

The Pharisee and the Tax Collector.

Reading Luke 18:9 - 14.

The reading is short, only six verses. But it follows in Luke's favourite method of comparisons. These may contrast or compliment. This is the second of two parables. We need to also take in the first parable. It concerns the disciples and their persistence in prayer. This parable follows the teaching of Jesus concerning the trials of the testings at the end of this age and will be very applicable in those days. In that context Luke says that Jesus taught them a parable that those who live through a difficult protracted time ought always to pray and not give up. It applies to those who suffer long times of difficulty in this age as well as they who will live through the great tribulation (17:20-37).

The self -righteous pharisee and the self confessed sinner. This is a study in compared appearances and reality. Of course the lesson for us is to be realistic about our own.

To help us understand the Pharisees, consider: They were the largest and most popular Jewish sect. It included scribes and lawyers. They were very popular, attracting to themselves the favour of most of the ordinary people. The Jewish historian, Josephus, speaks of them existing as early as 150 years before Christ. Their unwieldy name comes from the Hebrew word *parash*, meaning "to separate", A good name because they were continually separating holy things. At first they meant to separate themselves from the then current national corruption, attempting to restore the practice of nationally pure worship of almighty God.

By the Lord's time, things had gone sadly astray. they had abandoned any semblance of inner tenderness, reducing

a true spirit of holiness to mere external exactness screened by a veneer of purity. Their principles in the beginning were holy. The Lord in His day testified that all they had managed to do was to cleanse the outside of the cup and the plate, but within there was but abominable decay, like the whitewashed, corpse filled, tombs that the Jews then maintained in the place of burial grounds. They still kept up a form of outward regulation, but they had utterly lost all their heart service. Hypocrisy was now the substitute for that true spirit of godliness which characterized their origins.

They were now all show and pretence. Theologically they were the fundamentalists of the day, they acknowledged God to be the One God; But only the Pharisees accepted all the Old Testament. They believed in spirits, and a form of resurrection for the righteous and hell for the wicked.

The Sadducees were equivalent to our modernist in their religious opinions and practices. They also accepted the first five books of the Bible, containing the origins and the law that God gave to Moses, but no more. These two groups readily argued over their doctrinal differences. Paul, once a Pharisee used this discension on an occasion to his advantage when on trial. See Acts 23: 6-11.

In our reading, verse nine sets the pattern for the passage exposition. Jesus told a parable. It is a story meant to instruct. It may be history, but if it is fiction it is true to its setting and topic. The meaning, not the origin is most important to us today. He selected a group of Pharisees, "some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt."

We might find it in our heart to be critical of them. But let us not be too hasty to judge them. I remember attending a conference on ministry to muslims. And a young refugee said to me, "The trouble with you Australian Christians is that your Trinity is, 'Father, Son and the Holy Bible.'" He meant that we were more concerned about the exact meaning of a text than we were about its ministry to the heart of our hearer. I learned from him and have never forgotten it.

The Pharisee, Jesus said, trusted in himself, that is, he trusted in his own knowledge of and ability to respond to the precepts and demands of the Law, and his meticulous observance of them rather than in the God whose word it was and whom he professed to serve. He believed that the acceptance and approval of God would be achieved by him carefully keeping every part of the law of Moses. To achieve this with its many requirements the Pharisees had reduced every precept to a summary observance, that when kept, they believed, met that part of the requirement. The key word in this sentence is 'reduced', for in reducing the law to a simple set of workable 'do's' and 'don'ts' they also diluted its spirit and meaning. In summary they were formulating their own system of salvation by works.

Turn to the Sermon on the Mount. Here are a number of the sayings of the Pharisees that Jesus took up as examples of their method of modifying the Commandments, to make them easier to observe. These modifications were called "the tradition of the elders." The title is a description that differentiates it from the law of Moses

First, Matthew 5:21 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders

will be liable to judgement .

Jesus countered, Matthew 5:22-26. Read His response now.

Second, Matthew You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'

Jesus countered, Matthew 5:28-30. Read his response

Third, Matthew 5:31 It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.'

Jesus countered, Matthew 5:32. Read His response.

Fourth, Matthew 5:33 "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.'

Jesus countered, Matt 5:34 - 37. Read His response.

Fifth, "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'

Jesus countered, Matthew 5:39-42. Read His response.

Sixth, Matthew 5:43 "You have heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy

Jesus countered, Matthew 5:44-48. Read His response.

The tradition of the elders were the Pharisees and Scribes simplifications. In their view adequately observed the law of God given through Moses and they were much less trouble to observe. They then placed all their stress upon them. But, they took the heart out of God's word. Thus we read:

Matthew 15:2 &3 "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat." He answered

responding to them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?"

Mark 7:8 You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men."

Mark 7:9 And he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!"

Mark 7:13 thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do."

Then they compounded their guilt by looking down on others who were not trained as they had been to keep their traditions even though these others may have respected the law of Moses, and as Jesus put it here, 'they looked at others with contempt.'

V10. Two men went up into the temple to pray. A pharisee and a tax collector. There were two classes of tax collectors in the Roman world. There was the superior, Romans, working mainly with the Romans. And the inferior locals, Jews, mostly as found in the Gospels. They included Matthew, a disciple but known as 'Mathew the Tax Collector' Matthew 10:3, and amongst them also our man. These men were despised by the Romans, the Greeks, and the Jews, for their intolerable greed and ill gotten wealth. They were detested especially by the Jews, to whom Rome was odious, and they were considered betrayers of their liberties. Verse nine tells us that Jesus told this parable to this class of believer.

A Pharisee and a tax collector entered the temple together. Being Jewish they stood to pray. It was the hour for formal corporate prayer which was held at nine in the morning and three in the afternoon. There would be private prayer at other

times. What is your preferred posture in prayer? Some kneel when prayer is offered in Church.

What pose do you adopt as a forgiven sinner in the presence of your Heavenly Father? My own habit is to simply bow my heart in prayer into where-ever I am which seems to fit the instruction, "we ought always to pray and not lose heart." Luke 18:1 et.al. Travelling, or in bed when I awake at night, before I rise in the morning, or at my desk. I am a child of my Heavenly Father. As such I believe that I am ever welcome in His presence through the merits of Jesus Christ my Lord. If a matter is very serious I will kneel over an open Bible. Serious needs call for serious prayer.

My children do not need to kneel or stand in my presence, but I expect genial respect from them, and I offer it to them. Thus as I am a child of God, I personally do not feel an obligation to kneel or stand in His presence, but I offer due respect to God in his presence at all times. You ought to work out for yourself your own prayer offerings to God.

The Pharisee stood, according to custom, by himself and prayed. He would not identify with the tax collector. He could not share with other men: extortioners, unjust, adulterers, even this tax collector. He stood where he could look down on others. And from there he looked up to his own values.

He adhered to the stipulated fasting days which were the second and fifth days of the week, Monday and Thursday.

His was a very self centred prayer. Although it is addressed to God, it is directed to all those in the temple. Count the number of times he says "I" in vs11&12. He is like the rich fool in Luke 12:16-20. Look it up.

His moral values. According to the method of the Pharisee, having set himself apart from ordinary men, he began sharing his self righteousness with all who would listen, or could not fail to hear; he shared the virtues that he heaped upon his obedience. Alfred Edersheim points out that he dropped every pretence of thanksgiving in his ongoing interactions.

This Pharisee offered to God the three outward elements of his discipleship. Giving through tithes; Worship through fasting; and praying publicly. He performed each of these as an act to accrue the adulation and praise of others. In them he was rewarded by people praising his discipleship. Therefore his reward by was them, was paid instantly. and there was no more praise to come. When we look at the role of this man we can understand all the better the verse in the Bible that says: "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 5:20.

His Fastidious Giving. Pharisees were fastidious in their tithing. They tithed all they bought, or sold even to taking one tenth of garden herbs used in their dinner. They would not share a meal at the invitation of others, just in case it had not been tithed beforehand.

Paul's instruction to fellow Christians is different, "If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience." If however the conscience of a brother is otherwise, consider him. "But if someone says to you, 'This has been offered in sacrifice,' then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of *his* conscience." -

1 Corinthians 10:27&28. A brother's conscience is more important than your freedom.

Something to think about:

When scruples come into conflict there are times to overlook our own for that of others. It is an act of grace that exceeds the obligation of the law.

- *Is there ever a time to stand fast on your own convictions. What are they?
- *List the times when you should quietly go against you own preferred taboos.
- *How could you make such times a point of gracious witness?

Acknowledgements:

Scripture references are taken from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

Reference detail is taken from Alfred Edersheim's "The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah". He was a Jew who turned to Christ then was ordained as a minister of the Scottish Free Church and later as a Vicar of the Church of England.(English language updated)

Also from the notes of Adam Clark (1760-1832), a Wesleyan theologian. From his monumental Bible Commentary (English language updated).

Luke 18:13. The expression in our passage reflects the act of repentance from sin. This publican felt before God like Ezra 9:6 when the returning Israelites had mixed themselves with an heathen people, not distinguishing themselves from their idolatry and unholiness. He cried, "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens."