

# The Error of Trusting Self

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Luke 18:9-14 states, "And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others. Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. 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. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. 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. 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."

The parable of the Pharisee and the publican was given by our Lord that He might confront those who were religiously lost. I am afraid that this is a problem with a lot of people in our day and time; they are religiously lost. Their trust is in what they are, or what they have done that looks great in their own eyes instead of trying to do what pleases God. This was the fault of Cain in Gen. 4:3-7, trying to worship God man's way instead of doing it God's way.

With this in mind let's look at some things about the Pharisees. First of all they were very self-righteous. These people thought that the world revolved around them. What they did not realize was that Jesus came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Matt. 9:13). They were also ignorant of God's righteousness (Rom. 10:3). They were those who went about establishing their own righteousness. My friend if you are one of those who are trusting in your self-righteous life to get you to heaven, then you are missing out and will someday have a rude awakening. Psalms 14:1-3 says, "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good. The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no not one." In Romans 3:10, the apostle Paul quotes this Scripture in part while dealing with the wickedness of fallen man.

You may ask the question, what is real righteousness? In the Old Testament the righteous were those whose conduct was made conformable to God and those who justification was made possible through their faith in the promised Redeemer. Habakkuk 2:4 states in part, "The just shall live by faith." The apostle Paul refers to this Scripture in Gal. 3:1.

The New Testament righteous are those who have conditioned their lives by the standard which is not theirs, but God's. In 2 Tim. 1:9 the apostle Paul stated "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." The New Testament righteous are, the people related to God, and who, as a result of their relationship, walk with God. A righteous person is one justified by faith, showing forth his faith by his works. Those works will be for the glory of God and not for self.

Outwardly the Pharisees appeared righteous, but inwardly they were full of hypocrisy and iniquity (Matt. 23:28). As stated earlier, Jesus was not looking for the righteous, but for sinners (Matt. 9:13). The second thing that we find about the Pharisees is they despised others. What this means is that they loved only themselves and treated others with scorn. This same Greek word for "despised" is used again in Luke 23:11 as the word "nought" in telling how Herod and his soldiers treated Jesus when they were judging Him. Paul tells us in Rom. 14:3 that we are not to despise others because of what they believe. In fact the apostle Paul goes on to say in 1 Cor. 1:28, "And base things of the world, and things which are

despised, hath God chosen, yea and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are.” Christians should never despise others, saved or lost. Yes, Christians should despise sin, but never should they despise the sinner. The Pharisees despised sinners.

Now let's look at the publican. Here was a group of Jewish people that for the love of money had sold themselves to the Roman Government. In fact it is believed that they paid for the right to have their job; which was collecting taxes, tolls, and custom receipts. Out of these collections the publicans kept whatever they wanted to charge over and above what the actual amount owed was. They had no conscience whatsoever when it came to getting this money. They would think nothing of foreclosing on anyone's (including widow's) possessions and properties, or any other thing that they needed to do for their own gain.

The text tells us that the two men went up into the temple to pray so let's examine their prayers. First of all the Pharisee whose praying was anything but the right way. Verse 11 says that “he prayed thus with himself.” This tells us that he looked at himself as being practically on the same level with God. Sad to say that there are some people who think that their religious experience makes them a partner on the same level with God instead of a servant of God. The Pharisee also points out that he is better than other men, “I thank thee that I am not as the other men are...even as this publican.” I can remember when growing up in West Virginia many years ago I attended a church that believed in salvation by works and when they would have a testimony meeting people would never stand up and testify to the saving grace of God, and brag on the Lord Jesus Christ; but they would stand up and brag about everything that they didn't do and would do this bragging in a self-righteous manner. My dear friend if you can't brag on Jesus when you testify, then you ought to keep your mouth shut, lest you quench the Holy Ghost.

After saying what he was not the Pharisee now begins to inform God to just how righteous he was. Evidentially this Pharisee did not believe in the Omniscience of God; that is God knows everything and does not have to be informed. There was no law that commanded men to fast twice a week. Fasting was to be done as needed, especially as a means to concentrate on prayer. There was no law that commanded men to tithe of all that they possessed; though they were to tithe of their crops.

Next look at the prayer of the publican in verse 13, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” The prayer of this man was 180 degrees from how the Pharisee prayed. Notice some more things about how this man prayed: He stood afar off not wanting to be seen by others and take attention away from God. Also he did not feel worthy to enter the more sacred parts of the Sanctuary. Secondly, the publican kept his face and eyes pointed down. What a picture of a man realizing that he wasn't worthy to be in the presence of a Holy God. The publican was very remorseful. This something that is lacking in prayer today, especially when it comes to confessing sins before God. This man's remorse was so great that he smote himself upon the chest. What a picture of old time conviction. One who comes to God under the arresting conviction of the Holy Ghost, will come in a remorseful manner, not with a smile on their face as if they're saying, “I'm doing you a favor in coming to God manner. Last of all the publican came desiring mercy. He never mentions anyone else. It's him, the publican that is a sinner and standing in need of mercy. We must remember that this man grew up an instructed Jew. He had been taught about the holiness of God and the condition of man; and though he had wandered away from worship of God for the treasures of this world he had not forgotten how he had been brought up. He had no sacrifice to offer for his sin, nor did he have a priest to offer it; he was completely dependant on the mercy of God through faith.

In verse 14 we see the conclusion of this parable. Jesus stated that the publican went down justified rather than the Pharisee. He goes on to say that those who exalt themselves shall be abased, and those who humble themselves shall be exalted.

My dear friend, when considering this parable what is your condition in the sight of God? Are you depending upon your good works to get you to heaven, thinking that since you are alright in your own eyes then you are alright in the eyes of Almighty God? If this is so then you are dead wrong and will find your self going throughout eternity in Hell. God's Word in Eph. 2:8, 9 says, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not yourselves: it is a gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."

Have you been saved by the Grace of God through the finished work at Calvary by the Lord Jesus Christ?