

HOLIER THAN WHO?

Luke 18:9-14

9 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

13 "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

14 "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Our Lord's parable creates some interesting tensions!

The Serendipity discussion Bible asks:

1. How do you feel about the Pharisee in the story?
 - a. like punching him in the nose
 - c. I feel like putting him in his place
 - b. I feel the same way
 - d. I feel sorry for him
2. Why do you think the Pharisee acted this way?
 - a. gratitude to God
 - d. sincere desire to please God
 - b. peer pressure from his friends
 - e. he was self-righteous
 - c. fear of letting anybody know what he's really feeling
3. How do you feel about the tax collector?
 - a. at least he's honest
 - c. I can relate to this guy
 - b. he's more aware of who he is
 - d. after cheating us, he has his nerve
4. Why do you think the tax collector acted the way he did?
 - a. he knew he had done wrong
 - d. he was plea-bargaining with God
 - b. he wanted sympathy
 - e. he felt like dirt
 - c. he had a poor self-image
5. Which of these two could you share more with? Why?
 - a. he is more spiritual
 - d. more like the person I want to be
 - b. more honest
 - e. more likely to understand me
 - c. more like me
6. If the tax collector showed up here, how would he be received?
 - a. with open arms
 - c. with disgust
 - b. with suspicion
 - d. like a fellow-sinner
7. If the Pharisee showed up here, how would he be received?
 - a. with open arms
 - d. with cold stares
 - b. with raised eyebrows
 - e. with sympathy
 - c. with a few snickers
8. Why would you receive one of these people better than the other?
 - a. fewer surface problems to hassle
 - d. we don't tolerate phonies
 - b. less emotional healing needed
 - e. one would fit into our group better
 - c. we don't tolerate sinners

Which would you be more comfortable with? Which attitude do you have?

Ancient adage: **"Self-praise smells bad!"**

Swindoll adds, "like the poisoned rat in the wall—

if it isn't removed, the stench just gets worse!"

PERSONAL INSTRUCTION FOR DISCIPLES 17:1-19:27

Concerning recognition of sin 18:9-14

Justification is for those who acknowledge their sin

and trust God's mercy for forgiveness,
rather than their own goodness.

THE REASON FOR THE PARABLE 18:9 To whom addressed?

"To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable:"

Some are demonstrating their own kind of spiritual pride.

They're imitating Pharisees' attitude,
from different perspective.

Two characteristics:

1. They're confident of their own righteousness

=> **Self-righteous**

They're convinced they're good enough to make it with God.

If anyone would make it, they would; and some would make it!

2. They look down on everyone else.

They consider everyone else to be of little or no value, **valueless**.

They devalue them as people, reject them or hold them in contempt.

The parable demonstrates that

justification is not for the self-righteous.

DIFFERENCE IN THEIR PRAYERS 18:10-13

PRAYER OF THE PHARISEE 18:10-12

"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'"

His attitude: 18:11a

He wants God to know how good he is.

–to be convinced of his righteousness.

–to know how lucky He is to have such a valuable person on His side!

Along with his self-satisfaction comes a spirit of contempt for others.

He's better than *"other mortals"*.

His real attitude revealed--a "Freudian slip."

He prays *"to himself"* and says *"God, I thank Thee"*

If we take literal sense,

he could be talking to himself, as his own god.

Much as many Americans say *"In God we trust!"*—appropriately placed *on our money*, or maybe we trust *in ourselves*,

but few trust in the Creator of the universe.

He uses the normal form to identify the one to whom we pray.

Barclay suggests, "He didn't really go to pray to God.

He prayed *with Himself*."

One observer described a famous preacher's prayer as "the most eloquent prayer ever offered to a Boston audience."

The Pharisee prayed--to the grandstands, and to himself.

Plummer comments: *"He glances at God, but contemplates himself."*

His separation: 18:11b *'God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector.*

He thanks God that *he is NOT like other people!*

"They're thieves, unjust, and adulterers."

"*They're a bunch of **crooks, cheats, and sex perverts!***"

"I'm glad I'M not like *that!*"

He's especially grateful that he's not like

"this ... , this tax collector!"

They're especially despicable;

they "sold their souls" to the system.

His prayer expresses the essence of Pharisaism, separation from others.

Originally good—an attempt to keep themselves distinct from the lifestyle of pagan Greek culture which was making inroads into their community.

Whatever merit their original motives had, it degenerated into obnoxious self-righteousness, viewing themselves as better than everyone else.

One rabbi said, "If there are only two righteous men in the world, I and my son are these two; if there is only one, I am he!" —*Reminds me of two friends talking, one said, "We're the only two honest people left in the world, and sometimes I'm not so sure about you!"*

With a human measure, righteousness is relative, you can always find someone better and someone worse. Take the right point of comparison and you feel pretty good about yourself.

A little boy announced to his mother, "I'm like Goliath. I'm 9 feet tall." "Why do you say that?" asked his mother. "Well, I made a little ruler and measured myself with it; I'm 9 feet tall!"

Human standards don't count. The only evaluation that counts is by an absolute standard! The righteousness of God Himself; with that measuring stick, we all come up short!

His religion 18:12 *I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get."*

God required one fast a year

(on the day of Atonement, as an act of repentance for sin—the Pharisee seems unaware that he should be concerned about that);

he fasts twice a week (as a ritual)!

Fasting had been addressed in the O.T.

The people established many fasts,

usually in commemoration of a time of loss.

Zechariah tells them God never asked for this kind of fasting.

He wanted them to repent and turn to Him, not celebrate a fast.

The Pharisees fasted all the time

—to put on a show at the corner.

They dressed and acted so everyone would know they were fasting, and praise them for their spirituality.

He tithed everything in his possession—even tiny garden herbs (Matt. 23:23-- Jesus accuses them of tithing kitchen spices while neglecting the weightier matters of the law)

THE PRAYER OF THE PUBLICAN (TAX COLLECTOR) 18:13

"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

His attitude:

- * He stands at a distance; he won't presume to come near the Holy Place, where he'd be drawing near to God.
- * He can't even lift his eyes toward heaven to call out to God.
- * He's afflicted by his sin--he beat his breast--a symbol of grief and despair

Doesn't call himself "A sinner",
but "*THE* sinner"--strong recognition of sin

His petition: "*Lord, be merciful to me, THE sinner.*"

He considers himself a classic example of one who deserves God's judgment

He appeals to God with a religious appeal, normally made by sinners in the hands of an angry God: be appeased, be expiated, be propitiated--Let your wrath be turned away from me."

It's the root of the Greek O.T. word for the "mercy seat."

"I want this sin issue dealt with. I don't want my sin to be a barrier between us anymore. Forgive me. I am the sinner. You are the holy God. Cleanse me so I can enter your presence."

DIFFERENCE IN RESULTS 18:14

Results for the Publican 18:14a "*I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God.*

The publican walks away justified
=> ***declared righteous***.--changed!

Results for the Pharisee 18:14b "*I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God.*

Nothing! He left the same way he came in.

Self-righteous and unsaved.

We miss much because we don't view the Pharisees the way the people did.

We think of Pharisees as hypocrites.

However, people agreed with them.

Publicans were scoundrels--deserved condemnation, betraying God's people.

But Pharisees are committed to their religion--fanatics, and proud of it!

Christ says the Pharisee wasn't justified before God (**Rom. 10:1-4**).

Trying to establish his own righteousness, he ignores that which God provided and ended up bankrupt--with nothing.

Had he filed "*spiritual bankruptcy*", he could have called for help and received the righteousness of God Himself!

The Pharisee's pride condemns him;

the tax collector's humble faith saves him.

Though the human observer can only see his sinfulness,

God declares him righteous and he goes home clean.

***Eternal life is for those who acknowledge their sin
and trust God's mercy for forgiveness,
rather than their own goodness.***

Righteousness is a gift, made possible by His sacrifice, received by sinners who humbly approach God and trust HIM, rather than their own righteousness.

Sinners come to God recognizing our sin, and our inability to satisfy God.

No cause for pride—pride works against a proper relationship with God

The basic principle behind the results: 18:14c

For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled.

Everyone who humbles himself shall be exalted.

WHAT'S THE RELEVANCE OF THIS PASSAGE FOR ME?

Spurgeon: a duke boarded a galley ship. As he passed the slaves, he asked each what his offense was. Each claimed innocence. Someone else was responsible. One young man, however, responded, 'Sir, I deserve to be here. I stole some money. No one is at fault but myself. I'm guilty.' The duke seized him by the shoulder and shouted, 'You scoundrel! What are you doing here with all these honest men? Get out!'"

Businessman Samuel Colgate was an active church member. During an evangelistic campaign a prostitute came forward, asked God to save her and expressed a desire to join the church. "I'll gladly sit in some back corner," she said.

The preacher hesitated and for a moment the silence was oppressive. Finally, a member suggested that action on her request be postponed.

Mr. Colgate arose, "I guess we blundered when we prayed that the Lord would save sinners. We forgot to specify what kind. We'd better ask Him to forgive us. The Holy Spirit touched this woman, but apparently the Lord doesn't understand she isn't the type we want Him to rescue."

The key thought of the parable is found in the punch line.

The summary:

God exalts the humble and humbles the proud!

Which would you prefer to have God do for you?