

The Pharisee and the Publican

Text: *Luke 18:9 And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:*

Jesus had been teaching on effectual fervent prayer. He used the example of a poor widow who kept appearing before an unjust judge until she eventually got what she wanted (Lu. 18:1-8). Jesus who knows the hearts of all men (Ac. 1:24) sensed that His words were falling on deaf ears.

Most likely these men were Pharisees. They trusted in themselves that they were righteous. This phrase really sticks out, doesn't it? As Paul stated in Romans 7:18, "For I know that in my flesh, dwells no good thing..." Proverbs 14:12 tells us that, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof [are] the ways of death." We recognize that our own righteousness is as filthy rags in the sight of God (Isa. 64:6). Our righteousness comes from Christ and Christ alone. He lives in and through us. Any righteousness that we display is simply Him living in us (Ga. 2:20). <

2Corinthians 5:21 For he hath made him [to be] sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

The Pharisees were known for long prayers. They would stop on a busy narrow street and spread their arms wide and block the street while they made a long prayer, to be seen and heard of men (Mt.6:5-6).

Text: *Luke 18:10 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.

The Pharisee reminded God of just how good he was. I don't steal, I'm not unjust, I don't commit adultery, and I'm certainly not like that publican over there. Lord, I fast twice a week and I pay my tithes. Surely you are impressed with me?

Are we ever tempted to use a checklist to prove our righteousness to God? Naturally there are things we don't say and places we don't go, and we abhor the works and lusts of the flesh. Is that all that there is to being righteous? Is God impressed? I don't think so.

God wasn't impressed with the Pharisee's pretentious ways, nor is He impressed with ours. We can put on a performance to impress men, but if it doesn't come from the heart, that's all it is, a futile performance, God isn't listening.

Isaiah 1:14 Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a

trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them.

The Pharisee had an attitude similar to that of the Laodicean church which Jesus condemned.

Revelation 3:17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:

The Pharisee bragged that he fasted twice a week. Good diet control but not necessarily effective, unless done in the proper manner. Jesus told us to not appear to men that we are fasting, but to wash our face, anoint our head and go about our daily business.

Matthew 6:16 ¶ Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

God described the fast that He honored in Isaiah 58.5-6. He wasn't as impressed with our starving ourselves as He was with us going about to do His kingdom business.

*Isaiah 58:5 Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? [is it] to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes [under him]? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?
6 [Is] not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?*

The Pharisee bragged to God of how faithful he was in tithing. Under the law, he was obligated to give the first tenth of his income to the Lord, that there might be meat in His house. We, under the new covenant have the privilege to willingly follow the same pattern to further the kingdom of God. Nothing to brag to God about. God still honors our giving, but contrary to modern teaching, we can't use tithing to bribe Him into giving us overly abundant material blessings.

The Pharisee also despised others. Are we ever guilty of that? We probably wouldn't admit it, but perhaps we find ourselves more comfortable with those who share the exact doctrinal positions as ourselves? Or the same racial and cultural background? James had some harsh words about those who gave preference to a man with fine clothes and a big ring over a poor beggar (Ja. 2:1-7). Are we ever guilty of that? To make a point by exaggeration, if someone comes into our midst with purple hair, tattoos, skin piercing, etc. etc., do we want to withdraw? Hopefully we look at that individual as one who needs God. While we are condemning, He may be crying out, "Lord be merciful to me, a sinner." We need to remember that man looks on the outward appearance, but that God looks on the heart (1Sa. 6:7; 2Co. 10:7).

Text: *Luke 18:13 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.*

The publicans were a despised class of people who collected taxes for the Romans and

cheated people in the process. The publican recognized his unworthiness and cried out, "God be merciful to me a sinner." One thing I see in common throughout scripture is that great men such as David (Psalms 51), Daniel (Dan. 9:9-10), Isaiah (Is.6:5) and the Psalmists (Psalms 106:6), who had contact with God, recognized their own sinfulness and unworthiness.

Text: *Luke 18:14 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.*

Jesus repeated this kingdom principal once more, "If we exalt ourselves we will be abased, if we humble ourselves we will be exalted."

Isaiah 57:15 For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name [is] Holy; I dwell in the high and holy [place], with him also [that is] of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

*Psalms 51:15 O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.
16 For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering.*

17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and contrite heart, O God Thou wilt not despise.

Somebody Has Said

Just as the sinner's despair of any hope from himself is the first prerequisite of a sound conversion, so the loss of all confidence in himself is the first essential in the believer's growth in grace. - A.W. Pink