

The Pharisee and the publican

(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 to 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.”

This is a parable about our approach to God. Until every vestige of egotism, self-justification, and pride in our own understanding of God has gone, and there is just the equivalent of the publican's heartfelt reaching out, human thought “has little relation to the actual or divine” (S&H 297:30-31).

“When the Publican's wail went out to the great heart of Love, it won his humble desire” (S&H 448:3-5). That shows the quality of its genuineness. The implication is that the publican felt small before the immensity of Love. Any man who is in earnest and measures himself against the wonderfulness of what God is and against the vastness of Science is bound to feel that he has missed the mark in many directions; but that is not a miserable state of mind, for it signifies a mentality ready for correction and progress. The Pharisee by his attitude made certain that in no way could he be tutored or taught.

No human science or system can explain why it is that an attitude of mind such as the publican's could win for him such commendation

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as Jesus gave, since it is generally thought that a poor opinion of oneself is a sign of mental weakness. But the fact remains that in everyone's experience there have been times when, having felt abject at his own mental state and performance, there has come somewhere along the line not only a sense of comfort, but also a surge of new confidence. If it is true that false egotism has always blinded men, it must also be true that when this egotism is unseated by the awakening of the individual to its inadequacy, this opens the gates for the true ego of man, based on dependence on that which men call God, to take its rightful place.

At first sight the publican sounds like a wailing weakling, but the point is that he was empty of all self, and this allowed the divine to flow in. The more of self there is, the less room there is for the influx of the divine. Into the vacuums of sense comes the flow-in of Soul, but without those vacuums recognized and laid at the feet of divine Love Soul cannot operate for men. There is a constant necessity to heed Mrs Eddy's words, "A self-satisfied ventilation of fervent sentiments never makes a Christian" (S&H 7:21-23). Science is divine, and that is why every human reliance has to go.

When we think of the publican beating his breast and feeling empty, we need to realize that Jesus' finest hour was when he momentarily felt this emptiness and uttered the cry, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" The mood was similar, the need as openly expressed. Standing before the throne of grace, he spelt out to the great heart of Love his own tremendous need; and this need, thus spoken, must have been met immediately — the temporary human vacuum was found filled with the presence of God, and this sustained him with wonderful power. At the same time egotism was blinding the Pharisees to such an extent that they were priding themselves on doing their duty in ridding the community of a dangerous troublemaker.

Jesus says that the Pharisee "stood and prayed thus with *himself*" — it was only himself he was communing with, only himself he had faith in, not God, and he was surrounded by his self-centred complacency with regard to his personal performance in every direction in which he

looked.

In contrast, the publican had no opinion of himself. This is a desirable preparatory stage, though not a lasting or final one. We cannot fill vessels already full or even partially full, and they must be emptied of egotistical self-completeness. Nevertheless they cannot stay empty, for there are no vacuums to Principle. The reason for getting rid of self is to allow the truth of Principle's presence expressing itself in our individuality to be revealed and rejoiced in. Anything with self in it closes the door to the unselfed purposefulness of that true nature.

When we honestly empty our vessels of egotism in all its degrees, this permits the inflow of our true selfhood, unknown to egotism but always present and ready to manifest itself when egotism does not overlay it. The publican had opened his consciousness to that which is unfailingly waiting to fill such a state of thought, and that is Principle expressing itself as the individual. Whenever we let ourselves be denuded of self, we immediately find a flow of creative purposefulness, as Mind takes up its rightful position as *our* only Mind. Principle is ever present in consciousness and as consciousness, and the only thing which obstructs this is egotism, so whatever removes a false sense of self allows the true to become visible. It is not a question of us creating Principle's presence, for Principle is perpetually present. The perfect man is forever there. That which hides it is only error, and that is effaced either through Science or through suffering — in this case through the suffering of egotism.

Part and parcel of Bartimaeus' healing of blindness was that he not only recognized the Master for what he was and stood for, but also cast away his old garment, his old sense of self, and came before him no longer contaminated by egotism, but ready to receive the answer to his plea, "Lord, that I might receive my sight." (See Mark 10:46-52.) We have to be naked in order to be re clothed, and when we are naked of self, we find ourselves in our proper clothing as Principle's idea. Paul expressed this when he said, "not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon."

True humility does not deflate the ego or deprive man of individu-

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ality. This humility was expressed by Jesus when he said, "The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise," and this led him to make the greatest statement of humility ever made, "I and my Father are one." Mrs Eddy speaks of the Ego-man as the reflection of the Ego-God. (See S&H 281:10-11.)

Jesus kept himself constantly refreshed with the sense, "I can of mine own self do nothing." In human experience it is common that the best achievement comes when there has been such a feeling of personal inadequacy and emptiness that there has been a reaching out of the heart to something higher for inspiration. This indicates that Principle is the only presence and that all other claimed presence has to go for this fact to be realized.

The Master paints a picture of a man who saw that he was nothing without God and who felt the magnitude and wonderfulness of Principle. Because there were no self-opinionated thoughts, but a completely sincere and humble acknowledgment of the greatness of God, his consciousness would justifiably be illumined with all that this would lead him to, as the recognition of the perfection of God has always accomplished for anyone. Mrs Eddy wrote that "an acknowledgment of the perfection of the infinite Unseen confers a power nothing else can" (Un.7:20-22). The Pharisee, on the other hand, made all his claims for perfection to himself and of himself, leaving God out of the picture. "Whatever holds human thought in line with unselfed love, receives directly the divine power" (S&H 192:30-31), and you have unselfed love when self is *out* of the picture and God very much *in* the picture.

We soon despise the other fellow if we have a high opinion of ourselves based on egotism, and the fact that we look down on others as inferior should prove to us that what we have thought about ourselves is not much good. The Pharisee thanked God that he was a superior being, that he was "not as other men are," just as a Christian Scientist may sometimes express self-righteous gratitude to Science for saving him from being "as other men are;" but the fact is that we are all "as other men are" in truth, because there is only

one Mind and it is expressed universally. The only real proof of being a Christian Scientist is that we love our neighbour as our true self and therefore discern and acknowledge his unique expression of the one Mind.

Mrs Eddy says, "Cherish humility," and she describes humility as "the genius of Christian Science." "One can never go up, until one has gone down in his own esteem. Humility is lens and prism to the understanding of Mind-healing; it must be had to understand our textbook; it is indispensable to personal growth, and points out the chart of its divine Principle and rule of practice" (Mis.356:30,23-29). There are two effects of humility. One is that we gain immediate results in proofs of Principle's presence, and the second is that we have at last a "lens and prism" clarified of anything which would hide the Science of that presence.

The publican opened his door of consciousness through humility. The Pharisee closed it through complacency. The Christ-idea is forever saying, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me," but if no one listens for or hears the voice and opens the door, that Christ-idea cannot come in to human cognizance and so its ever-presence is not apparent. Awareness of the divine is what counts — it does not matter what a man says or writes apart from that. *With* that awareness, everything he says or writes is transfigured.

"Beholding the infinite tasks of truth, we pause, — wait on God. Then we push onward, until boundless thought walks enraptured, and conception unconfined is winged to reach the divine glory" (S&H 323:9-12). It is that pause which counts. That pause is the moment of the loss of egotism, because it is the moment of honesty. The moment of honesty is when a man feels nothing of himself and everything of God, and that is what this parable shows.