

The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

For centuries, Christians have rightly understood pride to be a potent spiritual hazard. As common experience demonstrates, pride can undermine trust and stir up dissension in human relationships. Spiritual pride can take on even more deadly proportions. Obsessed with one's own pious accomplishments and good works, a person can easily lose sight of the extent of his or her own sin. As we shall see, the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector warns against the danger of self-righteousness and exhorts us to approach God with humility, placing our ultimate trust in Christ alone.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Luke 18:9-14

TEACHING OBJECTIVES

1. To present and exegete the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:9-14.
2. To warn against the spiritual dangers of pride and self-righteousness.
3. To articulate the biblical doctrines of justification and imputation.
4. To exalt God for the grace and mercy He demonstrates toward sinners.

QUOTATIONS

Believers must not come into the presence of God but with humility and abasement. No disease is more dangerous than arrogance; and yet all have it so deeply fixed in the marrow of their bones, that it can scarcely be removed or extirpated by any remedy. It is no doubt strange that men should be so mad as to venture to raise their crests against God, and to plead their own merits before him. Though men are carried away by their ambition, yet when we come into the presence of God, all presumption ought to be laid aside. – John Calvin

It was the fault of the Pharisee that though he went up into the Temple to pray, he did not pray. There is no prayer in all that he said. It is one excellence of the publican that he went up to the Temple to pray and he did pray—there is nothing but prayer in all that he said. –Charles Spurgeon

BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the law of God act as a mirror? What did the Pharisee see when he looked at the mirror of God's law? What did the tax collector see?
2. What is right and true about the Pharisee's prayer? What is problematic? Based on this prayer, how did the Pharisee see himself before God?
3. Generally, what were the Pharisees like in Jesus' day? How were tax collectors regarded at this time? How do you think Jesus' listeners would have responded to the descriptions of the Pharisee and the tax collector in this parable?
4. In what ways are you tempted to behave like the Pharisee in this parable? Who are some "tax collectors" that you find it easy to look down upon? What might you be able to learn from these people about humility and true faith?