

Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican Luke 18v9-14 20th February 2025

“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 went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone that exalteth himself shall be abashed; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”

This parable has the added feature of having an explanation as to why it was delivered by Jesus. The situation is a common human failing, the inaccurate sense of superiority over others.

The **Pharisee** was an adherent of a form of the Jewish religion which is described elsewhere as *“the most straitest sect of our religion”* Acts 26v5. This is not Paul’s opinion but an inspired statement. They had a degree of understanding and appreciation. In Romans 11v25 it says that the Jews were only partly blind, not fully blind so they retained elements of the truth which as a people they once had more fully. Elsewhere Jesus criticised them as being hypocrites, that is those that say but do not do. In other words, do as they say not as they do. Mathew 23v3.

The Pharisees were not a religion founded on heresy but a religion which struggled to produce people of integrity. The nature of what they strived after was wrong. We should never strive to be better people than others, just those who are actually aware of their own failings more keenly. With that knowledge comes not a false piety or superiority but a desire to strive to be more Christ like in ourselves, and those who we are privileged to call our companions. If our companions cannot help us to see the faults in ourselves then they are not doing a very good job. If we do not want our companions to show us our transgressions, then we have deluded ourselves into thinking we can stand alone without outside help.

Job learnt that he could not remain a person of integrity in isolation, even praying for others behind their back, was not enough to truly help them, they need to know that you are praying for them. We all fail at that, as Job did! He was required to pray for the failing friends in the very last chapter, they could be saved despite their mistakes, when his children had already perished and were no longer able to be prayed for!

Pharisees are not just an old, outdated religion, there are many who follow the tenets of their deception even today. We can all too easily fall into a Pharisaic attitude if we are not awake to the potential for us to do so.

Such people thank God. They believe in Him and offer up prayer to Him.

They recognise sin and are repulsed by it. Avoiding extortion, loving justice, being faithful husbands, not having a wandering eye, and avoid compromise with the evil world., as they see it.

They fast regularly. They sacrifice for their faith, they are not unwilling to endure constraints to the normal indulgences, even of food itself, the daily bread God provides.

They sacrifice money, giving tithes of all they possess, believing the rest is theirs alone. Putting to shame many who talk about religion but never put their hand in their pocket to help others. How many can say that they give a tenth of their income in the service of divine things?

The **publican** was a condemned man. He earned his living from association with the state. The rulers were gentile interlopers whom God had reared up over Israel because of their sins, together with certain of Israel who accepted their patronage. He was not a person who had yet extricated himself from compromise, but even in a state of rejection by others (even this publican) he could see the need for change. He knew that he needed to repent and be transformed, as Jesus consistently taught, when he went about everywhere preaching the gospel to any of the lost sheep who would listen to him.

Jesus elsewhere dismissed them as those who were not brethren, Matthew 18v15-17. However, even non brethren can have their prayers answered if they seek forgiveness after acknowledgment of their sins. *"God be merciful to me a sinner"*. Saints are those who were sinners but have turned away from sin through the blood of Christ. We were all sinners but should not be so now, 1 Corinthians 6v11 *"And such were some of you, but ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus"*

Looking at passages which speak of sinners we see it as a class of people which is not continued onwards but rather there must be a moving away from those who are under divine condemnation because of sin. It is either being a sinner or a saint, not both!

Romans 5v8 *"But God commended His love towards us, in that, while we **were** yet sinners, Christ died for us"*.

James 5v20 *"Let him know that he which **converteth** the sinner from the error of his ways shall save a soul from death"*.

1 Peter 4v18 *"If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the **ungodly** and the sinner appear?"*

Jude v15 *"To execute judgment upon all which **ungodly sinners** have spoken against him"*.

This publican (not all publicans) not only had come to believe in the God of the Bible; they were both in the Jewish **Temple**, what should have been the House of Prayer for all nations; but also, had come to accept his true status before God, that of a sinner, who therefore needed to repent. He was not yet able to help others, as Jesus was.

We are not to be constant publicans who just continue in sin that grace may abound, but who heartily smite their breasts and regularly claim to repent! No, the parable is not telling us whom we should be, but whom we should not be. We need to be sinners no more but instead be imitators of Christ.