

## **The Pharisee and the Tax Collector – Luke 18:9-14.**

### **A Jubilee Sermon On the Central Doctrine of the Christian Religion and the Reformation: Justification by Faith**

**by Dr. Martin Luther.**

*Text (Luke 18:9-14): 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 unto me a sinner.’” 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.”*

In this Gospel-lesson two peculiar persons are exhibited, or two kinds of people in the company that are called God’s people; both of whom want to be God’s servants, appear before Him and seek justice. Accordingly also the two kinds of righteousness are depicted that are found upon earth: one which has great appearance throughout the world and in men’s eyes, and yet avails nothing before God, and is moreover condemned; the other which is not acknowledged by men, and yet is called righteousness before God and pleases Him. One is that of the excellent, haughty saint, the Pharisee; the other is that of the poor, humble, contrite sinner, the publican.

Here we hear also two marvelous, strange verdicts entirely contradictory to human wisdom and reason’s fancy, yea, horrible to all men: that the great saints are condemned as unrighteous, and the poor sinners are received, pronounced righteous and holy. But Jesus speaks of such saints, as is shown in the text, as trust in themselves to find righteousness in their own life and works which God must respect; and again of such sinners as heartily desire to get rid of their sins, and sigh after forgiveness and God’s grace. For no reference is here made to the other great company in the world, of those that are neither similar to this publican nor to the Pharisee, that care nothing at all for sin nor grace, but lead secure and wicked lives, paying no regards whatever

to God, heaven or hell.

What these two persons, the Pharisee and the publican, were called among the Jews, we have sufficiently heard in previous Gospel lessons, namely: the name "*Pharisee*" denotes the most decorous, honorable, pious class of people that endeavored zealously to serve God and to fulfill the Law, as St. Paul also glories concerning himself, that he had been such a one, too, before his conversion (Philippians 3:5).

Again, the name "*publican*" denoted among them such a person as lives in manifest sins and vices, serves neither God nor men, and is bent only upon robbing, plaguing and harming his fellow-man, as the publicans must do if they wished to make their offices pay which they had leased of the Romans at a great expense. In short, they were people held in no better esteem than manifest, unbelieving, wicked heathen, though they were Jews by birth; as Christ also compares them to heathen, Matthew 18:17: "If he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican."

Now it looks rather strange that Christ should place side by side two such persons as are altogether unlike and different one from another; but it looks still stranger and offensive, too, that He pronounces such odd verdicts, condemning the Pharisee wholly, and justifying the publican. Although He clearly speaks of both in such a manner as to indicate at the same time that He nevertheless does not condemn, nor wants us to condemn such works as the Pharisee here extols; for He Himself wills to present and depict him as a saint adorned with such works as must in no wise be chided or reproved, but are good and praiseworthy. On the other hand, He cannot laud or praise the publican as regards his life and works, as the very same must confess before God, condemn himself as a sinner and cannot think of one good work. And yet Christ examines, proves, and searches them in such a manner that He finds in the holy Pharisee nothing good, although he has many precious works; not on account of the works which are in themselves unblamable: but because the person is not good, and full of uncleanness. Again, He now finds in the publican, who had till then been a manifest condemned sinner, a very good tree and fruitful, though he do not shine in the great works of the Pharisee. Let us, therefore, study the character of both persons a little while.

In the first place you must duly magnify and adorn the Pharisee, as Christ Himself describes him with his good life; for here you hear such a man that may approach God and extol his life

before Him (this must, indeed, not be a false glory, but seriousness and truth), and may appeal to [God] Himself and adduce Him as a witness; he wants to appear and be found before Him in the right worship, and give an account of his whole life that it is directed to this one point of walking in His commandments.

He begins with the greatest and first commandment; he shows himself as adoring the true, one God, and as seeking above all things His kingdom and His will; he confesses to have all things from God, his being and life, he thereby attributes them to Him, and thanks Him for everything He hath given him, and particularly for this special grace and benefit of having kept him from sin and shame that he is not like the manifest sinners and publicans, and he prays that God would preserve him therein, and continue to bestow His blessing and good things for it. Here you behold nothing but the precious works of the first table and of all three first commandments; for he thereby also observes the Sabbath, because he goes into the temple for the purpose alone of discoursing with God and praying.

Thereupon he proceeds to the second table, and cleanses his conscience before God and men that he is not an extortioner, unjust, an adulterer, *etc.*, as [are] the great mass of other people. Herein the other five commandments are all comprehended; that he is such a man as may glory before the whole world of having done no one any injustice, violence or harm, nor burdened or grieved them against the fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth commandment, and may accordingly challenge any one to prove the contrary.

Moreover, he has also kept the sixth commandment, has not committed adultery, nor lives in debauchery, yea, keeps also his body in chastity and restraint; he in addition fasts twice in the week; this was not a sham-fasting as that of most of our priests and monks used to be, but a true fast as the Jews used to hold from morning till evening when the sun had set.

Finally, in addition to not only being no extortioner and unjust in respect to his fellowman's property and honor, he also gives tithes of all that he has fairly and honestly earned, and renders God obedience also by contributing towards sustaining the altar and the priestly office, of all God gave him, making no savings by miserly contributions or by withholding the same.

To sum up all points, here you see all commandments in a heap, and a paragon of a fine, pious, and, as it seems before men, godly, holy man, who must be commended to all the world as a pattern and example; that one might, indeed, wish, yea, it would be a desirable thing and

conducive to the common welfare, if we could have many such men.

Now, compare with him the other person, the publican, and you will find nothing at all to liken him unto the Pharisee; for the very name shows, that with such men not much virtue or honor can be found, and no one can take him to care much for God or His commandments; he not only gives God nothing of his own towards His worship, but rather commits public extortion and theft against his neighbor; he is, in short, such a man as is by his sinful life a public, known example, just as the Pharisee also speaks of him as one that is utterly deranged, and has hazarded his conscience, and is a hopeless case.

Now, how do things turn out so repugnant to common-sense, that the Pharisee is condemned by God, and the publican is justified? Will He Himself speak and decide against His law, according to which it is but just that he who has lived thereby, and is pious, should have its benefits and precede those that live in manifest sins against it? Or how, is God now such a man that delights in such people as do no good work, but are nothing but extortioners, adulterers, unjust? Indeed not! but here is another, higher judgment than world or flesh and blood know, which looks deeper into the hearts of these two men, and finds in the Pharisee something very foul which spoils all that might else be called good; and this the evangelist calls “to trust in one’s self,” and moreover, “to despise others”.

This is the blame in this good man, and the wicked servant that is great in the world. And would to God he had been the only one of his kind, and had not left so many children and heirs behind him; for the whole world, where she is best or is in any way good, and has anything good, lies entirely drowned in this vice; she will and cannot, wherever she knows of anything good in her, refrain from trusting in herself on account thereof, and from despising others that have it not: that is to exalt herself above God and fellow-men; and therefore by her very presumptive opinion of fulfilling God’s commandment she transgresses it, as St. Paul himself saith of the Jews, Romans 9:31: “But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness.”

What a strange affair it is that those who follow diligently after the Law, and engage in so many religious exercises, that they are not the people who keep it, as St. Paul also teaches, Galatians 6:13: “For neither they who are circumcised keep the law, *etc.*” For those are, indeed, curious saints, who by their very acts according to the Law do not keep, but transgress it. Where

then shall we find those that keep it? In like manner this Pharisee or his equals, with all his beautiful discipline and honor, which are indeed nice, glorious, excellent gifts, and praiseworthy and commendable in this world beyond all things upon the earth as the greatest gifts of God, much nicer than all beauty and ornaments, than gold or silver, yea than sun and light – this Pharisee, I say, receives the sentence of being worse before God than any robber, murderer, adulterer, *etc.* What will we do with this doctrine among the great mass of the world, whom we ourselves condemn on account of their public contempt of God, and on account of all their wickedness against God and men, which crieth unto the very heaven and multiplies to such enormities that the earth can almost no longer bear it?

Well, I have said before, here is not chided nor condemned *that* the Pharisee does *the works of the law*, else we should have to condemn God's gifts and His own law and praise their contrary. But I say this, that here *the person* is placed before God's tribunal, and things are found different from what the world judges, namely: that, although he possesses some excellent, commendable gifts, still the great blemish soils them that he misuses such gifts and corrupts them entirely before God.

For here he is charged with sinning thereby against God and men at once, and against the commandments of both tables; for in the first commandment self-trust is specifically and preeminently prohibited, that man shall not trust in himself or his gifts, nor please himself, as this work-saint does who boasts and tickles himself on account of the gifts he received from God, makes an idol thereof, and adores himself as if he were the proper, holy man whom alone God must respect and exalt.

Now this is already the greatest sin and vice whereby he runs directly against God, blinded and hardened, indeed, like an unbelieving heathen or Turk who knows nothing concerning God, is without repentance, yea, on account of his great sanctimoniousness he wants to know nothing of sin, dreads no wrath of God; he trusts to face it by his own works, he does not conceive at all that he and all men, even the true saints, cannot stand before God with all their righteousness and lives, but are guilty only of His wrath and condemnation, as David himself testifies, Psalm 130:3: "If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" and Psalm 143:2: "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant; for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified." Therefore the Pharisee also seeks neither grace nor forgiveness of sins, nor has he the least idea of needing

them.

Now, because he assails so abominably the first and highest commandment with base and shocking idolatry, self-trust, and confidence in his own holiness, and there is here no fear, trust, or love of God, but he seeks only his own honor and glory: therefore, we may depend upon it, he also keeps none of the other commandments truly and fervently, and his pretended prayer and worship is all falsehood and mendaciousness, yea, he thereby takes in vain, and disgraces in the worst manner God's name to adorn his lies, and consequently only provokes God's wrath and severe condemnation against himself, as God hath said, "The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain."

For what else is it than blaspheming against the High Majesty, and defying the same that he makes the vain prayer and says: "I thank Thee, God, that I am so holy and pious as to have no need of Thy grace whatever, but find so much in myself that I have kept Thy law and Thou canst reprove me in nothing, and that I have merited so much, that Thou must reward and recompense me for it in time and eternity, if Thou wilt keep the honor of being a righteous, truthful God."

In like manner behold how awkwardly he manages the other table and rages against his neighbor; for here also there is no Christian charity nor faithfulness whereby one might know that he sought his neighbor's honor or salvation or rejoiced at it; but he only rushes upon him and treads him under foot by his base contempt, and treats him as though the same were no human being; yea, whilst he should aid and save his neighbor from harm and injustice, he himself inflicts upon him the highest injustice. For though seeing and knowing that his neighbor is sinning against God, he does not so much as think of converting him and saving him from God's wrath and condemnation, that he might mend his ways; he has neither compassion nor pity in his heart for a poor sinner's misery and distress; he thinks it serves the publican right to remain in condemnation and destruction; he withholds from him all duty of charity and service enjoined upon him by God, that he, too, should above all things bring his neighbor from sin and condemnation to God's kingdom by teaching, admonishing, reproof and correcting him, *etc.*, yea, and this is his worst feature: he is glad and of good cheer because of his neighbor's being in sin and under God's wrath; whereby we may surely perceive what 'delight' and 'love' of God's commandments he possesses, and how much he 'hates' vice.

Now, of what use can such a man be in God's kingdom, that rejoices, is tickled and delighted

at the sin and disobedience of the whole world against God, and would be sorry if any one were pious at heart, and kept God's commandments, so much so, that even if he could he would only reluctantly help with the smallest service towards averting his neighbor's evil and condemnation? What good might we expect or seek of him, who has become so wicked as to begrudge even his neighbor's salvation?

The very heathen do not know to speak of a greater wickedness, nor to depict a more abandoned person than one so spiteful and envious as to experience only joy and delight when his neighbor fares ill; as some are so bad as to suffer harm readily to themselves if only another is thereby made to suffer a greater misfortune. Such devilish, hellish wickedness must be in no one so great as in such a sham-saint, who wants to have alone the glory before God and the world, and wants to be judged pure and holy, because all the others were stinkards and sordid fellows.

To give an illustration from common life: If a physician were reported as laying claim to the name of a pious, good man; if such a physician came to a person dangerously sick, and instead of advising and aiding the patient to rescue him from his disease, did nothing else than ridicule and mock at the poor fellow – who would not look upon such a physician as the most desperate villain upon earth, because he not only denied the poor sufferer his assistance in his extreme distress, but was also tickled at his misfortune, and wreaked his mood upon him? How much greater is the wickedness of this sanctimonious hypocrite – who, seeing his neighbor's soul in danger and affliction of eternal damnation, from which to save him he ought to stake his life and body, he does only nothing of the kind – even if he could save him with one word or sigh: but rather upbraids him with it, and rejoices at it, and as far as he is concerned, would prefer to hurl him into still deeper damnation?

In what would such a person assist or favor his enemy or one that harmed him, whom he certainly also owes love and assistance, if he expects a favorable treatment for himself at the hands of anyone: how would he there fly at him with chafing, cursing, beating, that he would not hold the very killing a sin but holiness, especially when inflicted on persons that refuse to acknowledge him a pious saint, as the pious fratricide Cain treated his brother, and as his children always yet do, as Christ Himself saith, John 16:2: "The time cometh, that whosoever killeth you, will think that he doeth God service."

Just as little will you find with such a one that he keeps one of the other commandments from

his heart; for he would just as little protect his neighbor's wife and children from being violated, or aid that their honor be preserved; yea, if they were violated, he would also rejoice and laugh in his sleeve, or if he had an opportunity he would do it himself or at least help that it be done.

For he avoids such and similar gross evil deeds surely not from a love of virtue or in obedience to God; and if he does not treat with pity his neighbor's distress and perplexity of soul, how should he regard the honor of his neighbor, or of his neighbor's family? Much less would he take pity or think of warding off the damage that might befall his neighbor's property, that it be not robbed or stolen or damaged in some other way; he would rather also rejoice there-at and say: "Serves him right." I shall pass by what he would do, if he were called upon to support his neighbor in poverty with his means, or grant him gratuitous assistance. Thus he would also most assuredly not protest against his neighbor being defamed and slandered, nor would he cover and adorn with his honor his neighbor's disgrace; but rather rejoice and share in belying and calumniating his neighbor in the worst manner possible, wherein such saints take a particular delight, as this one here charges the poor publican before God, and slanders other people whom he cannot accuse in truth.

Now behold, what a shameful, abominable devil dwells in such a nice saint, and can mask himself with a little appearance of a few works which he does before the people, and what he does by his worship, thanks and prayer, blaspheming against the very face of the High Majesty with nefariousness, and open defiance. He dares to glory before God with such abominable vices and boldly demand He must in return look upon him as a great saint, and grant him as a due reward heaven and everything which he may ask. Otherwise, if he were to understand that God would refuse his request and receive the poor publican in his stead, he would be incensed with such wrath and hatred also against God, as to correct Him publicly and say that He were not God, but the very devil of hell; yea, he would by all means, if he could, dethrone Him and take His seat: and, moreover, he is determined to suffer no reproof in this from anybody, but wants to be commended, whilst in truth he merits unmeasurably more than all other blasphemers, that God should cause the earth to open her mouth at once, and swallow him up quick.

Here you see what man is and does when he trusts his course to his own free will or natural power. For this Pharisee was set up by Christ as the best example of what man is able to do by his own power according to the Law. And most assuredly all men are, by nature and from Adam,



nothing better; they manifest the very same vices when they aim at being holy before God and better than other men, there is nothing to be found but a wicked contempt of God and men, and being filled with pleasure and joy when people sin against God. Such are twice, yea, many times worse than the publican and other manifest sinners of his like; because they not only do not keep God's commandment, but they also do not desire that it should be kept by anybody; they not only do not assist anyone or do any good, but moreover rejoice at other men's destruction and condemnation; and in addition to all this they also pride themselves and claim to be towering saints, and dare to blaspheme and lie before the Supreme Majesty, that they are not as other men, and have kept God's commandments as to make heaven quake there-at.

Now behold, on the other hand, this publican who also enters the temple to pray, but with quite different thoughts and prayer than the Pharisee. For he has this advantage to start with, that he must acknowledge himself a sinner, convinced and convicted by his own conscience, so that he cannot here glory in anything before God or men, or pride himself, but must be utterly ashamed of himself, and thus the Law has pierced his heart that he feels his misery and distress, being terrified, and in agony at God's judgment and wrath, and sighs fervently for redemption therefrom, but finds no counsel for his troubles anywhere, and can bring nothing else before God than sin and confusion wherewith he feels so burdened and oppressed, that he dares not to lift up his eyes; for he knows and feels he deserved nothing but hell and eternal death, and must condemn himself before God, in token and confession whereof before God he smites upon his breast.

Upon the whole, there is in fact nothing whatever here but sin and condemnation equally great before God as that of the Pharisee, only that the Pharisee does not know his filthiness, but wants to make it out to be all purity. Whilst the publican, on the contrary, feels his sin to such a degree that he knows not where to find shelter, must confess that he daily offends God by his wicked ungratefulness, contempt and disobedience for all His benefits and kindnesses which He showed in sparing his life till that very hour; for this reason he cannot trust in himself nor comfort himself with his own works, but must despair wholly of himself unless he find mercy and pity with God.

Likewise he can despise no one nor exalt himself above anybody: for he feels himself alone condemned most, and thinks all others are more blessed and pious, and especially this Pharisee

who is so full of filth before God. In short, you notice already here the beginning of true conversion in such a person as experiences compunction and sorrow over his sin and a fervent desire to get rid of it and seeks grace and compassion with God, and sincerely wishes to amend his life.

But you must closely attend the wording of the publican's prayer when he says, "*God be merciful to me a sinner.*" When did he learn thus to address God, or how can he dare to utter such words, arrange and place them? For according to reason and human judgment such prayer does not agree, nor is man able to press it from his own heart and thoughts, however short its wording. The Pharisee's prayer: "*I thank Thee that I am not as other men, extortioners, etc.,*" a righteous man may easily say, and shall say it: for no one must make such a liar of himself if he know himself innocent, that he should confess himself an extortioner, adulterer, *etc.*, but must say the truth, and not let the testimony of a good conscience be wrested from him; for that must be a pious man that can say such things in truth. On the other hand, even a rogue may speak these words, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" as they are perhaps spoken more by rogues than by truly penitent pious people: yea, who else would speak them than a sinful, condemned person? Yet judgment is reversed and becomes, as it were, wrong on both sides, turn and look at it as you like.

But it is, to get at the bottom, such a lesson and example as belongs in the school and theology of Christians, which the world brands as heretical; for, as I have said, no human reason, no human being, however exalted, wise and learned he may be, will be able to couple what the publican here couples and frames, a prayer of entirely contradictory words and concludes: "*God be merciful to me a sinner.*" Verily, this is the principal art, which lieth entirely outside of and far beyond the reach of human understanding.

For it never sounded so when God first began speaking to man. In Paradise it ran thus, saith Scripture (Genesis 2:17), when the Lord God said: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." At Mount Sinai, when God gave the Law, it also sounded thus (Exodus 20:5), "For I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God," that is, a God of wrath, "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me, *etc.*" Thus we are instructed by a brief notice that sin is condemned and God's wrath and punishment pronounced against it. With this it surely does not harmonize and agree that such a sinful and

condemned man should be allowed to appear before God and pray: “Be merciful unto me a sinner.” For these two, sin and grace, are against each other as fire and water. Grace does not belong where sin is, but wrath and punishment. How, then, does this man attain to the art of being able to couple and harmonize the two, and dares to ask and cry for grace for his sin? Here more is wanted than to know the Law and Ten Commandments which the Pharisee also knew, and it is another art whereof the Pharisee knew nothing, and all men know nothing of themselves.

This is the sermon of the dear Gospel concerning God’s grace and mercy in Christ, which is preached and offered to the condemned sinners without any merit on their part. This the publican must have heard, too, and the Holy Ghost must have touched and led his heart thereby, when he felt his sins, to approach God and offer such prayer that he firmly believes and holds as he heard from God’s Word, that God wills to forgive poor sinners their sins and have mercy upon them, that is, to turn His wrath and everlasting death from them for the sake of the promised Messiah, His Son. Such faith thus coupled and connected these two contrary elements in the prayer of the publican.

Well this sermon of the Gospel is indeed heard by many, and it seems an easy art to repeat it; but it is not so common as people think, every body knew it. The difficulty of its application is known to none better than those few who make it their study and practice so, too, to believe and pray as the publican did. The reason is, because the pious rogue and hypocrite, the Pharisee, is still hidden in us and hinders and resists that we cannot thus couple things.

Nor dare it be otherwise in external civil life and its righteousness; here we must say and teach nothing else than to the sinner belongs no grace, but wrath and punishment, *etc.*; else no one could live upon earth, nor would God be able to defend His majesty, if He would not insist upon the punishment of sins and the reward of good works; for everyone would soon say: “Let us sin with good cheer, for then we shall receive the more grace.” Yet things are altogether reversed here in His spiritual kingdom to the effect that wicked servants obtain grace and are pronounced pious: and those that have the name of being saints are wicked servants and condemned.

But the fact in the matter is, that God's tribunal and the courts of the world are two different things and separated from each other as far as heaven and earth. Before men it must be thus: If you are pious, you shall enjoy it; if you are a thief, you shall hang on the gibbet; if you commit murder, you will be beheaded; this order God Himself must maintain, else there would be no peace upon earth. But in His own kingdom, wherein He is sole Lord and Judge without intermediate agencies, things are done thus, that He alone is merciful unto the poor sinners; for there nothing at all is found but only sin, and no one is innocent before Him, as the Scriptures say.

But this also holds good, sinners are not all alike, and here we must again draw lines of distinction and point out, who those are that come under cognizance of His tribunal and grace. For there are some gross and hard cases, robbers, murderers, thieves, rogues, fornicators, who are so abandoned and drowned in sins and continue therein, that they never think of asking, how they may have a merciful God; they go forth without a care, as if there were nothing to trouble them. These St. Paul teaches the following lesson, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10: "Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." And Christ teacheth, Luke 13:3-5: "I tell you, Nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish;" for such are not like this publican, because they run their course without any repentance and restraint; they do not as yet belong in God's, but in the world's kingdom first mentioned. –

In the second place there are also other wicked servants who desire to imitate this publican and also pray the Lord's prayer; they have heard these words, that God wills to be merciful unto poor sinners; they learn to repeat them in the same manner, to smite upon their breasts, and to let on in words and gestures so humbly and repentingly that one might take an oath, yea, they themselves would take an oath, that they were just like this publican, and yet it is all false and deceit; for they are in nothing better than yonder Pharisee; and therefore God is merciful, too, unto them as He is unto him, that they do not feel His wrath, and He does not club and castigate them, but lets them remain knaves.

These are nominal Christians or factious spirits and false brethren, of whom there is also a great number in our denomination; they can also say the words and talk much in praise of the

Gospel and God's grace, they confess themselves poor sinners; yet when it comes to the point that they are taken hold of and reprov'd, they do not want to listen or allow it, but begin to become angry; they say their honor were trespassed on, their consciences were being burdened; or if they cannot do more, yet they practice all kinds of cunning against the Gospel.

These may pretend by words and appearances to be like this publican, but in fact they are like this knave, the hypocrite; for they talk and let on thus only for this purpose of making people believe they must be saints, and nobody must venture to style them otherwise till God touches them a little either by the devil, world, or by His Word: then they are so tender as not to be able to suffer anything in any way, complain of tyranny and injustice, *etc.* In short, where they were poor sinners before, there they are now perfect saints, and so haughty that no one is able to get along with their holiness.

Of such the world is now becoming full all over, especially of those great, powerful petty aristocrats and wiseacres; yea, also of both townsmen and farmers who have learned this from our Gospel, that they will receive and comfort themselves with the tidings that God is merciful unto poor sinners; and yet they want to be reprov'd of nobody nor called sinners, whilst in truth they conduct themselves in such a manner that God's Word cannot be silent at it; they want to apply God's Word which reprov's sin, to others, and say in addition, like this Pharisee, "I am not as other men, and whoever says so of me, treats me unkindly." And when we commence telling them their sins, they pretend we were preaching against the powers that be and were causing divisions, *etc.* In short, they want us to preach only what they like to hear, else it shall no longer be called Gospel-preaching. And such men are of the same cast with all nominal hypocritical saints, who can indeed themselves say, they were poor sinners, but they do not mean that it should be believed for a truth; for when others say so, too, they cannot bear it.

Well these two parties are alone able, and too much so, to couple these two propositions: I am a sinner, and, God is merciful unto me. But moreover there is the third party of those who should and would like to say it in a truthful manner; these find it the most difficult thing, to utter these two propositions at once from their innermost heart and to combine such confession and absolution. For against this they find in themselves two great impediments. On the one hand there is yet within us, as I have said, too much of the old wicked servant, the Pharisee, that we would like to be pious and just before God and better than others; this would be a cordial and the

sweetest joy attainable; for we all aim at reaching this point, that God must respect what we have done, and be pleased therewith; we would also moreover thank Him sometimes and confess that such were His divine grace. But there is a little peg fastened before this, and the road is barricaded, as the cherubim was placed before Paradise with a flaming sword, that nobody shall attain to this nor bring this glory before God.

Again, on the other hand, where the publican must come before God with nothing but sin and confusion, deprived of all his glory, clad in nothing but filth: there again is agony and labor, that he lay hold to this word: "Be merciful unto me," and apply it to himself; for here again he is opposed and hindered, and more powerfully, too, by both his own timidity and all men's wisdom, yea, by the very devil through God's Law, which he here quotes and inculcates out of place, to lead man into distress and despair.

Therefore it is indeed an art above the arts of all men, yea the most wonderful thing upon earth, that man should possess the grace of truly acknowledging himself a sinner and also of being able to turn about and close his eyes upon God's wrath and lay hold to nothing but grace. For such a heart as truly feels its sins, cannot think or argue anything else than that God is not graciously but angrily disposed towards it. Thus Judas, when he saw he had betrayed Christ into death, at once began to bemoan himself, and his reason and heart placed before him, as they always do, nothing but God's eternal wrath and condemnation. No human heart is able to evade this; for there stand God's commandment and law, which doom thee to death, and the devil who leads and chases thee to hell. How, then, is it possible to couple such words of the publican, against the Law, against one's own reason and feeling, all of which point the heart to nothing but wrath and indignation? Now it cannot enter man's heart in any way at all, that it should make a confession of sins, unless it have the Ten Commandments which alone show what sin is, and why it is sin. Therefore these two contrary articles must here counteract each other: to hear the Ten Commandments that condemn unto death and hell, and to forget them again, and to extricate one's self therefrom, and thus to ascend from hell into heaven.

Therefore let every one that is able to learn, also learn this great wisdom and be a scholar of this publican, that he may also duly distinguish these two articles that wrath may not remain nor cleave unto his sin, but that he grasp reconciliation and forgiveness; this means, that he must not pass sentence upon these matters according to human reason, nor according to the Law, but

apprehend the comfort of the Gospel and the doctrine of Christ through faith which alone teaches this wonderful union, that we can harmonize these two sentences which in truth are farther apart from one another than heaven and hell. For what else do these words mean, “I am a sinner,” than “God is my enemy and condemns me, nor have I merited anything else but eternal wrath, curse and condemnation”?

Now, when you begin to feel this, for it will not do here, to press it out with smiting upon the breast and own works; but it will come about of itself, if the Law affect you rightly: this will indeed teach you to smite upon your breast and humble yourself; if you cannot, I say, do more here than say: “Oh, I am a sinner,” then you are lost; for the Ten Commandments will drive and thrust you straightforward into hell, that your heart must say, you are the devil’s own, and God will not own you: and you will begin to flee away from Him and, if you could, you would run through hundred worlds to make sure your escape.

Then it is time that you stop your course in such flight and agony, and turn about and say: “This I am taught by my dear Gospel and by the pious publican, that this is before God the greatest wisdom, to know and believe, He is thus minded and hath established such a kingdom through Christ wherein He will be merciful unto poor, lost sinners and protect them. And thus you unite these two propositions into one word and confession: “I am indeed a sinner, but still God is merciful unto me; I am God’s enemy, but He is now my Friend; duly were I condemned, but yet I know that He does not will to condemn me, but to have me saved and an heir of heaven. Yea, this is His will, and He caused it to be preached unto me, and commanded to believe for the sake of His dear Son whom He hath given for me.

Lo, thus you have in this publican a beautiful example of true Christian repentance and faith, and an excellent masterpiece of high spiritual wisdom or theology, whereof the Pharisee and all his kinsfolk have never received a taste or savor. Moreover you also behold the meet fruits which follow faith, that he now, as a different man, redounds with different ideas, thoughts, words and works than before; he gives unto God alone the honor and praise of His divine grace; supplicates and adores Him in his heart and in true confidence in His Word and promise; else he could not have thought of these words or prayed them: and thus he does God the true acceptable worship and keeps the true Sabbath. In like manner he also now possesses such a heart as hates sin and disobedience, rejoices not in them, but regrets his having lived contrary to God’s

command, and now he seeks seriously and with all his heart to cease from sin, from grieving, cheating, belying, doing harm or violence to anyone, and would like to see all men live in the same way.

This is, in this Gospel-lesson, the picture of those two kinds of people among those who are called God's people: one represents the great sect of the false Church which, however, have the appearance and name of being God's most pious and holy servants; the other exhibits the small number of those that are upright members of the Church and true children of God, though they have not the name and great appearance before the world. Respecting the difference, then, whereby each party may be known by its properties and fruits, in order that we might separate appearance and name from truth, you have heard enough. –

Do, then, take heed also to follow this publican rightly and become like him, first in this respect that you be not a nominal, but a true sinner; that is, you must acknowledge yourself guilty before God of His wrath and eternal damnation, not only with words, but also in your conscience and with all your heart, and thus bring this word: "*Unto me a poor sinner*" before Him in truth; but therewith you must also instantly apprehend the other word, "*Be merciful unto me,*" in order to be able to blunt the Law's point and severeness: this means to turn from thee the sentence of condemnation which the Ten Commandments want to inflict upon you.

Thus, then, you are enabled, by this discrimination between two kinds of sinners, to pass this correct sentence on both sides: God is indeed indignant and angry with sinners, with those, namely, that do not want to be sinners, that is, who do not fear His wrath, but walk as yet securely and refuse to be corrected. On the other hand, God wills to be merciful unto poor sinners that feel their sins and accuse themselves and plead guilty at God's tribunal. Consequently things are here all inverted, also in accordance with God's Word and judgment, conformably to the persons; so that these Ten Commandments are furnished with this comment and their verdict is passed upon those who want to be named holy or at least no sinners, and do not believe that such sentence is pronounced against them; the Gospel, however, and the sentence of grace and comfort appertains to those who lie in agony and terror of wrath.

Secondly, you must resemble the publican also in this respect, that henceforth you cease from sin; for we do not read that he remained what he was before, but that he went forth and took home with him the grace that God justified him, as our text saith: "*This man went down to his*



*house justified,” etc.* These words do not imply that he remained in sins, neither did he enter the temple and pray for this purpose; for who desires to remain in sins, cannot ask for grace and pardon: but who prays thus, wishes and desires to become just and entirely rid of sins. This you must know, too, lest you deceive yourself; for there are many who look only at this, that the publican as a sinner receives grace and forgiveness; they have no thought, however, that God desires them to forget sin and that henceforth the bestowed grace must become a power within them; they want to understand it as though God justified and saved sinners, even when they remain in sins and unrighteousness.

Therefore Christians must needs guard on both sides against the devil and their own flesh; for when they begin to repent and would like to become other men, then first they feel the devil, how he bestirs himself, hinders and besets them not to continue in their repentance, but to remain in the old walks, *etc.* Again, if this does not prevent them from turning to God in spite of the devil, and from calling upon Him, then he assails them with feeble-mindedness and despondency. Yonder he makes sins too small, places them ever so far out of man’s sight and heart that we do not regard them, and crave no grace, or at least postpone repentance: here, however, he makes them too great, that he also fans the smallest spark into a blaze greater than heaven and earth, that we also on this side can scarcely grasp forgiveness or take courage to utter the words: “God, be merciful unto me.” Thus it is, indeed, and will ever be a capital art, and we shall do well to look upon this publican with his example as our master and teacher, and learn of him, and call upon God to let us reach the goal.

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