

Self-Righteousness And How To Overcome It

To attempt to tell you how to overcome self-righteousness is in itself very presumptuous.

I do not know of anyone who has overcome self-righteousness completely who is qualified to speak on this subject.

Yet I do speak with authority for I am one of the most self-righteous people who have ever lived, not was, but am.

Here are the reasons that I speak to you on this subject.

1) We need to see the subtlety of self-righteousness.

Luke 18:11-12 [NIV] *“The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: God, I thank you that I am not like other men, robbers, evildoers, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.”*

This is un-subtle self-righteousness, obvious for all to see.

If only all self-righteousness was so un-subtle.

If we think we are not self-righteousness we have no objectivity about ourselves.

That is, we do not have the ability to stand aside from ourselves and view ourselves as others see us.

2) We need to see the danger of self-righteousness.

Self-righteousness is what is most obnoxious in God's eyes, He does not like it at all. Strangely, it is also obnoxious in our sight as well when we see it in others.

3) We need to see self-righteousness in ourselves.

We have to learn the signs, see the danger signals.

We have to close the time gap between the moment of our sin and the moment we recognise we have sinned.

The sin of self-righteousness is so subtle that for some it may take years to see it in ourselves, for others months, for some weeks, days, hours, minutes or seconds.

Perhaps if we can narrow the time gap to seconds we may see it coming and avoid the sin, this must be our goal.

4) Self-righteousness is what stops us from maturing as Christians.

It was self-righteousness that prevented us from becoming converted in the first place.

Our self-righteous feeling of self-sufficiency blinds us to our need of a Saviour.

Until we climb down from our self-righteous attitude and admit we need a Saviour we will not mature through our relationship with God.

Self-righteousness is one of the attitudes that grieves the Holy Spirit and causes His special presence to depart from us.

Until we realise we are **not** going to enter the Kingdom of God clothed **only** in our own righteousness but desperately need to be credited with Christ's righteousness, we will **not** be saved from eternal death.

We only enter God's Heavenly Kingdom because Jesus Christ paid our debts and His righteousness is credited to us.

No righteous acts on our part [self-righteousness] will ever gain us entry into the Kingdom of Heaven.

What keeps us from true conversion, which is a one time change [repentance] and a life-long process [maturing spiritually] is that we feel we can prove our worth to God and don't need a Mediator.

5) Self-righteousness is what puts other people off Christianity.

It is the spirit of self-righteousness that causes people to reject the Church of God.

We need then to see self-righteousness in ourselves and deal with it so that others will not have our self-righteousness.

Self-righteousness in church members is a reason for many not to join a church fellowship.

People who know we claim to be Christians and yet see in us a self-righteous smugness are repulsed by this hypocrisy.

6) Self-righteousness is what causes tensions in relationships.

Self-righteousness causes people to "stick to their views" and express contempt to the views that others may hold.

The one who has to "*climb down*" is often the one who is self-righteousness, and that is painful to do.

The problem then is that if we do admit we are self-righteous we feel good about ourselves and become self-righteous by admitting we are self-righteous!

Perhaps we are beginning to see how difficult it is going to be to tackle this sin of self-righteousness!

7) Self-righteousness is the greatest obstacle to true spirituality.

Immorality is no small obstacle to true spirituality but self-righteousness greater.

Immorality is an obvious sin but self-righteousness is easy to see in others but hard to recognise in ourselves.

What do we mean when we talk about self-righteousness?

It is a feeling of well-being whether conscious or unconscious, that comes as a result of justifying ourselves.

Self-justification.

If we seek to be justified before God by our own works, we feel good about it, this is the feeling of self-righteousness.

When we know we have “*got it right*” we have this smugness that is self-righteousness, and we cannot be told anything.

When I’m this way, whatever you say you cannot convince me that I’m wrong.

We justify ourselves by defending our works, actions or words.

We want to live godly lives and know we have “*got it right*” but this can lead to a smugness that is self-righteous.

1 John 3:18-21 [NIV] *“Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God.”*

When we respond to God’s love for us by seeking to reflect that love towards others, we often fail and feel depressed.

Then we accept God’s forgiveness and feel we are pleasing God and are bold in our approach to Him.

This swing of feeling can end up with our being self-righteous, believing we have a “*hot line*” to God that others don’t have.

Jeremiah 17:9 [NIV] *“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”*

It is because our heart is deceitful that we can so easily become self-righteous without being conscious of this sinful attitude.

This is why self-righteousness is such a very difficult subject to understand.

The goal of this study is that we will end up becoming a little less self-righteous and hence more easy for others to live with.

Why is self-righteousness dangerous?

a) Self-righteousness leads to division

Self-righteousness is what separates Christians, each group feels that they are right while others are not.

Self-righteousness separates friends as one tries to impose what they feel is right on another.

b) Self-righteousness is difficult to see in ourselves

when we say “*I can’t help being this way when I am right*”.

If we do feel we have “*got it right*” then how do we avoid being self-righteous?

c) Self-righteousness makes us become un-teachable

d) Self-righteousness makes us become defensive

e) Self-righteousness grieves the Holy Spirit ...

We lose His special presence or anointing.

Without this special presence of the Holy Spirit we are left to our own ability and have no power to speak with authority, and have no peace of mind.

Examples of being self-righteous

As I give these examples I would like you to tick off any that you feel might apply to you.

If they don't apply to you, don't worry, but if I should happen to say anything that applies to you make a note "well, he got me there".

1 Being judgmental is a sign of self-righteousness

How many of us have this problem?

Matthew 7:1-5 [NIV] ***"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."***

The reason Jesus stated this fact this way is that we never get the plank out of our own eye, we are never totally without the ability to sin.

So we can never judge another person on their motive or their spiritual standing.

Self-righteousness is basically what lies behind the pointing of the finger

Isaiah 58:2-3 [NIV] ***"For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them. 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?' "Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers."***

Here is described a group of people who outwardly are very religious and God-fearing yet their prayers and humility were **not** being noticed by God.

Isaiah 58:4-5 [NIV] ***"Your fasting ends in quarrelling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?"***

God even says that you even find personal pleasure in your fasting, and make a great outward show of your religious activities.

Isaiah 58:6-9 [NIV] ***"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter, when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. "If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk,"***

Note the summary of the real spiritual fast.

To do away with the pointing of the finger and stop any malicious talk.

We may be able to live a day without food and drink but can we go for one whole day without pointing the finger [being judgmental] or malicious words [gossip]?

Are any of us at this moment trying to get God's attention, praying with all our might yet not receiving answers to our heartfelt prayers?

Perhaps we should have a "*no pointing of the finger and no gossip day*".

Could we do it, just 24 hours of such a fast?

Why do we judge?

We have this feeling that somehow we are qualified in ourselves to judge others.

This stems from the feeling that we are right and others are not.

Not being judgmental does not mean we do not make righteous judgements.

John 7:24 [NIV] "*Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgement.*"

Be honest with ourselves, endeavour to judge the merit of **our** actions not from first impressions as they may be made out of our prejudices.

Proverbs 3:5 [NIV] "*Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;*"

The basis of righteous judgement will be God's Law, His righteousness not the product of our own thinking.

What is being discussed is our **own** actions **not** the motives and spiritual standing of another person.

Luke 6:37-38 [NIV] "*Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*"

We want God's merciful judgement and Jesus is telling us we will receive this mercy from God in the **same measure** as we extend merciful judgement to others.

I know I need mercy in "a good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over."

Now be honest, is anyone reading this not judgmental and never "points the finger"?

2) Being defensive is a sign of self-righteousness

1 Corinthians 1:12 [NIV] "*What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ."*

This was being defensive about their own doctrines and lifestyle.

The greatest freedom is having nothing to prove.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 [NIV] *“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”*

While we are in the flesh and not the spirit we feel a need to prove as righteous, our beliefs, actions and words.

When we are full of the Holy Spirit that need disappears.

Psalms 94:22-23 [NIV] *“But the LORD has become my fortress, and my God the rock in whom I take refuge. He will repay them for their sins and destroy them for their wickedness; the LORD our God will destroy them.”*

Psalms 5:11-12 [NIV] *“But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you. For surely, O LORD, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favour as with a shield.”*

Whenever we seek to defend ourselves we inevitably point to the righteousness of our works or conduct.

Such an approach violates the promise that God will do the defending, we compete with God’s desire to defend His children.

Such an attitude of self-defence is self-righteousness.

3) When we are argumentative we show our self-righteousness

There are some who by nature are argumentative.

Romans 3:19-20 [NIV] *“Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. **Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.**”*

Paul was putting an end to the argumentative attitude of those who wanted righteousness through obeying all of the law.

God’s Word is not something to be argued over, it is to be obeyed.

An argumentative attitude springs from resentment, bitterness or pride, all of which are obnoxious to God.

Romans 9:20-21 [NIV] *“But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? “Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’” Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?”*

We do not “talk back to God”; we as the “clay” are in no position to argue with the “Potter”, our Creator God.

Some people are able to hold back the argumentative attitude and outwardly seem very calm and accepting people but inside there is a “volcano” ready to erupt at any time.

This argumentative attitude will come out in fault finding and being critical of others.

The need to be argumentative, to prove our point, has self-righteousness as its root, whether the person realises this fact or not.

4) Smugness is an attitude of self-righteousness

Smugness is a feeling of self-righteousness whereby a person doesn't think but knows they have "got it right" and that they are a "notch" above other people.

Revelation 3:17 [NIV] *"You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realise that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked."*

The people thought they had "made it", nobody could tell them anything.

Revelation 3:18 [NIV] *"I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see."*

They failed to see or acknowledge their self-righteousness, they needed their eyes to be opened.

This is the type of person who never complains, never explains, never apologises and never comes to terms with their own heart [what drives and motivates their lifestyle].

They are totally un-teachable.

This type of person wears a mask to cover the deep fears of being found out by others to be less than they seem outwardly to be.

This mask is made up of everything from their accent to being legalistic.

5) Holding a grudge is a sign of self-righteousness

Ephesians 4:30-31 [NIV] *"And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice."*

Bitterness is what grieves the Holy Spirit most.

An unforgiving spirit portrays that we have forgotten our own need for forgiveness for our sins.

Such a spirit portrays that we do not feel forgiven, which results in our feeling guilty, and our seeking to blame someone else for that feeling.

Whenever we hold a grudge we always feel we have a right to feel that way, this is self-righteousness.

How do we know when we **no** longer feel bitter towards the other person who may have wronged us?

When we **no** longer want that person to be punished for what they have done and pray from our heart that they will **not** be punished.

As long as we are still hoping that that person will "get what is coming to them" we are still holding a grudge and in the grip of a spirit of bitterness.

Matthew 5:44-48 [NIV] *"But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the un-righteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."*

Jesus didn't mean that we pray that our enemies will be punished but that they will not receive the punishment they deserve.

Is this not what we hope we will receive?

Mercy not our deserved punishment?

That our sins will be covered and not exposed for all to see.

If we want another's sins to be found out we are telling God, whether we realise it or not, how we want Him to deal with us.

6) Referring to our good works is self-righteous

Matthew 6:1-4 [NIV] “Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. “So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honoured by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

This need to let others know what “we have done for God” is a powerful desire, we all have great difficulty in not allowing such things to “slip out” in general conversation.

In a restaurant that was frequented by many Christians for a meal after services a lady was going from one table to another talking to those eating their meal.

At last she arrived at our table and commenced to tell us all she had done for God in that last week: visiting the sick, praying for those in need, etc., and she finished by saying “*the best thing about it is not telling others.*”

But we knew that she had let everyone else know in the whole restaurant!

Often we boast of our righteous works **not** realising we are doing it.

This urge to tell others may be about our trials and how we have dignified them by coming through without losing faith.

Or about our spiritual experiences that others may envy us.

Or the gifts of the Spirit we have received.

All such revelation is the product of our self-righteousness.

7) To claim we have no sin is self-righteous

1 John 1:8 [NIV] “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.”

There is nothing in God's Word more clear and precise than this statement of truth.

One of the most dangerous things about self-righteousness is its blinding power to our own sins.

Murderers and adulterers cannot see that they have done anything wrong.

Just as easy to overlook is bitterness, gossip and complaining.

Whether it is sins of the flesh or sins of the spirit it is all too easy for us to be unaware of them.

Jeremiah 17:9 [NIV] *“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”*

Our self-righteousness is the product of this deceitful mind, we see no wrong in our sinful actions.

The closer we are to God the more sensitive we are to our sins.

But if we allow ourselves to drift away from His presence our deceitful and self-righteous mind will blind us to our sins.

8) Self-pity is a sign of self-righteousness

Self-pity is self-righteousness because we are saying “I don’t deserve what is happening to me.”

What is it that we think we do deserve?

Self-pity is an easy trap to fall into, perhaps when we see it as self-righteousness we can avoid it and run from it.

9) Not forgiving ourselves is a sign of self-righteousness

1 John 1:9 [NIV] *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”*

This is a promise from God, conditional only on our confessing our sins.

[Each sin must be confessed individually because we committed them one at a time, a “blanket” confessing does not count, we need to be specific.]

We may say *“I know that God forgives my sins but I can’t forgive myself for what I’ve done, letting down my Creator in the way I did!”*

Perhaps we haven’t thought this attitude through.

What we are saying is that we know better than God what is forgivable.

That is self-righteousness.

God does not like it when we do **not** affirm what He has done.

When God forgives, He wants us to enjoy that freedom from guilt and we will never do that as long as we are punishing ourselves by not forgiving ourselves.

What God affirms we must affirm, what God forgives we must forgive, this includes our own selves.

If we don’t, we are in competition with God and full of self-righteousness.

Not forgiving ourselves is not taking the Blood of Christ seriously enough.

Psalm 103:11-12 [NIV] *“For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.”*

10) The feeling that God owes us something is totally self-righteous

Do we feel we have sacrificed for God?

Do we feel God has got to bless us because of all we have done for Him?

Romans 9:20 [NIV] *“But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? “Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’”*

The heart of self-righteousness is to feel that God owes us something and He needs to explain why these trials are coming on us when we have been so faithful to Him.

This is the way the unbeliever rationalises.

If we do this we are right back to square one.

For this is the way the atheist reasons.

The atheist says *“why doesn’t God explain Himself, why He allows so much pain, suffering and evil in this world when He claims to be a loving God?”*

The feeling that God owes us something is a weapon of Satan, especially if we feel it is because of something we have done.

Such an attitude is pompous and arrogant.

The first thing we as sinners ask for is mercy, for we have no argument or defence before our Creator God.

Luke 18:13-14 [NIV] *“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

Christians never “outgrow” the need for asking for mercy.

Never allow the thought to enter our minds that God owes us anything.

“I’ve given all this up for you God and look what has happened to me?”

“God, I’ve paid my tithes and look what has happened to my car!”

“I resisted that temptation and now I’ve lost my job.”

God doesn’t like such an attitude for it is self-righteous, for we are always in the need of mercy from God.

11) The feeling of guilt is a sign of self-righteousness

Genesis 45:3-5 [NIV] *“Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still living?” But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence. Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come close to me.” When they had done so, he said, “I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and **do not be angry with yourselves** for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.”*

Joseph told his brothers not to be angry with themselves.

Why?

Joseph was showing God’s mercy and love.

1 Corinthians 13:4-5 [NIV] *“Love ... keeps no record of wrong.”*

When we have **not** torn up the record of our own wrongs we are **not** affirming the love God has for us.

This allows Satan to use our guilty feeling to make us depressed and feel we have no worth to our Creator God.

God does not want us to feel guilty.

When we don't forgive others we try to punish them by giving them a "guilty trip".

If God has **not** forgiven **only then** would He want us to feel guilty, **but when He does forgive us He wants us to enjoy the feeling of freedom.**

Two levels of self-righteousness

a) The non-Christian level of self-righteousness

Luke 18:11-12 [NIV] *"The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'"*

This is **not** a Christian speaking yet at times a Christian may talk the same way or at least allow such thoughts to remain in our mind.

When a Christian does this he becomes self-righteous.

We need to remember we are born this way.

All people are self-righteous by nature, and on top of this is the devil who wants to keep us in this attitude of mind.

2 Corinthians 4:4 [NIV] *"The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."*

Non-Christians, those not yet brought to repentance and converted, are blind to the glory [holiness] of Christ and do not know God.

Non-Christians are also blinded to the need for the gospel message, they do **not** think they need God or His mercy.

If this blindness to their sin can happen to non-Christians, then we who are also still in "the flesh" like them, can experience the same blindness to sin, of which self-righteousness is a major part.

Blindness to the sin of self-righteousness can happen in measure to Christians.

Every Christian is only a hair breadth away from being blinded to our sins by Satan once again, especially the sin of self-righteousness.

The reason people do not become Christians is self-righteousness and the same self-righteousness can cause us to stop being Christians.

Start being Christ like for their was no self-righteousness in Jesus Christ.

Philippians 2:1-8 [NIV] *"If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves."*

Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!”

It was the fellowship of the Son of Man Jesus and the Holy Spirit [God] that produced the non self-righteousness in Jesus the Son of Man.

Our submitting to and fellowship with the Holy Spirit will bring about the same attitude of mind that Jesus the Son of Man had, an attitude that was devoid of self-righteousness.

Before anyone can be saved they have to see the need of a Saviour and self-righteousness blinds them to that need.

The need for forgiveness through repentance and the blood of Jesus Christ and the receiving of Christ’s righteousness through faith.

b) The Christian level of self-righteousness

1 Corinthians 4:8 [NIV] *“Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings – and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you!”*

This was godly sarcasm.

As far as we can tell this letter was written only four years after the church at Corinth was formed.

In that short time some in the Corinthian church thought they knew more than Paul.

They could not be told anything, for they had become super-spiritual.

But really they had become self-righteous.

In one sense a self-righteous Christian is an impossible situation, because a Christian is one whose only hope of justification [righteousness] is in imputed righteousness of Christ.

But sadly Christians can become self-righteous.

Galatians 3:3 [NIV] *“Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?”*

All the examples of self-righteousness already mentioned can at times be found in Christians.

This self-righteousness is something to hate, for God hates it because it is a major obstacle to our spiritual growth, and one of the chief ways we grieve the Holy Spirit.

How then do we overcome self-righteousness?

What I’m about to say is the way forward but it is **not** to say that anyone has ever accomplished total success in overcoming self-righteousness.

1) Recognise self-righteousness as our own problem

For me this has been the most convicting study I have ever had and humanly I wish I had never started it, but spiritually I know this understanding is something I desperately needed.

If we do not see self-righteousness in ourselves there is no way forward in our Christian life of coming to maturity.

It is one thing to say “*well, I know I’m not perfect*” it is a completely different thing to say “*I know I’m so self-righteous*”, that really hurts!

We have seen eleven examples of self-righteousness, we need to honestly admit to some if not all apply to ourselves.

The fewer number we admit to being ours, probably means the more self-righteous we are.

The greater number we admit probably suggests that we are closer to overcoming self-righteousness but not necessarily.

If we exclaim “*I admit to all eleven*” the very statement makes us feel good and in itself is a self-righteous statement!

This shows how subtle self-righteousness is.

That was the easy part, now it becomes really hard.

2) Resent self-righteousness by refusing to compute any wrong done to us

1 Corinthians 13:5 [NIV] “*Love ... keeps no record of wrongs.*”

Have we ever found ourselves saying “*I’ll remember that.*”

Surprise! Surprise!

Normally we don’t have a good memory but when we are hurt or ridiculed we consciously or unconsciously say “*I’ll remember that.*”

Why do we remember this event in fine detail?

Because we have kept a record of it.

Why do we keep a record of it?

Because at some time we want to use it to “*get our own back*” with that person who has hurt us.

Love keeps no record of wrong.

Don’t allow any wrong to be programmed into our memory, to be available at any time to be used.

If we say “*I’ll remember that*” we have computed it and at any time we meet or think about that person the wrong committed will flash up before our eyes and then be even more strongly embedded in our memory for future use.

The way we overcome self-righteousness is not to allow it to be programmed in our minds.

If there is no wrong recorded then we don’t have it to use.

How do we avoid programming a wrong?

Use the power of love, God given love.

Luke 23:33-34 [NIV] “When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals – one on his right, the other on his left. **Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”** And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.”

Forgive those who have hurt us, believe it was done in ignorance.

Matthew 5:44-45 [NIV] “But I tell you: **Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the un-righteous.**”

Pray that God’s mercy will be extended to those who have hurt us.

Philippians 4:2, 4-7 [NIV] “I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord.” ... “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. **Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.** And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Take the wrong done to God in prayer and leave it there, then fill our mind and memory with other things.

Philippians 4:8-9 [NIV] “Finally, brothers, **whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things.** Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me, put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”

A mind so full of such good things, about the person who has wronged us will **not** have room for the wrong done to us in a time of weakness.

An unforgiving spirit in us will cause the Holy Spirit to be grieved and we will lose His special presence.

Total forgiveness is as though the person had never wronged us for this is how God forgives us.

3) Resist self-righteousness by refusing to say anything that is negative

James 1:19 [NIV] “My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, **slow to speak and slow to become angry,**”

All problems that involve self-righteousness don’t get off the ground until we open our mouths and speak.

James 3:5-6 [NIV] “Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. **The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.**”

If we don’t speak, no hell will have the opportunity to break out and destroy relationships as sure as fire destroys things physical.

When we speak words that flow from the bitter spirit of self-righteousness then Satan steps in and causes destruction to take place.

James 3:11-12 [NIV] “Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? **Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.**”

Anything that is negative, critical or detrimental and **not** designed to support and build up is supporting Satan in His work of destroying potential children of God.

If I'm negative I'm going to mirror the devil who is always negative, for he has no joy-filled future to look forward to.

If we feel negative about something or someone just don't say it, for it is when we speak that Satan gets in to use such statements for his purpose.

4) Resist self-righteousness by refusing to clear our name

Many times in our life we will desire vindication.

We have taken our stand and no-one agrees with us.

People have said things about us that are **not** true, and we want our name and reputation cleared.

If we have vindication coming, God has promised that we will receive it.

God does **not** like it when lies are said about His children for it hurts Him.

God tells us that if we would just be quiet about what we see is an injustice, He will take care of this situation.

The best thing God does is vindicating, He loves to do it, and He is the expert.

1 Kings 8:31 [NIV] *"... declare the innocent not guilty, and so establish his innocence."*

This was Solomon's prayer to God which God accepted and was pleased to fulfil.

Psalm 9:4 [NIV] *"For you have upheld my right and my cause; you have sat on your throne, judging righteously."*

Proverbs 22:22-23 [NIV] *"Do not exploit the poor because they are poor and do not crush the needy in court, for the LORD will take up their case and will plunder those who plunder them."*

Proverbs 23:10-11 [NIV] *"Do not move an ancient boundary stone or encroach on the fields of the fatherless, for their Defender is strong; he will take up their case against you."*

Promises we can claim from God when we are falsely accused.

1 Corinthians 4:5 [NIV] *"Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God."*

Wait on God and He will vindicate the work of His servants.

5) Resist self-righteousness by living by faith alone

2 Corinthians 5:7 [NIV] *"We live by faith, not by sight."*

Don't try to figure out things in advance.

Hebrews 11:1 [NIV] *"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."*

Faith is believing and relying on God's promises being true and sure without any visible evidence.

We need to be willing to understand nothing that is going on at anytime in our life, waiting to see God's hand at work in hindsight only.

Proverbs 3:5 [NIV] “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;”

Wait and see how God will work things out.

Be led by the Holy Spirit.

Don't try to persuade the Holy Spirit to move in the path we wish to travel.

Such an approach will keep us from becoming self-righteous about what God may do for and through us.

For in the end we have to acknowledge it was God's work and give Him all the praise and glory.

What will it be like to the degree that we overcome self-righteousness?

a) We will experience a degree of peace in our lives

Notice the words “*to the degree*” for none of us being human will even attain a perfect state of being devoid of self-righteousness.

The most that can happen is for us to become less self-righteous and therefore more easy for other people and our Creator to live with us.

Proof of our overcoming self-righteousness will be to the degree that we experience peace in our lives.

When peace is absent then something is wrong.

The ungrieved Holy Spirit is recognised by peace in our lives.

There is an acrostic that guides us in knowing if what we are doing is within the Will of God for us and we are gradually becoming less self-righteous.

This acrostic is based on the word peace.

PROVIDENTIAL

Did all things fall into place or did we have to force them to conform to **our** will?

ENEMY

Is what is happening. The very thing that our enemy Satan desires **not** to happen

AUTHORITY

Is what we are doing in complete **harmony** with God's Word.

CONFIDENCE

Does what we are involved in **increase** or decrease our confidence in our Creator God?

EASE

Does what we are involved in come **easy** to us or are we constantly struggling and find it difficult?

b) When we are resisting self-righteousness there will be a lack of judgementism

We judge others because in our self-righteousness we consider we are qualified to judge others over their motives and spiritual standing.

Psalm 34:18 [NIV] *“The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”*

A judgmental attitude shows we have not been broken.

Our own spirit has to be crushed before the Holy Spirit can direct us.

Psalm 51:17, 12-13 [NIV] *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” ... “Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you.”*

God is looking for those who have a broken and willing spirit to bring the good news, the gospel message, to others.

Isaiah 66:1-2 [NIV] *“This is what the LORD says: “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?” declares the LORD. “This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.”*

The humble and contrite spirited person is where God wants to make His dwelling place.

1 Corinthians 3:16 [NIV] *“Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?”*

God dwells in us through the indwelling of Holy Spirit, once we have humbled ourselves through looking only to the Blood of Christ to save us and being totally reliant on Christ's righteousness [not our self-righteousness] being credited to us in faith.

Then and only then are we the purified and holy temple in which the Holy Spirit can dwell.

c) When we resist being self-righteous we will exude an air of pleasantness

Self-righteous people are mostly unpleasant people.

When we let go self-righteousness we feel pleasant and I believe are more pleasant to live with.

Galatians 5:22-23 [NIV] *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”*

People with a measure of these attitudes in their lives are pleasant people.

d) When we resist being self-righteous people will seek us out

Self-righteousness turns people off.

Un self-righteous morality attracts other people. People who live clean, moral and God fearing lives yet are not self-righteous about such a life.

This lifestyle is what attracted people towards Jesus Christ.

e) As we resist being self-righteous we begin to love people

Un self-righteous people show that they care.

Philippians 2:3-4 [NIV] *“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”*

The self-righteous person is only interested in his own needs and desires.

f) The more we resist self-righteousness the more real God will become to us

When we seek to get rid of self-righteousness, the Holy Spirit will dwell with us in a special presence and we will over time become more like Him through this close fellowship.

I truly hope that this understanding will really make a difference to our lives and there will be a greater presence and working power of the Holy Spirit in us individually and as a church.

g) As we resist self-righteousness a fresh insight into the scriptures will be given to us

John 16:13 [NIV] *“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.”*

God reveals His truth to us through the special presence of His Holy Spirit.

Self-righteousness grieves the Holy Spirit and we will **not** experience His teaching of truth.

Not new truths, **only** what is already in God’s Word, the Christian Bible, but is hidden to us until the Holy Spirit reveals it to us.

When we were first converted it was because we climbed down from our self-elevated pillar of self-righteousness.

We will only continue this process of conversion if we are continually aware of potential self-righteousness in ourselves and seek to overcome it always with God’s help.