

Luke 18:9-17

“Customs vs. Humble Obedience”

October 23, 2016

During Lent, some churches ask their members to not eat meat on Fridays. This is a custom of that denomination. There is nothing wrong with this custom as long as they do not make it a Law of God. In the Old Testament, God had us bow before Him. Therefore it is our custom to stand or kneel before our God or to bow before we enter the altar area which symbolizes the presences of God among us. So we teach our children to respect the altar area before we enter it. At one congregation I serve, we had a plaster picture of the Lord's Supper planted into the altar and the children wanted to touch it. I would allow and even encourage them to enter the altar area to touch the picture. Of course I would also teach them to bow before and after. Why? I wanted the children to respect our God and yet see Him as the God of love who gave His life on the Cross at Calvary for us.

In our text the Pharisee brags because he fasts twice a week and tithes everything he receives. God does not require we fast twice a week even back then. This was a custom that the Pharisees developed to show God honor. Likewise today God does not require we tithe 10 % of everything. This was a custom of the Pharisees. In the Old Testament, we are asked to tithe 10% but not of everything. Just as faith without works is no faith so also faith without tithing to the Lord is a

show of weak or no faith. We determine how much we want to tithe and God will accept our decision. We can tithe our time, our talents or our resources. God is only concerned that we express our faith in a tithe. A tithe means to give regularly. Often seniors tithe once a month when they receive their social security check. Likewise our tithe may be that we invite others to come to worship with us. Our tithe could be working around the church. The issue is that we are expressing our love for our God by regularly giving ourselves to our God.

Jesus condemns the Pharisee because he uses the carrying out of the custom to brag about himself. This Pharisee glorifies himself by saying that he is not like others who are such terrible sinners. He compares himself with robbers, evildoers, adulterers and even that tax collector and claims he is good. Yes, we can go to God thanking Him because He works in us so that we do right things in His eyes, but to brag about being good does not recognize that we are good because of our God. He wants us to come to Him humbly like this tax collector who said; **“God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”** He wants us to recognize that we are good because of the faith He gives to us. He wants us to recognize that we are good because of the spiritual strength He gives to us.

When Adam and Eve sinned, they left us without a relationship with our God. Rejecting the history of Adam and Eve is rejecting the inspiration of God in the Word of God. Rejecting the history of God as the Creator is rejecting the

inspiration of God in the Word of God. God had to come to us after our birth and give us the gift of faith often through the waters of Baptism. God had to come to us and give us the spiritual strength to do and say the right thing. Sadly, we don't necessarily listen to His call or follow His lead. Therefore we have no right to brag about following the lead of our God when we do and say the right thing because God has inspired the good things we do and say. Our sinful flesh rejects God's call and does what it wills.

At the end of our Gospel lesson, we are encouraged to come to Him like little children. One commentator expressed it this way. **We are to come to God with total dependence, full trust, frank openness, and complete sincerity.** Of course we don't do that because we are imperfect people. Therefore like this tax collector, we live in His undeserved grace and mercy. We don't need to fear humbling ourselves before our God because He is always willing to forgive and work with us to find His strength to do and say the right thing. Likewise He is willing to work with us to sort out the world's ideas of wisdom in contrast to His truth. In our political candidates we see some very flawed people. Rather than condemn them because we are so much better, we need to forgive them and pray that God will work with them to find humble spirits. I am saying be a tax collector not a Pharisee. I will say it another way, be humble not a gossip. Be humble because God is still working with us all. Amen.