

Three Infections That Affect The Soul

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When we think of the Pharisee depicted by Jesus in the telling of two men that went up to the Temple to pray, we are given insight into what will infect our soul and make us spiritually sick.

It seems so ironic for Jesus to say that this Pharisee *"prayed thus with himself."* That is what happens when we allow **ego**, pride, and **selfishness** to invade our hearts...we no longer pray to God, we just pray *"with"* (or "to") ourselves. Let us note the three infections that will make our soul sick:

Ego: Someone has said that egotism is the trait of a "self-made man" who worships his "creator." He goes beyond the conceit of thinking he is great. He knows it. He is more interested in self than in others around him or even in the valued noble causes that he claims to espouse. That mentality went with the Pharisaic spirit. This one was thankful he *"was not like the other man that was praying at the same time."* Actually, he thought he was better, i.e. more spiritual, perhaps more knowledgeable and exemplary, than the humble people around him whom he observed confessing their sins and bowing down before God in true prayer.

I read a story and have no idea who wrote it. It was about an island where all human feelings lived together: **Joy, Peacefulness, Anxiety, Amazement, Pity, and even Hatred and Envy.** One day a storm began to arise on the sea and Fear shouted that the tiny island would be overwhelmed and they would all be drowned. The feelings all panicked except "Love." Love began building; and at the end of the day, there was a boat large enough to carry them all through the storm. Each feeling put aside its own special interests and boarded the boat. But one would not come. Everyone looked at the shore and saw **Ego** huddled alone. **Love** got out of the boat and tried to get **Ego** to come onto the boat, but at last while all others escaped the storm, **Love**, who stayed with **Ego** trying to encourage him to enter the boat to be saved, himself died there on the island with **Ego**.

Pride: Behind the Pharisee's egotism was pride. He had built his self-image in which he thought he was superior "Pride makes us artificial. Humility makes us real." Most Christians who are proud deny it (especially to themselves). Thus one is defending an illusion of himself that is unreal. When one makes a mountain out of a speck of dust and destroys not only himself and his own welfare, but also the peace, love, and joy which should be shared in life by all, he has lost all.

This Pharisee's pride caused him to be disconnected/separated from his brother across the room from him. Someone has said: "It is better to lose your pride with someone you love, than to lose that someone by your pride."

As a result, the Pharisee lost, rather than gained by his prayer. He is today seen by all of us as an unloving hypocrite, while the humble publican who thought less of himself is greatly admired.

Coming back to the Pharisee's prayer, we see the real heart of the issue. C.S. Lewis said, "A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as you're looking down you can't see something that is above you."

Selfishness: Egotism and pride lead to selfishness. Ironically, the Pharisee started his prayer, by saying: *"I thank..."* A selfish man is seldom a thankful person. He never gets as much as he thinks he deserves. He can only say, "I thank You that I am not like other men." He did not see his own failures and limitations. Further, he wanted no judgment of his life and activity. The other man knew that he was under authority and that he was not perfect. He prayed for forgiveness. I doubt seriously that the Pharisee would have

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