



## *Feeling Justified*

Luke 18:9-14

### Study Helps and Application

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The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector is a study in contrasts: Two *very different men* praying two *very different prayers* unto two *very different destinies*.

**Discussion 1:** Two very different men. It is easy to see the sin in the Pharisee here. Now it is time to examine our own hearts.

– *What are some ways that I am like the Pharisee?*

[Our sins look so ugly on others. Warn others to be careful--it is so easy for us to lie to ourselves about the answers to these questions. If folks pick up on good things about the Pharisee defer those to the next question.]

- *Do you find yourself thinking "I thank you Lord that I am not like this Pharisee?"*
- *Do you find yourself comparing yourself to brothers and sisters... and feeling pretty good about the comparison?*
- *Examine the motives for your spiritual disciplines and ministry activity. Do you find yourself doing "spiritual accounting" and thinking surely God owes you for all your good works? (Isa. 64:6)*

– *Are there any ways that I should be more like the Pharisee?*

[Yes, this one takes some effort, but it is good to make people think! Are the disciplines listed bad things? Discuss the heart/motivation behind those.]

– *How am I like the tax collector?*

- *Do you recognize how offensive your sin is to God?*
- *Are you broken and shamed by it?*

[Grieving over your own sin is a healthy thing. Review the sanctification cycle... recognition of sin → contrition/repentance → trust for forgiveness/power-to-obey → gratitude → recognition of sin ... ]

- *Do you think that you are worthy to approach God (on your own)?--Do you fear God?*

<sup>ESV</sup> **Hebrews 12:28** Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe,<sup>29</sup> for our God is a consuming fire.

The fear of the LORD ...

- ... is the beginning of wisdom (Psa. 111:10; Pro. 9:10)
- ... is the beginning of knowledge (Pro. 1:7)
- ... is hatred of evil (Pro 8:13)
- ... prolongs life (Pro 10:27)
- ... leads to life (Pro. 19:23)
- ... is a fountain of life (Pro. 14:27)
- ... is clean, enduring forever; (Psa. 19:9)
- The reward for humility and ... is riches and honor and life (Pro. 22:4)
- In the ... one has strong confidence (Pro. 14:26)
- By the ... one turns away from evil (Pro. 16:6)
- Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the ... (Pro. 34:11)
- Therefore, knowing ..., we persuade others (2 Cor. 5:11)

*But what about ...? (this is an extra--if the conversation goes this way ...)*

<sup>ESV</sup> **Hebrews 4:16** Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

[Taken out of context, this is dangerous. *Let us then* ... should lead you to read the previous verses that clearly reveal a fear of God context. Our ability to approach God in Christ our great high priest is a radical extension of God's grace and should be seen in the proper light (and celebrated!) Our approach to God's Holiness apart from Christ would be like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego entering Nebuchadnezzar's furnace alone. (Dan 3:25)]

<sup>ESV</sup> **Hebrews 4:13** *And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*<sup>14</sup> *Since then we have a great high priest* who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.<sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.<sup>16</sup> ***Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace,*** that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Discussion 2: Two very different prayers.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Matthew 12:34b** For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

– *What's so wrong with the Pharisee's prayer?*

[Gratitude is shown to God for his purity. Personal piety and faithful and consistent giving are expressed as virtues... not bad things... right?]

▪ Based on *externals*

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Samuel 16:7b** For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart."

*(this is not good news--Jer 17:9)*

- Based on *comparison* -- Not like other people/*that* guy --*Is that even true?*

[He is speaking to God things that are false: "...I am not like other men." The Pharisee's pride blinds him to what the Psalmist revealed (14:2) and he'd no doubt been exposed to as a Pharisee. Paul, a redeemed Pharisee, "got it" and wrote about it to the church in Rome.]

<sup>ESV</sup> **Psalm 14:2** The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. <sup>3</sup> They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Romans 3:10** as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; <sup>11</sup> no one understands; no one seeks for God.

- Based on what he was *not*

He emphasized the "don'ts" of the law - "*I have not; ... I am not*"

- Based on *arbitrary laws*

He's adding to God's laws - God's Word doesn't say to fast twice a week

- *Have you recognized our tendency to set standards based on ourselves?*

[People should be... about as righteous as me.]

## *PRIDE*

God *hates* it (Prov. 8:13). Also note how it is listed among the worst of sins (Rom 1:29-30) while describing rebellious mankind as "suppressors of the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom 1:18)]

### *Wisdom personified hates pride:*

<sup>ESV</sup> **Proverbs 8:13** The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil. ***Pride and arrogance*** and the way of evil and perverted speech ***I hate***.

One of the main purposes of the fear of the Lord in Proverbs is to align a person's heart with what the Lord loves. Describing what wisdom hates (and therefore what the Lord hates) calls a person to examine his or her heart, to guard it from such things, to walk in accord with what the Lord loves, and to seek wisdom for all relationships and interactions (cf. the similar function of 6:12-19). Whether a person's heart and path are aligned with wisdom is a recurring theme of this chapter. [ESV Study Bible, Crossway--study note for Prov. 8:13]

<sup>ESV</sup> **Romans 1:29** They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, <sup>30</sup> slanderers, haters of God, insolent, ***haughty, boastful***, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, <sup>31</sup> foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

- *Are you learning to recognize, be grieved by, and repent of your pride?*

[Pride can pollute anything--one can even be tempted to take pride in one's own repentance!]

- *What's so commendable about the tax collector's prayer?*

[We see that this man goes away justified (declared righteous--saved!). Is it particularly articulate? Or theologically comprehensive? This is the closest thing we can find to "a sinner's prayer" (uttered at new birth) in the Bible. Should we be teaching people to repeat it to get saved? --No... **Bring the conversation around to a broken and contrite (Godly sorrow).** A newborn-in-Christ's first prayer should hardly be expected to be elegant prose or theologically deep.

*Psalm 51 is a place everyone should know to go to see an expression of contrition and repentance in prayer--written by David after his great sin with Bathsheba (seduction & adultery, cover-up, murder...).*]

<sup>ESV</sup> **Psalm 51:17** The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

**Discussion 3:** Two very different destinies. One went away justified and the other did not ("rather than the other").

- *What is the fundamental difference in these men?*

[The Pharisee, as the introduction to the parable notes, trusted/had confidence in his own righteousness. The tax collector, in brokenness, threw himself at the mercy of God. He was justified by his humble faith in the mercy of God. Justification by grace (the mercy was undeserved) through faith is neither new to Christianity (the Reformation) nor limited to the New Testament. We see it as early as Gen 15:6!]

<sup>ESV</sup> **Genesis 15:6** And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

- *Assess your Christian growth. Is it marked by lowliness? Are you learning to "fear your own righteousness" (Bunyan)?*

[Self assessment, but as you see commendable growth in brothers and sisters around you, encourage them (though they'll likely feel undeserving).]

### *Memory Verse*

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### *Additional Resources*

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- *Psalm 51*
- *Justification By Faith is the End of Boasting*, by John Piper  
[http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1999/1081\\_Justification\\_by\\_Faith\\_is\\_the\\_End\\_of\\_Boasting/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1999/1081_Justification_by_Faith_is_the_End_of_Boasting/)



## *Feeling Justified*

*Luke 18:9-14*

A parable which helps answer the questions:

- Who is justified? (14)
- Who is accepted?
- Who is right with God?
- Who is really righteous? (9)
- What is true righteousness? (9)
- How and when should we feel justified?

### **1. Two Very Different MEN (10)**

#### **A Pharisee**

Even people who've never opened a Bible have some idea in mind when they hear the word Pharisee. It means being self righteous and/or hypocritical, as we use it today. That's a partly true assessment of the Pharisees of Jesus' day. Jesus said they were self-righteous and hypocrites. But it might surprise you to know that Jesus' negative assessment of the Pharisees was a radical, new one in his day. It would not have been the common street-level assessment of the Pharisees.

- They were the most popular group of religious leaders, liked especially among the working class.
- They themselves were hard workers, good and usually honest businessmen.
- They were nationalists, God-fearers.
- They thought that blessing would return to Israel if it were more pure.
- So they interpreted the Law of Moses in the most literal, the strictest way.
- They sought to update, re-contextualize, and freshly apply the law to every corner of life.
- And they generally practiced what they preached. They were disciplined folk.
- They were aggressive and stringent in their obedience to the law.

So whether we know the term Pharisee from modern usage or from the Bible, we probably have a very negative opinion of the Pharisees, but many in the 1<sup>st</sup> century didn't. They thought:

- If anyone was going to heaven, surely a Pharisee was.
- If God was pleased with anyone, surely a Pharisee made the list.

#### **A Tax-Collector**

It's hard to understand what "tax-collector" meant to those hearing Jesus tell this story

For us we either think of an IRS agent or Zaccheus, who was a wee-little man. Both of those are pretty benign. But in 1<sup>st</sup> C times, they were hated above almost any other class or kind of people:

- They were often Jews, which means they were viewed as traitors. They were serving the Roman occupation of their land. They were the means of funding the brutal Roman army that was hell-bent on conquest – violent conquest.
- They were one of the only street level representations of Rome’s abuse, tyranny, dishonesty.
- They were personally dishonest. Extremely, famously corrupt – taking extra from the people for themselves. Tax-collector was synonymous with robber – e.g., one ancient piece of graffiti says “*all are tax-collectors; all are robbers.*” They got rich by stealing from the people, even from their own people.
- They were known for their wild, extravagant living. They were known for their parties, for their drunkenness and gluttony.

There is absolutely no contemporary equivalent. Maybe the closest thing I can think of would be someone in a Mexican drug cartel. Traitors / thieves / wealthy (unjustly) /

Now, Luke gives us a hint about a surprise right up front. It’s no surprise to us if we’ve read the whole parable already, but it was a shocking thing for Jesus’ first hearers. So Luke tells them up front that the parable is going to be upside down (read v 9).

Luke has been showing this inverse or reverse in the kingdom of God. He frequently introduces a good man and a bad man, and by the end of the story the good man is shown to be lost and bad man is shown to be saved. *Examples:*

- Jesus came as a physician to the sick, not the well; for “sinners,” not for the righteous (5:31-32)
- He came to preach the gospel to the “poor” (ch 4) – the spiritually impoverished
- A tax-collector is one of his first converts (ch 5) – in fact, Matthew becomes an apostle and a gospel writer
- He had the reputation of eating and drinking with sinners, of being a friend of tax collectors and sinners (ch 7)
- He received the worship and forgave a woman who was a prostitute (ch 7)
- Jesus said that when the end-time heavenly banquet is assembled, he’ll have invited crippled, the lame, the blind to dine with him – not those who can repay him (ch 14)
- Ch 15 it’s the lost sheep that he goes after, “not the 99 righteous ones that need no repentance”
- It’s the wayward, rebellious prodigal son who is saved at the end of that parable in ch 15 – not the smug, proud, faithful, obedient older brother who refuses to celebrate that his brother has come home.
- In Ch 16, it was the leprous Lazarus, and not the rich man, who went to heaven.

- In Ch 17, it was the Samaritan leper (not 9 Jewish lepers), that was forgiven, not just healed.

We've been calling this series of messages: "Righteous Sinners." And that's a word-play that's right there in Luke.

- The "righteous" are the so-called righteous – those who think that they are righteous (v 9).
- The "sinners" are those who, like the tax-collector, are famously sinful – they are professional sinners. And they know themselves to be sinners because their conscience tells them this, and all of society tells them this.
- So the so-called "righteous" really are sinners.
- And the so-called "sinners" really can be made righteous by grace.
  - That's what this parable is about.

## 2. Two Very Different PRAYERS (11-13)

### THE PHARISEE'S PRAYER

There are some good things about this guy and his prayer. We know it ends badly for him, but don't let that (yet) taint the way it unfolds.

#### 1. His Purity is commendable

- He isn't a thief – he's even fair or just (11)
  - He isn't an adulterer (11)
  - He fasts twice a week (12)
  - He pays tithes on all that he gets (12)
    - More than just giving a 10<sup>th</sup> of his money before taxes...
    - If someone gives him a piece of gum, he gives 1/10 of it to the poor
- He doesn't steal or cheat; he doesn't cheat on his wife; he even skips food twice a week; and he gives meticulously of his money. Those are all good things. This is above and beyond religion.

#### 2. Gives credit to God for his purity

His prayer isn't much different than some of what you find in the Psalms.

**Psalm 119:161-164** *Princes persecute me without cause, But my heart stands in awe of Your words. <sup>162</sup> I rejoice at Your word, As one who finds great spoil. <sup>163</sup> I hate and despise falsehood, But I love Your law. <sup>164</sup> Seven times a day I praise You, Because of Your righteous ordinances.*

And we've all prayed similar prayers, especially when we've seen pain caused by some specific sin that we've been kept from. "God, I thank you that you've kept me off drugs" or "kept me from the devastation of adultery."

So what's wrong with the Pharisee's prayer? (5 things)

1. His acceptance with God was based on *externals*
2. His acceptance with God was based on *comparison*  
Not like other people  
Not like *that* guy – that tax-collector
3. His acceptance with God was based on what he was *not*  
He emphasized the “don't s” of the law - “*I have not; ... I am not*” (11)
4. His acceptance with God was based on *arbitrary laws*  
He's adding to God's laws – God's Word doesn't say to fast twice a week (12)  
He set up an arbitrary standard for acceptance; and having basically met it, he felt justified.
5. In short, his acceptance with God was based on *himself* (“I” – 4x)  
His whole prayer is focused on himself and what he's done and not done.  
There's no mention of any sin, any need – no confession, no repentance

It's not that this Pharisee is lost despite his righteousness; his righteousness is the very essence of his lostness. His righteousness is the very thing getting in the way of being made right with God.

*“When I had been fasting, praying, obeying, I thought I was aiming at the glory of God, but I was doing it all for my own glory – to feel I was worthy. As long as I was doing all this to earn my salvation, I was doing nothing for God, all for me! I realized that all my struggling to become worthy was an exercise in self-worship. I was actually trying to avoid God as saviour, and to be my own saviour. i.e. I was not worshipping him, but using him.”*

*--David Brainerd*

It's not that this Pharisee is lost *despite* his righteousness, despite the fact that he's good.

- His righteousness is the very essence of his lostness.
- His righteousness is the very thing getting in the way of being made right with God.
- That's why Spurgeon entitled one of his messages on this parable as “**Too Good to be Saved!**”

*“The Pharisee's whole righteousness was sinful.”*

*--John Bunyan*

*Isa 64:6 ...all our righteous deeds are as filthy rags...*

## **THE TAX-COLLECTOR'S PRAYER**

He stands at a distance and can't look up to heaven (13) – demonstrates his sense of unworthiness

He says "God, be merciful to *the* sinner" (13) (definite article in the Greek)

No comparison here

As far as he's concerned, he's the only one that matters.

merciful = "make atonement for me" or "propitiate me"

By the way... what a short "sinner's prayer" (the only sinner's prayer in the Bible)

*Don't trust in a "sinner's prayer"*

No mention of anything good he'd done. Surely there had been some good things. He was at the Temple, for one. But he mentions nothing of good that he can commend.

*"Godly men are afraid of their own righteousness."*

*--John Bunyan*

## **3. Two Very Different DESTINIES (14)**

The tax-collector went home "justified" --A legal term = to be declared righteous

What's amazing about the parable is both guys' destinies. Not just that the tax collector can be saved and is saved, but that the Pharisee isn't. Look at those scary words "rather than the other" (14).

*"We must be made righteous before we can do righteousness."*

*--John Bunyan*

\*\*\*The Bible's purpose is *not* so much to show you how to live a good life. The Bible's purpose is to show you how God's grace breaks into your life and saves you from the sin and brokenness otherwise you would never be able to overcome... Religion is 'if you obey, then you will be accepted'. But the Gospel is, 'if you are absolutely accepted, and sure you're accepted, only then will you ever begin to obey'. Those are two utterly different things. Every page of the Bible shows the difference.

Later in this chapter, Jesus teaches us that it is very hard for the rich to be saved (24-25). Why is it that the rich and the righteous have such a hard time getting the gospel? They have self-sufficiency. They have worked hard.

## Application

### Are you a tax collector type?

Have you come to the end of yourself yet? Have you given up on looking for acceptance in society, in family, in career, in yourself? Good, then you're ready for Jesus.

- Do what this man, this tax-collector, did.
- Isn't he proof enough that no one is beyond the reach of the grace of Jesus?
- Why do you doubt?

### Are you a Pharisee type?

Can a Pharisee be saved? Yes, see Paul's example in Phil 3

**Phil 3:3-9** *[We are those who] glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh, <sup>4</sup> although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: <sup>5</sup> circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. <sup>7</sup> **But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.** <sup>8</sup> More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and **count them but rubbish** so that I may gain Christ, <sup>9</sup> **and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith...***

Christian, you are not done fighting the temptation to trust in our own righteousness and view others with contempt. It is ever present and it is potentially deadly.

IE, this is a parable for getting saved

And this is a parable in further growing in Christ, further fighting sin.

**Don't dare think: "Thank God I'm not like those Pharisees"**

Christians grow, but they grow low

- The "holier" we get the less it probably feels like it
- We are to see more of our sin the closer we get to him (pervasiveness of the sin, the root of it)
- We grow in further sensing our need for Christ,
  - so we grow in humility, even though we see more of our pride
  - and we grow in ever increasing thankfulness for our grace,

This man *went to his house justified*. You can go home. You can go home in peace.

**Ecclesiastes 9:7** Go *then*, eat your bread in happiness and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works.



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- *Are there any ways that I should be more like the Pharisee?*
- *How am I like the tax collector?*

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- *Have you recognized our tendency to set standards based on ourselves?*

### *PRIDE*

God *hates* it (Prov. 8:13). Also note how it is listed among the worst of sins (Rom 1:29-30) while describing rebellious mankind as “suppressors of the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom 1:18)]

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- *Are you learning to recognize, be grieved by, and repent of your pride?*
- *What's so commendable about the tax collector's prayer? (Psalm 51:17)*

**Discussion 3:** Two very different destinies. One went away justified and the other did not (“rather than the other”).

- *What is the fundamental difference in these men?*
- *Assess your Christian growth. Is it marked by growth-in-lowliness? Are you learning to “fear your own righteousness” (Bunyan)?*

### *Memory Verse*

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