

JOHN BUNYAN

THE PHARISEE

AND THE

PUBLICAN

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The Pharisee and the Publican

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 to me a sinner.— Luke, xviii. 10–13.

In the beginning of this chapter you read of the reason of the parable of the unjust judge and the poor widow; namely, to encourage men to pray. “He spake a parable to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;” and a most sweet parable for that purpose it is: for if through importunity, a poor widow woman may prevail with an unjust judge, and so consequently with an unmerciful and hard-hearted tyrant, how much more shall the poor, afflicted, distressed, and tempted people of God, prevail with, and obtain mercy at the hands of, a loving, just, and merciful God? The unjust judge would not hearken to, nor regard the cry of, the poor widow, for a while: “But afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.” “Hark,” saith Christ, “what the unjust judge saith.” “And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him?—I tell you that he will avenge them speedily.”

This is therefore a very comfortable parable to such of the saints as are under hard usage by reason of evil men, their might and tyranny: for by it we are taught to believe and expect, that God, though for a while he seemeth not to regard, yet will, in due time and season, arise and set such in safety from them that puff at them; Psalm xii. 4.

Let the good Christian pray always; let him pray, and not faint at seeming delays; for if the widow by importunity prevailed with the unjust judge, how much more shall he with his heavenly Father. “I tell you,” says Christ, “that he will avenge them speedily.”

But now, forasmuch as this parable reacheth not (so directly) the poor Publican in the text, therefore our Lord begins again, and adds to that other parable, this parable which I have chosen for my text; by which he designeth two things: First, The conviction of the proud and self-conceited Pharisee: Secondly, The raising up and healing of the cast down and dejected Publican. And observe it, as by the first parable he chiefly designeth the relief of those that are under the hands of cruel tyrants, so by this he designeth the relief of those that lie under the load and burden of a guilty and disquieted conscience.

This therefore is a parable that is full of singular comfort to such of the sinners in the world that are clogged with guilt and sense of sin; and that lie under the apprehensions of, and that are driven to God by the sense of the judgment that for sin is due unto them.

In my handling of this text, I shall have respect to these things—

1. To the persons in the text.
2. To the condition of the persons in the text.
3. To the conclusion that Christ makes upon them both.

First, For the persons. They were, as you see, far one from another in their own apprehension of themselves; one good, the other bad; but yet in the judgment of the law, both alike, both the same, both sinners; for they both stood in need of mercy. True, the first mentioned did not see it, as the other poor sinner did; but that altereth not the case: he that is in the judgment of the law a sinner, is in the judgment of the law for sin condemned, though in his own judgment he be ever so righteous.

Men must not be judged, or justified, according to what themselves do think, but according to the verdict and sentence that cometh out of the mouth of God about them. Now, the sentence of God is, “All have sinned:” “There is none righteous, no, not one;” Rom. iii. It is no matter, then, what the Pharisee did think of himself; God by his word hath proclaimed him a sinner: a sinner, by reason of original sin; a sinner, by reason of actual transgression. Personally, therefore, with reference to the true nature of their state, they both were sinners, and both by the law under condemnation. True, the Publican’s leprosy was outward; but the Pharisee’s leprosy was inward: his heart, his soul, his spirit, was as foul, and had as much the plague of sin, as had the other in his life or conversation.

Secondly, As to their conditions (I do not mean by condition, so much a habit of mind, as the state that they had each of them put themselves into by that mind.) “The one,” says the text, “was a Pharisee, the other a Publican.” A Pharisee: that is, one that hath chosen to himself such a course of life. A Publican: that is, one that hath chosen to himself such a course of life. These terms, therefore, shew the divers courses of life that they had put themselves into. The Pharisee, as he thought, had put himself into a condition for heaven and glory; but the Publican was for this world and his lusts.

Wherefore when the Pharisee stands in the temple, he boasteth of himself and good condition, but condemneth the Publican, and bitterly inveigheth against him. But, as I said, their personal state, by the law, was not at all changed. The Pharisee made himself never the better; the Publican also abode in his place.

Indeed the Publican is here found to recant, and repent of his condition, and of the condition that he had put himself into; and the Pharisee to boast of his. But the Publican’s repentance was not of himself, but of God, who can also, yea, and sometimes it is evident (Acts ix.) he doth, make Pharisees also repent of that condition that they have chosen to be in themselves; Phil. iii. 3–8.

The Pharisee, therefore, in commending of himself, makes himself never the better; the Publican also, in condemning of himself, makes himself never the worse. Nay, contrariwise, the Pharisee, by commending of himself, makes himself much the worse, ver. 14; and the Publican, by condemning of himself, makes himself much the better. “I tell you (says Christ) 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.”

But, I say, as to men’s commending of themselves, yea, though others should commend them also, that availeth, to God-ward, nothing at all. “For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.” So then, men in “measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise;” 2 Cor. x. 12.

Now, this was the way of the Pharisee; I am not, saith he, as other men: I am no extortioner, nor unjust, no adulterer, nor yet as this Publican.

“Two men went up into the temple to pray;” and they two, as I said, as opposite one to the other, as any two men that ever went thither to pray. One of them was over righteous, and the other wicked over much. Some would have thought, had they not by the word of Christ been otherwise described, that they had been both of the same religion; for they both went up into the temple to pray; yea, both to pray, and that at the same time, as if they did it by appointment, by agreement; but there was no such thing. The one was a Pharisee, the other a Publican: for so saith the after words: and therefore persons as opposite as light and darkness, as fire and water; I mean, as to their apprehensions one of another. The Pharisee could not abide the Publican, nor could the Publican brook the Pharisee; and yet both went up into the temple to pray. It is strange to see, and yet it is seen, that men cross in their minds, cross in their principles, cross in their apprehensions; yea, and cross in their prayers too, should yet meet together in the temple to pray.

“Two men;” men not of the middle sort, and them too picked out of the best and worst that was: two men, a Pharisee, and a Publican.

To be a Pharisee was in those days counted honourable for religion, and for holiness of life. A Pharisee was a man of esteem and repute among the Jews, though it is a term of reproach with us;

else Paul would not at such a time as he did it, have said, “Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee;” Acts xxiii, 6; Phil. iii. 5. For now he stood upon his purgation and justification, especially it appears so by the place first named. And far be it from any to think, that Paul would make use of a colour of wickedness, to save thereby himself from the fury of the people.

A Publican was in those days counted one of the vilest of men, as is manifest; because when they are in the word, by way of discrimination, made mention of, they are ranked with the most vile and base; therefore they are joined with sinners—“He eateth with publicans and sinners,” and “with harlots.” “Publicans and harlots enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Yea, when our Lord Christ would have the rebellious professor stigmatized to purpose, he saith, “Let him be to thee as an heathen man and a publican.”

We therefore can make no judgment of men upon the outward appearance of them. Who would have thought, but that the Pharisee had been a good man? for he was righteous; for he prayed.

And who could have thought, that the other had been a good man? for he was a Publican; a man, by good men and bad men, joined with the worst of men, to wit, with sinners, harlots, heathens.

The Pharisee was a sectarian; the Publican was an officer. The Pharisee, even because he was a sectarian, was had the more in esteem; and the Publican, because he was an officer, was had the more in reproach. To speak a little to both these:

1. The Pharisee was a sectarian; one that deviated, that turned aside in his worshipping from the way of God, both in matter and manner of worship; for such an one I count a sectarian. That he turned aside from the matter, which is the rule of worship, to wit, the written word, it is evident; for Christ saith, that they rejected the commandments of God, and made them of no effect, that they might keep their own traditions. That they turned aside also as to their manner of worship, and became sectarians, there is with no less authority asserted—“For all their works they do for to be seen of men;” Acts xxvi. 5; Mark vii. 9–13; Matt. xxiii. 5.

Now this being none of the order or ordinance of Christ, and yet being chosen by, and stuck to of these sort of men, and also made a singular and necessary part of worship, became a sect, or bottom for those hypocritical factious men to adhere unto, and to make of others disciples to themselves.

And that they might be admired, and rendered venerable by the simple people to their fellows, they loved to go in long robes; they loved to pray in markets, and in the corners of the streets; they shewed great zeal for the small things of the law, but had only great words for things that were substantial—“They made broad their phylacteries, and enlarged the borders of their garments;” Matt. xxiii.

When I say the Pharisee was a sectarian, I do not mean that every sectarian is a Pharisee. There were the sects of the Herodians, of the Alexandrians, and of the Sadducees, with many others; but to be a Pharisee, was to be of the straitest sect: “After the most straitest sect of our religion, I lived a Pharisee.” That, therefore, of all the sects, was the most strait and strict. Therefore, saith he, in another place, “I was taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers.” And again, “Touching the law, a Pharisee;” Acts xxii. 3; xxvi. 4–6; Phil. iii. 5. The Pharisee, therefore, did carry the bell, and wear the garland for religion; for he outdid, he went beyond all other sectarians in his day. He was strictest, he was the most zealous; therefore Christ, in his making of this parable, waived all other sects then in being, and pitched upon the Pharisee as the man most meet, by whose rejection he might shew forth and demonstrate the riches of his mercy in its extension to sinners: “Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee;” such a brave man as you have heard.

2. The Publican also went up thither to pray. The Publican, I told you before, was an officer: an officer that served the Romans and himself too; for the Romans at that time were possessors of the land of Jewry (the lot of Israel’s inheritance), and the emperor Tiberius Cæsar placed over that land four governors, to wit, Pilate, Herod, Philip, and Lysanias; all these were Gentiles, heathens, infidels; and the publicans were a sort of inferior men, to whom was let out to farm, and so men that were employed by these to gather up the taxes and customs that the heathens had laid upon the Jews to be paid to the emperor; Luke ii. 1; iii. 1, 2, 12, 13.

But they were a generation of men that were very injurious in the execution of their office.

They would exact and demand more than was due of the people; yea, and if their demands were denied, they would falsely accuse those that so denied them to the governor, and by false accusation obtain the money of the people, and so wickedly enrich themselves, Luke iii. 13, 14; xix. 2, 8. This was therefore grievous to the Jews, who always counted themselves a free people, and could never abide to be in bondage to any. And this was something of the reason, that they were so generally by all the Jews counted so vile and base, and reckoned among the worst of men, even as our informers and bum-bailiffs are with us at this day.

But that which heightened the spirit of the people against them, and that made them so odious and filthy in their eyes, was for that (at least so I think) these publicans were not, as the other officers, aliens, heathens, and Gentiles, but men of their own nation, Jews, and so the brethren of those that they so abused. Had they been Gentiles, it had not been wondered at.

The Publican then was a Jew, a kind of a renegade Jew, that through the love that he had to unjust gains, fell off in his affections from his brethren, adhered to the Romans, and became a kind of servant to them against their brethren, farming the heathenish taxations at the hand of strangers, and exacting of them upon their brethren with much cruelty, falsehood, and extortion. And hence, as I said, it was, that to be a publican, was to be so odious a thing, so vile a sinner, and so grievous a man in the eyes of the Jews. Why, this was the Publican! he was a Jew, and so should have abode with them, and have been content to share with his brethren in their calamities; but contrary to nature, to law, to religion, reason, and honesty, he fell in with the heathen, and took the advantage of their tyranny to poll, to rob, and impoverish his brethren.

But for proof that the Publican was a Jew.

1. Publicans are, even then, when compared with, yet distinguished from, the heathen; “Let him be to thee as an heathen man and a publican,” Matt. xviii.; which two terms, I think, must not here be applied to one and the self-same man, as if the heathen was a publican, or the publican a heathen; but to men of two distinct nations, as that publican and harlot is to be understood of sinners of both sexes. The Publican is not an harlot, for he is a man, &c., and such a man as has been described before. So by publicans and sinners, is meant publicans and such sinners as the Gentiles were; or such as, by the text, the Publican is distinguished from: where the Pharisee saith he was not an extortioner, unjust, adulterer, or even as this Publican. Nor can he by “heathen man” intend the person, and by the term publican, the office or place, of the heathen man; but by publican is meant the renegade Jew, in such a place, &c., as is yet further manifested by that which follows. For—

2. Those publicans, even every one of them that by name are made mention of in the New Testament, have such names put upon them; yea, and other circumstances thereunto annexed, as doth demonstrate them to be Jews. I remember the names of no more but three, to wit, Matthew, Levi, and Zaccheus, and they were all Jews.

(1.) Matthew was a Jew, and the same Matthew was a publican; yea, and also afterwards an apostle. He was a Jew, and wrote his gospel in Hebrew: he was an apostle, and is therefore found among the twelve. That he was a publican too, is as evident by his own words; for though Mark and Luke, in their mentioning of his name and apostleship, do forbear to call him a publican (Mark iii. 18; Luke vi. 16); yet when this Matthew comes to speak of himself, he calls himself Matthew the publican (Matth. x. 3); for I count this the self-same Matthew that Mark and Luke make mention of, because I find no other Matthew among the apostles but he: Matthew the publican, Matthew the man so deep in apostacy, Matthew the man of that ill fame among his brethren. Love, in Mark and Luke, when they counted him among the apostles, did cover with silence this his publican state (and it is meet for Peter to call Paul his beloved brother, when Paul himself shall call himself the chief of sinners); but faithfulness to the world, and a desire to be abased, that Christ thereby, and grace by him, might be advanced, made Matthew, in his evangelical writings, call himself by the name of Matthew the publican. Nor has he lost thereby; for Christ again to exalt him (as he hath also done

by the apostle Paul), hath set, by his special providence, the testimony that this Matthew hath given of his birth, life, death, doctrine, and miracles, in the front of all the New Testament.

(2.) The next publican that I find by the Testament of Christ, made mention of by name, is Levi, another of the apostles of Jesus Christ. This Levi also, by the Holy Ghost in holy writ, is called by the name of James: not James the brother of John, for Zebedee was his father; but James the son of Alpheus. Now I take this Levi also to be another than Matthew; First, because Matthew is not called the son of Alpheus; and because Matthew and Levi, or James the son of Alpheus, are distinctly counted where the names of the apostles are mentioned (Matt. x. 3) for two distinct persons: and that this Levi, or James the apostle, was a publican, as was the apostle Matthew, whom we mentioned before, is evident; for both Mark and Luke do count him such. First, Mark saith, Christ found him when he called him, as he also found Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom; yea, Luke words it thus: “He went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom, and he said unto him, Follow me;” Mark ii. 14; Luke v. 27.

Now, that this Levi, or James the son of Alpheus, was a Jew, his name doth well make manifest.

Besides, had there been among the apostles any more Gentiles save Simon the Canaanite, or if this Levi James had been here, I think the Holy Ghost would, to distinguish him, have included him in the same discriminating character as he did the other, when he called him “Simon the Canaanite;” Matt. x. 4.

Matthew, therefore, and Levi or James, were both publicans, and, as I think, called both at the same time; were both publican Jews, and made by grace the apostles of Jesus Christ.

(3.) The next publican that I find by name made mention of in the Testament of Christ, is one Zaccheus. And he was a publican; yea, for ought I know, the master of them all. “There was a man,” saith Luke, “named Zaccheus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich,” Luke xix. 2. This man, Christ saith, was a son of Abraham, that is, as other Jews were; for he spake to stop the mouths of their Pharisaical cavillations. Besides, the Publican shewed himself to be such an one, when under a supposition of wronging any man, he had respect to the Jewish law of restoring four-fold; Exod. xxii. 1; 2 Sam. xii. 6.

It is further manifest that he was a Jew, because Christ puts him among the lost; to wit, among the lost sheep of the house of Israel, ver. 10; and Matt. xv. 24; for Zaccheus was one that might properly be said to be lost, and that in the Jews’ account: lost, I say, and that not only in the most common sense, by reason of transgression against the law, but for that he was an apostate Jew, not with reference to heathenish religion, but as to heathenish, cruel, and barbarous actions; and therefore he was, as the other, by his brethren, counted as bad as heathens, Gentiles, and harlots. But salvation is come to this house, saith Christ, and that notwithstanding his publican practice, forasmuch as he also is the son of Abraham.

3. Again, Christ, by the parable of the lost sheep, doth plainly intimate, that the Publican was a Jew. “Then drew near all the publicans and sinners for to hear him, and the Pharisees and Scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.”

But by what answer doth Christ repel their objections? Why, he saith, “What man of you having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost until he find it?” Doth he not here, by the lost sheep, mean the poor publican? plenty of whom, while he preached this sermon, were there, as objects of the Pharisees’ scorn, but of the pity and compassion of Jesus Christ: he did without doubt mean them. For, pray, what was the flock, and who Christ’s sheep under the law, but the house and people of Israel? Ezek. xxxiv. 11. So then, who could be the lost sheep of the house of Israel, but such as were Matthew, James, Zaccheus, and their companions in their and such like transgressions?

4. Besides, had not the publicans been of the Jews, how easy had it been for the Pharisees to have objected, that an impertinency was couched in that most excellent parable of the lost sheep? They might have said, We are offended, because thou receivest the publicans, and thou for

vindication of thy practice propoundest a parable of lost sheep; but they are the sinners of the house of Israel, and the publicans are aliens and Gentiles. I say, how easily might they thus have objected? but they knew full well, that the parable was pertinent, for that the publicans were of the Jews, and not of the aliens. Yea, had they not been Jews, it cannot, it must not be thought, that Christ (in sum) should call them so; and yet he did do so, when he called them “lost sheep.”

Now, that these publicans were Jews, what follows but that for this they were a great deal the more abominated by their brethren; and (as I have also hinted before) it is no marvel that they were; for a treacherous brother is worse than an open enemy, Psalm lv. 12, 13; for, if to be debauched in an open and common transgression is odious, how odious is it for a brother to be so; for a brother in nature and religion to be so. I say again, all this they did, as both John insinuates, and Zaccheus confesses.

The Pharisee, therefore, was not so good, but the Publican was as bad. Indeed the Publican was a notorious wretch, one that had a way of transgressing by himself; one that could not be sufficiently condemned by the Jews, nor coupled with a viler than himself. It is true, you find him here in the temple at prayer; not because he retained, in his apostacy, conscience of the true religion; but God had awakened him, shewed him his sin, and bestowed upon him the grace of repentance, by which he was not only fetched back to the temple and prayer, but to his God, and to the salvation of his soul.

The Pharisee, then, was a man of another complexion, and good as to his own thoughts of himself; yea, and in the thoughts of others also, upon the highest and better ground by far. The Publican was a notorious sinner: the Pharisee was a reputed righteous man. The Publican was a sinner out of the ordinary way of sinning; and the Pharisee was a man for righteousness in a singular way also. The Publican pursued his villanies, and the Pharisee pursued his righteousness; and yet they both met in the temple to pray: yea, the Pharisee stuck to, and boasted in, the law of God: but the Publican did forsake it, and hardened his heart against his way.

Thus diverse were they in their appearances: the Pharisee very good, the Publican very bad: but as to the law of God, which looked upon them with reference to the state of their spirits, and the nature of their actions, by that they were both found sinners; the Publican an open, outside one, and the Pharisee a filthy, inside one. This is evident, because the best of them was rejected, and the worst of them was received to mercy. Mercy standeth not at the Publican’s badness, nor is it enamoured with the Pharisee’s goodness: it suffereth not the law to take place on both, though it findeth them both in sin, but graciously embraceth the most unworthy, and leaveth the best to shift for himself.

And good reason that both should be dealt with after this manner; to wit, that the word of grace should be justified upon the soul of the penitent, and that the other should stand or fall to that which he had chosen to be his master.

There are three things that follow upon this discourse.

1. That the righteousness of man is not of any esteem with God, as to justification. It is passed by as a thing of naughtiness, a thing not worth the taking notice of. There was not so much as notice taken of the Pharisee’s person or prayer, because he came into the temple mantled up in his own good things.

2. That the man that has nothing to commend him to God, but his own good doings, shall never be in favour with him. This also is evident from the text: the Pharisee had his own righteousness, but had nothing else to commend him to God; and therefore could not by that obtain favour with God, but abode still a rejected one, and in a state of condemnation.

3. Wherefore, though we are bound by the law of charity to judge of men according as in appearance they present themselves unto us; yet withal, to wit, though we do so judge, we must leave room for the judgment of God. Mercy may receive him that we have doomed to hell, and justice may take hold on him, whom we have judged to be bound up in the bundle of life. And both these things are apparent by the persons under consideration.

We, like Joseph, are for setting of Manasseh before Ephraim; but God, like Jacob, puts his hands across, and lays his right hand upon the worst man's head, and his left hand upon the best (Gen. xlviii.), to the amazement and wonderment even of the best of men.

“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.”

In these words many things are worth the noting. As,

First, The Pharisee's definition of righteousness; the which standeth in two things: 1. In negatives; 2. In positives.

1. In negatives; to wit, what a man that is righteous must not be: “I am no extortioner, no unjust man, no adulterer, nor yet as this Publican.”

2. In positives; to wit, what a man that is righteous must be: “I fast twice a-week, I give tithes of all that I possess,” &c.

That righteousness standeth in negative and positive holiness is true; but that the Pharisee's definition is, notwithstanding, false, will be manifest by and by. But I will first treat of righteousness in the general, because the text leadeth me to it.

First, then, a man that is righteous, must have negative holiness; that is, he must not live in actual transgressions; he must not be an extortioner, unjust, an adulterer, or as the Publican was. And this the apostle intends, when he saith, “Flee fornication,” “Flee youthful lusts,” “Flee from idolatry;” and, “Little children keep yourselves from idols;” 1 Cor. vi. 18; x. 14; 2 Tim. ii. 22; 1 John v. 21.

For it is a vain thing to talk of righteousness, and that ourselves are righteous, when every observer shall find us in actual transgression. Yea, though a man shall mix his want of negative holiness with some good actions, that will not make him a righteous man. As suppose, a man that is a swearer, a drunkard, an adulterer, or the like, should, notwithstanding this, be open-handed to the poor, be a great executor of justice in his place, be exact in his buying, selling, keeping his promise with his friend, or the like; these things, yea, many more such, cannot make him a righteous man; for the beginning of righteousness is yet wanting in him, which is this negative holiness: for except a man leave off to do evil, he cannot be a righteous man. Negative holiness is therefore of absolute necessity to make one in one's self a righteous man. This therefore condemns them, that count it sufficient if a man have some actions that in themselves, and by virtue of the command, are good, to make him a righteous man, though negative holiness is wanting. This is as saying to the wicked, Thou art righteous, and a perverting of the right way of the Lord: negative holiness, therefore, must be in a man before he can be accounted righteous.

2. As negative holiness is required to declare one a righteous man; so also positive holiness must be joined therewith, or the man is unrighteous still. For it is not what a man is not, but what a man does, that declares him a righteous man. Suppose a man be no thief, no liar, no unjust man; or, as the Pharisee saith, no extortioner, nor adulterer, &c., this will not make a righteous man; but there must be joined to these, holy and good actions, before he can be declared a righteous man. Wherefore, as the apostle, when he pressed the Christians to righteousness, did put them first upon negative holiness, so he joineth thereto an exhortation to positive holiness; knowing, that where positive holiness is wanting, all the negative holiness in the whole world cannot declare a man a righteous man. When therefore he had said, “But thou, O man of God, flee these things” (sin and wickedness), he adds, “and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness,” &c.; 1 Tim. vi. 11. Here Timothy is exhorted to negative holiness, when he is bid to flee sin. Here also he is exhorted to positive holiness, when he is bid to follow after righteousness, &c.; for righteousness can neither stand in negative nor positive holiness, as severed one from another. That man then, and that man only, is, as to actions, a righteous man, that hath left off to do evil, and hath learned to do well, Isa. i. 16, 17; that hath cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armour of light. “Flee youthful lusts

(said Paul), but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart;" 2 Tim. ii. 22.

The Pharisee, therefore, as to the general description of righteousness, made his definition right; but as to his person and personal righteousness, he made his definition wrong. I do not mean he defined his own righteousness wrong; but I mean his definition of true righteousness, which standeth in negative and positive holiness, he made to stoop to justify his own righteousness, and therein he played the hypocrite in his prayer: for although it is true righteousness that standeth in negative and positive holiness; yet that this is not true righteousness that standeth, but in some pieces and ragged remnants of negative and positive righteousness. If then the Pharisee would, in his definition of personal righteousness, have proved his own righteousness to be good, he must have proved, that both his negative and positive holiness had been universal; to wit, that he had left off to act in any wickedness, and that he had given up himself to the duty enjoined in every commandment: for so the righteous man is described; Job i. 8; ii. 3. As it is said of Zacharias and Elisabeth his wife, "They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless;" Luke i. 5, 6. Here the perfection, that is, the universality, of their negative holiness is implied, and the universality of their positive holiness is expressed: they walked in all the commandments of the Lord; but that they could not do, if they had lived in any unrighteous thing or way. They walked in all blamelessly, that is, sincerely, with upright hearts. The Pharisee's righteousness, therefore, even by his own implied definition of righteousness, was not good, as is manifest these two ways—

1. His negative holiness was not universal.
2. His positive holiness was rather ceremonial than moral.

1. His negative holiness was not universal. He saith indeed, he was not an extortioner, nor unjust, no adulterer, nor yet as this Publican: but none of these expressions apart, nor all, if put together, do prove him to be perfect as to negative holiness; that is, they do not prove him, should it be granted, that he was as holy with this kind of holiness, as himself of himself had testified. For,

(1.) What though he was no extortioner, he might yet be a covetous man; Luke xvi. 14.

(2.) What though, as to dealing, he was not unjust to others, yet he wanted honesty to do justice to his own soul; Luke xvi. 15.

(3.) What though he was free from the act of adultery, he might yet be made guilty by an adulterous eye, against which the Pharisee did not watch (Matt. v. 28), of which the Pharisee did not take cognizance.

(4.) What though he was not like the Publican, yet he was like, yea was, a downright hypocrite; he wanted in those things wherein he boasted himself, sincerity; but without sincerity no action can be good, or accounted of God as righteous. The Pharisee, therefore, notwithstanding his boast, was deficient in his righteousness, though he would fain have shrouded it under the right definition thereof.

(5.) Nor doth his positive holiness help him at all, forasmuch as it is grounded mostly, if not altogether, in ceremonial holiness: nay, I will recollect myself, it was grounded partly in ceremonial and partly in superstitious holiness, if there be such a thing as superstitious holiness in the world; this paying of tithes was ceremonial, such as came in and went out with the typical priesthood. But what is that to positive holiness, when it was but a small pittance by the by. Had the Pharisee argued plainly and honestly; I mean, had he so dealt with that law, by which now he sought to be justified, he should have brought forth positive righteousness in morals, and should have said and proved it too, that as he was no wicked man with reference to the act of wickedness, he was indeed a righteous man in acts of moral virtues. He should, I say, have proved himself a true lover of God, no superstitious one, but a sincere worshipper of him; for this is contained in the first table (Exod. xx.), and is so in sum expounded by the Lord Christ himself (Mark xii. 30). He should also, in the next place, have proved himself truly kind, compassionate, liberal, and full of love and charity to his neighbour; for that is the sum of the second table, as our Lord doth expound it, saying, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself;" Mark xii. 31.

True, he says, he did them no hurt; but did he do them good? To do no hurt, is one thing; and to do good, is another; and it is possible for a man to do neither hurt nor good to his neighbour. What then, is he a righteous man because he hath done him no hurt? No, verily; unless, to his power, he hath also done him good.

It is therefore a very fallacious and deceitful arguing of the Pharisee, thus to speak before God in his prayers: I am righteous, because I have not hurt my neighbour, and because I have acted in ceremonial duties. Nor will that help him at all to say, he gave tithes of all that he possessed. It had been more modest to say, that he had paid them; for they, being commanded, were a due debt; nor could they go before God for a free gift, because, by the commandment, they were made a payment; but proud men and hypocrites love so to word it both with God and man, as at least to imply, that they are more forward to do, than God's command is to require them to do.

The second part of his positive holiness was superstitious; for God had appointed no such set fasts, neither more nor less but just twice a-week: "I fast twice a-week." Ay, but who did command thee to do so, other than by thy being put upon it by a superstitious and erroneous conscience, doth not, nor canst thou make to appear. This part, therefore, of this positive righteousness, was positive superstition, and abuse of God's law, and a gratification of thy own erroneous conscience. Hitherto, therefore, thou art defective in thy so seemingly brave and glorious righteousness.

Yet this let me say, in commendation of the Pharisee, in my conscience he was better than many of our English Christians; for many of them are so far off from being at all partakers of positive righteousness, that neither all their ministers, Bibles, and good books, good sermons, nor yet God's judgments, can persuade them to become so much as negatively holy, that is, to leave off evil.

The second thing that I take notice of in this prayer of the Pharisee, is his manner of delivery, as he stood praying in the temple: "God, I thank thee," said he, "that I am not as other men are." He seemed to be at this time in more than an ordinary frame, while now he stood in the presence of the divine Majesty: for a prayer made up of praise, is a prayer made up of the highest order, and is most like the way of them that are now in a state beyond prayer. Praise is the work of heaven; but we see here, that an hypocrite may get into that vein, even while an hypocrite, and while on earth below.

Nor do I think that this prayer of his was a premeditated stinted form, but a prayer *extempore*, made on a sudden according to what he felt, thought, or understood of himself.

Here therefore we may see, that even prayer, as well as other acts of religious worship, may be performed in great hypocrisy; although I think, that to perform prayer in hypocrisy, is one of the most daring sins that are committed by the sons of men. For by prayer, above all duties, is our most direct and immediate personal approach into the presence of God; as there is an uttering of things before him, especially a giving to him of thanks for things received, or a begging that such and such things might be bestowed upon me. But now, to do these things in hypocrisy (and it is easy to do them so, when we go up into the temple to pray), must needs be intolerable wickedness, and it argueth infinite patience in God, that he should let such as do so arise alive from their knees, or that he should suffer them to go away from the place where they stand, without some token or mark of his wrath upon them.

I also observe, that this *extempore* prayer of the Pharisee was performed by himself, or in the strength of his own natural parts; for so the text implieth. "The Pharisee," saith the text, "stood and prayed thus with himself," or "by himself," and may signify, either that he spoke softly, or that he made this prayer by reason of his natural parts. "I will pray with the Spirit," said Paul; 1 Cor. xiv. 15. "The Pharisee prayed with himself," said Christ. It is at this day wonderfully common for men to pray *extempore* also; to pray by a book, by a premeditated set form, is now out of fashion.

He is counted nobody now, that cannot at any time, at a minute's warning, make a prayer of half an hour long. I am not against *extempore* prayer, for I believe it to be the best kind of praying; but yet I am jealous, that there are a great many such prayers made, especially in pulpits and public meetings, without the breathing of the Holy Ghost in them; for if a Pharisee of old could do so,

why not a Pharisee do the same now? Wit and reason, and notion, are not screwed up to a very great height; nor do men want words, or fancies, or pride, to make them do this thing. Great is the formality of religion this day, and little the power thereof. Now, where there is a great form, and little power (and such there was among the Jews, in the time of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ), there men are most strangely under the temptation to be hypocrites; for nothing doth so properly and directly oppose hypocrisy, as the power and glory of the things we profess. And so, on the contrary, nothing is a greater temptation to hypocrisy, than a form of knowledge of things without the savour thereof. Nor can much of the power and savour of the things of the gospel be seen at this day upon professors (I speak not now of all), if their notions and conversations be compared together. How proud, how covetous, how like the world in garb and guise, in words and actions, are most of the great professors of this our day! But when they come to divine worship, especially to pray, by their words and carriage there, one would almost judge them to be angels in heaven. But such things must be done in hypocrisy, as also the Pharisee's was.

“The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself.”

And in that it is said he prayed with himself, it may signify, that he went in his prayer no further than his sense and reason, feeling and carnal apprehensions went. True Christian prayer oftentimes leaves sense and reason, feeling and carnal apprehensions, behind it; and it goeth forth with faith, hope, and desires to know what at present we are ignorant of, and that unto which our sense, feeling, reason, &c., are strangers. The apostle indeed doth say, “I will pray with the understanding;” 1 Cor. xiv. 15; but then it must be taken for an understanding spiritually enlightened. I say, it must be so understood, because the natural understanding, as such, receiveth not the things of God, therefore cannot pray for them; for they to such are foolish things; 1 Cor. ii. 14.

Now, a spiritually enlightened understanding may be officious in prayer these ways—

1. As it has received conviction of the truth of the being of the Spirit of God; for to receive conviction of the truth and being of such things, comes from the Spirit of God, not from the law, sense, or reason; 1 Cor. ii. 10–12. Now the understanding having, by the Holy Ghost, received conviction of the truth of things, draweth out the heart to cry in prayer to God for them. Therefore he saith, he would pray with the understanding.

2. The spiritually enlightened understanding hath also received, by the Holy Ghost, conviction of the excellency and glory of the things that are of the Spirit of God, and so inflameth the heart with more fervent desires in this duty of prayer; for there is a supernatural excellency in the things that are of the Spirit: “For if the ministration of death (to which the Pharisee adhered), written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses, for the glory of his countenance, which glory was to be done away; how shall not the ministration of the Spirit be rather glorious? For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory: for even that which was made glorious hath no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth;” 2 Cor. iii. 7–10. And the Spirit of God sheweth, at least, some things of that excellent glory of them to the understanding that it enlighteneth; Eph. i. 17–19.

3. The spiritually enlightened understanding hath also thereby received knowledge, that these excellent supernatural things of the Spirit are given by covenant in Christ to those that love God, and are beloved of him. “Now we have received,” says Paul, “not the spirit of the world (that the Pharisee had), but the Spirit which is of God, that we make know the things that are freely given to us of God;” 1 Cor. ii. 12. And this knowledge, that the things of the Spirit of God are freely given to us of God, puts yet a greater edge, more vigour, and yet further confidence, into the heart to ask for what is mine by gift, by a free gift of God in his Son. But all these things the poor Pharisee was an utter stranger to; he knew not the Spirit, nor the things of the Spirit, and therefore must neglect faith, judgment, and the love of God, Matt. xxiii. 23; Luke xi. 42, and follow himself only, as to his sense, feeling, reason, and carnal imagination in prayer.

He stood and prayed thus “with himself.” He prayed thus, talking to himself; for so also it may (I think) be understood. It is said of the unjust judge, “he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man,” &c., Luke xviii. 4; that is, he said it to himself. So the Pharisee is said to pray with himself: God and the Pharisee were not together, there was only the Pharisee and himself.

Paul knew not what to pray for without the Holy Ghost joined himself with him, and helping him with groans unutterable; but the Pharisee had no need of that; it was enough that he and himself were together at this work; for he thought without doubting that he and himself together could do. How many times have I heard ancient men, and ancient women at it with themselves, when all alone in some private room, or in some solitary path; and in their chat they have been sometimes reasoning, sometimes chiding, sometimes pleading, sometimes praying, and sometimes singing; but yet all has been done by themselves when all alone; but yet so done, as one that has not seen them must needs have concluded that they were talking, singing, and praying with company, when all that they had said, they did it with themselves, and had neither auditor nor regarder.

So the Pharisee was at it with himself; he and himself performed, at this time, the duty of prayer. Now I observe, that usually when men do speak to or with themselves, they greatly strive to please themselves: therefore it is said, there is a man “that flattereth himself in his own eyes, until his iniquity be found to be hateful;” Psalm xxxvi. 2. He flattereth himself in his own way, according as his sense and carnal reason dictate to him; and he might do it as well in prayer as in any other way.

Some men will so hear sermons and apply them that they may please themselves; and some men will pray, but will refuse such words and thoughts in prayer as will not please themselves.

O how many men speak all that they speak in prayer, rather to themselves, or to their auditory, than to God that dwelleth in heaven. And this I take to be the manner, I mean something of the manner, of the Pharisee’s praying. Indeed, he made mention of God, as also others do; but he prayed with himself to himself, in his own spirit, and to his own pleasing, as the matter of his prayer doth manifest. For was it not pleasant to this hypocrite, think you, to speak thus well of himself at this time? Doubtless it was. Also children and fools are of the same temper with hypocrites, as to this: they also love, without ground, as the Pharisee, to flatter themselves in their own eyes; “But not he that commendeth himself is approved.”

“God, I thank thee, I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this Publican,” &c.

Thus he begins his prayer; and it is, as was hinted before, a prayer of the highest strain. For to make a prayer all of thanksgiving, and to urge in that prayer the cause of that thanksgiving, is the highest manner of praying, and seems to be done in the strongest faith, &c., in the greatest sense of things. And such was the Pharisee’s prayer, only he wanted substantial ground for his thanksgiving; to wit, he wanted proof of that he said, He was not as other men were, except he had meant, he did not, that he was even of the worst sort of men: For even the best of men by nature, and the worst, are all alike. “What, then, are we better than they? (saith Paul), No, in nowise;” Rom. iii. 9. So then he failed in the ground of his thankfulness, and therefore his thankfulness was grounded on untruth, and so became feigned and self-flattering, and could not be acceptable with the God of heaven.

Besides, in this high prayer of the Pharisee, he fathered that upon God which he could by no means own; to wit, that he being so good as he thought himself to be, was through distinguishing love and favour of God—“God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are.” I thank thee, that thou hast made me better than others; I thank thee that my condition is so good, and that I am so far advanced above my neighbour.

There are several things flow from this prayer of the Pharisee that are worth our observation: as—

1. That the Pharisees and hypocrites do not love to count themselves sinners, when they stand before God.

They choose rather to commend themselves before him for virtuous and holy persons, sometimes saying, and oftener thinking, that they are more righteous than others. Yea, it seems by the word to be natural, hereditary, and so common for hypocrites to trust to themselves that they are righteous, and then to condemn others: this is the foundation upon which this very parable is built: “He spake this parable (saith Luke) unto certain which trusted in themselves as being righteous,” or “that they were” so, “and despised others,” ver. 9.

I say, hypocrites love not to think of their sins, when they stand in the presence of God; but rather to muster up, and to present him with their several good deeds, and to venture a standing or falling by them.

2. This carriage of the Pharisee before God informs us, that moral virtues, and the ground of them, which is the law, if trusted to, blinds the mind of man that he cannot for them perceive the way to happiness. While Moses is read (and his law and the righteousness thereof trusted to), the veil is upon their heart; and even unto this day (said Paul) the veil remaineth “untaken away in the reading of the Old Testament, which veil is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart;” 2 Cor. iii. 14, 15. And this is the reason so many moral men, that are adorned with civil and moral righteousness, are yet so ignorant of themselves, and the way of life by Christ.

The law of works, and the righteousness of the flesh, which is the righteousness of the law, blinds their minds, shuts up their eyes, and causeth them to miss of the righteousness that they are so hotly in the pursuit of. Their minds were blinded, saith the text. Whose minds? Why those that adhered to, that stood by, and that sought righteousness of the law. Now,

The Pharisee was such an one; he rested in the law, he made his boast of God, and trusted to himself that he was righteous; all this proceeded of that blindness and ignorance that the law had possessed his mind withal; for it is not granted to the law to be the ministration of life and light, but to be the ministration of death, when it speaks; and of darkness, when trusted unto, that the Son of God might have the pre-eminence in all things: therefore it is said when the heart “shall turn to him, the veil shall be taken away;” 2 Cor. iii. 16.

3. We may see by this prayer, the strength of vain confidence; it will embolden a man to stand in a lie before God; it will embolden a man to trust to himself, and to what he hath done; yea, to plead his own goodness, instead of God’s mercy, before him. For the Pharisee was not only a man that justified himself before men, but that justified himself before God; and what was the cause of his so justifying himself before God, but that vain confidence that he had in himself and his works, which were both a cheat and a lie to himself? But I say, the boldness of the man was wonderful, for he stood to the lie that was in his right hand, and pleaded the goodness of it before him.

But besides these things, there are four things more that are couched in this prayer of the Pharisee.

1. By this prayer the Pharisee doth appropriate to himself conversion; he challengeth it to himself and to his fellows. “I am not,” saith he, “as other men;” that is, in unconversion, in a state of sin, wrath, and death: and this must be his meaning, for the religion of the Pharisee was not grounded upon any particular natural privilege: I mean not singly, not only upon that, but upon a falling in with those principles, notions, opinions, decrees, traditions, and doctrines that they taught distinct from the true and holy doctrines of the prophets. And they made to themselves disciples by such doctrine, men that they could captivate by those principles, laws, doctrines, and traditions: and therefore such are said to be of the sect of the Pharisees: that is, the scholars and disciples of them, converted to them and to their doctrine. O! it is easy for souls to appropriate conversion to themselves, that know not what conversion is. It is easy, I say, for men to lay conversion to God, on a legal, or ceremonial, or delusive bottom, on such a bottom that will sink under the burden that is laid upon it; on such a bottom that will not stand when it is brought under the touchstone of God, nor against the rain, wind, and floods that are ordained to put it to the trial, whether it is true or false. The Pharisee here stands upon a supposed conversion to God; “I am not as other men;” but both he and his conversion are

rejected by the sequel of the parable: “That which is highly esteemed among men” (Luke xvi. 15) “is abomination in the sight of God.” That is, that conversion, that men, as men, flatter themselves that they have, is such. But the Pharisee will be a converted man, he will have more to shew for heaven than his neighbour—“I am not as other men are;” to wit, in a state of sin and condemnation, but in a state of conversion and salvation. But see how grievously this sect, this religion, beguiled men. It made them twofold worse the children of hell than they were before, and than their teachers were, Matth. xxiii. 15; that is, their doctrine begat such blindness, such vain confidence, and groundless boldness in their disciples, as to involve them in that conceit of conversion that was false, and so if trusted to, damnable.

2. By these words, we find the Pharisee, not only appropriating conversion to himself, but rejoicing in that conversion: “God, I thank thee,” saith he, “that I am not as other men;” which saying of his gives us to see that he gloried in his conversion; he made no doubt at all of his state, but lived in the joy of the safety that he supposed his soul, by his conversion, to be in. Oh! thanks to God, says he, I am not in the state of sin, death, and damnation, as the unjust, and this Publican is. What a strange delusion, to trust to the spider’s web, and to think that a few, or the most fine of the works of the flesh, would be sufficient to bear up the soul in, at, and under the judgment of God! “There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet are not washed from their filthiness.” This text can be so fitly applied to none as the Pharisee, and to those that tread in the Pharisee’s steps, and that are swallowed up with his conceits, and with the glory of their own righteousness.

So again, “There is a way” (a way to heaven) “which seemeth right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death;” Prov. xxx. 12; xiv. 12. This also is fulfilled in these kind of men; at the end of their way is death and hell, notwithstanding their confidence in the goodness of their state.

Again, “There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing;” Prov. xiii. 7. What can be more plain from all these texts, than that some men that are out of the way think themselves in it; and that some men think themselves clean, that are yet in their filthiness, and that think themselves rich for the next world, and yet are poor, and miserable, and wretched, and blind, and naked. Thus the poor, blind, naked, hypocritical Pharisee thought of himself, when God threatened to abase him: yea, he thought himself thus, and joyed therein, when indeed he was going down to the chambers of death.

3. By these words, the Pharisee seems to put the goodness of his condition upon the goodness of God. I am not as other men are, and I thank God for it. “God (saith he), I thank thee, that I am not as other men are.” He thanked God, when God had done nothing for him. He thanked God, when the way that he was in was not of God’s prescribing, but of his own inventing. So the persecutor thanks God that he was put into that way of roguery that the devil had put him into, when he fell to rending and tearing of the church of God; “Their possessors slay them (saith the prophet), and hold themselves not guilty: and they that sell them say, Blessed be the Lord, for I am rich;” Zech. xi. 5. I remember that Luther used to say, “In the name of God begins all mischief.” All must be fathered upon God: the Pharisee’s conversion must be fathered upon God; the right, or rather the villany of the outrageous persecution against God’s people, must be fathered upon God. “God, I thank thee,” and, “Blessed be God,” must be the burden of the heretic’s song. So again, the free-willer, he will ascribe all to God; the Quaker, the Ranter, the Socinian, &c., will ascribe all to God. “God, I thank thee,” is in every man’s mouth, and must be entailed to every error, delusion, and damnable doctrine that is in the world: but the name of God, and their doctrine, worship, and way, hangeth together, as the Pharisee’s doctrine; that is to say, by nothing at all: for God hath not proposed their principles, nor doth he own them, nor hath he commanded them, nor doth he convey by them the least grace or mercy to them; but rather rejecteth them, and holdeth them for his enemies, and for the destroyers of the world.

4. We come, in the next place, to the ground of all this, and that is, to what the Pharisee had attained; to wit, that he was no extortioner, no unjust man, no adulterer, nor even as this Publican, and for that he fasted twice a-week, and paid tithes of all that he possessed. So that you see he pretended

to a double foundation for his salvation, a moral and a ceremonial one; but both very lean, weak, and feeble: for the first of his foundation, what is it more, if all be true that he saith, but a being removed a few inches from the vilest men in their vilest actions? a very slender matter to build my confidence for heaven upon.

And for the second part of his ground for life, what is it but a couple of ceremonies, if so good? the first is questioned as a thing not founded in God's law; and the second is such, as is of the remotest sort of ceremonies, that teach and preach the Lord Jesus. But suppose them to be the best, and his conformity to them the thoroughest, they never were ordained to get to heaven by, and so are become but a sandy foundation. But any thing will serve some men for a foundation and support for their souls, and to build their hopes of heaven upon. I am not a drunkard, says one, nor a liar, nor a swearer, nor a thief, and therefore I thank God, I have hopes of heaven and glory. I am not an extortioner, nor an adulterer; not unjust, nor yet as this Publican; and therefore do hope I shall go to heaven. Alas, poor men! will your being furnished with these things save you from the thundering claps and vehement batteries that the wrath of God will make upon sin and sinners in the day that shall burn like an oven? No, no; nothing at that day can shroud a man from the hot rebukes of that vengeance, but the very righteousness of God, which is not the righteousness of the law, however christened, named, or garnished with all the righteousness of man.

But, O thou blind Pharisee! since thou art so confident that thy state is good, and thy righteousness is that that will stand when it shall be tried with fire (1 Cor. iii. 13), let me now reason with thee of righteousness. My terror shall not make thee afraid; I am not God, but a man as thou art; we both are formed out of the clay.

First, Prithee, when didst thou begin to be righteous? Was it before or after thou hadst been a sinner? Not before, I dare say; but if after, then the sins that thou pollutedst thyself withal before, have made thee incapable of acting legal righteousness: for sin, where it is, pollutes, defiles, and makes vile the whole man; therefore thou canst not by after acts of obedience make thyself just in the sight of that God thou pretendest now to stand praying unto. Indeed thou mayst cover thy dirt, and paint thy sepulchre; for that acts of after obedience will do, though sin has gone before. But, Pharisee, God can see through the white of this wall, even to the dirt that is within: God can also see through the paint and garnish of thy beauteous sepulchre, to the dead men's bones that are within; nor can any of thy most holy duties, nor all when put together, blind the eye of the all-seeing Majesty from beholding all the uncleanness of thy soul (Matt. xxiii. 27.) Stand not therefore so stoutly to it, now thou art before God; sin is with thee, and judgment and justice is before him. It becomes thee, therefore, rather to despise and abhor this life, and to count all thy doings but dross and dung, and to be content to be justified with another's righteousness instead of thy own. This is the way to be secured. I say, blind Pharisee, this is the way to be secured from the wrath which is to come.

There is nothing more certain than this, that as to justification from the curse of the law, God has rejected man's righteousness, for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof, and hath accepted in the room of that the glorious righteousness of his Son; because indeed that, and that only, is universal, perfect, and equal with his justice and holiness. This is in a manner the contents of the whole Bible, and therefore must needs be more certainly true. Now then, Mr Pharisee, methinks, what if thou didst this, and that while thou art at thy prayers, to wit, cast in thy mind what doth God love most? and the resolve will be at hand. The best righteousness, surely the best righteousness; for that thy reason will tell thee: This done, even while thou art at thy devotion, ask thyself again, But who has the best righteousness? and that resolve will be at hand also; to wit, he that in person is equal with God, and that is his in Jesus Christ; he that is separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens, and that is his Son Jesus Christ; he that did no sin, nor had any guile found in his mouth; and there never was any such he in all the world but the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

Now, Pharisee, when thou hast done this, then, as thou art at thy devotion, ask again, But what is this best righteousness, the righteousness of Christ, to do? and the answer will be ready. It is to

be made by an act of the sovereign grace of God over to the sinner that shall dare to trust thereto for justification from the curse of the law. “He is made unto us of God, righteousness.” “He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth;” 1 Cor. i. 30; 2 Cor. v. 21; Rom. x. 4.

This done, and concluded on, then turn again, Pharisee, and say thus with thyself—Is it most safe for me to trust in this righteousness of God, this righteousness of God-man, this righteousness of Christ? Certainly it is; since, by the text, it is counted the best, and that which is best pleaseth God; since it is that which God hath appointed, that sinners shall be justified withal. For “in the Lord have we righteousness” if we believe: and, “in the Lord we are justified, and do glory;” Isa. xlv. 24, 25.

Nay, Pharisee, suppose thine own righteousness should be as long, as broad, as high, as deep, as perfect, as good, even every way as good, as the righteousness of Christ; yet since God has chosen, by Christ, to reconcile us to himself, canst thou attempt to seek by thy own righteousness to reconcile thyself to God, and not attempt (at least) to confront this righteousness of Christ before God; yea, to challenge it by acceptance of thy person contrary to God’s design?

Suppose, that when the king has chosen one to be judge in the land, and has determined that he shall be judge in all cases, and that by his verdict every man’s judgment shall stand; I say, suppose, after this, another should arise, and of his own head resolve to do his own business himself. Now, though he should be every whit as able, yea, and suppose he should do it as justly and righteously too, yet his making of himself a judge, would be an affront to the king, and an act of rebellion, and so a transgression worthy of punishment.

Why, Pharisee, God hath appointed, that by the righteousness of his Son, and by that righteousness only, men shall be justified in his sight from the curse of the law. Wherefore, take heed, and at thy peril, whatever thy righteousness is, confront not the righteousness of Christ therewith. I say, bring it not in, let it not plead for thee at the bar of God, nor do thou plead for that in his court of justice; for thou canst not do this and be innocent. If he trust to his righteousness, he hath sinned, says Ezekiel. Mark the text, “When I shall say to the righteous, that he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousness shall not be remembered: but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it;” Ezek. xxxiii. 13.

Observe a few things from this text; and they are these that follow.

1. Here is a righteous man; a man with whom we do not hear that the God of heaven finds fault.
2. Here is a promise made to this man, that he shall surely live; but on this condition, that he trust not to his own righteousness. Whence it is manifest, that the promise of life to this righteous man, is not for the sake of his righteousness, but for the sake of something else; to wit, the righteousness of Christ.

1. Not for the sake of his own righteousness. This is evident, because we are permitted, yea, commanded, to trust in the righteousness that saveth us. The righteousness of God is unto us all, and upon all that believe; that is, trust in it, and trust to it for justification. Now therefore, if thy righteousness, when most perfect, could save thee, thou mightst, yea oughtst, most boldly to trust therein. But since thou art forbidden to trust to it, it is evident it cannot save; nor is it for the sake of that, that the righteous man is saved; Rom. iii. 21, 22.

2. But for the sake of something else, to wit, for the sake of the righteousness of Christ, “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness, that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus;” Rom. iii. 25, 26; see Phil. iii. 6–8.

“If he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousness shall not be remembered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed (in trusting to his own righteousness), he shall die for it.”

Note hence further.

1. That there is more virtue in one sin to destroy, than in all thy righteousness to save thee alive.

If he trust, if he trust ever so little, if he do at all trust to his own righteousness, all his righteousness shall be forgotten; and by, and for, and in, the sin that he hath committed, in trusting to it, he shall die.

2. Take notice also, that there are more damnable sins than those that are against the moral law. By which of the ten commandments is trusting to our own righteousness forbidden? Yet it is a sin: it is a sin therefore forbidden by the gospel, and is included, lurketh close in, yea, is the very root of, unbelief itself; “He that believes not shall be damned.” But he that trusteth in his own righteousness doth not believe, neither in the truth, nor sufficiency of the righteousness of Christ to save him, therefore he shall be damned.

But how is it manifest, that he that trusteth to his own righteousness, doth it through a doubt, or unbelief of the truth or sufficiency of the righteousness of Christ?

I answer, because he trusteth to his own. A man will never willingly choose to trust to the worst of helps, when he believes there is a better as near, and to be had as soon, and that too, upon as easy, if not more easy terms. If he that trusteth to his own righteousness for life, did believe that there is indeed such a thing as the righteousness of Christ to justify, and that this righteousness of Christ has in it all-sufficiency to do that blessed work, be sure he would choose that, thereon to lay, lean, and venture his soul, that he saw was the best, and most sufficient to save; especially when he saw also (and see that he must, when he sees the righteousness of Christ), to wit, that that is to be obtained as soon, because as near, and to be had on as easy terms: nay, upon easier than man’s own righteousness. I say, he would sooner choose it, because of the weight of salvation, of the worth of salvation, and of the fearful sorrow that to eternity will overtake him that in this thing shall miscarry.

It is for heaven, it is to escape hell, wrath, and damnation, saith the soul; and therefore I will, I must, I dare not but choose that, and that only, that I believe to be the best and most sufficient help in so great a concern as soul-concern is. So then he that trusteth to his own righteousness, does it of unbelief of the sufficiency of the righteousness of Christ to save him.

Wherefore this sin of trusting to his own righteousness is a most high transgression; because it contemneth the righteousness of Christ, which is the only righteousness that is sufficient to save from the curse of the law. It also disalloweth the design of heaven, and the excellency of the mystery of the wisdom of God, in designing this way of salvation for man. What shall I say, It also seeketh to rob God of the honour of the salvation of man. It seeketh to take the crown from the head of Christ, and to set it upon the hypocrite’s head; therefore, no marvel that this one sin be of that weight, virtue, and power, as to sink that man and his righteousness into hell, that leaneth thereon, or trusteth unto it.

But, Pharisee, I need not talk thus unto thee; for thou art not the man that hath that righteousness that God findeth not fault withal; nor is it to be found, but with him that is ordained to be the Saviour of mankind; nor is there any such one besides Jesus, who is called Christ. What madness then has brought thee into the temple, there in an audacious manner to stand and vaunt before God, saying, “God, I thank thee, I am not as other men are?”

Dost thou not know, that he that breaks one, breaks all the commandments of God; and consequently, that he that keeps not all, keeps none at all of the commandments of God? Saith not the scripture the same? “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all;” Jam. ii. 10. Be confounded then, be confounded.

Dost thou know the God with whom now thou hast to do? He is a God that cannot (as he is just) accept of an half righteousness for a whole; of a lame righteousness for a sound; of a sick righteousness for a well and healthy one; Mal. i. 7, 8. And if so, how should he then accept of that which is no righteousness? I say, how should he accept of that which is none at all, for thine is only such? And if Christ said, “When you have done all, say, We are unprofitable,” how camest thou to say, before thou hadst done one thing well, I am better, more righteous than other men?

Didst thou believe, when thou saidst it, that God knew thy heart? Hadst thou said this to the Publican, it had been a high and rampant expression; but to say this before God, to the face of God, when he knew that thou wert vile, and a sinner from the womb, and from the conception, spoils all.

It was spoken to put a check to thy arrogancy when Christ said, “Ye are they that justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts;” Luke xvi. 15.

Hast thou taken notice of this, that God judgeth the fruit by the heart from whence it comes?

“A good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man, out of the evil treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is evil;” Luke vi. 45. Nor can it be otherwise concluded, but that thou art an evil man, and so that all thy supposed good is nought but badness; for that thou hast made it to stand in the room of Jesus, and hast dared to commend thyself to the living God thereby: for thou hast trusted in thy shadow of righteousness, and committed iniquity. Thy sin hath melted away thy righteousness, and turned it to nothing but dross; or, if you will, to the early dew, like to which it goeth away, and so can by no means do thee good, when thou shalt stand in need of salvation and eternal life of God.

But, further, thou sayst thou art righteous; but they are but vain words. Knowest thou not that thy zeal, which is the life of thy righteousness, is preposterous in many things? What else means thy madness, and the rage thereof, against men as good as thyself. True, thy being ignorant that they are good, may save thee from the commission of the sin that is unpardonable; but it will never keep thee from spot in God’s sight, but will make both thee and thy righteousness culpable.

Paul, who was once as brave a Pharisee as thou canst be, calleth much of that zeal which he in that estate was possessed with, and lived in the exercise of, madness; yea, exceeding madness (Acts xxvi. 9–11; Phil, iii. 5, 6); and of the same sort is much of thine, and it must be so; for a lawyer, a man for the law, and that resteth in it, must be a persecutor; yea, a persecutor of righteous men, and that of zeal to God; because by the law is begotten, through the weakness that it meeteth with in thee, sourness, bitterness of spirit, and anger against him that rightfully condemneth thee of folly, for choosing to trust to thy own righteousness when a better is provided of God to save us; Gal. iv. 28–31. Thy righteousness therefore is deficient; yea, thy zeal for the law, and the men of the law, has joined madness with thy moral virtues, and made thy righteousness unrighteousness: how then canst thou be upright before the Lord?

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