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The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

Luke 18:9-14

God's forgiving grace is available to all persons who come to Him, knowing their need and seeking forgiveness for sins that have separated them from God. Those who proudly profess their perfection and superiority, shut themselves off from this forgiveness.

That theme was played out in the parable of the lost son. The willful and wandering son came home to a joyous welcome, while the self-righteous older brother held himself aloof from the joy of family affection and the fellowship of the loving father.

A few months after the Lord spoke that parable, and again in the context of teaching a mixed and sometimes unfriendly audience, He set forth the parable of this lesson. The scene was moved from the family farm to the city and the temple. The elder brother was replaced by an unnamed Pharisee, the younger brother, by an equally unnamed publican, and the unnamed father by God Himself.

1. What is the difference between confidence and arrogance? Is understanding such a difference necessary in pleasing God?

2. At what point has a person gone "too far" into sin to be a recipient of God's grace?

3. Read v. 9. Why would someone who viewed himself righteous, view others with contempt?

4. Read v. 10-12. This man was a Pharisee. Tell a few things that you know about this class of religious men.

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5. Some translations of verse 11 say the Pharisee was praying “*by himself.*” Others say “*to himself.*” Is either of these statements significant? Why?

6. Find as many single words as you can that describe the Pharisee’s prayer. Are you impressed with this man’s spirituality? Why or why not?

7. Read verse 13. Describe a typical “tax gatherer” in Jesus’ day. How do you suppose the people in Jesus’ audience would react to this character?

8. The Pharisee described his religious deeds in verse 12. Do you think he really did these things? Why or why not?

9. Why do you think the Pharisee felt compelled to mention the tax-collector in his prayer? Does this expose any tendency we might have in ourselves?

10. Describe the tax collector’s position and posture in the prayer. Does this indicate anything important?

11. There are various kinds of prayer in the Bible: Confession, praise, thanksgiving, supplication, etc. How would you classify this Pharisee’s prayer? How would you classify the tax collector’s prayer?

12. Read v. 14. Describe how Jesus’ hearers (v. 9) might have responded to this parable. Was Jesus condoning the sin of the tax-gatherer? Why was he so gracious and approving of him?

13. In what subtle (and not so subtle) way might we today show the same attitude as the Pharisee in this parable?

14. What is God trying to convey to us in this parable?