

# Psychology of Self-Righteousness

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If a person wishes to inflict harm, justify an act of lawlessness, or make themselves look better than others, that individual must convince themselves and those in their sphere of influence that their motives are reasonable or honorable. This includes the argument that “the end justifies the means.” In other words, whatever the “end goal” is, it is so laudable that “turning a blind eye to perceived wrongdoing” is perfectly acceptable given the alternatives. We see this dynamic at play in politics today; not to mention other areas of society including the judicial system.

One such example is the “Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation” or “SLAPP”, which is a lawsuit intended to censor, intimidate, and silence critics by burdening them with the cost of a legal defense until they abandon their criticism or opposition. In the typical SLAPP, the plaintiff does not normally expect to win the lawsuit. The plaintiff’s goals are accomplished if the defendant succumbs to fear, intimidation, mounting legal costs, or simple exhaustion and abandons the criticism. In some cases, repeated frivolous litigation against a defendant may raise the cost of directors and officer’s liability insurance for that party, interfering with an organization’s ability to operate. A SLAPP may also intimidate others from participating in the debate. A SLAPP is often preceded by a legal threat. SLAPPs bring about freedom of speech concerns due to their chilling effect and are often difficult to filter out and penalize because the plaintiffs attempt to obfuscate their intent to censor, intimidate, or silence their critics ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strategic\\_lawsuit\\_against\\_public\\_participation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strategic_lawsuit_against_public_participation)).

So making a false accusation, in order to discredit someone else, is considered justifiable in an effort to prove that “one’s cause/opinion” is more righteous than another person’s cause/opinion. This is just one example of self-righteous behavior. In a similar manner, the religious leadership during Christ’s time on earth did not really care whether he was explaining God’s truth correctly or not. Instead, they perceived him as a threat to their power and influence. Therefore, they schemed to discredit and intimidate him by leveling false charges. If these false charges could stick, the religious leaders would come out looking very righteous by comparison, which might expedite their goal of completely eliminating him.

*Now the chief priests and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put him to death, <sup>60</sup>but found none, even though many false witnesses came forward. But at last two came forward <sup>61</sup>and said, “This fellow said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days’” (Mt. 26:59-61; NKJV used throughout unless otherwise noted).*

Conveniently, these false witnesses misinterpreted what Christ said in John 2:18-21, but that did not matter because “the end justified the means” as far as the religious leaders were concerned. In fact, some of these same leaders were present when Christ originally made that statement; so they were without excuse. In other words, if they had a problem with it, they should have addressed it at that time.

Another form of self-righteousness is “intellectual superiority”. This is seen in many areas including man’s educational systems, political systems, and in the media. As far as they are concerned, only their point of view has credibility. Everyone else is intellectually inferior. This attitude was shared by many in the ruling class during the “run up” to the 2016 election in America,

*Speaking at a fundraiser in New York City on Friday, Hillary Clinton said half of Donald Trump's supporters belong in a "basket of deplorables" characterized by "racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, and Islamophobic views"* (<https://time.com/4486502/hillary-clinton-basket-of-deplorables-transcript>).

So "putting down" a certain person, or group, is commonplace with those who believe they are intellectually superior to others. Obviously, if Almighty God was impressed with those who are intellectually superior, He would have chosen some of these people as disciples for His son Jesus Christ. However, this is not what happened. Instead, the majority of Christ's disciples would be regarded as "deplorables" by the ruling class in America today because they were not the powerful and influential of their generation.

*For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble (well born), are called. <sup>27</sup>But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise (in their own eyes), and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; <sup>28</sup>and the base (insignificant) things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not (considered important), to bring to nothing the things that are (considered important), <sup>29</sup>that no flesh should glory (in its own misguided importance) in His presence (1Cor. 1:26-29; Ed. notes in parentheses).*

In another example of this self-righteous attitude, a religious leader portrayed himself as the epitome of righteousness at the expense of someone who was genuinely sorry for the sins he had committed.

*Also he (Christ) **spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised***

***others:** <sup>10</sup>"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup>The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men-extortioners, unjust, adulterers, **or even as this tax collector.** <sup>12</sup>I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.'<sup>13</sup>And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God be merciful to me a sinner!'<sup>14</sup>I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for **everyone who exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted**" (Lk. 18:9-14; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).*

In this last parable, the Pharisee "trusted in himself that he was righteous" or better than other people, especially those who were regarded in society as being "inferior". This mindset explains why some people believe they can even resort to violence in an attempt to enforce their agenda. In other words, they feel justified to do whatever is necessary to make the "intellectually inferior" accept, and submit to, their superior ideology. This attitude backfired on one group of people who wanted to take control of an entire nation by challenging, and attempting to undermine, the appointed leadership. Sadly, we see a similar movement happening in America today.

*Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men; <sup>2</sup>and they rose up before Moses with some of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, representatives of the congregation, men of renown. <sup>3</sup>They gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you*

*exalt yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?"* (Nu. 16:1-3).

The truth is that Korah, and the rebels that supported him, had exactly that agenda. In other words, they wanted to "exalt themselves above the congregation of the Lord" by forcibly ceasing power. They refused to recognize that Almighty God had vested His authority in Moses and Aaron to serve the nation; just as God allows people today to elect the governments they want through peaceful means (cf. Rom. 13:1-7). Korah believed that he was somehow more righteous, and therefore better suited, than the leadership appointed by God, but Moses corrected him by clarifying that his rebellion was against God.

***You take too much upon yourselves, you sons of Levi!*** (Nu. 16:7b; emphasis added).

***Therefore you and all your company are gathered together against the Lord. And what is Aaron that you murmur against him?*** (Nu. 16:11; emphasis added).

Next, "the Lord" responded to those who wanted to cease power without the authority to do so.

*And he (Moses) spoke to the congregation, saying, "Depart now from the tents of these wicked men! Touch nothing of theirs, lest you be consumed in their sins."<sup>27</sup> So they got away from around the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; and Dathan and Abiram came out and stood at the door of their tents, with their wives, their sons, and their little children.<sup>28</sup> Then Moses said: "By this you shall know that the Lord has sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of my own will.<sup>29</sup> If these men die naturally like all men, or if they are visited by the common fate of all men, then the Lord has not sent me.<sup>30</sup> But if the Lord creates a new thing, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the pit, **then you will understand that***

***these men have rejected the Lord***" (Nu. 16:26-30; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

After making this announcement, these rebels could have repented but they refused to and were swallowed up. Sadly, their self-righteousness prevented them from acting in a humble manner which would have acknowledged, and been respectful toward, God's authority as vested in those who were appointed to serve the nation. Again, we see the same self-righteous attitude today in those who want to cease control of power, and force their ideology on others, even if it means doing so by violence (<https://www.newsweek.com/lefts-scheme-defund-police-has-deadly-consequences-opinion-1524472>).

Driven by his self-righteous attitude, Satan attempted to remove the governing authority in the heavenly realm a long time ago. Although he was unsuccessful, he continues to affect the attitudes of all those who seek to make changes through violent means (Eph. 2:1-3; 6:11-12).

*For you (Satan) have said in your heart: "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars (angels; cf. Rev. 1:20) of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; <sup>14</sup>I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, **I will be like the Most High**"* (Isa. 14:13-14; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

Because of Satan's self-righteous attitude, followed by his violent actions, he was banned from the presence of Almighty God (cf. Eze. 28:16).

*And he (Christ) said to them, "**I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven**"* (Lk. 10:18; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

Those, who believe their way of doing things is better than others', need to work within the laws of the land to achieve any meaningful change. Otherwise, they are acting in a self-righteous manner that shows no respect toward the opinions and wishes of other people. Also, the self-righteous mind takes the position that it would not commit the same perceived injustice that it is against, even though their arguments may not stand up to scrutiny if open discussions were part of the narrative. In dealing with some of the leaders in Jerusalem, Jesus Christ pointed out that they were just as self-righteous as their forefathers, and they would do exactly the same thing if they were alive at that time in history.

*Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly (righteous), but inside (real motives) are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. <sup>28</sup>Even so **you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.** <sup>29</sup>Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, <sup>30</sup>and say, '**If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.**' <sup>31</sup>**Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are the sons of those who murdered the prophets** (Mt. 23:27-31; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).*

Putting Christ's point into a modern day scenario, protesters who claim they would not commit the same injustices as those who lived a hundred or two hundred years ago, are deceived because they would not be able to resist the societal norms of past eras without losing either their job, position in society, or even their life. Therefore, it is important to understand that everyone is fully capable of committing various forms of

injustice regardless of what generation they live in. To claim otherwise is a deception that is enabled by a self-righteous mindset. The reality is that everyone is guilty of transgressing the word of God as summarized by His law and commandments, and breaking any law of God results in everlasting death unless the individuals genuinely repent.

*For **all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God** (Rom. 3:23; cf. Prov. 20:9; Eccl. 7:20; Ps. 143:2(b); emphasis added).*

*Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because **all sinned** (Rom. 5:12; emphasis added).*

*But we are all like an unclean thing, and **all our righteousness is like filthy rags**; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities (sins), like the wind, have taken us away (Isa. 64:6; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).*

The self-righteous mind categorizes "sin" into varying degrees of severity, but God does not. As far as God is concerned, if someone has broken one of His laws, that person is just as guilty as someone who has broken all of them.

*But if you show partiality (Lev. 19:15), you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. <sup>10</sup>For **whoever shall** (believe they need to) **keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all** (breaking the whole law) (Jas. 2:9-10; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).*

The self-righteous mind is skilled in the futile exercise of comparing one person's, or group's, supposed "sins" with their own opinion of what is right and wrong. In other words, the self-righteous mind believes it alone can determine what is morally or ethically correct. Consequently, they feel entitled to act as both judge and jury.

*Judge (condemn) not that you shall not be judged (Rom. 14:4). <sup>2</sup>For with what judgment (condemnation) you judge, you will be judged; and with the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you. <sup>3</sup>And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? <sup>4</sup>Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck out of your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? <sup>5</sup>**Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye** (Mt. 7:1-5; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).*

The self-righteous mind is incapable of seeing itself for what it really is, which is "hypocritical". For instance, the self-righteous are the ones destroying statues and monuments in America because they believe the people represented by these statues and monuments were worse "sinners" than they are. As we have seen, this is not the case. So instead of removing these statues and monuments, **the self-righteous should consider these historic figures as a reminder of their own sins and shortcomings. This is why all the good, bad, and ugly stories in the Bible are recorded for posterity, and not covered up or removed.**

*But with most of them (ancient nation of Israel) God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. <sup>6</sup>**Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. <sup>7</sup>And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play (celebrate the golden calf)." <sup>8</sup>Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; <sup>9</sup>nor let us test Christ, as some of them also tested, and were destroyed by serpents; <sup>10</sup>nor murmur, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed by the***

*destroyer. <sup>11</sup>Now **these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition (instruction), on whom the ends of the age have come** (1Cor. 10:5-11; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).*

The bottom line is that all human beings are self-righteous to one degree or another because it is hard for us to humble ourselves and admit our sins. We prefer to focus on the supposed faults of others because it distracts from our own shortcomings. Also, the self-righteous are proud people who credit themselves for their accomplishments in this life rather than humbly expressing gratitude toward Almighty God who makes it possible to do anything. In reality, it is only because of God's goodness that we all exist and are able to do the things we do. This is one of the main lessons that the son of Almighty God taught those during his time on earth.

*Now as he (Christ) was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" <sup>18</sup>So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? **No one is good but One, that is, God** (Almighty) (Mk. 10:17-18; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).*

It is only through the actions of Almighty God, that anyone can comprehend the extent of their own unrighteousness, repent of their sins, and begin living a new life of willing obedience to the word of God.

*.... **the goodness of God** (Almighty) **leads you to repentance** (Rom. 2:4 (b); Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).*

***No one can come to me** (Christ) **unless the Father who sent me draws** (leads) **him; and I will raise him up at the last day** (Jn.*

6:44; cf. Ps. 65:4; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

*And he (Christ) said, "Therefore I have said to you that **no one can come to me unless it has been granted to him by my Father** (Jn. 6:65; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).*

When this occurs, one's self-righteousness is gradually replaced with God's righteousness. By definition, this means the process of writing God's law on the inner hearts or motives of those who are led to repent of their sins (Jer. 31:31-34; cf. Ac. 2:36-38).

*My tongue shall speak of Your word, for **all Your commandments are righteousness** (Ps. 119:172; cf. Dt. 6:24-25; emphasis added).*

***Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness. And Your law is truth** (Ps. 119:142; cf. 119:144, 151, 155; emphasis added).*

***The entirety of Your word is truth** (as unaltered by translators), *and every one of Your righteous judgments endure forever* (Ps. 119:160; cf. Mt. 4:4; Dt. 8:3; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).*

The primary reason that "the god of this age" has continued to believe in his own deceptions is due to self-righteousness (2Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:1-3; 6:12). In other words, Satan has convinced himself that his way of living is better than willingly obeying God's way of life, as summarized by His law and commandments, and Satan is proud of it. However, Satan's self-righteous pride will be brought low at some point in the future. When this occurs, the real source of self-righteous attitudes will be removed, and mankind will begin to live in harmony and happiness with one another (cf. Isa. 2:1-4).

*For the day of the Lord of hosts shall come upon everything proud and lofty, upon everything lifted up-and it shall be brought low (Isa. 2:12).*

In the meantime, it is important to understand that self-righteous behavior is contrary to God's will because it is harmful to those who practice this form of deception, and it also harms those affected by it. Humility is the antidote for self-righteousness, but humility can only occur when everyone realizes they are as sinful as anyone else, and accountable to God for their words and actions (Mt. 12:36; Rom. 14:12; Heb. 4:13).

Left to our own devices, we will not desire the humility that leads to repentance. Thankfully Almighty God will eventually lead everyone to see themselves for who they really are....and that is imperfect, sinful human beings in desperate need of His help and forgiveness (2Pet. 3:9; 2Sam. 14:14; Zech. 13:8-9).

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