

The Pharisee and the Publican.

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.

There is a form of prayer which has the semblance of religion but does not spring from a regenerate heart. This is illustrated in the Pharisee. Real prayer is illustrated in the Publican, who felt his own unworthiness, made a humble confession of it and threw himself on the mercy of God.

*Two went to pray? O rather say
One went to brag, th' other to pray:
One stands up close and treads on high,
Where th' other dares not send his eye.
One nearer to God's altar trod,
The other to the altar's God.*

(Richard Crashaw)

The Place of Prayer.

“Two men went up into the temple to

pray.”

The Temple’s situation was intended to raise its purpose in the estimation of the worshipper. It was set on high, because the God who put His name there is high and holy. We are to remember that the church exists to raise God in the estimation of the people. It exists for His glory’s sake. It is not there to cater for everyone’s wishes or demands, and should not be treated in that way. Let us never forget that this holy place is here for the Lord’s sake. Psalm 122:1: “I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD.”

Because the church exists for the Lord’s sake it ought to be frequented. In the parable before us, the two men Jesus refers to actually attended the place of worship. They were not there to admire its glorious architecture. They were not

there even for the social side of things – i.e. fellowship with others. They were there to pray.

Not everyone in Jerusalem was regular in the sacred place dedicated to the worship of God. Not everybody cared for it. But before dealing with the points of difference between the Pharisee and the Publican, they had at least this in common that they attended the house of God.

The house of God should be open to all. That two men of different character and different standing in society were in the Temple at the same time proves this. What was true for the Temple should be true of every place where Israel's God and Saviour is worshipped.

I don't know of one incident in the whole ministry of Jesus Christ where

He told any individual or group that they were not welcome in the place of worship. He did drive out the money-changers from the Temple, but that was not because He didn't want them there ever. They could come, so long as they realised that the Temple was not there for their personal enrichment. Ordinarily, all were welcome.

The house of God should be known as a place of prayer –“Two men went up into the temple to pray.” If it isn't known as a place of prayer then it isn't meeting the end of its existence. God puts a special honour upon the place of worship and prayer there. Check out Isaiah 56:7, Luke 1:10 & 19:46.

The Prayer of the Proud Man.

Pharisees had a bad reputation because of their attitude to Jesus Christ and His

claims and teaching. However, they were held in high esteem by many, who preferred them ahead of publicans - i.e. tax-collectors.

The Pharisees gave themselves to the reading of Scripture. They were staunch defenders of religious tradition. They were keepers of the Law. Although we must not forget that many of their traditions and laws were not based on the Word of God and were, in fact, contrary to it. Nevertheless, they were still considered religious conservatives. They did not espouse the doctrine of the Sadducees who rejected the after-life.

Pharisees were also looked upon as generous. They gave liberally of their income. In the Temple were great receptacles for monetary offerings shaped like the open end of a trumpet. A Pharisee could make a great show of rolling coins

around the horn of the offering trumpets, making sure all around both heard and saw his generosity.

We expect religious men to pray and it is the prayer of a religious man that our Lord first draws our attention to. But what a strange prayer it was – if we could call it a prayer at all! To begin with, he prayed “with himself.” In fact, his prayer began, continued and ended with himself! We can imagine him taking up his position, as Pharisees often did, in a prominent place where all could see him, and maybe even hear him.

This man was religious, but he was far from spiritual! His prayer was self-righteous, self-centred and self-satisfied. He never asked for anything because he thought he had everything. He was so bold as to give God the credit for his conceit – “Lord, I thank thee...”

In the history of every church there have been people just like this Pharisee. They believe that they are right and everybody else is wrong. They “trust in themselves that they are righteous, and despise others” (V.9). They would assume a prominent place before men because they are convinced they have a prominent place before the Lord.

Are you like the Pharisee in the Lord’s parable? You would despise the faults of others but see none in yourself? Others need forgiveness, but not you?! It is a true saying that “pride is the only disease that makes everyone sick but the one who has it.”

The Prayer of the Penitent.

The Publican stood “afar off”, his place and posture betokening his true feeling

concerning himself. He would not make a spectacle of himself under the eye of God who knew him so well. Nor would he “lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven.” Who can honestly look into the face of the Holy One and be so bold as to say, “I have never offended thee!”?

Next we are told that the Publican “smote upon his breast.” This illustrates his contrition. Certain people who witnessed the death of Christ were so affected by it that they acted in the same way (Luke 23:46-49).

Confession is the natural outcome of contrition. The Publican had only one word to say about himself, and it wasn't flattering. He called himself a “sinner.”

Doubtless he was acquainted with the Law of God in the Scriptures. This was the standard by which he judged himself.

You might venture a guess as to which part of the Law of God got home to him the most. It seems from what the Pharisee said that this man had the reputation typical of tax-collectors, who were known for extortion as they collected for the government from their own people.

The 7th Commandment says, “Thou shalt not steal.” But this man had actually broken the whole Law of God, which summed up in a word is – “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart...and thy neighbour as thyself.” The whole Law hangs on these and if we offend in one point we are guilty of all.

The Publican didn’t make excuses, but cried out for mercy. “Be merciful” is from the Greek *ηιλαστηετι* (hilastheti), and means “be propitious.” The mercy-seat that covered the Ark of the Covenant, and upon which the blood of a lamb was

sprinkled on the Day of Atonement, was known as the propitiatory. This pictures the Gospel, for we are told that the blood of Christ is our propitiation (Romans 3:25, 26).

God answered the Publican's prayer and "justified" him, i.e. forgave him for Christ's sake, the promised Messiah. And as well as forgiveness, the term "justified" also means "righteous." God's mercy in His Son not only pardons our offences, but pronounces us clean. Legally speaking, believers have the same standing before God as Him. They are counted as "the righteousness of God in Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:20, 21).

*I do not come because my soul is free
from sin
And pure and whole and worthy of Thy
grace;
I do not speak to Thee because I've ever*

*justly kept
Thy laws and dare to meet Thy face.*

*I know that sin and guilt combine to
reign o'er
Every thought of mine and turn from
good to ill;
I know that when I try to be upright and
just
And true to Thee, I am a sinner still.*

*I know that often when I strive to keep a
spark of
Love alive for Thee, the powers within
Leap up in un-submissive might and oft
benumb
My sense of right and pull me back to sin.*

*I know that though in doing good I spend
my life,
I never could atone for all I've done;
But though my sins are black as night, I
dare to*

*Come before Thy sight because I trust
Thy Son.*

*In Him alone my trust I place, come
boldly to Thy
Throne of grace, and there commune
with Thee.*

*Salvation sure, O Lord, is mine, and, all
unworthy,
I am Thine, for Jesus died for me.*

(Martin Luther)