

# A New Attitude

By Mary Kane

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Switching churches has never been an easy task for my family. But God had been showing me that there were some very deep fundamental errors in the doctrine of our current church, therefore it was time to find a new church home. I felt God leading me to small Bible church in our hometown. I tried out the church for a couple of weeks myself and then my husband and sons began to attend as well. It's never easy to be the "new family" in a small close-knit church. In hopes of making a few new friends I got involved with ministry opportunities that fell within my gifting. One evening, while at church for a children's group, I was feeling a little left out and lonely. I gave myself a pep talk and decided to make another effort to reach out and introduce myself to other women. As I walked down the long Fellowship Hall hallway I saw a woman, Sue, headed toward me on my left. I waited until she drew closer and greeted her. To my astonishment she completely ignored me and walked on by. Feeling rather hurt, I sat down in the Fellowship Hall and decided I was done trying to make friends in my new church. As a matter of fact I had quite a good "grouch" going on in my heart when I overheard two other women talking, "Too bad about poor Sue. She's been completely deaf in her right ear for many years." I had a good laugh at myself while I thanked God for allowing me to hear about Sue's bad ear. I decided to trade in my bad judgmental attitude for a little grace and try again to make some friends!

*"Do not speak evil of one another, brethren.  
He who speaks evil of his brother and judges his brother, speaks  
evil of the law and judges the law.  
But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a  
judge.  
There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy.  
Who are you to judge another?  
James 4:11-12*

Please pray for the Holy Spirit to give you guidance and read Luke 18:9-14.

## **Who went to the temple to pray?**

The Pharisees were "one of the parties or movements within Judaism of the late second temple period" (*The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* 823). Solomon's temple had been destroyed in 587/586 BC by Nebuchadnezzar. Known for their strict and rigorous adherence to Jewish Law, the Pharisees were a very proud and self-righteous group who looked down on those who didn't follow their extrabiblical traditions and customs. The root word for Pharisee means "to separate, to wound." Many people were indeed "wounded" by the attitude of the Pharisees, including Jesus Himself. They were a very influential, powerful and respected sect in Israel.

Tax collectors, also called publicans, on the other hand, sat at the extreme opposite end of the social ladder. "Because tax collectors were Jews working for the hated Romans, they were considered traitors by fellow Jews" (*Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* 987). After collecting all the fees required by the Romans, the tax collectors were allowed to keep any surplus they gathered by whatever means they wished, usually fraud. Despised and hated by every other social class in Israel, tax collectors were ranked with the "worst kinds of sinners" prostitutes, adulterers and thieves. But, there was one who deeply loved the sinners and tax collectors—Jesus.

## **What was the posture of the Pharisee as he was praying?**

### **What was the position of the tax collector when he was praying?**

The NKJV gives us another bit of information about the attitude of the Pharisee. Please fill in the blank below with detail given in verse 11:

**"The Pharisee stood and prayed  
."**

The word "himself" from the above phrase means, among other things: own self, own conceits, thyself (*SwordSearcher Complete Bible Suite*). It also means, "... by itself, by ones own authority... by himself...in mind, in thought" (*The Complete Word Study Dictionary, New Testament* 494). From this definition, it is not unreasonable to

assume that there may have been threads of self-centeredness in the prayer of the Pharisee.

Now please go back and reflect on the prayer of the Pharisee for a few moments in verses 11-12.

**What is missing from the Pharisee's prayer?**

He never confesses his sin or his need for God.

**Do you see anything else wrong regarding his line of thinking?**

Actually, the error in the reasoning of the Pharisee, still plagues the minds of many people in the twenty-first century (don't tell me God's Word isn't relevant). Let's draw this error out for examination.

**To whom did the Pharisee compare himself to in verses 11-12?**

The Pharisee's error was that he compared himself to other sinners—people just like you and me. Busily focused on the sins of others, the Pharisee missed his own sin problem. We can all look pretty good for a few moments when we compare ourselves to people whom we consider to be "big sinners." But, God's word informs us that sin is not just outward; its inward as well. SO being better than the other guy also involves our thoughts, hearts and attitudes. If we are going to try to earn our way into heaven in this manner then, how many guys do we have to be better than? Or as the famous book by Andy Stanley says, "How Good is Good Enough?" The Pharisee's plan for dealing with his sin is faulty. What he needs is a new attitude—a new focus. He needs Jesus.

**Who did the tax collector compare himself to?**

God's Word tells us that when the tax collector was praying he could not even lift his eyes towards heaven; he knew how he lined up next to the Holy One. In this regard the tax collector had a correct opinion of himself. He could not begin to regard himself as righteous before a Holy God. The tax collector was extremely aware of his need.

## **Please write the contents of the tax collectors prayer.**

The poor hated tax collector does everything right.

- 1. He approaches God humbly.** The text says that the tax collector “would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven.” The Greek word for *raise* in this verse is *epairo* which means to: exalt self, to lift up a sail, “exalting” oneself, being “lifted” up with pride...”(The New Strong’s Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words 1094). To paraphrase this verse “The tax collector would not even consider raising his eyes to heaven, let alone raising up his accomplishments in pride to God.”
- 2. He appeals to God’s great mercy.** The original word for *mercy* in this verse is loaded with doctrinal meaning. Packed into this one word for *mercy* is the Gospel in a nutshell. By asking God for his *mercy*, the tax collector is asking God for the forgiveness of his sin by the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. The following quote is taken from the definition of the Greek word for *mercy*,

“It is God who is “propitiated” by the vindication of His holy and righteous character, whereby through the provision He has made in the vicarious and expiatory sacrifice of Christ, He has dealt with sin that He can show mercy to the believing sinner in the removal of his guilt and the remission of his sins...Through the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ, he who believes upon Him is by God’s own act delivered from justly deserved wrath, and comes under the covenant of grace” (The Strong’s New Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words 1149).

The tax collector appealed to God for His great mercy and received His great grace!

- 3. He admits his sin and need for God.** The Greek word for sinner used here is *hamartolos* which is derived from *hamartano* which means “to miss the mark, to err especially morally, to sin, offend, trespass” (The SwordSearcher Complete Bible Suite). He told God exactly where he stood—he needed help!

The Pharisee, on the other hand, mistakenly thought he was in good shape. He did not need God for anything as he had worked out his own

faulty form of righteousness. Ahh! But what does God say about our own pathetic attempts at manufacturing righteousness?

**Please write Isaiah 64:6 on the lines provided.**

The tears poured into my eyes as I looked at what God will do for us if we'll only ask Him. Please read Isaiah 61:10 and be greatly blessed.

**What is God waiting to do for us according to Isaiah 61:10?**

In closing, we have a choice to make. We can choose our own filthy rags of a self-righteousness attitude or be dressed in the garments of His sterling-white righteousness; as beautiful as a bride on her wedding day. Old Attitude vs. New Attitude. The choice is easy. Out with the old and in with the new!