

Elder Vernon Johnson

Numbers

Two

Pharisee and Publican

Lk. 18:9 "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."

With the contrast of these two men, the Lord taught a great lesson on the need for humility. The Pharisee represented those which trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others. Self-righteousness leads to self-exaltation and subsequently the belittlement of others in their eyes. A self-righteous man is proud of his own works and exalts his own works. The Pharisee was thankful for himself and that he was better than others. He was proud that he was not an extortioner, he was proud that he was just (even though he really was not). He was proud that he was not an adulterer. He was proud that he was better than the publican (even though he was not). He was proud of his religious exercises and how well he performed them. His standard was himself. He had an improper standard. We should not measure ourselves by ourselves, but look unto the perfect standard which is God's word. Some would say that this man had not been born of the Spirit. I think we should not make such judgments. The truth is God's children can and often do become self-righteous in their actions and judgments. The Lord warned that "every one that exalteth himself shall be abased."

The publican viewed himself in light of God's word. He saw himself to be a sinner and unworthy of the least of God's mercy. He knew within his heart that he was under the curse of the law, as it is written, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them." This man's standard was the perfect standard of God's word. We have all sinned and come

short of the glory of God. However, we do not all acknowledge our condition. The publican acknowledged his condition, felt his unworthiness even to come close in the temple or to raise his eyes unto heaven. He did not cry out for justice, for he already felt the conviction of sin. However, he cried out for mercy and acknowledged he was a sinner. In this condition, he experienced something that he probably did not expect. He experienced the forgiveness of his sins and felt the fellowship of God in his heart. As the Lord also said, "he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."