

Are You Self-Righteous?

We all have a deep need to feel all right. And we can spend a lot of time and energy trying to do things that make us feel like we're OK—OK with ourselves, with others and even God. But we don't need to wear ourselves out trying to be right with God through our own effort. The truth is we can't make our lives right on our own, but we *can* receive the righteousness of God by putting our faith in Christ.

Romans 3:20 says, "Therefore by the works of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin." That means the reason God established the law was to show us how much we need a Savior who can make us righteous before Him.

Self-righteousness is believing we are made right with God through our own works. For example, a person might think, "Well, if I read through my Bible every year, then God will be pleased with me." But the truth is we don't have to read our Bible to please God; we read it because it helps us in our everyday life. It's for our own good. In the same way, my preaching doesn't make me a righteous person. The only way we are made righteous (right with God) is by having faith in Jesus Christ—it's not something we can ever earn in our own effort.

I used to really struggle with self-righteousness. Many years ago somebody came to the church I was attending and suggested that we all read through the Bible in a year. The pastor got on board, and every Sunday he'd ask, "Who's been doing your Bible reading?" Well, I didn't want to be the one not standing up, so I got really serious about it.

We all got a calendar so we could check off the days we read the chapters. I put it up on the refrigerator so everybody who came in would ask me what it was, and I was so proud. As long

as I had all my checkmarks, I liked that calendar. But then I got 36 chapters behind and had these big, gaping holes! It was like a nightmare for me.

So one day I decided I was going to catch up, and I zipped right through the chapters. And honestly, when I closed my Bible I felt so relieved. But then I almost immediately heard the Holy Spirit say to me, "So, tell Me, what did you learn?" And I realized I could not remember *one* thing!

God taught me an important lesson that day. He would rather we read one verse and actually get something out of it and connect with Him than read 36 chapters and learn nothing. The point is we need to have the right motives for the things we do and stop making laws out of tasks that make us feel better about ourselves but are unfruitful.

In 2 Corinthians 5:21 Paul writes, "God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Every day of my life I say, "I am the righteousness of God in Christ." Now, I'm not righteous because I do everything right. No one is perfect, and none of us do everything right. The Bible says in 1 John 1:8, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

You might say, "Well, Joyce, shouldn't we try to do what's right?" Absolutely! God wants us to live through faith in Christ. Then, as we have a personal relationship with Him, we'll do the right thing by His grace because we *want* to do the right thing. He puts the desire in us to do what's right.

In Philippians 3:3 Paul explains that "we are the circumcision who worship God in the Spirit, and boast in Christ Jesus, and place no trust in the flesh." He says he obeyed the law without fault, and if any person had a reason to have confidence in himself by the law's standard, he had more of a reason than anyone.

In verses 7-9 of that chapter, Paul goes on to say, "But what things were gain to me, I have counted these things to be loss for the sake of Christ. Yes, certainly, I count everything as loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have forfeited the loss of all things and count them as rubbish that I may gain Christ, and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is of God on the basis of faith."

Paul is saying in order to have a relationship with Christ, he had to be willing to gather up all of his accomplishments and the things he had worked so hard for and be willing to get rid of them all. That's because it's nothing but trash compared to the priceless privilege of knowing Christ as our Lord and Savior.

Yes, what we do matters, but our good works do not make us acceptable to God. We are only made right with Him by putting our faith in Jesus Christ. And when we put our faith in Christ, we can rest in knowing that everything is all right.

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