

Day Nineteen

And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. "The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' "But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' "I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."
-Luke 18:9-14

The Right Attitude in Prayer

A few days ago we looked at the physical posture in prayer. Today we will look at the mental posture, or the heart, in prayer. It is not surprising that often the two are not that far apart in relationship. Our verse today is the same as that of the study on physical posture.

It may also be useful to look at the language we use as well when we address God. Many feel that the pronouns used to address God ought to be such as to reflect respect, reverence and awe for the Almighty God, Creator of the universe. I don't find fault in this as it can reflect the true nature of the heart. But, that being said, is a prayer unacceptable if one does not use 'Thee', or 'Thou' when addressing God? That may be a question to ask and answer following this lesson.

The differences were so stark with the two who prayed in our text today, that one cannot but see plainly the deficiencies of the Pharisee and the acceptance of the humble tax-gatherer. The very fact that the Pharisee called to attention his own accomplishments is an indication that his heart was ill prepared to pray to God. If you are unsure as to whether or not one must kneel, sit, lie prostrate, or another humble position, perhaps now is a good time to revisit *Day 15's* devotional. While we do not want to discount the physical posture, it is even more imperative to look at the condition of the heart

the one must have when bringing petitions, prayers, intercession, supplications, etc... before God.

Jesus' parable that we are looking at begins by Him telling us why He is going to present it. *And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: -Luke 18:9.* For those who would come to God in prayer thinking upon their own righteousness are such as which God finds unacceptable. This is not a new concept. Jesus addresses this in those who would bring gifts to the altar. *"If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. -Matthew 5:23-24.*

We have looked at making sure we have forgiven those who have sinned against us when we studied the text of the Lord's model prayer in *Day 10.* We saw that God will not forgive us if we do not forgive others. So, our heart's condition is important to God.

Under the Old Law, which is a shadow, or type of the New Law, we see that time after time cleansing ceremonies were required of those who would come before God in service to Him. *He placed the laver between the tent of meeting and the altar and put water in it for washing. From it Moses and Aaron and his sons washed their hands and their feet. When they entered the tent of meeting, and when they approached the altar, they washed, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. -Exodus 40:30-32*

The Psalmist writes of this as well; *Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood And has not sworn deceitfully. He shall receive a blessing from the LORD And righteousness from the God of his salvation. - Psalms 24:3-5*

Many of the verses we will look at have been used previously in other contexts but are equally valid here. Take the verse that Paul gives us concerning clean hands: *Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension. -1 Timothy 2:8*

The sins of Judah had become so prevalent that God refused to listen to their prayers, we find this in Isaiah's prophecy. ***"So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you, Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood. "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, Learn to do good; Seek justice, Reprove the ruthless; Defend the orphan, Plead for the widow. -Isaiah 1:15-17***

Micah says much the same in his prophecy. ***"You who hate good and love evil, Who tear off their skin from them And their flesh from their bones, And who eat the flesh of my people, Strip off their skin from them, Break their bones, And chop them up as for the pot And as meat in a kettle." Then they will cry out to the LORD, But He will not answer them. Instead, He will hide His face from them at that time, Because they have practiced evil deeds. -Micah 3:2-4***

We see that there cannot be a division of our actions and our hearts toward God. He sees them as one and the same. We cannot practice evil and expect God to hear our prayers as acceptable. That is not to say that God does not hear men who commit sins. There is a difference in those who practice, i.e., sin without regret continually, and those who sin as does everyone is susceptible to doing.

The Psalmists tells of those things the Father accepts from a heart He delights in. ***The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise. By Thy favor do good to Zion; Build the walls of Jerusalem. Then Thou wilt delight in righteous sacrifices, In burnt offering and whole burnt offering; Then young bulls will be offered on Thine altar. -Psalms 51:17-19.*** This is where our hearts need to be when we pray.

Now you may be able to better answer the question from the beginning of our study concerning the language we use to address the Father. Does the lowly and humble heart speak the same words as the proud and arrogant heart?

Prayerful Thoughts: Our Father, let us come to You with pure hearts and motives, in humility.