

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

**And someone said to Him, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" And He said to them, "Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able."
(Luk 13:23-24)**

www.sermonaudio.com/crc

www.unholycharade.com (blog)

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The Doctrine of Eternal Punishment (Part 15)

Self-Idolatry is a Road to Hell June 14, 2026

Sermon Text: Luke 18:9-14

Scripture Reading: Daniel 3:1-7;
4:28-37

Idolatry, ultimately, is always *the worship of self*. When man in his sin refuses to acknowledge and give thanks to the true God, inevitably he does this:

For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile

in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. (Rom 1:21-23)

These images *are always images not only of man's imagination, but of man himself*. He makes a "god" that HE desires and thus all idols emanate from that idol factory, the mind and heart of the sinner.

The essence of sin, you might say, is man's worship of himself – a self-idolatry – which manifests itself in pride.

Col 3:5 Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.

We saw it already in our readings from Daniel-

Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, the height of which was sixty cubits and its width six cubits; he set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. (Dan 3:1)

"The king reflected and said, 'Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?' (Dan 4:30)

Herod was eaten by worms because he accepted the people's praise – "the voice of a god and not of a man." **Satan** fell because he declared that he would be like the Most High. And Satan's man, the **Antichrist**, will set up an image of himself and demand it be

worshipped. And this same spirit is in man the sinner.

Let's look at still another example of this self-worship as revealed to us in still another parable from the Lord Jesus Himself. It is familiar to us – the account of the Pharisee and the Publican –

Luk 18:9-14 And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt:

(10) "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

(11) "The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. (12) 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'

(13) "But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast,

saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'

(14) "I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

The Pharisee, who regarded himself as a holy, righteous, worshipper of God. In fact, his arrogance made him an *idolater*. He was in God's temple, but his "god" was himself. He was regarded by the populace as the epitome of true religion. But it was all a lie, a façade, and his religion only took him to hell. [This is why we are looking at this parable in the course of our series on the doctrine of eternal punishment].

The broad road to hell is populated by idolaters and the spirit in them is pride – the worship of self.

Listen to him once more:

Luk 18:11-12 "The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself:

'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. (12) 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'

"I am not like other people."

The rich man in the story of the rich man and Lazarus, was of the same spirit. He was not like this filthy beggar – obviously he was blessed by God. He was better. Only too late did he discover the lie – that the idol of himself took him to eternal torment in that flame.

In the last three decades we have seen many such cases in this church. *"I am not like other people. God sees that I am better. I am very active in the church. I give my tithes."* And yet they ended in hell. We know this because their fruit was rotten.

This Pharisee and all those like him, act as their own judge. This is the height of foolishness:

"Men must not be judged or justified according to what they

themselves think, but according to the verdict and sentence that comes from the mouth of God concerning them. It matters not what this Pharisee thought of himself. In fact, God had declared that he WAS like others, that he WAS like that tax-collector – a *sinner*. [John Bunyan]

And even worse. There is no sinner more wicked than the religious hypocrite.

2Co 10:12 For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding....2Co 10:18 For it is not he who commends himself that is approved, but he whom the Lord commends.

Let's say it again – the broad road to hell is filled with people who serve as their own judges. They are criminals before the Lord and yet they place themselves on the

judge's chair. Beware of this delusion.

Both of these men, who to us would appear as different as night and day, went to church. If we saw them enter there, we would conclude that both of them were of the very same religion – both of them regarded as Christians. Listen to Bunyan once more [From his great treatise entitled *The Pharisee and the Publican – The Way and Method of God's Free Grace in Pardoning Penitent Sinners; Proving that He Justifies them by Imputing Christ's Righteousness to them*] –

“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 man had been a good man? For he was a Publican: a man who joined with the worst of sinners like harlots and heathens.”

The Frequency of Publicans in Scripture

As a bit of an excursus to show the wonderful grace of God in saving the worst of sinners, notice how often tax-collectors and sinners are mentioned in the Gospels:

1. Matthew was a Jew and a publican, yet he became an apostle. Consider how he says it himself - Mat 10:2-4 Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; (3) Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas **and Matthew the tax collector**; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; (4) Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him.
2. Levi (James the son of Alphaeus). Bunyan concludes that this was not the same Matthew - Mar 2:14 As He passed by, He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting in the

tax booth, and He *said to him, "Follow Me!" And he got up and followed Him.

3. And then of course, Zacchaeus the tax collector.

“Thus as different as they were in their appearances, the Pharisee it seemed very good and the Publican very bad, but as to the law of God they were both found to be sinners. The Publican’s filth was outward and visible, but the Pharisees corruption was inward and hidden. And it was the worst one of these two that the Lord received, while the “best” of them (so it appeared) was rejected.

The righteousness of man (man’s works) is not of any esteem with God in reference to justification. Man’s own righteousness is, in God’s sight in this regard, a thing not worth even taking note of. The Pharisee’s “good” deeds were a stench to God because he entered the temple all dressed up in his own good things. ANY person who has nothing to commend himself to God except his own deeds will never find favor with the Lord.”

The Pharisee and all of his kind are nothing but idolaters, worshipping themselves and demanding that God do the same.

Consider Once More the Pharisee's Prayer

"The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. (12) 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'

Idolaters worship themselves and pronounce themselves righteous. They have a brash and obnoxious arrogance so that, as with this Pharisee, they "stand" in God's temple. Note the contrast with the Publican-

"But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'

Pride leads to self-worship which is idolatry. Notice that such false worship is turned back upon itself-

"The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself."

When the hypocrite comes to church on Sunday, for instance, he or she comes to pray – *to themselves*. This is a remarkably deep evil. *A man prays, when he prays, to the god he worships.* This Pharisee was praying to himself! He was NOT praying to God. God is not even in his mind.

The hypocrite's religion is earthly. It is a solo affair. God is nowhere present in it. The hypocrite prays to himself, sings to himself, tithes to himself, helps others for himself. There is only this Pharisee and himself.

Lest we fail to examine ourselves in light of these things, we must be certain to remember why the Lord Jesus told this parable:

(9) And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in

themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt:

One of the chief hallmarks of the idolater of *self* worship, is that they regard others with contempt. That is a powerful word – *contempt*. You can even see it express itself in the tone of voice or facial expression. “I am not like THIS sinner.” It is a hallmark sign of the worshiper of self.

Where the sin of pride is present in seed, be sure that it will grow and bear fruit that can be seen. One of its chief fruits is contempt toward others.

Psa 31:18 Let the lying lips be mute, Which speak arrogantly against the righteous With pride and contempt.

Psa 123:4 Our soul is greatly filled With the scoffing of those who are at ease, And with the contempt of the proud.

This word “contempt” means “to despise, to disdain, to regard as

nothing.” [Hillary Clinton’s “deplorables.”] To show by one’s attitude or manner of treatment that a person (or thing) has no merit or worth or significance.

The ONLY One who has the right to hold another with contempt is the Lord Himself toward those such as this Pharisee.

When we see someone who claims to be a Christian evidencing contempt toward others, particularly toward genuine Christians, we can be sure we are dealing with the same kind as this Pharisee. Such people do not know the Lord and they are traveling to hell.

Pro 30:12-13 There is a kind who is pure in his own eyes, Yet is not washed from his filthiness. (13) There is a kind—oh how lofty are his eyes! And his eyelids are raised in arrogance.

The Pharisee’s kind consider themselves to be capable of converting themselves. They have high, certain hopes of heaven. “I

am not a drunkard, says one, nor a liar, nor a swearer, nor a thief, and therefore I thank God that I have hopes of heaven and glory.” [Bunyan]

If a Man Does not Love the Brethren

Contempt like any sin, if present in the smallest seed and if permitted to take root, WILL grow until ultimately it breaks forth. We all become what is planted in us. God’s Seed or the Devil’s. Many, in the history of this church for instance, have I am sure started apparently well. They appeared godly. They seemed to love the brethren. But there was that seed of pride and self-worship which lay there, almost dormant, unrepented of. They refused to confess it- and whenever it was exposed even in the slightest, they suppressed it-

1Jn 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.

We must all examine ourselves lest we fall into the same deception that

leads to hell. Do you love Christ’s people? Or do you see an attitude of contempt?

How did the Pharisees, for instance, who regarded themselves as righteous and thus were self-idolaters...how did they regard the Lord Jesus? With contempt. Disdain.

Do you see this deadly progression? –

Pride → Self Worship → Idolatry → Contempt of Christ’ People → Contempt of Christ → Hell

The Lord chose to humble Nebuchadnezzar, but very few who go down this path of self-idolatry ever return from it.

How Could a Sinner like the Publican Pray as He Did?

"But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast,

saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'

How? He had long pursued the wickedness characteristic of these Publicans. Greed, dishonesty, treason to his own people. And yet, there he is – *God, be merciful to me, the sinner.*

The explanation is not to be found within him. He did not suddenly decide one day to become religious. No, the explanation lies entirely *with God.*

If you have not listened to last week's Romans study on Romans 9 in which I read several sections from Lloyd-Jones commentary, then you simply must hear it. Or if you prefer and you have that commentary you can read it there, or if you prefer you can listen to MLJ himself at mljtrust.org and go to the Romans series, sermon #3217. It is vital that you hear him on this. It is the entire reason this rank sinner, the Publican, went up to the temple to pray and that he prayed as he did.

Let me just summarize the reason this sinful man came and prayed as he did.

It is entirely due to the election of God. And this election or selection if you prefer, is NOT to be explained as is so commonly done. Election is NOT God looking at this mass of fallen humanity and then saying "I will choose this one and reject that one." This is the common explanation, but it is not really correct.

Rather, God's election is Him decreeing in eternity past to create a new humanity in another Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ. And so He creates. Before any Christian was even born, He declared and created, so that, though each one of us was born into this world just like all the rest, dead in sin, haters of God, nevertheless Jacob was never the same as Esau. You, Christian, were never the same as the rest of fallen humanity.

Because out of the dust of your ruin, out of this clay of humanity, the divine Potter declared you to be His new creation in His new

humanity. And in time, at just the right time, the Lord effected that creation. He regenerated you. You were born again as the child of God He predestined you to be.

And the rest? Like this Pharisee? God simply lets them alone. They remain in sin by their own choice and reject Christ by their own choice.

Therefore, what we see here in these two men are really the two fundamental kinds of human beings. Both sinners, yet the one being the object of God's election and creation. The other left to go his own way. The one declares himself to be what he is – a sinner whose only hope is God's mercy, undeserved, this one receives mercy, the other? He remained condemned and received justice.

And there you have the explanation of those two men going up to the temple to pray, the one coming away still dead in his sin, the other declared righteous before God.

Which one are you? All who call upon the Lord for His mercy, confessing their sin and absence of anything in themselves to obligate God to save them, will never be disappointed.

YOU and ME, all of us, were born into this world with that sin-seed of pride and self-idolatry. If anyone stubbornly refuses to confess it and ask the Lord to remove it and save us, be certain that it will take root and grow until, like that Pharisee, you view even the Lord with contempt and perish in your sin.