



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. (Luke 18:9-14)

God loves to draw contrasts between opposing poles of morality for our learning and edification. You will recall the Two Trees in the Garden – one representing Christ and righteousness, the other self-will and the Serpent of the Garden. We also remember the stark contrast between the Rich Man (he has no name in Hell) and the beggar, Lazarus. There is a very profound decision that we must make between God and mammon – we cannot have it both ways. If God be God, then follow Him; but if Baal be God, then follow him: *“And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.”* (1 Kings 18:21) It is worse on a man’s soul to hear the counsel of God and not answer, than to even choose the wrong choice. We are doing this daily in our churches of America. Jesus tells us, too, of two sons – both sons of their father – one of which went away to a far country, out of the will of his father, and wasted himself in riotous living. But, in the latter end of his debauchery, he REMEMBERED his father; he made a resolution to return and repent; he acted on his resolution; and the father received him with joy. That same privilege exists for all who have opted for a besetting sin, or a full-blown sinful lifestyle, over the comfort and delight of dwelling on the promises of God, their Father in Heaven.

In the cited text today, we again see two men contrasted so fully, one from the other. One was a man of prestige and clerical authority – well respected and highly honored in the social circles of the church. The other was a despised publican upon whom society looked down with disdain and distrust. Each of us is very much like one, or the other, of these two men - perhaps not in the case of title or respect, but in the depravity or sincerity of our hearts.

Jesus is speaking to those who “trusted in themselves” that they were righteous and felt so much better than others because of their own righteousness and not the imputed righteousness of the Lord. Both men seemed to do the right things at the beginning. I say “seemed” because further discourse of our Lord reveals that the first was a hypocrite, and the second a despondent and contrite sinner. As we examine these diverse men, let us consider in what way we may be like one, or the other, or BOTH.

#### WHAT EACH DID PROPERLY:

1. *“Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.”* We see that both men came to the right place to worship the Lord – one a Pharisee (religious cleric), and the other a publican.
2. We observe that both men came to the Temple for the right purpose, that is, to pray.
3. *“The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee.”* This is a mixed proposition! The Pharisee did not truly pray out of his heart to God, but *“with himself.”* But he did, at the very least, utter the ‘perhaps’ empty words (that is, to himself). Had the Pharisee stopped with these last words, he would have been on better ground. We know that the publican came for one purpose – to ask God for mercy. This is always a suitable purpose for prayer.

#### WHAT THE PHARISEE DID THAT WAS NOT PLEASING TO GOD:

1. He prayed within himself for all to hear. This is play-acting for the benefit of an audience. The Greeks call a play actor by a certain word: HYPOCRITE!

*Hupokrites* (hoop-ok-ree-tace'); Word Origin: Greek, Noun Masculine, Strong #: 5273

- a. one who answers, an interpreter
- b. an actor, stage player
- c. a dissembler, pretender, hypocrite

We have a high number of professing Christians who fall under that definition. See how much better he believes himself than all others: “. . . *that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.*” Did you get that? “. . . *or even this publican.*” What unadulterated arrogance. We all are nothing apart from the unmerited grace we have from God.

*“I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.”* Do we need to inform God in prayer that we have fasted and tithed? These statements were made in boast to all in earshot – not to God. God not only knows what we do in our outward acts, but He knows the secrets of our hearts and thoughts. Many prayers are offered up in churches today that bear these same marks of hypocrisy.

#### TWO DIFFERENT ATTITUDES EXPRESSED:

**The Pharisee:** He was proud and self-righteous. He truly did not know God. He prayed for the benefit of being heard and not of spiritual Communion with God. He prayed within himself instead of to God. He boasted of his good works which were, in the sight of God, of nothing worth.

**The Publican:** Notice the prayer of the publican: *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 publican, like the prodigal son, came to realize his distance from the father; but the Father in Heaven is more concerned in our direction than in the enormity of our sins. Though he stood afar off, he was facing the Temple of the Lord. He felt unworthy to approach nearer than he was. Until we at first realize our unworthiness, we cannot face God. The publican, far from being proud, would not so

much as lift his downturned face to God. He was totally ashamed of his great failure as a sinner. Have you ever reached that point, or are you still a Pharisee? The publican did not jump up and down shouting hallelujahs, but rather beat upon his breast – a gesture of deep anguish – in recognition of how far his wretched life fell short of the righteousness of God. Have you, my friend, ever arrived at that abyss into which you look at your total failure and realize there is a God above that “*seeth me?*” It would not have been honest for this publican to thank God for making him so righteous, because, first of all, he had not known God as Lord and Savior previously; and, secondly, he had not been worthy to thank God since God knows not the unrepentant sinner.

The publican did not ask for health and wealth – he asked for only one thing: MERCY upon a great sinner. That is one prayer the Lord ALWAYS hears. Proud boastings and proud words will avail nothing with the Lord, but a prayer uttered out of a broken spirit and a contrite heart will always garner the ears of the Lord. *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.* (Psalms 51:17) The Pharisee probably loved to be called rabbi, or teacher, or scholar. He loved his title. He probably loved to stand in public places making long prayer. *But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.* (Matt 23:13-14) Does this description remind you of any ministers of our own time?

Mercy is the result of Grace. Without them, we are damned in Adam's world. The Lord Jesus Christ satisfied both through the demands of the Law in dying a substitutionary and redemptive death on the cross for all who are His elect and chosen. Are you? Do not while the hours away wondering about this last point, dear friend. . . . *rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.* (2 Peter 1:10-11)