

Resist Becoming Religious

Wanting to Serve God Your Own Way

People want to serve or do good in their own way, rather than according to God's prescribed will, commands, or understanding. The Bible repeatedly warns against self-directed religion, leaning on personal ideas, or doing what seems right to us instead of obeying God fully. Often this theme is in scriptures like Cain's offering (self-chosen worship) and broader teachings on obedience versus self-will.

Key Examples of Self-Directed "Service" or "Good"

Genesis 4:3 *And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. 4 And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: 5 But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wrath, and his countenance fell. ... 7 If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door.*

Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground (his own choice from farming), while Abel brought the firstborn of his flock as God evidently required. God respected Abel's but not Cain's.

Judges 17:6 and Judges 21:25 *In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.*

These describe a time of moral and spiritual chaos where people followed their own standards

Deuteronomy 12:8 *Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes.*

Warning against self-directed practices.

Warnings Against Leaning on Our Own Understanding

Proverbs 3:5 *Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. 6 In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. 7 Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil.*

A core verse on not trusting self-directed ways when serving or following God.

Proverbs 12:15 *The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.*

Proverbs 14:12 and Proverbs 16:25 *There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.*

Isaiah 5:21 *Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!*

Romans 10:2 *For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. 3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.*

Describes people with zeal for God but not according to knowledge (their own way).

Positive Calls to Serve God's Way (Not Our Own)

These contrast with self-willed service and emphasize obedience, wholeheartedness, and following God's directions:

Joshua 24:15 *And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.*

1 Samuel 12:24 *Only fear the LORD, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you.*

Deuteronomy 10:12 *And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, 13 To keep the commandments of the LORD, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?*

Colossians 3:23 *And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.*

The overarching message is that true service to God requires humility, obedience to His Word and commands, and reliance on Him rather than inventing our own methods or standards—even if they seem "good" to us. Self-willed approaches often stem from pride or ignorance and lead to rejection or harm (as with Cain or the period of the Judges).

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Self-Righteousness—the dangerous attitude of trusting in one’s own goodness, works, or standards rather than humbly relying on God’s righteousness through faith and grace. The Bible portrays it as rooted in pride, leading to contempt for others, ignorance of true sinfulness, and rejection of God’s way of salvation. It often contrasts self-righteousness with genuine humility and dependence on Christ.

Classic Parable of Self-Righteousness

Luke 18:9-14 — Jesus directly targets those who trust in themselves: **9** *And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: 10 Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. 11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. 12 I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. 13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*

Establishing “Our Own Righteousness” Instead of God’s

Philippians 3:9 Paul contrasts his former self-righteousness with true righteousness: **9** *And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.*

Isaiah 64:6 — *Human righteousness apart from God is worthless: But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.*

Right in Our Own Eyes (Prideful Self-Justification)

Proverbs 21:2 *Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts.*

Proverbs 30:12 *There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness.*

Job 32:1 So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes. **2** Then was kindled the wrath of Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the kindred of Ram: against Job was his wrath kindled, because he justified himself rather than God.

Luke 16:15 *And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.*

Broader Warnings Against Self-Righteous Attitudes

Romans 3:10 *As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one.*

Proverbs 12:15 *The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.”*

Isaiah 5:21 Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!

Matthew 23:28 (Jesus condemning the scribes and Pharisees) **28** *Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.*

Self-righteousness is repeatedly shown as deceptive and offensive to God because it denies our need for His mercy, exalts human effort, and often leads to judging or despising others. True righteousness comes not from self but from faith in Christ (as emphasized in Romans and Philippians). The humble tax collector in Luke 18 is justified, while the self-exalting Pharisee is not.

Stirring Trouble - People who habitually stir up trouble, strife, contention, discord, or division. The Bible strongly condemns such behavior—often linking it to pride, anger, hatred, gossip, or a perverse heart—and warns of its destructive consequences. It contrasts these troublemakers with those who promote peace and wisdom.

Core Warnings About Sowing Discord and Strife

Proverbs 6:12-15 Describes the worthless person who continually stirs trouble:

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12 A naughty person, a wicked man, walketh with a froward mouth. 13 He winketh with his eyes, he speaketh with his feet, he teacheth with his fingers; 14 Frowardness is in his heart, he deviseth mischief continually; he soweth discord. 15 Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly; suddenly shall he be broken without remedy.

Proverbs 6:16-19 One of the seven things the Lord hates: **16** These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: **17** A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, **18** An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, **19** A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.

Proverbs 16:28 *A froward man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends.*

Anger, Pride, and Hatred as Sources of Stirring Trouble

Proverbs 10:12 *Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins.*

Proverbs 13:10 *Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom.*

Proverbs 15:18 *A wrathful man stirreth up strife: but he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife.*

Proverbs 28:25 *He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife: but he that putteth his trust in the LORD shall be made fat.*

Proverbs 29:22 *An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression.*

Proverbs 15:1 (Related to how words stir trouble) *1 A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.*

Busybodies, Gossips, and Talebearers Who Spread Trouble

1 Timothy 5:13 *And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not.*

Proverbs 26:20-21 (Talebearing and quarrelsome people fuel strife like fire) **20** *Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth. 21* *As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife.*

New Testament Warnings Against Division and Troublemakers

Romans 16:17 *Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. 18* *For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.*

Titus 3:9 *But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain. 10* *A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; 11* *Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.*

The scriptures portray those who constantly stir trouble as driven by sinful motives (pride, anger, deceit) and likens their actions to kindling destructive fires or sowing seeds that produce chaos. God hates discord among brothers, and such behavior often leads to sudden calamity or broken relationships. In contrast, Scripture encourages peacemaking, slow anger, love, and wise counsel.

True humility (the opposite of self-righteousness and pride) and **God's righteousness** (received by faith, not earned through self-effort). These passages emphasize that God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble, that true righteousness comes from Christ rather than our own works or appearances, and that humility involves submitting to God, recognizing our sinfulness, and walking in dependence on Him.

On True Humility

James 4:6 *But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. 7* *Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8* *Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hand, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded... 10* *Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.*

1 Peter 5:5 *Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with*

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humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. 6 Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.

Proverbs 22:4 *By humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, and honour, and life.*

Micah 6:8 *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*

Proverbs 11:2 *When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom.*

Matthew 23:12 (Jesus on exaltation and humility) **12** *And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.*

Psalms 51:17 *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.*

God's Righteousness Through Faith (Not Self-Righteousness or Works)

Romans 3:21 *But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; 22* *Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: 23* *For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; 24* *Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*

Philippians 3:9 (Paul rejecting self-righteousness) **9** *And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.*

Galatians 2:16 *Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.*

Romans 10:3-4 (Contrasting self-righteousness with submission to God) **3** *For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. 4* *For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.*

A closer look at Matthew 23 (Jesus Condemning Hypocritical Self-Righteousness)

Jesus strongly rebuked the scribes and Pharisees for outward appearances of righteousness while their hearts were full of hypocrisy. This ties directly to self-righteousness:

Matthew 23:27-28 *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity."*

Matthew 23:23 (Neglecting weightier matters while focusing on minor self-efforts) **23** *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye have done, and not to leave the other undone.*

The full chapter (Matthew 23) contains multiple "woes" highlighting how self-righteous leaders burdened others, sought honor, and blocked the kingdom while appearing pious outwardly.

Additional Verses on Humility and Dependence

Proverbs 29:23 *A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit.*

James 4:10 (Repeated for emphasis) **10** *Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.*

These teachings show a clear contrast: **self-righteousness** exalts self, trusts in personal efforts or appearances, and often leads to judging others (as in the Pharisee of Luke 18). **True humility** acknowledges our sin, submits to God, receives His righteousness by faith, and results in grace, wisdom, and exaltation in due time. Walking humbly with God involves justice, mercy, and dependence rather than prideful independence.