

Judges 20:1-17
The Social Perils of Self-Righteousness
Sermon Outline

Introduction: Everyone in Judges 20 is pointing the finger—but no-one at himself. The result is war.

I) Ruinous Self-Righteousness

A) The Levite

- 1) The symptoms of self-righteousness
 - All about ‘me’
 - Self-defense
 - Cover up re oneself and exaggeration re the bad-guys
 - Redirected scrutiny
- 2) The social results of self-righteousness:
- 3) What about us?

B) The Benjaminites

- 1) The symptoms of self-righteousness
 - Self defense

v. 13: But the Benjaminites would not listen to the voice of their brothers

- 2) What about us?

Once we commit to self-justification, we have to be wholly right all the time

C) The nation

- 1) The symptoms of self-righteousness
 - Over-reactive self-righteousness
 - “Holy” convocation *to Yahweh at Mizpah. Purge evil from Israel (v 13)*
 - Ludicrous and sad irony
- 2) What about us?

Summary: Unified at last—but for what?

II) How do we break from self-righteousness and social ruin?

A) Admit the truth

B) But how can we?

Questions for Reflection this Week

- 1) Define self-justification. How can you tell if you are falling into it?
- 2) Compare the Levite's account of what happened in Gibeah (Judges 20:4-6) with the narrator's earlier account (19:12-29). What is different? What does the Levite change? What does he leave out? Why? How do the Levite's modifications contribute to the angry resolve of Israel?
- 3) Reflect on the following: "Once we commit to self-justification we find it very hard to admit to any compromising behaviors or motives in ourselves. We discover that we *have* to be wholly just and right. To be only partly just and right isn't enough."
- 4) Document the ways in which Israel as a nation over-reacts to the story of the Levite. Why is their 'righteous indignation' inappropriate and even ludicrous (notice their determination to "Purge evil from Israel"—v. 13).
- 5) Compare Israel's holy convocation at Mizpah to David's holy convocation of the people on the eve of the Temple construction in 1 Chronicles 29:11ff). How are they different in tone? Why?
- 6) Reflect on the following: "Certain things that people do make us very angry. One possible reason for this is that we feel secretly guilty about lots of things but cannot admit to it because we are committed to the charade of self-righteousness. Finding a particular crime to get really angry about, a crime that we have not in any obvious way committed ourselves, can take our minds off our own guilt."
- 7) The best way to reverse the socially destructive spiral of self-righteousness is to be honest with each other and with God about our own sins. Note the advice Jesus gives us in Matthew 7:1-5. Notice the promise James gives us in James 5:16. Why does honest confession bind people?
- 8) Read Isaiah 53. How does this chapter set us free to be honest with God and each other about our sin?