

THE WESLEYAN.

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"LET US CONSIDER ONE ANOTHER TO PROVOKE UNTO LOVE AND TO GOOD WORKS."—HEBREWS x. 24.

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DIVINITY.

[FOR THE WESLEYAN.]

REMARKS ON THE PARABLE OF THE PHARISEE AND PUBLICAN.

LUKE XVIII. 9-14.

THE Divine Teacher, Jesus, having in the parable of the unjust Judge and the oppressed widow, taught us that "men ought *always* to pray and not to faint," we are instructed in the parable now before us, *how* we ought to pray. In doing this, the design of our Lord appears to be twofold:—

First—The parable was delivered for the instruction and conviction of those, in every age, who, like the ancient Pharisees, "trust in themselves that they are righteous, and despise others;" i. e., who confide in their own performances and observances as righteousness—a ground of acceptance before God; and while they entertain a high opinion of their own piety, look down with disdain upon others, as less holy than themselves.

Secondly—To illustrate and exemplify that immutable and equitable rule of the divine government of moral agents, agreeably to which God invariably humbles the man that exalts himself, and exalteth those that abase themselves.

I.—Let us consider the Character and probable Moral Condition, of these two individuals here mentioned: the "one a Pharisee, the other a Publican;" than which, except as they probably were both Jews, and certainly both sinners, two more opposite characters could not have been selected out of the whole Jewish nation.

The Pharisees were the most numerous, distinguished, and popular sect among the Jews: and, because of their strict and scrupulous observance of the externals of religion as prescribed in the Mosaic law, and the "Tradition of the Elders," claimed to be considered as the favourites of heaven, and the holiest persons on earth. One of these two men was of this sect, a professedly and reputedly just, benevolent, and eminently virtuous man.

The other was a Publican—a Roman Tax-gatherer, a collector or receiver of the tribute levied by the Roman Emperors on the Jews. These officers of the customs were of two kinds: the *Receivers General*, or "chief of the publicans," such was Zaccheus; and the common publicans, or subordinate collectors or receivers of the Roman tribute. The individual spoken of by our Lord was probably of the latter sort—a common publican: as, it is believed, was also Matthew. These publicans, beyond all doubt, both superior and subordinate, were generally oppressive, unjust, and wicked men: as such, they are spoken of, not only by Jewish and heathen writers, but by our Lord and the Evangelists, as being among the dregs of the people; and by the Jews especially, they were held in the utmost abhorrence.

Now let us suppose the Pharisee to be, and to do, all that he describes and boasts of himself; and to be esteemed by others as one of the holiest of men; (remembering, however, the character which our Lord has given of them, and the epithets he has applied to them: hypocrites—covetous—a generation of vipers—whited walls—painted sepulchres—devourers of widows' houses—pretenders to piety—exposed to the damnation of hell;)—and let us suppose this publican to be, of all publicans, one the most rapacious, hateful, and wicked; and that such were the characters of these two men as they awoke on the morning of that day when they went up to the temple.

We may imagine then we see, what was often seen among the ancient, and what is still seen among modern pharisees—imagine we see this pharisee in the midst of his family;—for the domestic circle is the place to see men as they really are—sullen, dissatisfied, or passionate and overbearing—frowning upon all; neither wife, nor children, nor servants can please him—pouring forth the overflowings of "a heart full of evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornication, thefts, false witness, blasphemies;" and yet he goes forth, and wishes, and claims to be regarded by every one he meets, as one of the most immaculate of men. Follow him to the synagogue, or to the market; there he appears with a disfigured countenance, to intimate that he had been mortifying the flesh by long fasting; and then causing a trumpet to be sounded, to call attention to the distribution of his alms, while the deceived and gazing throng exclaim, See yonder holy man!

Leaving the hypocritical and proud pharisee to receive and enjoy his reward, in the admiration and applause of his fellow-men, let us turn to the publican—the guilty, hated publican. Where is he? and what are his views and feelings?—what the judgment he forms of himself? Having, perhaps, passed a restless night, scared and terrified by wild, distressful dreams, he awakes, and rises with a guilty and accusing conscience—his numerous crimes are all arrayed before him—the righteous God is angry with him, and frowns upon him in terrible displeasure—"indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish," already fill his soul. His language is, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" The sight of his family, the prattle of his children—the anxious enquiries, and the affectionate and endearing attentions of his wife, all fail to bring relief to his burdened and distressed mind—"the arrows of the Almighty are within him, the poison whereof drink up his spirit; the terrors of the Lord set themselves in array against him." He turns from his family, he goes forth from his dwelling, either to the receipt of custom, that the cares and engagements of his calling may serve to dissipate the gloom and wretchedness of his soul—or to seek some place of retirement, where he may indulge in tears and sorrow, in sighs and groans. Such we suppose to be the character, condition and feelings of these two men, when the hour of the temple service arrives.

II. But to proceed. It is the hour of worship, and they both resolve to go up to the house of the Lord. They go,—but with what different dispositions and feelings! See the Pharisee, with his deep-fringed garment, and his broad phylactery bound upon his forehead and upon his arms, full of self-complacency and self-importance, proudly ascending the hill of the Lord—who so righteous, who so worthy as he? He boldly enters the temple, and lifting his brazen front to heaven, passes on to the court of the Israelites, and as near the holy place, the seat of the Divine Majesty, as possible, takes his standing there alone, lest he should be polluted by the touch or proximity of less pious and worthy worshippers than himself, and especially by "publicans and sinners."

But see the guilty, self-condemned publican, following the pharisee at a respectful distance to the house of prayer. Faltering, trembling, groaning beneath his load of sin, as he too bends his steps toward the holy place, watering his path with his tears, and fearing lest at every step the earth should open its mouth and swallow him up, as it did the impious Korah and his company. He enters the precincts of the temple—it is all

he dares to do; and "standing afar off" from the holy place, and from the holy pharisee, in the court of the Gentiles; with downcast eyes, he smites upon his unworthy breast, in token of his guilt and sorrow.

They go to pray—mark, they go to pray—prayer is the service in which they profess to engage. And what is prayer? It is an exercise of the heart—an expression of dependance and want—the cry of the soul to God for mercy and help. Listen to the Pharisee! Ignorant of his sinful and depraved state by nature—of the spirituality and extent of the obligations of the divine law—filled with self-complacency and self-importance, because of his fancied moral superiority, and sanctity—his freedom from those flagrant crimes and vices of which some are guilty; and presuming that the Almighty beheld him with the same complacency with which he contemplated himself: from the pinnacle of vanity to which his own conceit had elevated him, he looks down with contempt, and with an un pitying heart, on publicans and sinners, and proceeds to enumerate his fancied virtues, saying—"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."

All this might be true, or there might not be one word of truth in it. Be this as it may, there is not one word, or breath of prayer in it. No adoration of God—no confession of sin—no acknowledgment of dependance—no expression of want—no cry for mercy—no supplication for grace—no deprecation of wrath—no reference to an atoning sacrifice—no humility, penitence, sorrow or faith, without which there can be no prayer. Our Lord has characterised both the man and his pretended prayer, thus—"He trusted in himself that he was righteous, and despised others."

Hear now the Publican: hear him did we say? who heard him but his God? It was a deep and inward groan—it was the language of an humbled, sorrowful, prostrate heart—"God be merciful to me a sinner!" How brief—how comprehensive—how appropriate—how expressive of his condition and feelings—and how acceptable to God! We find here all that God requires in a guilty sinner's prayer, and by which it is essentially distinguished from what is called the prayer of the pharisee: observe—

(1.) There is an humble confession of sin—"me a sinner." Whether he had been, as we have supposed, rapacious, cruel, and unjust as a tax-gatherer, or not, he saw and felt himself to be a depraved creature, a vile transgressor, a wretched sinner: he knew that God beheld him as such, and that his sins had exposed him to the divine displeasure; and hence, in his own true character, and with convictions and confessions of his guiltiness and unworthiness, he prostrates himself before the offended Majesty of heaven; and if at that moment he thought of other sinners, it was only to feel and to acknowledge with St. Paul, "of whom I am chief. Nothing of this, however, appeared in either the Pharisee or his prayer. He was too proud and self-righteous to confess himself a sinner."

(2.) The Publican's prayer was penitential, as well as confessional. He was not only a convinced, but humbled and broken-hearted sinner. His, was a godly sorrow, working genuine repentance. Shame, grief, self-abasement, and self-abhorrence filled his soul: this is evident from the manner of his praying—standing "afar off"—not daring so much as to lift his eyes to heaven, the habitation of the divine holiness and glory—and smiting on his breast, in token of his great grief and indignation against sin; and especially, from