of them engaged in the form of religious worship. But these two men are as different as Cain and Abel. They're as different as light and dark.

Now here they are in the same building, in the same temple, doing the same thing, praying and worshipping. Both of them believe in God, but they're different.

All right, two different men. Our Lord said, "Two men went to church but one was a Pharisee and the other was a Publican." Now my friend; it's impossible to imagine a more striking contrast in the eyes and opinions of this Jewish congregation than a Pharisee and a Publican.

It's just impossible to imagine a greater contrast. The Pharisee was the most religious man of his day. Somebody said one time back in these days; "If two men go to heaven, one of them will be a Scribe and one of them will be a Pharisee."

These Pharisees were the strictest of the religionists of their day. They kept the Sabbath. They engaged in ceremonies. They kept all the rituals. They knew all the traditions. These men would take the Scriptures and stand out on the street corner and read them and they would pray on the street corners to be seen of men.

These were moral men, these were pious men. These were men that made broad their phylacteries. These were men that would have Scripture verses written on their caps and all these things. They were most religious. That's the Pharisees.

The other men were the Publicans. Now, to the Jew he had a disgraceful office. Do you know what his office was? Usually these Publicans were Roman tax collectors. They were the scum of society.

These men were ruthless. They were collecting taxes. The Jews hated badly enough to pay all these taxes but they had enough of their own people come and collect them and over collect them.

They always added to the taxes so they could get something for themselves called, "a gift." We know something about that in this day, the 5% extra, the 10% extra, something like for personal use.

Our Lord talking about the Publicans and how people disliked them; He said, "*If a man will not hear the church let him be to you as a heathen and a publican.*"

## SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS THE GREATEST SIN

LUKE 18:9 • HENRY T. MAHAN

---

Now, those are the two men. Our Lord said, “Two men went to church; two men went to the temple to pray.” One of them was a Pharisee. He was a denominational leader. He was a well-taught man in the Bible. He was a moral man. He was a tither. He was a faster. He was a man who was most religious.

The other man; now listen to me, this parable is for our day, it’s for this self-righteous day when men are seeking approval and acceptance by God on the basis of what they’ve done in religion. He said, “The other is a Publican,” an extreme comparison, extreme contrast.

**Second:** Notice these two men. Both went to church. They were different in character. They were different also in their approach to God

Now the Amplified Bible says: “The Pharisee came in and he took his stand ostentatiously.” He was down near the front. He felt like he belonged there. He felt like he was part of this religious organization. He felt like he paid his dues you know. He felt like he’s as good as anybody there or better than most of them.

He felt very well versed in the Scriptures. He felt like a very righteous man and he went right down to the front and he began to lift his hands, holy hands in prayer. He began to lift his eyes to heaven.

He had a smug expression on his face and a satisfied feeling in his heart and he begins to pray with himself; “God I thank you I’m not like other men. I thank you God I’m not like other men, extortioner, adulterer, unjust. I’m not like that.”

“I’m not even like that Publican back there. Lord; I fast, you know that, twice a week. And Lord I pay tithes of all that I possess. I wouldn’t rob God. I pay my tithes strictly. If I’m late, \$13.00; you get \$1.30 cents. If I make \$150.00 you get \$15.00. I tithe everything I possess.”

There he stands, there he stands. He told them the truth too. Yes sir, he was telling the truth. He was not an unjust man outwardly. He was not an extortioner outwardly. He was not an adulterer outwardly.

He did fast. He did pray. He did read the Bible. He did give alms and he let God know about it and everybody else too. That’s generally the way self-righteous Pharisees do; they want everybody to know about their good works you know.

They want everybody to know what they’ve done this week and how many times they’ve prayed, and how much Scripture they’ve read. That’s the reason they like all this counting and raising hands you know and letting folks see what they have done.

But the Publican, the other man; now this is the tax collector; this disgraceful fellow into this disgraceful occupation; he wouldn’t come down front. The Scripture says: “He stood at a distance.” He was ashamed. He was ashamed of himself and of his sins.



## SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS THE GREATEST SIN

LUKE 18:9 • HENRY T. MAHAN

---

He was guilty, he was embarrassed. He didn't feel like he belonged. He felt like a sinner. He felt dirty, he felt filthy, and he felt before God that he had no right to be there. He wouldn't lift his hands to heaven, the Scripture says, "*he wouldn't lift so much as his eyes to heaven.*"

So he stood back there in the corner and he just smote upon his breast. Somebody said he felt like that his source of his whole problem was his heart, his depraved, wretched heart, and he just beat on that heart; he just beat on that heart.

And this is what he said; listen to him, listen to the two men different in their prayers, different in their prayers, different in their character, different in their approach, and different in their prayers.

Listen to him: "*O God, be merciful to me the sinner* (not be just, because he knows if God gave him justice He's damn him), *be merciful.*" The Pharisee asked for justice. He said: "Lord; I want you to reward me for what I've done. I've served you admirably, I've served you courageously, I've served you faithfully, and I've served you loyally. I've kept your Word, now you reward me."

But not this man: "*O God be merciful to me.*" And someone tells us that's a definite article there, the sinner. "There's not another one like me. I'm the chief of sinners." That's the language of Saul of Tarsus, "*chief of sinners,*" who later became Paul the apostle.

This man; do you know what he was actually saying according to the original translation of Scripture? "O God make a propitiation, O God offer an atonement for me on the mercy seat;" that's what he's saying. "O God be reconciled to me by the sacrifice which thou hast appointed." Now there he is.

Can you find today's religion in either of these men? Can you find yourself? "*Our Lord spake this parable to certain who trusted in themselves.*" Which one sounds like you? Which one sounds like your pastor?

Which one sounds like the deacon down at your church, or the elder, or the steward? Which one sounds like the congregation which you worship? "God I thank you I'm not like others," lifting our hands and our eyes, ostentatiously to glory in ourselves.

Thanking God how good we are, how we don't go to the picture show, we don't curse, we don't drink, we don't gamble, we don't swear, we don't dance, we don't play cards, and we don't bowl. We don't do this and we don't that. We thank you God!

How many people do you hear cry; "O God; let thy blood be propitiation for me on the mercy seat, the chief of sinners?"

I'm going to shock you here because the Bible is a shocking Book. Two men leave church. One of them leaves accepted by God. The other leaves eternally damned. Do you want to pick out which one?

## SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS THE GREATEST SIN

LUKE 18:9 • HENRY T. MAHAN

---

Well now, the average person would say: “If there’s anybody in heaven it’s that Pharisee. Why he tithed and gave alms, and fasted. He wasn’t an adulterer, he wasn’t unjust. He wasn’t an extortioner. And if anybody is going to heaven surely it will be that man.”

Well, you missed it. Our Lord said: “It was the other fellow that went home justified.” Look at it yourself there **in Luke 18:9-14**. These men left the temple.

The Pharisee came to the temple. He came rich in merit and rich in self-esteem, rich himself, and righteousness, and he went away empty under the judgment of God because judged him on the very ground he chose to stand on.

He chose to stand on his merit and it wasn’t enough. He chose to stand on his holiness and he wasn’t holy enough. He chose to stand on his righteousness and it wasn’t righteous enough. He chose to stand on his deeds and they weren’t good enough and God condemned him.

The other man chose to approach God as a sinner. He chose to approach God empty handed. He chose to approach God as a needy sinner and God did what He said He’d do. “*Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest: Ho everyone that thirsteth; come to the water and drink.*” That’s right!

“*Though your sins be as scarlet; I’ll make them white as snow. Come to me.*” And that’s what happened to that sinner. God justified him in the Lord Jesus Christ. That’s the way I’m coming, like that Publican.

**“In my hands no price I bring  
Simply to the cross of Christ I cling  
Could my tears forever flow?  
Could my zeal no languor know?  
These for sin could never atone  
Christ must save and Christ alone.”**

And the word unto every Pharisee that comes to a Holy God boasting of what you are, what you know, and what you have! He went home condemned in his self-righteousness. He justified himself and was condemned.