

Son; and our only redress is to approach Him on the terms of reality. That reality was seen in the publican's honest faith expressed in honest prayer.

May we always pray humbly before God in such a humble spirit as the publican possessed. It would be to the honor of God that all self-righteous conduct, attitude, and motive in serving and praying to God be removed from us. The Pharisee had a heart problem that caused him to refuse to see himself as God saw him, while the publican saw things as they really are between God and man. That reality of spiritual sight is the gist of humility. When we see ourselves as we really are, we will serve God and pray to God honestly as did the publican. With our eyes toward the ground, and our hearts feeling the guilt of our defilement, we will smite our evil hearts with our fists and cry out in utter self-abasement and with self-abhorrence, *God be merciful to me, the sinner*. If we have honest appraisal of ourselves, our lives, our service, then our prayers will be a continual exercise of this honest approach to God. Our life will then be filled with the commendations of Christ as He notes our honest walk and hears our honest prayers. Amen.

A series of expository studies for
Serious Bible Students and Honest Inquirers on

HONEST PRAYER

from some of those Holy Scriptures
that have to do with
Sincere Prayer, Real Prayer,
Honest Prayer.

Honest Prayer is in Accord with the Word of God,
which Sacred Writ is the Sole Determining Authority as
to what Constitutes Prayer in its Genuine Spiritual
Substance.

The First in this series is

THE HONEST SPIRIT AND MANNER OF HONEST PRAYER:

THE PARABLE OF THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN

Being an exposition of Jesus' teaching in

Luke 18: 9-14,

Wherein He exposes dishonest prayer to be
abomination to God; and shows honest prayer to
God is honored and blessed even when its content
acknowledges one's own failure as deserving only
condemnation from a Holy God.

Chapter 1	<i>The Manner and Spirit of Honest Prayer</i>	page
CONTENTS AND OUTLINE		
<i>heading</i>		<i>page</i>
THE SPIRIT AND MANNER OF HONEST PRAYER		
The Study Text,	<i>Luke 18:9-14</i>	3
The Reason for the Parable,	<i>Luke 18:9</i>	4
Spoken to the Self-righteous,	<i>Luke 18:9a</i>	5
Spoken to Those Who Disdain and Demean Others	<i>Luke 18:9b</i>	6
I. TWO CONTRASTING MEN IN PRAYER		
	<i>Luke 18:10</i>	8
The Dishonest Self-righteous Pharisee		8
An Honest Unrighteous Publican		8
II. TWO CONTRASTING SPIRITS AND MANNERS IN PRAYER,		
	<i>Luke 18:11-12</i>	10
The Manner of Dishonest Prayer,	<i>Luke 18:11a</i>	10
The Content of Dishonest Prayer,	<i>Luke 18:11b-12</i>	10
The Manner of Honest Prayer,	<i>Luke 18:13a</i>	14
The Content of Honest Prayer,	<i>Luke 18:13b</i>	15
III. TWO CONTRASTING RESULTS OF PRAYER		
	<i>Luke 18:14</i>	20
Justification through Honest Prayer,	<i>Luke 18:14a</i>	20
Exaltation through Honest Prayer,	<i>Luke 18:14b</i>	22
ii		

Chapter 1	<i>The Manner and Spirit of Honest Prayer</i>	page
<p>that is His because as we humble ourselves with Him, we draw a portion of the fruit of the eternal principle of self-humiliation leading to exaltation. That is an eternal law of God.¹⁸ This exaltation is the truth of <i>Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up</i>, precisely what the publican did and had promised him by Jesus' words. Again, <i>But he giveth more grace unto the humble. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.</i>¹⁹ This was the experience of both the Pharisee and the publican. The one was resisted by God for his pride and arrogance; to the other God granted grace and favor for his humility.</p> <p>The kind of exaltation that the world gives is at best secondary to this real exaltation by God. This exaltation is genuine favor. It is authored by God Who has all and gives all. <i>Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.</i>²⁰ The kind of spirit and motive in approaching God as was exhibited in the manner and content of the honest prayer of the publican will <i>be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.</i>²¹ But the manner and content of the dishonest prayer of the Pharisee exhibited <i>Pride [that] goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.</i>²²</p> <p>The primary reason for men's prayers to God should be to find justification in His sight. We should reason thusly: "If God is pleased with me, then I know things will go well with me. I know that He controls all things; therefore if I am in His favor He will bless me." We all know that we shall answer to Him in judgment; consequently we need to be justified in His sight. We have a need to know that with which He is pleased. Then we will have no fear of Him in judgment. This kind of justification is what the publican obtained and at which the Pharisee failed. They both sought it, but only one found it. Honest prayer to God must be an act of humility on our part, because we are unworthy of Him or of His</p>		

¹⁸ Phil. 2:5-11 ¹⁹ Jms. 4:10, 6 ²⁰ I Peter 5:6 ²¹ I Peter 1:7 ²² Prov. 16:18

For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

II Corinthians 5:21

And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.

Philippians 2:9

Exaltation through Honest Prayer

There were two contrasting results for these two men and their prayers as regards exaltation. Jesus said, *he that humbleth himself shall be exalted*. There could be no greater honor than to be from this cause commended by Jesus Christ. Every Christian longs to hear the words of favor from God, and the most important and profound come only by means of honest humility expressed at the throne of grace in acknowledgement of Jesus Christ's substitutionary life and death for sinners.

Notice the exaltation that the publican secured as a result of his humble spirit as expressed in his honest prayer. He not only went down to his house justified, but Jesus said that he was *exalted*. In explaining the reason for the justification, He said, *For he that humbleth himself* [just as the publican had done] *shall be exalted*. To be declared righteous is what justification is; and that is exaltation in itself. But Jesus means even more than that. The kind of humble and trusting approach to God as the publican exhibited will bring a share in the glory of Christ in His eternal kingdom. That is the *far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory* of which Paul wrote as being the result of the humiliation of this earthly life.¹⁷ This exaltation or glory is what has ever been the possession of the Son of God, and now it is His to give to honest believers among men by virtue of His substitutionary work as man's Savior. The authority to share these glories falls to Him because of His humbling Himself on the cross. This exaltation is our share in all

¹⁷ *II Cor. 4:17*

CHAPTER I

THE SPIRIT AND MANNER OF HONEST PRAYER

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.*

Luke 18:9-14

Jesus had much to say on honest prayer. Following His teaching on the effect of continuing in honest prayer and its influence against the continuing evils of this age,¹ He now teaches, in another parable, the spirit and manner of that kind of honest prayer. He defines the word "honest" through the examples of the Pharisee and the publican. Christ used His message on God's positive consideration of the honest prayers of His elect as a backdrop to teach in another parabolic illustration His definitive word on just what constitutes this "honest prayer" as just taught in the Parable of the Unjust Judge.

Jesus used this parable to emphasize that our prayers must be honest if they are to be heard by God. In this parable He emphasized the different approaches to and the different results of prayer. He places before us two men with their prayers, who

¹ *Luke 18:1-8*, The Parable of the Unjust Judge

represent two classes of men, perhaps representing today professing Christians—churchgoers. And as we study this parable, we would do well to remember that one of these two men might bear a resemblance to some of us. We may exhibit tendencies that take after the one or the other. In these men and their approaches to God, there are two contrasting spirits and manners in prayer presented. One is dishonest prayer, the other is honest prayer. Jesus would have us to learn from them which would be our best approach to God. In the prayers of these two men—a Pharisee and a publican—there are quite contrasting results of prayer also. May we consider attentively this teaching from Jesus and so learn to pray always in the spirit and manner of the honest prayer of the publican.

The Reason for the Parable

And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.

Luke 18:9

Two of the basic rules for understanding the Bible properly are to identify the one speaking and the one to whom he is speaking. It is obvious that Jesus Christ is the speaker and teacher of this parable; but this verse specifies a particular group for whom the parable was originally intended: *certain which trusted in themselves*. This also gives to us the original reason for the parable. These did not trust in Jesus Who is God's manifestation of grace, but in their own finite selves. They could not hear the Wisdom saying, "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool." Look around you, see the demands made upon men which they are unable to meet in themselves. Mental breakdowns are common; Americans spend millions of dollars on tranquilizers each year because men are trusting in themselves. It is only through God that men can be enabled to endure properly the challenges of a world that consists of a sin-cursed and sin-orientated environment. Jesus is teaching honest prayer as the key element for being right with God, which in turn will enable its devotees to stand the stresses of everyday life.

means that if we bring ourselves down in the sight of God and man, it is a virtue of humility; but if God must bring us down in His sight and in man's, then it is an abasement, a degradation, a disgrace, a shame. If we humble ourselves before God as did the publican, it is an act of virtuous humility, to be commended by our Judge. If we refuse to humble ourselves before Him, it will bring dishonor to us in the end by our Judge. It is all a matter of honesty with God. The Pharisee thought himself to be more than he was; he was honest neither with himself nor with God. But the publican was simply honest and realistic about his place before a holy God, and was rewarded accordingly. The Pharisee thought to justify himself before God; therefore Jesus discredited and dishonored him. The publican thought to humble himself before God; therefore God credited and honored Him with a word of justification.

Honest prayer brought justification to the publican; he *went down to his house justified*. The word used by Jesus was δικαιωω, "to deem to be right." Ideally it is the complete fulfillment of the law of God that alone could bring such an acclaim from God, but this declaration came to the publican because his violations of God's holy Law were covered at the mercyseat. He had the same righteousness as God's own. This was quite an announcement. It meant that this publican had secured a righteousness that God had provided him through honest faith as expressed in an honest prayer, and that imputed or merely counted righteousness was entirely acceptable to Him. *He went down to his house*, that is, he returned to his life on earth, actually in possession of a righteous standing before God. He had experienced *being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*¹⁶ before payment had actually occurred at Calvary. God saw through the ritual of the Temple sacrificial system into the heart of the gospel of the grace of the blood of Jesus Christ; and the publican spoke to God an honest prayer that resulted in this wonderful declaration from Jesus. His sins were covered and he had a justified (righteous) position before God through Christ,

¹⁶ Romans 3:24

III. TWO CONTRASTING RESULTS OF PRAYER

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

God answered the prayers of these two men. God in human flesh, in Jesus' words, gave the conclusive and final response to the praying on both Pharisee and publican. Jesus' decisive resolution of the prayers of these two men covered two critical areas of justification and exaltation.

Justification through Honest Prayer

There were two contrasting results for these two men and their prayers as regards justification. Jesus said, *this man* [the publican] *went down to his house justified rather than the other* [the Pharisee]. Jesus made it a point of contrast in the way that He stated it, *This man rather than the other*. But Jesus also gave us the reason for the justification of the one and the condemnation of the other. He said that it was because the one *humbled himself*, while the other *exalted himself*. While humility brings its own reward, so self-exaltation brings its own reward. The one is good, the other is evil; and the one good brings a good reward, while the other evil brings an evil reward. They both alike bring certain and sure outcomes. The principle is found throughout the Bible. The original Greek is unique, and the Authorized Version helped clarify it by the way it is translated Jesus' words.

In the original the same Greek word is used for *humbleth* and *abased*. The translators caught the very meaning of Jesus' words by naming a self-induced humbling as *humbleth*, but a God-originated humbling as *abasement*—same Greek word, different meanings. *Abasement* has the connotation of degradation and humiliation, while *humbleth* is a rather sweet virtue to a sensitive soul. This

The reason for this parable is to teach this key ingredient of prayer: An honest spirit—temper, tone, disposition—and manner of prayer to God. Jesus emphasized this kind of prayer as the only preeminently honest prayer.

Spoken to the Self-righteous

This parable was spoken to persons who *trusted in themselves that they were righteous*; or the more literal translation, they “persuaded themselves” that they were righteous. This self-persuasion is at the heart of dishonest prayer. It exemplifies the wrong spirit and manner of dishonest men praying dishonest prayer. These to whom Jesus originally spoke this parable had “persuaded themselves” that they had in themselves a righteousness that was acceptable to God. How foolish to stand against the plain and honest teaching of Scripture! But that is the position of dishonest men. From Genesis through Revelation man is pictured as a terrible and vile sinner in the sight of God, who lacks any righteousness before the Holy God. Isaiah testified against all the self-righteous when he proclaimed,

But we are as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

Isaiah 64:6

Or hear the more recent verifying testimony of the great apostle,

As it is written, there is none righteous, no not one.

Romans 3:10

Sin blinds its devotees, and the self-righteous who convince themselves of their own righteousness are irrationally persuaded that they possess a spark of goodness that is pleasing to God, and they pray accordingly.

In addition to the testimony of the sacred Scripture, the self-righteous person resists the convicting power of God's Holy Spirit. He has always been a force in the world to convince all men of their guilt because of personal sin. This pharisaical self-righteousness was

predominating throughout Jewry during the time of Christ and the early church. The word of Stephen spoke directly to this evil condition,

Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears; ye do always resist the Holy Ghost, as your fathers did so do ye.

Acts 7:51

The Holy Spirit makes sin and its subsequent guilt known to men, and through that knowledge, all men come to realize that sin against God is a personal problem. He enters the mind and reveals sin as repugnant to God. He does convince men that he is personally destitute of all godly righteousness. But these to whom Jesus originally spoke this parable had quenched the Spirit, and had persuaded themselves that they were righteous. Therefore, Jesus chose to teach these kinds of people, through a parable exhibiting two contrasting spirits and manners in prayer, what actually comprises honest prayer. This parable should correct such foolishness as that which leads men to pray dishonest prayers to the honest God.

Spoken to Those Who Disdain and Demean Others

These to whom Jesus spoke this parable also *despised others*. This is another side of dishonest prayer that assures negative responses from God. This means that they thought little of others as compared to themselves. How very typical of the Pharisees is this reference; although it can with no degree of certainty be stated that these were Pharisees to whom He gave this teaching. Nonetheless, they as a group did look down on others because of their own conformity to certain ceremonial rules and religious regulations. Men of this type always despise others who do not measure up to what they consider necessary behavior. They look to other men for their standard of excellence instead of to God alone. This type said to the once blind man who was given sight by Jesus, *Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us?*² They think of themselves as being far above others in station and status. God said through the prophet Isaiah that these kind are,

² John 9:34

**God be mercysated for my sins. Oh God! Become
someway, somehow, atoned for me, the great sinner. My
only hope is for You to provide an adequate sacrifice to
cover my very black sin. Oh God! See the blood of Your
gracious provision for the covering of your Holy Law,
which, if you scrutinize it together with me and without
the blood, is your broken law.**

That is precisely what God has done in His Son, Jesus Christ. The publican-type sinners of the Old Testament without exception looked forward through a haze of cloudy types and representations of the real. As the writer of Hebrews put it,

*These [Old Testament saints] all died in faith, not
having received the promises, but having seen them afar off,
and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and
confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.*

Hebrews 11:13

But we today look back on the manifest work of God's atonement for sin in the cross of Jesus. *This is my blood*, said Jesus, *which is shed for many for the remission of sins*. The publican realized as he saw the blood from his animal sacrifice flow over the altar that his salvation would have to come from a higher source than mere men; this sin-cursed earth could not produce a worthy offering for his sin. Therefore, he appealed to God, in the truest kind of honest prayer, for mercy and for Him to provide somehow for his sins to be covered by the death of Another. The content as well as the manner of his appeal to God qualified the publican's prayer as honest prayer.

into one who had his sins removed by God in an act of loving grace. He desired to be pleasing and acceptable to God only on the basis of God's own covering for sin, provided by the shedding of His Own blood. He may not have understood many of the details of Christ's atonement, but he understood that his only hope lay in God's own provision of mercy, and not in his own worth. He had learned the great lesson of the Old Testament:

*And almost all things are by the law purged with blood;
and without shedding of blood is no remission.*

Hebrews 9:22

The Pharisee saw nothing noteworthy in any sacrifice; indeed he needed none because according to his own dishonest prayer, he was *not as other men are*. To him the blood was but a ritual. Could this be true of any of us? Is the blood of Jesus only a liturgy performed by a rather distant God, Who is not personal to us, and His work in the cross of Christ being a mere story in which we ourselves are not really participants? Could we have missed the real meaning of worship, which is to exalt Jesus Christ in our own personal estimation as our own personal Lord and Savior?

How very different was the spirit and motive of the publican! Imagine as the publican brought his sacrifice to the temple priest. He watched as the priest took the knife at the altar just outside the Holy Place—very near the Holy of Holies—and took the knife to the throat of the little innocent lamb. He was filled with sorrow, not only for his sins, but that they had caused the death of an innocent victim. He understood that the blood of animals was not sufficient payment for his sins to satisfy the wrath of God against his sins. He knew that just inside the Temple, inside the Holy of Holies, was the mercyseat and the ark and the altar of incense and the shew bread; but his mind was upon the place where the blood had been placed by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement. He remembered the mercyseat. His attention was upon his broken law, upon his sins, upon his own personal guilt, and that nothing but God could take such guilt away. He cried out in desperation,

³*A people that provoke me to anger continually to my face.*

⁴*Which say, Stand by thyself come not near to me; for I am holier than thou. These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day.*

⁵*I will not keep silence, but will recompense, even recompense into their bosom,*

⁶*Your iniquities, and the iniquities of your fathers together, saith the LORD.*
Isaiah 65: 3,5,6,7

This spirit, this temper, is a mood which is dishonesty incarnate; and a prayer that originates from this kind of disposition and temperament will be dishonest prayer flaunted before the honest God. The Christian will exhibit different prayer from this kind of arrogance-motivated and self-bragging spirited blasphemy exhibited by the Pharisee in this parable. The Christian will pray honest prayers as demonstrated by the publican; both Christians and publicans pray honest prayers to the honest God.

In considering these contrasting persons in prayer, we will emphasize three main points of contrast between the pharisaical kind of approach to God and the publican kind of approach to God in prayer. First, we will distinguish between two contrasting men in prayer—a Pharisee and a publican, *verse 10*. Second, we will learn two contrasting spirits and manners in prayer, which occur among men, *verses 11-13*. And third, we will learn from two contrasting results of prayer, as determined by Jesus, *verse 14*. Unfortunately, both kinds of prayer are found among God's own people, because many have forgotten the fundamental truth of honest prayer, and that one's spirit and manner in prayer is more important than words merely uttered toward God. May we all carefully listen to Jesus and learn the spirit and manner of honest prayer.

I. TWO CONTRASTING MEN IN PRAYER

Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. Luke 18:10

The Dishonest Self-righteous Pharisee

One of these two men was a Pharisee, a member of a sect of religious Jews who maintained a high plane of external cleanliness. They were proud, haughty, and self-righteous; and held the “common” people in great disrespect. Therefore, they separated themselves from those who did not conform to their own ideas of rightness and religion. They believed in keeping themselves very clean outwardly and observed their interpretation of the Law of Moses quite strictly. They made a great show at being religious and believed that salvation came by keeping the law. How much in error were their beliefs in this regard, because law only brings condemnation upon all,

Therefore, by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. Romans 3:20

For if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain. Galatians 2:21

It is no surprise to find Christ speaking out again and again against the Pharisees and their type of righteousness,

Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:20

An Honest Unrighteous Publican

The other man who approached God in this parable was a publican. These men were Jewish tax collectors who served the Roman government. Since Judea was a province of the Roman Empire and publicans helped the Romans in their occupation of Palestine, the majority of Jews looked upon them as traitors; and

The high priest took the blood of a goat into this Holy of Holies and sprinkled it upon the mercyseat seven times in order to make a blood covering for the broken Law of Ten commandments beneath. In this way was the sin covered. This was a picture of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, taking away the guilt of a broken Law of Ten Commandments.

And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses.

Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross. Colossians 2:13-14

But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building;

Neither by the blood of bulls and of goats, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. Hebrews 9:11-12¹³

In the word, *merciful*, this publican used the same word-stem for *mercyseat*¹⁴ as the condition on which he appealed to God for salvation. What the publican really prayed was, “God, be mercyseated for me the sinner.” He asked God somehow, someway, to provide for him a covering for his violations of God’s Holy Law of Ten Commandments that lay under the *mercyseat* in the ark. He was saying, “God, provide a sacrifice to cover my sins, a bloody sacrifice that will cover the broken law of my guilt, that will satisfy you as a payment for my sins in which you will delight.” The publican knew of the Shekinah Glory—the mark of God’s presence—which dwelt between the cherubim upon the mercyseat when sin was covered by blood.¹⁵ He understood the principle of an innocent victim’s death taking the place of one who, as a guilty violator of God’s law, was already under the condemnation of death. He sought to be changed from one who was not able to approach God because of his defilement

¹³ Q.v. the entire pertinent section, *Hebrews 9:1-15* ¹⁴ *Hebrews 9:5*¹⁵ *Psalms 80:1*

translated *merciful* has deep and enlightening meaning. Its near root-kin word is translated *mercyseat* in *Hebrews 9:5*, and *propitiation* in *Romans 3:25*. This word will unlock the real justifying power of the publican's prayer of faith. The idea of the *mercyseat* in the tabernacle is the key that unlocks this door of understanding to us.

The tabernacle of God was the place where God manifested His presence with the children of Israel. Later, after the construction of the temple, He manifested Himself in it, which arrangements were patterned like the original tabernacle, both having been patterned after the true tabernacle in heaven.⁹ It was there that the people approached God through the priesthood on the basis of the shed blood of animal sacrifices.

There were two principal areas of this approach, the inner Holy of Holies and the outer Holy Place, separated by a heavy veil.¹⁰ The high priest entered the inner Holy of Holies only once a year on the Day of Atonement to atone for the sin of the people. In that inner chamber several pieces of furniture were variously used to reflect certain great spiritual truths, but two of those articles within the separating veil portrayed the primary message of the entire sacrificial system of the Jews; they were the ark of the covenant and the *mercyseat*.¹¹ To put it simply, the ark was a box and the *mercyseat* its elaborate lid. The term *mercyseat* was used as we use the term "seat" of a county. The "county seat" is the main, or dominant, town in the county; it is the place to conduct county business. So also the *mercyseat* was the place where God determined to conduct mercy's business. The ark contained among other things the tablets of stone whereon were written the Law of Ten Commandments.¹² The *mercyseat* covered the top of the ark and had two angelic beings of gold looking down on the *mercyseat*. It was within this Holy of Holies that God dealt with the ceremonial defilement of His people, and where God continuously portrayed the shed blood of Jesus Christ in order to pass over the sins of His people.

⁹ *Hebrews 9: 1-5* ¹⁰ *Hebrews 9:1-3* ¹¹ *Hebrews 9:5* ¹² *Hebrews 9:4*

they were hated for their complicity and collusion with the Romans. Very often their dealings were crooked, and because of this, together with their contact with the Romans, each publican was considered as religiously unclean and as the chief of sinners. They were outcasts of the temple and of the society of God's people, the Jews. They were associated in character with thieves and adulterers, with the profane and the immoral.

What a contrast in our text! The one man a Pharisee, an outwardly clean, external keeper of the law; and the other a publican, a hated, looked down on, held in contempt, despised traitor. However, both were in need of the Savior. Both are about to approach God in prayer, and both will warrant a response from Him. Unfortunately, only one will pray honest prayer from an honest and renewed heart, the other will pray dishonest prayer from an evil and unregenerate heart.

II. TWO CONTRASTING SPIRITS AND MANNERS IN PRAYER

We will first consider the spirit and manner of the Pharisee; and second, we will take notice of the spirit and manner of the publican. In both considerations there will be considerable contrasts between the two, which amount to just one difference: the one being dishonest, the other being honest.

The Manner of Dishonest Prayer

*The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself,
Luke 18:11a*

Notice first, his manner. This Pharisee, having been convinced of his own righteousness, *stood and prayed* to God. Standing in prayer is one of the acceptable postures for prayer. However, this word, *stood*, actually means, “standing erect,” and indicates a posture of assurance and even boldness. Can you not see this self-righteous man entering the temple court with the most costly sacrifice available? Then he proudly turns it over to the priest, hoping for all to see his costly sacrifice. As soon as the priest received the animal, he cared little or none at all for the sacrificial blood. His interest in the sacrifice is over as soon as he gets the notice of others. He proudly and boldly takes the highest and most prominent place of prayer in the temple. Once in a prestigious position before the people, he is ready to bless God and man with his noble prayer. Therefore, he *stood* erectly and stately in a physical position which was indicative of the inner position and condition of his heart.

The Content of Dishonest Prayer

*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 18:11b-12*

Second, *he would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven.* Literally, the Greek reads that he “was not willing to lift up his eyes to heaven.” He had no inclination to look up, because, conscious of his own guilt, he felt a deep sense of shame and sorrow for his sins. Men who are conscious of guilt tend to fix their eyes on the ground of their earthy existence, suggesting an inner awareness of their humble or modest origin and existence. They feel their baseness before God.

Third, *he smote upon his breast.* Notice that the publican was convinced that the source of his guilt lay much deeper than just outward acts. He sensed a deep anguish because of his sinful nature; therefore he smote upon himself in the area of his heart. He understood the corrupt condition of men’s hearts, that they are *deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*.⁸ By smiting his breast he showed his awareness of an inner condition of condemnation in any consideration from God.

Also, in his prayer there is evident an extreme self-condemnation in the publican. The Greek has a definite article before the word, *sinner*. He said, *God be merciful to me the sinner*. He considered himself the sinner above all sinners., just as Paul expressed the same concerning himself,

*This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that
Christ came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. I
Timothy 1:15*

He saw the sins of no one else at that moment. Only his own sins haunted his conscience and caused a burden of guilt and shame that was so terrible that he could only cry out for God’s mercy, *God be merciful to me the sinner*.

The Content of Honest Prayer

God be merciful to me a sinner. Luke 18:13b

The content of his prayer showed a profound understanding of man’s guilt and of God’s gracious redemption. The Greek word

⁸ *Jeremiah 17:9*

himself a violator of the Holy Law of God, and was in the same ostracized and outcast lot as the publican. The Pharisee was again inaccurate, even dishonest, about himself in prayer to the honest God.

The Pharisee concluded his self-righteous and vain prayer by claiming more righteousness than the law required. He said, *I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess*. The law required only one fast a year during the Great Day of Atonement, and demanded tithes only on the increase of the herd and on the fruit of the field; but in his own mind, his righteousness exceeded even what God required. Oh! The boldness of this hypocritical ignorance of the righteousness of God and of the wickedness of man! The holy and perfect and good law, which was meant to show man's guilt before God, was itself perverted to show this man's super-righteousness. He twisted the law's proper and intended use into a grotesque vindication of his own claim to righteousness. He used God's pure law for his impure purpose at vainglory in his immensely dishonest spirit and motive in prayer.

The manner and content of his prayer was abomination before God, and it only served to further condemn him. Instead of his prayer becoming a vehicle of blessings, it became a cause of condemnation, because his attitude was not humble.

The Manner of Honest Prayer

And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast.

Luke 18:13a

The manner of this publican was very different from the Pharisee. **First**, the publican is described as *standing afar off*. To one who saw himself as a sinner before God, the temple represented divine sanctity. This publican did not consider himself worthy to approach God or even to approach God's house; therefore he stood afar off. He could in no way justify himself for his corrupt condition before God, and considered himself unclean in God's estimation, as most certainly he was.

As we study his prayer, we will find out much about his spirit and motive in praying. He begins by addressing "God." Already, he has broken our Lord's strict commandment, *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain*.³ Because of an arrogant spirit, His prayer was a vain thing in God's sight; therefore this was a vain use of God's name. This points up the utter uselessness of even prayer for the man who is self-righteous. There must first be a change in attitude before prayer is acceptable to God, or becomes profitable to man. The unbeliever cannot so much as open his mouth before God in prayer, except it is in humbleness of heart. Only one prayer by the natural man is acceptable, honest prayer, and that is the prayer of humble faith and repentance. *Unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure*;⁴ that means even their prayers are impure. We should learn from this that our attitude in prayer is our first and main consideration in approaching God. Reverent is His name, and reverence is our use of it; and reverence is the attitude of honest prayer.

His first appeal in prayer is his imitation thanks; he said, *I thank thee that I...*, and then goes on to list his supposed righteousness as reason for his thankfulness. This Pharisee was actually thanking God for how righteous he was! How vain is this also, and it just confirms our condemnation of his use of God's name at all, even in prayer. This was indeed a baseless and hollow thanks rendered to God. This is the value of all prayer that is spoken in the wrong spirit. Merely voicing thanks is not real thanks at all, especially if the thanks are in themselves for an evil motive—in this case, for self aggrandizement and for furthering self-righteousness. We should learn from this that real thanks to God must be thought out and accurately spoken, else it is just more sin. This kind of prayer is actually a cause for judgement from God, rather than a basis for receiving favors from Him. Truly, *Unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled*.⁵

³ Exodus 20:7 ⁴ Titus 1:15 ⁵ loc.cit.

This Pharisee's prayer was accompanied by a **self-conceit and despicable comparisons** with others. His thanks were that he was *not as other men are*, and a little further into his supposed prayer he said, *or even as this publican*. It is not pleasing to God when we compare ourselves with other men and not with God only. Our righteousness and goodness may really appear to be of some worth when considered only in man's horizontal plane, but when compared with the perfections of God, the result is inward shame and abhorrence of self. Others are forgotten when we are allowed a portion of the light of His purity. This should teach us that acceptable prayer—real prayer, honest prayer—requires a proper view of ourselves as regards God, wholly apart from other men, and without any comparisons with the conduct of other men; or else no audience in the presence of God is possible.

All this self conceit and arrogance leads their advocates to **foolish and untenable lies to God** in their supposed prayers. This Pharisee claimed that, *I am not as other men are, ...or even as this publican*. Since this Pharisee was a member of the human race, one of the sons of Adam, he was indeed as other men, namely, a sinner in need of repentance and brokenness before God. Since *all have sinned and [equally] come short of the glory of God,*⁶ even this self-righteous Pharisee was just like the publican when it came to approaching God. He was a violator of God's Holy Law and Person through his personal choice of sin over compliance, because as a sinner by natural birth, he had not failed the mark of excellence required by God. Because his prayer was in itself a lie, it contained this consequent lie.

To add to his untruth, He listed three things that he considered the publican guilty of before God, as denoted in his qualifying words, *or even as this publican*. **First**, he declared to God that he was not an *extortioner*. This had reference to the publicans' practice of forcing extra monies from his fellow Jews through fraudulent additions to the actual tax liabilities, which he collected for his own profit. The publicans were certainly guilty of this sort of

⁶ Rom.3:23

extortion, but how would this help or prove meritorious to this Pharisee? That others are guilty of evils against God eases not our own fate before Him. Contrariwise, since God is not "informed" through our prayers, God's attention was not diverted from the evils of the Pharisee's failures, but the attention of the Pharisee had been significantly and detrimentally focused from his own ills to others' wrongs. It is the *beam* in our eye that hinders true and accurate prayers to God. With a *beam* in one's eye, only inaccuracies and distortions will be addressed to God. We should learn from this that in our relations with God, only two persons are under ever consideration, God and I, period.

Second, the Pharisee claimed not to have been *unjust*, again comparing himself to the publican. It is somewhat ironic that this publican probably was not just and fair in his dealings with other men, but in marked contrast with this Pharisee, the publican was honest with God. While the publican unjustly deceived other men about their taxes in order to profit himself, in marked contrast, the Pharisee unjustly attempted to deceive God about his own real moral condition in an attempt to justify himself. This made the Pharisee much more *unjust* than was the publican. What a lie this was! What a dishonest prayer to claim to be *just*, while in that very claim of self-awareness, he is guilty of the very extreme of injustice—attempting to deceive the undeceived God in prayer.

Third, The Pharisee claimed moral cleanness by disclaiming any association with *adulterers*. Again, he saw in the publican "a sinner"; the commonwealth of Israel branded every publican "a sinner" in the religious world. Therefore, this publican—all publicans—were "sinners," violators of the covenant, transgressors of the Abrahamic and Mosaic traditions, and had been outcasts with murderers, liars, thieves, and *...adulterers*." To this Pharisee this publican was morally unfit to approach God, and his analysis was correct. But the Pharisee failed to realize that he himself was also branded by God's holiness "a sinner." Because of even one sin, he was *guilty of all*,⁷ that is, he was

⁷ Jms. 2:10