Contempt or Humility

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"He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt." Luke 18:9

Do you know when I'm most tempted to consider myself righteous by my own power or deeds? For me, it's not merely when I look at my good works. It's when I look at my self-believed righteousness in comparison to my view of someone else. Certainly, I've done more good in God's eyes than some murderer or drug dealer, which makes me feel a little righteous about myself. Certainly, my works done "for God's glory" are more significant in God's eyes than those of a five-year-old child, right? When I hand-pick with whom to compare myself, I'm tempted both to see myself as righteous and to start to treat others with contempt. Contempt is the feeling that a person is beneath consideration, worthless, or deserving scorn.

That's the common thread found in the two episodes in Luke 18:9-17. The Pharisee in Jesus' parable thought himself righteous as he contemptuously compared himself to the tax collector in the story. The disciples contemptuously rebuked the people who were bringing little children to Jesus, thinking there were more important people for Him to bless, perhaps even themselves. How ironic that we sinners might consider ourselves righteous even when we find ourselves treating those for whom Christ died so poorly. God have mercy! And He does!

There is another common thread in these two episodes: humility. The tax collector in Jesus' story and children do not think of themselves highly, or believe they are owed something by God because their works are better than others. They seek our Lord's love and mercy on account of Him. Those are the ones who go home blessed and justified because Jesus is gracious. He demonstrates it by His cross and empty tomb. His grace justifies us and molds in us a high regard for those He loves…sinners like you and me!