

The Pharisee and the Publican

Key Verse: “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 18:14***

Selected Scripture:
Luke 18:9-14

The Pharisees were thought to be a very religious class among the Jews. They were devout, at least outwardly, and very exact in keeping their traditions. Inwardly, however, as the Lord tells us, as a group they were far from right. “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” Jesus, because he could read their hearts, was competent to make the additional pronouncement that they were like sepulchers, beautifully white on the outside but inwardly full of corruption.—Matt. 23:27

There are similar groups among Christendom today—those who are outwardly moral, very particular, exact, scrupulous, and yet not pleasing to the Lord. They are proud of their righteousness and fail to realize that even though they may be naturally less depraved than others, they have nothing wherein to boast. They, like all mankind, are far from being actually perfect. “There is none righteous, no, not one. ... They are all gone out of the way.” (Rom. 3:10-12) The parable of our lesson is intended to show that God looks with more sympathy and compassion upon the more sinful person, who is humble and recognizes his condition, rather than on the morally better

individual, who boasts of his supposed righteousness.

The parable begins, “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.” (Luke 18:10-12) The self-righteous Pharisee was evidently, in many respects, a good moral person. However, he was very proud, and he boasted of his righteous deeds. He also was very quick to condemn others, a telling sign of a poor heart condition.

The other man in the parable—a publican, or tax collector—was of a lower class and generally despised by the people. He had many weaknesses and sinful blemishes, but he realized his condition. “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.”—vs. 13

All Christians, by virtue of their relationship to God, the covering of their sins, the begetting of the Spirit, and the transforming work progressing in their hearts, have every reason to give thanks to the Lord. However, they have nothing whereof to boast, or as the Apostle Paul puts it, “Who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? ... why dost thou glory?”—I Cor. 4:7

If, therefore, the difference between ourselves and others be recognized as of the Lord and his work of grace in us, rather than of ourselves, this is the proper attitude of heart. All who have this realization may properly give thanks to the Lord that in this respect they are different from others. Only by God and his Son, Christ Jesus, are we different. “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus.”—Eph. 2:8-10 ■