

Don't Lose Perspective!

Luke 18:9-14

April 26, 2020

Scripture Reading: Romans 3:9-18

Opening Illustration: What kind of person do you despise? What sort of sinner do you really loathe in your heart? Now, I know the answer that you would give in polite conversation. You would say, "I don't despise anybody!" Instead, you would say, "I love everyone as a blessed child of God!" Me too. I would say that, too, because we HAVE to say that. We may even want to mean it when we say it. I am not asking this question in order to get an answer, especially if it is only what we think we should say. Instead, I am asking this question in order to lead you to look into your heart and ask yourself how you really feel about people...how you really feel about THOSE people...how you really feel about yourself.

I. Introduction

A. Last week

1. *Losing heart*—beginning to lose our persistence in prayer.
 - a. We were reminded that the question is not "Will God answer my prayer?" but instead, "Am I going to be persistent in prayer in the first place?"

B. This week

1. *Losing perspective*—beginning to think pridefully about ourselves and our walk with Christ.
 - a. Today we will be challenged in our sense of superiority to others.

C. Next week

1. *Losing focus*—beginning to lose clarity about what the gospel is and what it calls us to.
 - a. Next week we will remind ourselves of what the gospel actually is. In other words, we will be reminded of the actual content and call of the gospel.

II. Two Ways we can Go Astray (Luke 18:9)

A. We may begin to think that we are righteous in ourselves.

1. What does this say?
 - a. This parable was written to correct those who thought "in themselves" that they were righteous.
 - i. In other words, this parable was given to correct an attitude. It was written to correct something within us, not simply an action.
 - ii. Point: You don't have to say self-righteous things or act in self-righteous ways to BE self-righteous. This parable was written to correct the internal attitude that may or may not lead to unloving actions. Remember, in this parable the tax collector had NO IDEA that the Pharisee thought he was disgusting!

Quote: The pride of others often offends me, and makes me studious to hide my own; because their good opinion of me depends much upon their not perceiving it. But the Lord knows how this dead fly taints and spoils my best services, and makes them no better than specious sins...But though my disease is grievous, it is not desperate; I have a gracious and infallible Physician. I shall not die, but live and declare the works of the Lord.¹

2. What does this mean?

- a. We may begin to think that since there are so many others whose sins are more scandalous and egregious than ours, that we are somehow better than them.
- b. We may begin to define sin in such a way that makes us think we do not practice it. We are very susceptible to this self-deception.

¹ Works vol 1 pages 322-323

ILL: “At least I am not Hitler!” This makes me wonder what Hitler did to salve his conscience. Did he ever say, “Hey! At least I’m not Mussolini! Or Stalin...” The point is that we can always find SOMEBODY worse than ourselves. Being better than the next guy doesn’t mean that we are any good, though.

- 1) **2 Corinthians 10:12** For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding.

B. We may begin to look on others with disdain.

1. What does this say?
 - a. That we may begin to look at others with a self-righteous condescension.
 - i. This Greek word (ἐξουθενέω) was used to describe how the Roman guards treated Jesus. They not only beat Him and humiliated Him...the HATED him! [See Luke 23:11]
2. What does this mean?
 - a. This means that whatever message this parable communicates, it does so with an eye toward people who look down on others.

III. Two Men Went Up to Pray (Luke 18:10-13)

A. Notice the similarities between these two men.

1. They both went to the same place.
 - a. They both went to the temple.
2. They both went with the same purpose.
 - a. They both went to pray

B. Notice the contrasts between these two men.

1. They were in 2 radically different classes:
 - a. One was a Pharisee:
 - i. This means that it was assumed that he was a “good” person.
 - ii. This means that it was assumed that he was a religious person.
 - iii. This means that it was assumed that he was a knowledgeable person.
 - iv. This means that it was assumed that he was a man in spiritual authority.
 - b. The other was a tax collector:
 - i. This means that he was regarded as a traitor against his people.
 - 1) After all, who was he collecting taxes from?
 - 2) After all, who was he collecting taxes for?
 - c. This means that he was regarded as a bad person.
 - d. This means that he was regarded as a sinful person.
2. They had radically different perspectives:
 - a. The Pharisee
 - i. Prayed to himself
 - ii. Thanked God for how good he (the Pharisee) was in comparison to others!
 - iii. He even gave examples of the people he despised:
 - 1) Swindlers—“grabbers”. This is the Greek word ἄρπαγες which means “to snatch away, to grab”. The Pharisee hated cash grabbers! He despised greedy people.
 - 2) Unjust—“unrighteous”. This is the Greek word adikoj. This word will be very important to this parable a little later on.
 - 3) Adulterers-sexually immoral people. Seems to speak for itself.
 - 4) This tax collector- “οὗτος ὁ τελώνης”
 - There is an emphasis here in the Greek. Luke could have used the anaphoric use of the article here. Instead, he uses “οὗτος”. Not just a tax collector...this tax collector!
 - iv. He even gave examples of how he was better!
 - 1) I fast twice a week—I take in less than I should.

Quote: The Law provided for but one fast, that on the Day of Atonement, so his fasting *twice a week* was a work of supererogation [doing more than you have to]. The pious were in the habit of fasting more often than the Law required and fasting on Monday and Thursday is attested (e.g. *Taanith* 10a, 12a).²

2) I tithe on everything I get—I give out less than I have to.

- The law didn't require that they tithe on everything, but the Pharisees did.
- "The Law prescribed that certain crops be tithed (Deut. 14:22), but it was a Pharisaic practice to tithe even garden herbs (11:42)."³

b. The Tax Collector

- Was too embarrassed to go too far into the temple.
- Was unwilling to lift up his eyes.
- Was beating his chest (lamenting).
- Was completely focused on his badness!
- Begged God for forgiveness—"Be merciful to me, the sinner!"

1) Notice, not "a" [NKJV] sinner... "the" sinner!

- This is what we call in Greek syntax the article "par excellence". What this use of the Greek article articulates is:
 - "In essence, *par excellence* indicates the *extreme* of a particular class."⁴
 - Essentially, then, the tax collector, here is saying that he is the worst of all sinners.

Point: I think any Christian may feel like they are the worst of sinners. We know ourselves all too well sometimes. Paul himself considered himself the worst of sinners. **1 Timothy 1:15** says, "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost *of all*." I would suggest to you that there is nothing wrong with feeling this way.

IV. Two Men Walked Away (Luke 18:14a)

A. They both went home

1. Is this really noteworthy? Yes.

- This comment shows that they went about their daily lives. Life didn't stop for them.
- We have to live with ourselves. They both had to go home. The question is whether or not they went home in a good spiritual condition or a bad spiritual condition.

B. Only one was justified.

1. What does this mean? What is "justified"?

- The Greek word here [δικαιόω] means to be declared righteous.
- It is the same word used to describe being saved.
 - See Romans 3:19-28

2. What's the point of this?

- This means that the tax collector went home a changed man, having been forgiven and regenerated by the God of the Universe.
- This means the other man (the Pharisee) went home unchanged and, even though he had no idea, still very much in his sins.

V. Why is it this way? (Luke 14b)

A. The Principle: *Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled.*

1. What does this mean?

- This means that God does not accept rivals.

² Leon Morris, [Luke: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 3, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 282.

³ IBID, 282.

⁴ Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, page 222-223

- 1) There is only one being in the universe that is good. It's not you. It's the triune God of the Bible. See **Luke 18:19**
- ii. This means that God delights in bringing the prideful down.
 - 1) **Isaiah 2:11** The proud look of man will be abased And the loftiness of man will be humbled, And the LORD alone will be exalted in that day.

Quote: A broken and contrite spirit is pleasing to the Lord; he has promised to dwell with those who have it; and experience shows, that the exercise of all our graces is in proportion to the humbling sense we have of the depravity of our nature.—**John Newton**⁵

B. The Practice: *What makes the difference between the Pharisee and the Tax Collector?*

1. One understands his sinfulness, the other doesn't.
2. To what, then, does this call us?
 - a. Sinner, know yourself.
 - i. If you know yourself properly, you would never think too highly of yourself.
 - ii. If you know yourself properly, you would never despise anyone else.

"We seem to be as sure that we are weak, sinful, fallible creatures, as we are that we exist; and yet we are prone to act as if we were wise and good. In a word, we cannot deny that a great part of our knowledge is, as I have described it, like the light of the moon, destitute of heat and influence; and yet we can hardly help thinking of ourselves too highly upon the account of it."

John Newton⁶

⁵ Works, vol 1 pages 325-326

⁶ Works, vol 1 page 251