

THE PARABLE OF THE PHARISEE AND PUBLICAN

[BIBLE TEXT](#) : Luke 18 :9-14

LESSON 181 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness" (Proverbs 30:12).

[BIBLE TEXT in King James Version](#)

Luke 18:9-14

⁹ And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: ¹⁰ Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men *are*, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. ¹² I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. ¹³ And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as *his* eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

[BIBLE REFERENCES:](#)

I The Penitent's Prayer

- 1 The publican prayed, "God be merciful to me a sinner," Luke 18:13;
Hosea 14:2
² Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive *us* graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips.
- 2 The sinner's prayer of repentance for sin is an acceptable one with God,
Proverbs 28:13
¹³ He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh *them* shall have mercy.
1 John 1:9
⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
Psalms 34:18
¹⁸ The Lord *is* nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.
Isaiah 66:2
² For all those *things* hath mine hand made, and all those *things* have been, saith the Lord: but to this *man* will I look, *even to him that is* poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.
2 Corinthians 7:10
¹⁰ For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.
Ezekiel 18:21
²¹ But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die.
- 3 God's mercy and forgiveness are extended to all who pray with godly sorrow and repentance for sin,
Micah 7:18-19
¹⁸ Who *is* a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth *in* mercy. ¹⁹ He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.
Ephesians 2:1-7
¹ And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins; ² Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: ³ Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. ⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, ⁵ Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) ⁶ And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus: ⁷ That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in *his* kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.
Exodus 34:6-7
⁶ And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed,

The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, ⁷ Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear *the guilty*; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth *generation*.

Psalm 103:8

⁸ The Lord *is* merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.

4 Full pardon for sin is promised to the penitent,

Isaiah 44:22

²² I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee.

Isaiah 55:7

⁷ Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

Jeremiah 3:22

²² Return, ye backsliding children, *and* I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto thee; for thou *art* the Lord our God.

Hosea 14:4

⁴ I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him.

Luke 15:21-24

²¹ And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. ²² But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put *it* on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on *his* feet: ²³ And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill *it*; and let us eat, and be merry: ²⁴ For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

II Prayer of Self-Justification

1 The Pharisee sought to establish his own righteousness and not the righteousness of God, Luke 18:10-12;

Isaiah 58:2

² Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God.

Isaiah 65:5

⁵ Which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou. These *are* a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day.

Romans 10:2-13

² For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. ³ For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. ⁴ For Christ *is* the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. ⁵ For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them. ⁶ But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down *from above*;) ⁷ Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) ⁸ But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, *even* in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; ⁹ That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart man believeth unto

righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. ¹¹ For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. ¹² For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. ¹³ For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

- 2 The Pharisee extolled his own works in contrast with the works of the publican who prayed for mercy, Luke 18:13;

Ephesians 2:8-9

⁸ For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: ⁹ Not of works, lest any man should boast.

2 Timothy 1:9

⁹ Who hath saved us, and called *us* with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,

Titus 3:5

⁵ Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;

Romans 3:24-28

²⁴ Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: ²⁵ Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; ²⁶ To declare, *I say*, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. ²⁷ Where *is* boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. ²⁸ Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

1 Corinthians 1:29

²⁹ That no flesh should glory in his presence.

III Exaltation and Abasement

- 1 The publican went home justified before God because he prayed with repentance, with faith, and asked for mercy, Luke 18:14;

Romans 4:5

⁵ But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

- 2 The Pharisee could not see the necessity for repentance and God's saving grace in his behalf, and so was not justified before God, Luke 18:14;

Romans 4:2-4

² For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath *whereof* to glory; but not before God. ³ For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. ⁴ Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.

1 John 5:10

¹⁰ He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.

NOTES:

Two Prayers

We learn from the parable of the Pharisee and the publican that not all who pray to God are accepted by Him. Jesus described two men of vastly different character, one a Pharisee and the other a publican. Their social standing in their

community was widely different. The Pharisees were usually thought to be of a better class of people, and were often Men of high repute in the Temple worship. They considered themselves teachers and interpreters of the Law. Many of them were men of much learning, and their standard of religion was of the strictest the nation of Israel afforded.

The publicans were tax collectors for the Roman government, which caused them to *be* heartily disliked by everyone. This dislike stemmed from the fact that the publicans received a percentage of all taxes they collected. They contracted with the Roman government to procure a certain amount of taxes from the people. This privilege of tax collecting was greatly abused by the publicans because the Roman officials seldom were concerned about any of the methods the publicans used to gather the taxes. Official Rome cared little if the amount of taxes the publicans gathered was an exorbitant amount — which it usually was — so long as the Roman government received its desired amount of taxes.

It was these two men, of such widely separated positions in the community life that Jesus used as an example of two methods of prayer. Both of these men went to the Temple to pray. Their mode of praying and their attitude toward God were as different as their lives. The results of their prayers were different also; for one went away justified and the other did not. The reason for the difference was in the attitude they took toward God.

Our Just God

With God there is no respect of persons, and He will hear the prayer of one man as soon as He will hear the prayer of another. "Is it fit to say to a king, Thou art wicked? and to princes, Ye are ungodly? How much less to him that accepteth not the persons of princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor? for they all are the work of his hands" (Job 34:18, 19). "For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him" (Romans 10:12). **(Acts 10:34-35** ³⁴ Then Peter opened *his* mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: ³⁵ But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. **James 2:1-9** ¹ My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* of glory, with respect of persons. ² For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; ³ And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: ⁴ Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? ⁵ Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? ⁶ But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? ⁷ Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called? ⁸ If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: ⁹ But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.)

Therefore the publican, though he was despised by his own countrymen, was not rejected from petitioning God because of his wickedness. Neither was the Pharisee more readily accepted of God because of his so-called high religious standing.

Exalting Self

The Pharisee prayed: "God, I thank thee, that I am not

as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess." The Pharisee recited to himself his abstinence from the flagrant sins of the world, and congratulated himself in that he was not as the publican who was nearby, also praying. By such a recitation the Pharisee thought to call God's attention to his worth as a true follower of God.

The Pharisee was using others as a rule of measure by which to measure himself. Paul spoke of this: "For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise" (II Corinthians 10:12). The only rule of measure by which we dare measure ourselves is the revealed Word of God. Jesus Christ was the Perfect Man, of full stature before God (**Ephesians 4:13** ¹³ Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:). He, and no other, is to be our example.

While the Pharisee was not guilty of the *sins* he enumerated, he was guilty of some that were equally as grave, and perhaps more insidious and damning. The majority of the Pharisaical sect was guilty of hypocrisy and of perverting judgment. (**Matthew 23:23** ²³ Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier *matters* of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone) This Pharisee was guilty of the same sin as many in Israel of whom Paul spoke: "For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Romans 10:2, 3).

Furthermore, this Pharisee, as a self-styled teacher of the Law and an expounder of its spiritual truth, had missed completely the main purpose of the priesthood and the Tabernacle sacrifices. Their purpose was the demonstration of the need of a perfect Sacrifice for the sins of mankind, and the Divine provision to be made that they might be received by God, and be justified before Him.

The whole economy of the Mosaic Law was to prove that by the works of the Law no man could be justified (**Galatians 2:16** ¹⁶ Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified). Furthermore, "the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Galatians 3:24).

As this Pharisee prayed within himself, thinking he would be justified before God because of his good works, he was rejected of God because of his self-justification.

Prayer for Mercy

How different was the prayer of the publican, and his approach to God. "God be merciful to me a sinner." There was no boasting of his good deeds. He hung his head, and could not so much as look up. He could only smite his chest in the agony of the weight of his guilty conscience which had driven him to the house of God that he might obtain solace for his soul. The Temple was a place in which the publicans were seldom seen, yet the house of God was a proper place for the publican's soul

to find peace.

God places no premium on sin. Sin is sin, and one wrong deed is as worthy of condemnation as another. The Pharisee was no better than the publican, and was equally as guilty. This publican had opened his heart to God; God had faithfully convicted him of his sin, and he was praying the best prayer a sinner can pray: "God be merciful to me a sinner."

The publican went down to his house justified before God because he confessed his sin. He asked God for mercy, and mercy was granted. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13). The Pharisee, not willing to confess or enumerate his own sins, not willing even to admit the presence of any, received no mercy or justification, for he not only failed to confess his sins but was unwilling to forsake them. However wicked the publican had been in the past, he prayed with a confessing heart; he was sorry for his sins, and was willing to forsake them all and live according to God's commandments.

"For every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 18:14). Only those who approach God with a true conception of their own unworthiness of any favors from God, and of their own unrighteousness, shall ever be pardoned. God spoke to Job on the subject of righteousness: "Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?" (Job 40:8). The Pharisee thought to prove his own righteousness in spite of what his own religion taught him, and so had no righteousness at all. The publican knew he had no righteousness, and sought the only righteousness there is — God's righteousness!

QUESTIONS

- 1 Describe the mode of life of the publican and the Pharisee.
- 2 What was a publican's duty?
- 3 Why were the publicans so disliked by everyone?
- 4 Of what class of people were the Pharisees?
- 5 How did the publican's prayer differ from the Pharisee's?
- 6 Who was justified before God?
- 7 What is justification?