

## **The Problem of Self**

### **Introduction:**

1. Cartoonist Walt Kelly created the comic strip, Pogo. On one occasion, Pogo is seen holding a litter pick-up stick and a burlap bag. Getting ready to pick up garbage humans had strewn over Okefenoke Swamp, Pogo made a significant observation, "We have met the enemy and he is us."
2. Leaving the realm of cartoons and coming to the realm of history, we state that Ignatz Semmelweis was the chief resident at Vienna General Hospital in the mid 1800's. He divided his time between examining cadavers in the laboratory and assisting women to give birth in the maternity ward. The high death rate among young mothers at Vienna General disturbed him greatly. Semmelweis began to investigate the problem, even considering the possibility that his techniques were the problem. Eventually, he developed the theory that he and his colleagues were transferring deadly diseases from the cadavers in the laboratory to the mothers in the maternity ward. As soon as they began washing their hands, the death rate dropped significantly. It was then that he realized that he had not been an angel of life (as he had imagined himself to be), but was an agent of death instead! He could have said to his colleagues, "we have met the enemy, and he is us!" They were victims of self-deception, and it cost young mothers their lives!
3. To a large degree, it seems that many in our society are consumed with self, so much so, that we have now produced with is called the "Me Generation." But problems involving "self" are not confined to any one generation. Multitudes in our society are obsessed with "rights," and this is especially evident among the "pro-choice" crowd – people who demand the "right" to do with their own bodies as they choose, while showing complete disregard for the life of the child they are carrying!
4. In many realms it seems that our greatest problems are rooted in self. In fact, it is difficult to name a sin which is not rooted in self! This is especially evident with regards to such sins as murder, theft, fornication, adultery, lying, drug addiction, etc.
  - a. When it comes to sin, who is our greatest enemy?
    - (1) We might say it is Satan, and he is an enemy! I Peter 5:8.
    - (2) But who does he conquer? It is those who give themselves over to him!
  - b. This is why Jesus taught that we must deny self. Matt. 16:24. Cf. Gal. 2:20
5. Lesson Title: The Problem of Self

### **Discussion:**

#### **I. Some Problems Involving Self.**

- A. Self-Centered (Absorbed in Self).
  1. This begins early in life, as we observe the actions of children to draw attention to themselves
  2. We hear a lot about Narcissism in today's world. Term originated in Narcissus of Greek mythology. He was a physically attractive young man who, upon seeing his own reflection in a pond, was so taken with himself that he withered away while staring at his own reflection in the water!
  3. Leonard Bernstein, the celebrated orchestra leader, was asked "what is the hardest instrument to play?" Without hesitation, he said "second fiddle." He further said I can always get a first violinist, but to find one willing to play second violin is a problem. Yet if no one is willing to play second we have no harmony.
  4. This attitude was alluded to in 2 Tim. 3:1-2
  5. Some Bible Examples of Self-Centeredness.
    - a. Jacob, who said "sell me this day thy birthright," Gen. 25:29-33.
    - b. David, who committed adultery with Bathsheba, 2 Sam. 11:1-4.
    - c. Ahab, who pouted because Naboth would not sell him his vineyard, I Kings 21:1-4.
    - d. Judas, who betrayed Jesus, Matt. 26:14-16.
- B. Self-Willed.
  1. One who is stubborn, set on having his own way, come what may.
  2. Illus. "Some seek their own way in the kingdom of God."
  3. Bible verses regarding those who are self-willed: Ex. 32:9; Deut. 1:43; Ps. 78:10; Jer. 7:23-24; Luke 19:12-14; Acts 7:51; 2 Pet. 2:10.
  4. Elders are warned not to be self-willed, Titus 1:7.
- C. Self-Righteous (An inflated view of self, while believing others are inferior).
  1. The Pharisees were especially guilty of this sin.
    - a. Luke 7:36-39; Luke 18:9-14.
  2. Other scriptures: Prov. 30:12; Matt. 23:28; I John 1:10; Rev. 3:17.
  3. This attitude is what prompted the parables set forth in Luke 15.

4. Someone has observed, “if you walked up to ten people and asked them why they should be allowed to go to heaven, probably three fourths would say ‘because I am a good person.’”

**D. Self-Indulgent**

1. Defined as “indulging one’s own desires, passions, whims, etc., especially without restraint.
2. Bible verses regarding the self-indulgent: Prov. 7:16-18; Hag. 1:4; 2 Peter 2:18-19.
3. Bible examples of some who were self-indulgent.:
  - a. Solomon, Ecclesiastes 2:4-8.
  - b. Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel 4:28-31.
  - c. The rich farmer, Luke 12:16-21.
4. The preceding examples involved materially “rich” people; however, one does not have to be “rich” in order to be self-indulgent. Evidenced by people piling up credit card debts for unnecessary material goods.

**E. Self-Conceit.**

1. An inflated estimate of one’s own abilities, looks, powers, egotistical, vain, puffed up, etc.
2. Haman was an Old Testament example of a self-conceited ego maniac, Esther 6:6-10.
3. God hates pride! Prov. 16:18; Jas. 4:6.
  - a. Its origin is of the world, I John 2:15-17.
4. The proud to be abased, Matt. 23:12.
5. Must learn instead to glory in the Lord, I Cor. 1:31.

**F. Self-Delusion.**

1. The act of lying to yourself or of making yourself believe something that is not true. Such people are quick to justify themselves and to blame others. King Saul was a case in point. I Sam. 15:3,8-9,13-15.
2. Scriptures dealing with self-delusion: I John 1:8; Jer. 17:9-10; John 8:33-34,44; Rev. 3:17.

**G. Self-Complacency.**

1. Self-satisfied.
2. When self-satisfied, no progress, no improvement will be made.
3. Self-complacency has often been a cause for man’s downfall, I Cor. 10:12.
  - a. For this, Israel was rebuked, Amos 6:1.
  - b. Self-complacency results in a failure to act, Judges 5:23.
  - c. Self-complacency is opposed to the spirit of Christianity. Phil. 2:12; 3:13-14.

**II. How May the Problems of Self Be Solved?**

**A. By Putting self to death, Gal. 2:20!**

1. The world’s philosophy is “live for self;” the Bible teaches we must die to self.
2. We need to put things in perspective. Illus. Winston Churchill was asked, “doesn’t it thrill you to know that every time you make a speech, the hall is packed and overflowing?” Reply: “it is quite flattering. But when I feel that way, I always remember that if instead of making a political speech I was being hanged, the crowd would be twice as large.”

**B. This is done by:**

1. Self-denial.
  - a. A pre-requisite for following Christ, Matt. 16:24.
  - b. A willingness to give up those things which will destroy our souls, Matt. 18:8-9.
2. Self-control, Prov. 16:32; 2 Pet. 1:5-6.
3. Self-Sacrifice, 2 Cor. 8:5; Rom 12:1-2.

**III. Why Must We Separate from Self?**

- A. God’s ways are not our ways, Jer. 10:23.
- B. Man’s way is a way of destruction, Prov. 16:25.
- C. God’s way is best for all, Matt. 7:13; John 14:6.

**Conclusion:**

1. God wants self to be relegated to the background.
2. Obey the truth of God, I Peter 1:22.
3. Amazingly, It is only when we learn to deny ourselves and submit our wills to God, we then (and only then) begin to experience true happiness, and we begin to live in hope of eternal life in heaven!

--Bobby Witherington, March 20, 2016