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## "GOD BE MERCIFUL TO ME, A SINNER."

– MAY 10. – *Luke 18:9-17.* –

**Golden Text – "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 18:13.**

WHILE the Pharisee presents to our minds the extremes of conceit, selfishness and hypocrisy it is always well to remember that there are many approaches to that disposition which give sure signs that those who have and who are cultivating them will by and by mature the same kind of fruit unless they change their course. The spirit of meekness, which is the spirit of all true children of God, is the very opposite of the spirit of proud, boastful self-righteousness. It is only this spirit that can gain the ear of the Lord and bear away the answers of peace, as illustrated in the case of the publican so strikingly in contrast with that of the Pharisee.

How this calls to mind the words of wisdom and of warning to guard against every approach to a spirit of pride and vain glory: – "Be sober, and watch unto prayer"; "Be sober, be vigilant" against "your adversary, the devil; I say...to every man...not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly"; "In simplicity and godly sincerity" have your "conversation in the world." (1 Pet. 4:7; 5:8; Rom. 12:3; 2 Cor. 1:12.) It is the intoxication that comes from imbibing the spirit of the world that leads to that foolish boasting of which a man in his sober senses would be ashamed, and such intoxication is an abomination in God's sight and is unworthy of the least of his children; for every sober man must realize that he is far, very far, short of perfection. Boasting, therefore, is only an evidence of ignorance and of intoxication with the worldly spirit.

To further enforce this teaching, our Lord calls attention to the beautiful, artless simplicity of childhood as a pattern in this respect of

what all must be who would enter the Kingdom of God. To be a child in guilelessness and simplicity, however, is one thing, while to be a child in understanding and development of character is another; and it is in the former, and not in the latter respect, that we are to be children. And it is in this respect that the people of God are spoken of as his "little ones" (Luke 17:2), and by the beloved John as "my little children." They may be old in years and gray-headed, but their hearts are young and preserve the sweet simplicity of childhood. On the other hand, they may be ripe in character and learned in the wisdom of God, as was the Apostle Paul, who said, "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man I put away childish things." And the same apostle also says, "Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men." "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong." – 1 Cor. 13:11; 14:20; 16:13.

The simplicity of childhood, realizing its need, confesses it and asks mercy, instead of attempting to deceive itself by philosophizing. In this respect we must continue "children," we must continue to admit our own imperfection, continue to admit our need of mercy, continue to trust in the precious blood provided to cleanse us from all sin, if we would continue to have the Heavenly Father's ear and favor, and if we would continue to be "*justified*" in his sight.

We urge upon all the importance of sincere prayer; – private or "closet" prayers, "family" or "household" prayer and "social" prayer with fellow-Christians. Each has its special importance to everyone who is running the heavenly race; and each has Scripture sanction. They need not be lengthy: indeed few of the Scriptural examples of prayer were so; but they must be sincere, from the heart and not a lip service. Heart prayers are always accompanied by efforts of life in harmony with the prayers; while lip prayers are usually in contradiction of the living epistle. Prayer without corresponding endeavor is like faith without works; it is a dead, worse than useless, thing.

Prayer is required, not to change God's plans, but to bring our hearts into such a condition as will prepare us to receive and appreciate the blessings which God has freely promised and which he delights to grant to his children. Hence our requests should be such only as God has authorized us to ask and expect. Our requests should be unselfish: The Apostle remarks that some ask and receive not because they ask amiss (not in harmony with the Lord's arrangements), to consume the things asked for upon selfish desires. – James 4:3.

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