

activated



CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

THE LIGHT BREAKS IN

From deathbed to new life

HEAVEN IS FULL OF SINNERS

A lesson from the Master
on love and mercy

FLESH OR SPIRIT?

Does do-it-yourself
religion work?

For a wide range of books and audio and video productions to feed your soul, lift your spirit, strengthen your family, and provide fun learning times for your children, please contact one of our distributors below, or visit our Web site at www.activated.org

Activated Ministries
P.O. Box 462805
Escondido, CA 92046-2805
USA
info@activatedministries.org
(877) 862-3228

Activated Europe
Bramingham Pk. Business Ctr.
Enterprise Way
Luton, Beds. LU3 4BU
England
activatedEurope@activated.org
(07801) 442-317

Activated Africa
P.O. Box 2150
Westville 3630
South Africa
activatedAfrica@activated.org
083 55 68 213

Activated India
P.O. Box 5215
G.P.O.
Bangalore - 560 001
India
activatedIndia@activated.org

© 2004 Aurora Production AG
All Rights Reserved.
Printed in Thailand.
www.auroraproduction.com

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in *Activated* are from the New King James Version of the Bible © 1982 Thomas Nelson, Inc.

When other versions are quoted, some typographical changes have been made for the sake of clarity and uniformity.



Vol 5 Issue 10
October 2004

EDITOR
Keith Phillips

DESIGN
Giselle LeFavre

ILLUSTRATIONS
Doug Calder,
Etienne Morel

PRODUCTION
Francisco Lopez

PERSONALLY SPEAKING

A story is told of Pope Leo XII and a visit he made to the jail of the Papal States in 1825, which goes like this: The pope insisted on questioning each of the prisoners as to how he had come to be there. Every man protested his innocence—all but one, that is, who humbly admitted that he was a forger and a thief. Turning to the jailer, the pope said sternly, “Release this scoundrel at once, before his presence corrupts all these noble gentlemen here!”

We chuckle, but there’s a lesson here for all of us: God’s forgiveness goes to those who know they need it, don’t deserve it, and can’t earn it—to those who depend solely on the mercy and grace of God. It’s like what Jesus told the self-righteous, hypocritical religionists of His day, “If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, ‘We see.’ Therefore your sin remains” (John 9:39-41).

That goes for salvation, but it also goes for everyday living. How often are we like the other men in the story, bound up in pious little prisons of our own making because we aren’t willing to admit our mistakes and shortcomings? It’s silly, really, to try to keep up the pretense of being so perfect or righteous when the Lord and we and others all know we’re anything but. All the while, Jesus is trying to tell us, “Lighten up! Stop trying to be perfect, because you never will be. Just do the best you can and trust Me for the rest!”

Let’s not be self-righteous, but get down to what really counts—being ourselves, loving the Lord, and sharing the good news with others: “If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed!” (John 8:36).

Keith Phillips
Keith Phillips
For the *Activated* family



BE DEBT free

A FEW YEARS AGO Sergio was going through a severe financial crisis. He had gotten himself so deeply in debt that even if he could have sold everything he had *twice*, he still would not be able to repay all he owed. He had taken out a large loan in a foreign currency and, due to a sudden and extreme change in the exchange rate, his debt was now far greater than the original sum he had borrowed—and that was only a fraction of Sergio's overall debt. Sergio's main creditor was his father-in-law, who was a very wealthy old man.

One day the old man called Sergio and said, "I know you're going through rough times, and I want to help you. You don't have to continue the monthly payments on the money you borrowed from me. Actually, I'd like to forgive the debt altogether."

That would have given Sergio enough financial leeway to renegotiate his debt with the bank and keep his company afloat, but Sergio refused the offer. "I can't let you do that, sir. It's a matter of principle. I must pay back all I owe you."

The old man tried to reason with Sergio. "What you've been paying monthly doesn't even cover the *interest* on the money I loaned you. Besides, you happen to be married to my only daughter. When I die—and it won't be long—all I have will be hers and yours. This is not a matter of principle, but stupid pride."

But Sergio stubbornly held on to his decision. He continued in his futile attempt to restore to his father-in-law what he had borrowed from him, but not for long. Soon Sergio became insolvent and lost his company and almost everything else he had—all because of pride!

Of course, we should pay our debts and do all we can to remain solvent. That is part of our testimony as Christians. However, Sergio's refusal to accept his father-in-law's pardon was foolish, since he was soon to become co-heir of all the old man had, including the meager amounts Sergio was repaying toward his debt.

Sergio was like many people who refuse the pardon God so generously offers humankind, who insist on trying to make restitution themselves. They try, through their good works, sacrifice, and self-denial to repay the unrepayable, when they could so easily turn a page and start writing a new story for their lives by receiving Jesus as their Savior and accepting *His* payment for their sins and shortcomings.

Jesus offers a pardon to every man, woman, and child on the face of the earth. All we have to do is say, "Yes, Jesus, I need Your forgiveness. There is no way I can make up for all my selfish and unloving deeds. The only way I can be free from this debt is by accepting Your sacrifice on the cross for my sins. Thank You for dying for me!" •

MÁRIO SANT'ANA IS A FULL-TIME VOLUNTEER WITH THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN BRAZIL.

THE PARABLE OF THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN

{ PUBLICAN

Heaven

is full of

SINNERS

JESUS OFTEN TAUGHT IN PARABLES. One of the shortest yet most profound was the parable of the Pharisee and the publican. The Bible tells us that Jesus “spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others” (Luke 18:9).

The Pharisees were the most influential of all the Jewish religious sects of Jesus’ day. The word “Pharisee” means “the separated ones,” which sums up the basic nature of their beliefs. They were strict legalists who pledged to observe and obey every one of the countless restrictive rules, traditions, and ceremonial laws of Orthodox Judaism. They considered themselves to be the only true followers of God’s Law, and therefore felt that they were much better and holier than anyone else. Thus they separated themselves not only from the non-Jews—whom they absolutely despised and considered “dogs”—but even other Jews.

The publicans were tax collectors for the foreign occupier and ruler of Palestine, Imperial Rome. The Romans would instruct the publicans how much to collect from the people, and then the publicans could charge *extra* for their own income. So publicans were usually extortioners and were therefore considered traitors and absolutely despised by other Jews.

So when Jesus told this parable, comparing a Pharisee and a publican, He had chosen the two most opposite figures in the Jewish community. The one was considered the best, most righteous, most religious, most godly of men, whereas the other was considered the worst scoundrel imaginable.



The parable:

Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector [publican].

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, “God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.”

And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!”

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted (Luke 18:10–14).

Which of these two men did Jesus say was justified before God?—The Pharisee who appeared to be so righteous and holy, and who no doubt felt that he was a very righteous and good man?—Or the tax collector, the sinner, who was despised by others and who apparently even despised himself?—The tax collector who knew he had no goodness of his own and needed God’s mercy.

So often, God’s way of looking at things is very different from ours. He says, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8–9).

Although that publican’s sins were undoubtedly many, because of his honest and humble confession that he was a sinner who needed God’s help, Jesus said this publican was the one who left the Temple justified that day.

In God’s sight, self-righteous pride like this Pharisee manifested is the greatest sin of all—that hypocritical holier-than-thou attitude that causes people to look down on others who they think aren’t as good as they are. When people get this way, others usually find them to be the hardest people to be around—narrow-minded, intolerant, critical, and judgmental.

The Gospels also tell us that when the Pharisees saw Jesus sitting down and

eating with publicans and sinners, they were enraged and accused Jesus to His disciples. When Jesus heard that, He said to the Pharisees, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’ For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance” (Matthew 9:10–13). In other words, “I would rather see you have love and mercy, and not just your dutiful keeping of the Law. I’d rather you’d give love to others than to be so self-righteous and condemning!”

None of us have any goodness of our own. Anything good about us is only the Lord, and *His* goodness. His Word says, “*All* have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Even the apostle Paul said that there was nothing good in himself (Romans 7:18).

Jesus got so infuriated by the hypocritical, self-righteous hypocrisy of the Pharisees that He told them that they were worse than the drunks and prostitutes, publicans and sinners they despised, and that there was more chance for such sinners to make it to Heaven than there was for them (Matthew 21:31). He even told His own disciples, “Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of Heaven” (Matthew 5:20). And the only way to be better than the Pharisees is to have

***So often,
God’s way
of looking
at things
is very
different
from ours.***

The worst kind of people in the sight of God are those who pretend to be good and look down on everybody else.

Jesus' righteousness—salvation, through accepting His pardon for your sins—because the Pharisees were as “good” as anyone could possibly be in the natural.

Jesus so hated the hypocritical pretense of the Pharisees that He denounced them publicly. “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness” (Matthew 23:25–28).

The thing that made the Pharisees so self-righteous and hypocritical was their pride. They were too proud to confess that they were sinners like everyone else. In fact, they not only couldn't confess their sins, they couldn't even see their sins. Therefore they became “blind leaders of the blind” (Matthew 15:14).

It's a big relief to honestly admit that we can't be good or righteous in ourselves. After all, God has said in His Word that nobody is good: “There is none righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10). “By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8–9).

The worst kind of people in the sight of God are those who pretend to be good and look down on everybody else. We

just need to be honest and confess, “I'm no good. I'm a sinner. Of course I make mistakes! Anything good about me is only Jesus!”

God's idea of righteousness is not the supposedly sinless perfectionist, but the pitiful, hopeless, humble sinner who knows he needs God. Those are the ones He came to save.

God's idea of goodness is *godliness*—a sinner who knows he needs God and depends on Him for salvation—not the self-made, self-righteous, hypocritical Pharisees who think they can save themselves by their own goodness.

God's idea of saintliness is a sinner saved by grace, a sinner who has no perfection, no righteousness of his own at all, but is totally dependent on the grace and the love and the mercy of God. Believe it or not, that is the *only* kind of saints there are!

You cannot save yourself by your own works, your own goodness, your own attempts to keep God's laws and to love Him, or even your own endeavors to find and follow His truth. You cannot save yourself no matter how good you try to be. There's nothing you can do to get it except receive it by faith—that's all! You have to humble yourself and acknowledge that you *don't* deserve it, that you're just a lost sinner, and that there's no way you can be saved except by the grace of God.

The worst sinners in the world can go to Heaven through faith and God's forgiveness, and the seemingly best people can go to Hell because of unbelief and unwillingness to confess their need for God. Heaven is full of sinners, saved by grace through faith. •

PRAYER FOR THE DAY

Jesus, self-righteousness is pride and pride is the opposite of love and humility, so please give me love and humility today. Help me not to criticize or condemn others, but to love and forgive and encourage. You said, “I will have mercy and not sacrifice.” Help me to have that kind of love for others, to be quick to forgive others' sins and shortcomings, as You have forgiven me. Help me to be as merciful to others as You are to me. Amen.

(At the time of this experience, Virginia Brandt Berg [1886–1968] was a helpless, hopeless invalid. Paralyzed from the waist down in an accident, she had been confined to bed for most of the previous five years. She also had life-threatening heart and lung problems, and suffered various other side effects from numerous unsuccessful operations to try to restore the use of her legs. Her condition had steadily deteriorated until she weighed only 78 pounds [35 kg].)

The light breaks in

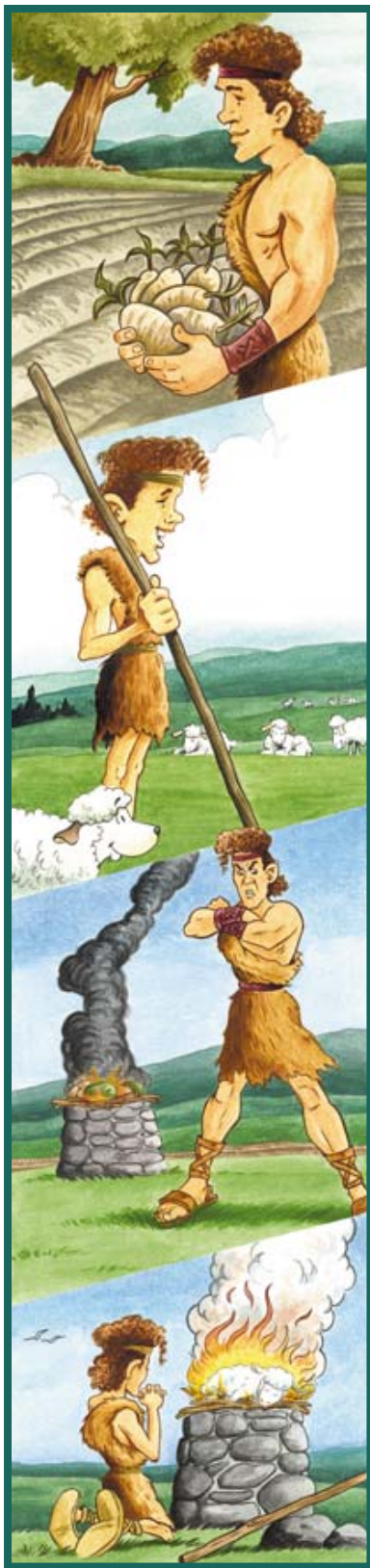
BY VIRGINIA BRANDT BERG

ONE EVENING AS I LAY ALONE on my sickbed, there suddenly came into my heart an intense longing; I felt compelled to cry aloud to some unseen power for help. I could not raise my voice above a whisper, so in an earnest whisper I pled, "If it could be possible that there is a God out there somewhere, *reveal Yourself to me.*" I seemed driven by some power beyond myself to call and call, so over and over I repeated, "If You are there, please, oh please, for mercy's sake, reveal Yourself to me."

As though in response to my plea, a deep conviction of sin came over my heart. I felt as though I were the vilest of sinners. This was unusual for the simple reason that I had always been rather self-righteous. I had lived a very moral life and was quite proud of it—very self-satisfied. It was as though my eyes had suddenly been opened and I saw myself in my true condition for the first time in my life—my past good works appeared as nothing. The burden of sin and self increased until it seemed greater than I could bear, and at length I began to weep.

I was not alone any longer, for I felt His presence in that room as real as if some member of my family were standing by my sickbed, and I was talking to Him as naturally as a little child talks to a parent. I told Him all about it, and I knew He heard and understood, for a sweet, indescribable peace and a cool restfulness came over my troubled spirit. I had seen no vision, heard no voice, nor otherwise evidenced anything with the natural senses, but had made such real, personal contact with Him that I could truly say, "I *know* whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him" (2 Timothy 1:12). All my unbelief had fled. God was real indeed, and I was a "new creature" in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17 KJV). The light had broken in! •

(THE ABOVE IS AN EDITED EXCERPT FROM *THE HEM OF HIS GARMENT*, THE LIFE STORY OF VIRGINIA BRANDT BERG. *THE HEM OF HIS GARMENT* IS AVAILABLE AT: WWW.ACTIVATED.ORG.)



FLESH OR SPIRIT?

THE MOST RAGING RELIGIOUS CONTROVERSY the world has ever known has been between the do-it-yourself religions and the God-alone-can-save-you kind. Man has always been trying to save himself, to work his way to Heaven, with just a little help from God thrown in. That way he can give himself most of the credit and go his own way.

The first murder was committed by a religionist of the do-it-yourself kind, Cain, the oldest son of the first couple, Adam and Eve. Cain decided he would sacrifice to God whatever he wanted, instead of the lamb that God had asked. He would set his own standards, and that would be his religion. But Cain's sacrifice—fruits and vegetables from his garden, the fruit of his own labors, his own righteousness—displeased God and was rejected. Meanwhile

BY DAVID
BRANDT
BERG
(D.B.B.)

his brother Abel simply and humbly sacrificed a lamb—exactly what God had asked. When Abel’s sacrifice was accepted and his own rejected, Cain became so enraged that he killed Abel (Genesis chapter 4). This was the beginning of the persecution of the true Church by the false Church. Cain was religious—very religious. He tried very hard to save himself in his own way, even sacrificing to God and claiming to worship God. He did his best to earn his own salvation, but his best wasn’t good enough, because his way was not God’s way but rather the way of all false religions.

Those who follow false religions all depend on self-righteousness and their own way. Most of them claim to be worshiping God and seek a little help from Him to make it. But because they work so hard at trying to earn it, they figure they deserve it, with or without His help, and are quite offended if He doesn’t seem to appreciate their goodness. They say, “Why, look at all we’ve done for You, God! You ought to give us a medal! We really deserve to be saved! If You’re ever going to save anybody, You should save us! If anybody’s going to make it to Heaven, we should certainly make it!”

On the other hand, Abel just did what God told him to do—and he “offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain” (Hebrews 11:4): the sacrifice of pure faith as demonstrated in doing what God had told him to do. By sacrificing a lamb, which was a foreshadowing of Jesus dying on the cross for the sins of the world (John 1:29), Abel showed that he was trusting God alone to save him. He knew he had only God’s righteousness and none of his own, and that salvation was purely a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8–9).

Abel’s humble sacrifice made such a fool out of the hard-working Cain—the self-made man and devout religionist, devoted to his own form of worship—and so totally exposed the futility and hypocrisy of Cain’s hard work that Cain was furious. After all his labors of the flesh, his legalistic reasoning and his demands for salvation in return for all he was doing, Cain was so humiliated that he tried to wipe out the awful truth that his religion had failed to save him—and he did so by killing the man whose simple faith in God’s grace had exposed him.

Thus began the battle royal between pride and humility, between the damned religionists and the saved sinners—the perpetual warfare that has been waged ever since between flesh and spirit, works and faith, law and grace, self and God.

This conflict has resulted in some of the greatest misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the Scriptures that have ever existed. Most people have been trying to save themselves ever since, with as little thanks to God as possible, and they have twisted the Scriptures to try to prove they could do it! But God can’t help them to save themselves. He does not help those who think they can help themselves, but only those who know they can’t. They can’t save themselves, no matter how much they try to get His help to do it their way.

As a young Christian, I too was deceived for a time by the delusive doctrine of “on and off, now it’s here, now it’s gone” eternal insecurity taught by some churches and “works” religions. But then one day as a teenager, I was thrilled to discover the simple truth of John 3:36. After years of discouragement and defeat and lack of assur-

“Look at all we’ve done for You, God! If anybody’s going to make it to Heaven, we should certainly make it!”

The Devil's message has always been, "Save yourself! You're your own god, your own savior. Why depend on another?" But God's message is, "Only I can save you. You cannot save yourself!" God doesn't save those who think they can save themselves, but only those sinners who know they can't!

—D.B.B.

ance of my own salvation, I found that all I had to do was believe. That was enough! Jesus said, "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life"—right now! No ifs, ands, or buts about it! No "providing you're a good boy or girl and go to church every Sunday," and none of this "sinless perfection" business.

I just hadn't been able to make it on my own, and I knew it. It seemed that the harder I tried to be good, the worse I got! As the apostle Paul lamented, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:24–25).

That was all there was to it. There was nothing else, no other way, no righteousness of my own, none of my own good works. None of these could keep me saved any more than they could save me in the first place! Only Jesus could do it! Not only had He had to save me, but He also had to do the good works through me. It was all Jesus, and nothing of myself or my own goodness or self-righteousness—just Jesus. I was so relieved to learn that, as I knew I could never make it otherwise. It had to be God. I just couldn't do it, so He did!

The trouble with many Christians today is that they're still living in the Old Testament. Their Christianity is a works religion. Years ago I remember hearing about some missionaries who had gone overseas. Upon arrival they were asked by the local people, "Are you Old Testament or New Testament Christians?" At first the missionaries didn't understand what they meant, but they soon found out that "Old Testament Christians" referred to those who placed a great deal of importance on church buildings, ceremonies, formalism, and tradition—those whose

religion was primarily a works religion. A "New Testament Christian" was one whose major emphasis was not on things that are seen (buildings and pomp and circumstance), but rather on the unseen things of the spirit and the simplicity of everyday Christian living, like that of Jesus and His disciples. What a comparison, and how true!

In the Old Testament, God had a hard time getting the children of Israel away from the idolatry of Egypt. He used the Mosaic Law as their schoolmaster to teach simple truths through object lessons and rituals: the Tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant, and animal sacrifices. These were types and shadows, analogies, mere pictures of the spiritual realities and eternal truths He was trying to lead them into, almost like you would do with little children. He had to take what they understood—the forms and ceremonies that they were familiar with in the religions of Egypt and other heathen nations around them—in a fatherly attempt to audio-visualize for them the genuine spiritual truths of the true mature worship of God Himself. As the apostle Paul says, these were all types of the true (Romans 5:14), mere visual likenesses or illustrations of the unseen realities of the spirit world!

Paul says, "When that which is perfect has come [when we join Jesus in Heaven], then that which is in part will be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known" (1 Corinthians 13:10–12).

Paul was saying that even the gifts of the Holy Spirit of this New Testament era are almost like toys, gifts from a loving Father to His simple little children to help communicate understanding of Himself and His will. How much more, then, were the material object lessons of the temple worship of the Old Testament childish toys for even tinier children spiritually, to help them understand their heavenly Father's love? But "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son" (Hebrews 1:1-2).

When Jesus came, He told the Samaritan woman at the well, "The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:23-24). This is the spiritual era in which we are now living.

But Paul goes even further than this in his prediction to the early Christians of Corinth when he says that the time is coming when we shall see Jesus face to face and put away even these childlike gifts of communication in the spirit. For "whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away" (1 Corinthians 13:8-10). Even what we have now is only a sample of the glorious realities to come!

In the Old Testament were the illustrations, and in the present New Testament era are the spiritual truths that we have now by faith alone (John 1:17). But when Jesus comes again, we shall see Him as He is and literally be like Him and actually experience the fullness of the realities of God and the world to come!

"Beloved, now are we the children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). •

(THE ABOVE ARTICLE AND 11 OTHERS ARE AVAILABLE IN *MORE LIKE JESUS*, FROM AURORA PRODUCTION.)

The most encouraging thing about King David's example, believe it or not, was his human failures, sins, and shortcomings, which gave God a chance to get all the glory and show there's hope for you and me. I never got much encouragement from the perfectionism of people like Enoch, who walked so close to God that he got completely out of touch with humanity, so God had to take him out of this world (Genesis 5:24; Hebrews 11:5). I take a lot more heart from the pathetic stories of the drunks and the harlots and the publicans and the sinners who came to Jesus for love and mercy, who He treated kindly and forgivingly. They didn't go to the harsh, rigid, self-righteous, unyielding, unforgiving, critical, and condemning religious leaders who told them to be perfect or go to Hell, but they came to Jesus for His love, mercy, forgiveness, encouragement, and patience.

—D.B.B.

ENDTIME INSIGHTS

IN 552 BC, LONG BEFORE MACEDONIA-LED GREEK CITY-STATES BECAME THE DOMINANT POWER in the Western world, the Hebrew prophet Daniel foretold of war between Greece and Persia, and its outcome. Over 200 years later, in 333 BC, Daniel's prophecy was fulfilled exactly as he predicted!

This remarkable prophecy is recorded in the eighth chapter of the Bible's book of Daniel. (The vision is recounted in

verses 1 through 14, and interpretation is given in verses 15 through 27.) Then, in the same chapter, the prophet takes us far into the future, to events of the Endtime, the time in which we are now living.

Vision: "In the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar [552 BC] a vision appeared to me [Daniel]. ... There, standing beside the river, was a ram which had two horns, and the two horns were high; but one

was higher than the other, and the higher one came up last. I saw the ram pushing westward, northward, and southward" (Daniel 8:1-4).

Interpretation: "Then it happened, when I, Daniel, had seen the vision and was seeking the meaning, that suddenly there stood before me one having the appearance of a man. And I heard a man's voice [saying], 'Gabriel, make this man understand the vision.'



DANIEL CHAPTER 8—A VISION OF THE FUTURE!

And he said ... “The ram which you saw, having the two horns—they are the kings of Media and Persia” (Daniel 8:15–16,19–20).

The Medes ruled an empire that included a tribe known as the Persians. In 552 BC, Cyrus (later Cyrus the Great) was ruler of the Persian district of Anshan. Cyrus rebelled with the help of many disaffected Medes and overthrew the Median Empire in 550 BC. Cyrus then established the Persian Empire. Because Medes had helped

Cyrus rise to power, a Mede traditionally held the second most important position in the kingdom—“two horns [but] one was higher than the other.”

Vision: “And as I was considering, suddenly a male goat came from the west, across the surface of the whole earth, without touching the ground; and the goat had a notable horn between his eyes. Then he came to the ram that had two horns, which I had seen standing beside the river, and ran at him with furious power. And I saw him confronting the ram; he was moved with rage against him, attacked the ram, and broke his two horns. There was no

power in the ram to withstand him, but he cast him down to the ground and trampled him; and there was no one that could deliver the ram from his hand. Therefore the male goat grew very great” (Daniel 8:5–8a).

Interpretation: “The male goat is the kingdom of Greece. The large horn that is between its eyes is the first king” (Daniel 8:21).

Here we have the male goat, with its “large horn” [Alexander the Great] furiously attacking the ram [Persia]. At the battles of Issus in 333 BC (in which Alexander himself led the cavalry charge across the Pinarus River) and Gaugamela in 331 BC, Alexander the Great’s forces soundly defeated the army of the Persian king, Darius III, ushering in the rule of Alexander the Great over the Persian Empire.

Vision: “The male goat grew very great; but when he became strong, the large horn was broken” (Daniel 8:8a).

Interpretation: Alexander began his military campaign when he was 20 years old and conquered all the known world that he considered important—from Greece to India and southern Russia to northern Africa—in only eight years. No doubt this swift conquest

is why the Lord pictured his kingdom as a winged leopard in the vision of Daniel 7:6, and here as a goat that moved so fast it didn’t touch the ground. But at the height of his power—“when he was strong”—Alexander died at the age of 33.

Vision: “In place of it [the large horn] four notable ones came up toward the four winds of heaven” (Daniel 8:8b).

Interpretation: “As for the broken horn and the four that stood up in its place, four kingdoms shall arise out of that nation, but not with its power” (Daniel 8:22).

When Alexander died, his generals (called collectively the Diadochi) fought over his empire, dividing it to “the four winds.” These weaker successor kingdoms were depicted as a four-headed leopard in Daniel 7:6.

Beginning with Daniel 8:9, the prophecy suddenly jumps far into the future, to events of the Endtime. “Out of one of them [the four notable horns] came a little horn which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Glorious Land [Israel].” •

TO BE CONTINUED.

Six reasons why it is wrong to think that we, in ourselves, are righteous:

1. *Because we are not.*

Ecclesiastes 7:20
Isaiah 64:6a
John 8:7
Romans 3:10,23
Galatians 6:3

2. *Only God is good.*

Matthew 19:17a
Job 9:2b
Psalm 71:16b

3. *It displeases and separates us from God.*

Job 13:16b
Isaiah 65:5
Romans 10:3

4. *It causes us to be lifted up in pride.*

Proverbs 30:12–13
Luke 18:9–15

5. *It makes us unable to see our own sins.*

Proverbs 30:12
Luke 6:41–42
John 9:41

6. *It causes us to be unmerciful to others.*

Matthew 23:29
Matthew 9:13

True righteousness means trusting in God, not self.

Galatians 3:6
Philippians 3:9
Titus 3:5

If there's anything good about us, it's only by God's grace.

1 Corinthians 4:7
1 Corinthians 15:10
2 Corinthians 3:5

Three reasons why we should want to be humble:

1. *Because God loves and delights in the humble.*

Psalm 51:17
Psalm 138:6a
1 Peter 3:4
1 Peter 5:5b

2. *Humility brings honor and God's blessing.*

Psalm 25:9
Psalm 34:18
Proverbs 22:4
Proverbs 29:23
1 Peter 5:5b

3. *Humility can spare us from trouble.*

1 Kings 21:17,25–29
2 Chronicles 32:26

Follow Jesus' example of humility.

Matthew 21:5
John 13:5,12–15
Luke 22:27
Philippians 2:5–8

Be humble with others.

Romans 14:2–3
1 Corinthians 13:4
Philippians 2:3

I know that self-righteousness is wrong, that it displeases God and rubs others the wrong way. I try not to be like that, but I also want to stand up for the right, to think and say and do the right things in order to please God and be respected by others, so it's sometimes a bit of a dilemma. Where does rightness stop and self-righteousness begin? How can I tell when I'm being self-righteous?

Good questions—and you're not alone in your dilemma. Here are some excerpts of a message that someone received from Jesus in prophecy when she asked Him, "What are the symptoms of self-righteousness, and what can I do to overcome it?" As always, no one can explain things as clearly or well as Jesus. This message can serve as a good "self-diagnostic checklist" for us all.

Self-righteousness

ANSWERS TO YOUR QUESTIONS

(Jesus:) Often when you're self-righteous, you don't even know it, because the things you're doing or thinking are good things, or seem like good things. It's just that they're not the *best* thing, or the things that I want, or are not being done in a spirit of love and mercy.

Many times I want to show you a better way, but I can only do this when you humble yourself and acknowledge Me and listen to Me. When you yield to a self-righteous spirit, you're actually yielding to your *own* spirit, which is sometimes unmerciful, impatient, quick to judge, critical, thinks that it knows best, and isn't willing to listen to Me or others.

People make mistakes. People are sometimes lazy. People can be unloving. People have problems. If you feel you are better than other people or that you are above their problems—that you're stronger, smarter, more capable—then you're probably even worse off than them because you're self-righteous and don't even know it.

If you're concerned that you may be self-righteous, ask yourself these questions:

- ✘ *Do I often think I know best, and so reject or argue with what others say, or insist on having things my way?*
- ✘ *Do I criticize people when they make mistakes?*
- ✘ *Do I justify my criticisms and lack of love?*
- ✘ *Do I think of myself as better than others?*
- ✘ *Do I get impatient with others?*
- ✘ *Do I choose to do what best suits my own purposes?*

These are all symptoms of self-righteousness. If you find that several of these "shoes" fit, then it's time to lay down your pride and your own ways and ask Me to help you change.

Now ask yourself these questions:

- ✘ *Do I try to be an example of the Lord's Spirit of love in the way I think, react, and interact with others?*
- ✘ *Do I take into consideration that I could be wrong and the other person right?*
- ✘ *Do I truly listen to the opinions and viewpoints of others?*
- ✘ *Do I forgive others and overlook their faults, as I want them to forgive and be patient with me?*
- ✘ *Do I extend the Lord's love, mercy, and patience to others?*
- ✘ *Do I admit my mistakes?*
- ✘ *Do I admit that I'm weak and need help from the Lord and others?*
- ✘ *Am I willing to apologize to people who I may have hurt or wronged?*
- ✘ *Am I quick to forgive and accept the apologies of those who make mistakes or wrong me?*
- ✘ *How much do I depend on the Lord's counsel through the written Word and His living voice of prophecy?*

If you can't honestly answer yes to the questions on this last list, then these are also things you should pray for Me to help you with.

Turn to My written Word—read it, absorb it, believe it, and let it change you. Turn to My voice of prophecy—bring your questions to Me and hear My personal Words for you. Turn to others—listen to them and be open to their point of view. Turn to Me—depend on My goodness, not your own. Those are the keys to overcoming self-righteousness.

Love, Jesus



Humble people are My friends

The humble person may not end up on the top of the heap, but he is more likely to have a truly successful life because he is more likely to succeed in the things that matter most. He is a quiet force for good, and I always reward that. He also wins the love and respect of others because his humble spirit conveys his love and respect for them. They see him putting their happiness before his own, and that makes them want to do the same.

Humility runs contrary to human nature. It is the nature of man to try to appear to be more than he really is by boasting of his personal attributes, abilities, and achievements. He hopes to make himself feel better about himself and to win the respect of others, but it seldom turns out that way. He may feel better about himself for the moment, but pride drives others away.

As a proverb states, “Pride comes before a fall.” The proud live in fear of falling, of being exposed and humiliated. But the humble have nothing to fear because they have nowhere to fall—they are already lowly in their own eyes. The humble are always welcome with Me. They are My companions and friends. And when they join Me in Heaven, they will feel right at home and fit right in. Heaven was made for people like them!