

The Publican and the Pharisee
Luke 18:9-14
February 13, 2005 by C.W. Powell

An Indelible Mark of Justification

Text: Luke 18:9-14

- 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.

I expect over the next several weeks to bring some sermons on the nature of worship. We will be looking at various passages of Scripture, but you will find that the themes will overlap. The themes of Scripture are remarkably the same. The themes of spiritual worship, repentance of sins, the love of God, the love of neighbor, forgiveness of sins and a life of thankfulness and joy are repeated over and over again. The troubles we have in this world are the result of sin and the curse of God, but through the grace of God, they are turned to our good by the manifold wisdom of God.

This wonderful and famous parable of our Lord, is a wonderful place to start. There are several things about this parable that we need to consider.

I. Two men went up to pray. Prayer is at the core of true worship. There are two parts of true worship.

A. Listening to God. God will not listen to you, if you do not listen to Him. This is a very clear principle of Scripture. Note these passages:

1. Proverbs 1:20-30 Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets: She crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, saying, 22 How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scornors delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you. Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; 25 But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; 27 When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. 28 Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD: They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof.

2. Psalm 50:16,17 But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee. *ûPs. 50:16,17*

B. Talking to God. This we call prayer. Worship is a two-way conversation with God. He speaks to you in His word, and you talk to him in prayer. This is a very personal operation, and can

only take place by individuals in earnest relationship with God. No collective rites and ceremonies can be of any value if those who offer these rites have their hearts far from God. As Isaiah said:

Isaiah 1:11-15 11 To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. 12 When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? 13 Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. 14 Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. 15 And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.

C. This parable is set in the middle of a number of parables that speak of essential elements of true prayer. The first is the parable on persevering prayer—that true prayer does come from light and frivolous notions; the parable that follows has to do with receiving Christ as little children, that is without any ability to even know what you need from Him; that is followed by the parable of the Rich Young Ruler, a negative example of how NOT to approach Christ. Some of these will be topics of future messages.

II. The great difference in the WAY the two men prayed.

A. First, the publican. Publicans were tax collectors and were despised by the Jews. Rome used the practice of farming out the taxes and those who collected the taxes under the authority of Rome “farmed” their territory and bled them [to mix the figure] for as much as they could bring. They became very rich, and were considered traitors to God and the nation of Israel. There was no doubt in the minds of the people of Israel that the publicans were sinners. That was apparent.

1. Only one affection is set before us here. There is no expression of love for God; there is no expression of faith; there is no expression of joy or gladness. Only one of contrition and sorrow for sin.

2. Please forgive me, but Jesus was not fool. He knows the mind of His Father. He knows what is most pleasing to the Father, and if He chose this as a subject for the nature of true prayer, He must be speaking of something so basic that without it no worship is possible.

3. Notice, the man does not speak of sins. He goes much deeper than that: he speaks of being a sinner. Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner.

All true worship must begin here. God will despise your worship if it does not begin here. Note these passages:

a) Psalm 50:15-17 "O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise. For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." Any sacrifice that you offer to God must be offered with a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart.

b) Isaiah 66:1-3 "Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word. He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol. Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations." God is in heaven; He is holy and lifted up above all

things that He made. He is not your buddy. He is not your good pal. He is not your sugar daddy. What is the attitude of your sacrifices??

B. Second, the Pharisee.

1. He thanks God that he is not like other men. He does not claim any merit of his own, but gives God glory for everything that he is. There is no humility here, and certainly not brokenness and a sense of unworthiness. But he does give God credit for it all. He also prayed in the inner man--he did not pray out loud: he spoke from his mind and spirit. Do not think that his error was that of outward pretense. His error went much deeper than that. He was blind to his own arrogance and the horror of his own condition.

2. He then catalogues all the virtues that he is thankful for:

a) For what he wasn't: extortioner, unjust, adulterer.

b) Certainly not as this publican:

c) His reference was two fold: himself and the publican, rather than God.

d) The ceremonies he performed: Fasted twice on the Sabbath, for that is what the word means. Give tithes of all he possessed;

e) All external; has to do with deeds, and not what he is.

f) Even though he gives God the credit, he is not thereby justified. This is a devastating critique of the New Perspectives, the theology of Norman Shepard, and all who sympathize with them.

g) You are not justified by works, period, even those works which are performed by you by the power of God.

3. What was the man's fault? He flattered himself in God's eyes, and despised others. He no doubt fancied himself very humble and faithful to God, but he couldn't see his own arrogance. He couldn't truly worship God, because he had his eyes on himself and on others who were not worthy.

4. His abominable externalism was not because he worshipped in the eyes of men, or did things to be seen of men, but because he trusted in externals.

5. When men boast of their works before God, they never drag out the secrets of their hearts; no they bring out the things that men see. Deeds not the affections of the heart.

6. This is the true communion in the body and blood of Christ. The first and most basic affection that much grip our hearts in the Lord's Supper is the fact of our natural guilt before the Lord; we are unworthy of such a feast, but we trust in Christ's broken body and shed blood alone for the forgiveness of our sins.

7. We are not worthy; we have done no works that are worthy; we have nothing in ourselves even as the people of God to justify us before the Lord; rather, our very life comes out of death. We are worthy of death, but no life can come out of our own death, though we richly deserve to die; but our own death cannot give us life, but only the wrath of God forever and ever. Our life is wrapped up in the death of Jesus Christ

8. We will never be worthy of his love. No works of thanksgiving and praise can ever make us worthy.

III. The Publican went up justified. Not because he put on a show of humility; no, that will not do it either. But who then can be saved?

A. Jesus is not telling us how to be saved, or what prayer to pray to be saved.

B. Jesus is rather telling us how those who are saved pray. They pray out of a sense of contrition and brokenness, not despising others, but standing alone before God. The Pharisee was not alone before God; no he had the publican in his mind and he had a bundle of good works on his

mind. He thought he was thankful, but the stink of his arrogance made his thanksgiving stink before God. It was no sweet savor that ascended from the Pharisee to God; quite the contrary.

C. This is something what Paul mean when he said, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

D. No man is justified before God who does not come as a sinner to God; this is not natural for the sinner; this is the work of God.

IV. Application

A. Let us humble ourselves before the Lord; he resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.

B. Let us make much of Christ, and very little of our works, even those that are done in faith and in love; for our righteousness in the very best are but filthy rags, as the catechism says:

Q114: Can those who are converted to God keep these Commandments perfectly?

A114: No, but even the holiest men, while in this life, have only a small beginning of such obedience,[1] yet so that with earnest purpose they begin to live not only according to some, but according to all the Commandments of God.[2]

C. Beware of despising others, for God looks with mercy upon us, and we are required also to show mercy to others.

May God bless you.