

**Pharisees imagine that they are better than others****Zac Poonen:**

"Jesus spoke this parable to some people who viewed others with contempt: Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee....he prayed to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people' (Luke 18:9-11).

In this parable we observe first of all that this Pharisee didn't pray to God. He prayed to himself (verse 11). He thanked God in his heart, that he was better than others. He didn't say that aloud, for then he would have lost his reputation for humility!!

Suppose one day, someone loses his temper at you and gets angry. But you control your temper and keep quiet. Then you secretly congratulate yourself and say, "Lord, I thank You that I am not like this person. I thank You that I have self-control". You have, at that moment, prayed the same prayer that the Pharisee prayed. That other person fell into a 10-foot pit called "anger". But you fell into a far deeper 1000-foot pit called "spiritual pride". Which of you was worse? That person may be convicted later of his anger and repent and come back to the Lord. But you may never see your self-righteousness - and thus never repent of your spiritual pride! Finally, in God's eyes, that person ends up better than you.

Spiritual pride is like an onion. When you peel off one layer, you think you have finished with it. But there is another layer underneath - and another underneath that, and yet another underneath that - and so on. We will never eliminate spiritual pride completely from our lives on earth. But we can make the onion quite thin, if we judge ourselves faithfully - instead of judging others!!

Spiritual pride is also very subtle and can clothe itself in the garb of humility!! A Sunday-School teacher was teaching this story of the Pharisee and the tax-collector to her children. At the end she said (words that sounded exactly like the Pharisees' words), "Children, thank God we are not like the Pharisee"!! We laugh at that and we say "Thank God we are not like the Sunday-School Teacher"!! Yes, spiritual pride is indeed like an onion!!

Pride and selfishness are two sins that we will never be totally free from, until Christ returns and we become like Him. These sins are like onions with innumerable layers. If we cleanse ourselves as soon as we see one layer of either of these, in us, we can gradually reduce the size of these onions. Our longing should be to make these "onions" as thin as possible, before Christ returns. If you are doing that, you are on the right track - and you will never be a Pharisee.