

# Humble Faith

Luke 18:9-14  
SS Lesson for 05/15/2016

**Devotional Scripture:** 1 Peter 5:1-6

## OUTLINE

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OVERVIEW AND KEY VERSE OF THE LESSON

*Key Verse: Luke 18:14*

*Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary*

*Commentary from The Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary*

LESSON INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

*From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary*

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HUMBLE FAITH TESTED BY TRUST (LUKE 18:9)

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Trust not in self by knowing that competence is only through God (2 Cor 3:4-6)

Trust not in self by knowing that in weakness God's strength makes us strong (2 Cor 12:9-10)

Trust not in self by knowing that God works in us according to His good purpose (Phil 2:13)

Trust not in self by knowing that all our strength comes from Jesus (Phil 4:13)

*Trust not in own righteousness (9)*

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Fearing God is one of man's duties to God (Eccl 12:13)

Fearing God and walking humbly with Him is one of God's requirements of man (Mic 6:8)

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## Introduction

### Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson teaches us that God blesses those who display **Humble Faith**. The study's aim is to recognize pride as a primary source of sinful problems in the world today. The study's application is to adopt a humble spirit in all areas of life.

*(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)*

### Key Verse: Luke 18:14

*And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'*

### Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

These verses include two of Jesus' parables about prayer. One was addressed to the disciples (vv. 1-8), and the other (vv. 9-14) to "some who were confident of their own righteousness."

**Jesus told the Parable of the Unjust Judge** to teach persistence in prayer: **that they, His disciples, should always pray and not give up.** Verses 2-5 contain the parable itself. **A widow** continued to go before an unjust **judge** to plead for **justice** in her case. **He** continually **refused** to "hear" her case, **but finally he** decided to give her **justice so that she** would not **wear him out with her** complaining. Jesus interpreted the parable (vv. 6-8), pointing out that if **the unjust judge** would give **justice**, then imagine how **God** (the just Judge) **will see that they get justice, and quickly.** Jesus' question, **When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?** was not spoken out of ignorance. Nor was He questioning whether all believers would be gone when He returns. Instead, He asked the question to spur the disciples on to faithfulness in prayer, to encourage them to keep on in their praying. This is another good lesson from a bad example (cf. 16:1-13). The purposes of the **Parable of the Prayers of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector** were to show that one cannot trust in himself for **righteousness** and should not view others with contempt (v. 9). The Pharisee's prayer was concerned with telling **God** what a good man he was, for not only did he keep the Law by fasting and tithing (v. 12), but also he considered himself better than other people (v. 11). He was using other people as his standard for measuring righteousness. On the other hand **the tax collector** used **God** as his standard for measuring righteousness. He realized that he had to throw himself on the **mercy of God** for forgiveness. Jesus' application of the parable echoed His teaching in 13:30. It is necessary for people to humble themselves before God to gain forgiveness, and those who are proud (**everyone who exalts himself**) will be brought low (**humbled**) by God.

### Commentary from The Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

I was a good child. I went to church every week, was a good student, participated in many activities, and even volunteered on the side. I was also a braggart. I took pride in my accomplishments, too much so, at times. I tended to parade my deeds like some sort of pedigree. Boasting was common for me. But one day my grandfather silenced my self-aggrandizement. I was in mid-boast when he interrupted me with a single sentence. He looked up and said, "The preacher who preaches of himself has a congregation of one." At first, I did not catch the meaning of this. When he explained it, I was outraged that he would apply the saying to me. However, after considering my actions, I realized that he was right. Since then, that old proverb has stayed in my mind. My problem was that, like the Pharisee in the lesson, I was exalting myself. This Pharisee had "the pedigree." He was someone with the highest standing in the temple. He fasted more than required, tithed every source of income, and was well respected in his community. In contrast, the publican came from the lowest stratum of society. His occupation made him an outcast. Publicans were known for being liars, so he was shunned by respected members of the community. Since he collected taxes

for the government, he was hated by almost everyone. We find these two at the temple, praying. However, there is a noticeable difference in their prayers. The Pharisee's prayer was an elaborate laundry list of his accomplishments. His prayer was the equivalent of "Thank God I am not as bad as that person over there!" He showed no awareness of sin in his life, let alone remorse or repentance. He did not see his need for God's mercy. His prayer was all for show. The publican's prayer was sincere and honest. His plea was that God would remember him, despite his sinfulness. He did not highlight any good deeds. He did not look for someone with greater sin and try to pass himself off as better than that person. He merely asked that God show him mercy. We know whose prayer God honored. Scripture tells us that it was the publican who went away forgiven that day. Why? The Pharisee's prayer was prideful and self-righteous. The publican's prayer was humble. Humility is one of the great earmarks of a deep faith. We are told that God bestows grace upon the humble (Prov. 3:34) and that He crowns them with salvation (Ps. 149:4). We are also told that humility brings honor to His followers (Prov. 18:12). Proverbs 18:12 also mentions that pride can bring about a person's downfall. We are also told that God resists the proud (Jas. 4:6). Paul goes on to tell us that we should esteem others as better than ourselves (Phil. 2:3). Believers should lift others higher, not take a sanctimonious attitude and bring them down. As the old adage states, "There but for the grace of God go I." We should be so occupied with our own sinfulness that we cannot judge the sins of those around us. Which person are you—self-righteous Pharisee or humble publican? Let us make practicing humility evidence of an authentic faith.

## ***Lesson Introduction and Background***

### **From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary**

I was recently visiting a church in a medium-sized city and chatting with a friend before the worship service began. A man and his wife walked by; I was introduced, and we shook hands. As the couple went to their seats, my friend whispered, "That's our chief of police." My immediate reaction was likely what yours might have been: impressed. I did not know him, but assumed the chief was a person deserving respect. Contrast this with another encounter I had in a coffee shop in Los Angeles a few years ago. As I sat working on my computer, a 30-something man came in with two young women who were dressed in a suggestive, immodest fashion. His hands were all over those women. I don't know what their business was, but my mind assumed the worst. My opinion of this stranger was one of disgust and contempt. I figured that he was using or abusing those young women in ways that I would disapprove of strongly. One-time encounters. Two people I didn't know. Why the difference in my reactions? Why did I consider one a respectable citizen and the other a contemptible lowlife? We sometimes form opinions of people based on scant information, strong opinions that may be resistant to change. Should we trust the neat and clean man who is dressed in a smart business suit or the young man wearing baggy gang-style apparel and sporting many tattoos? We form quick opinions, but the reality might be that the businessman is a crook while the other man is a youth minister. Today's lesson is the story of two men from Jesus' world who were on opposite ends of society's respect gauge. The lesson that Jesus gives shows us that God judges us by what is in our hearts, not by our perceived reputation or social status.

The Pharisees were an elite group of Jewish men in the first century AD. They played a prominent role as frequent opponents of Jesus in the four Gospels. We wish we knew more about this group, because some information about the Pharisees from sources outside the New Testament is inconsistent and even conflicting. Although the majority of Pharisees lived in the cities and villages of Israel (see Luke 5:17), they were also located in the Jewish quarters of the cities of the Roman Empire. For example, Paul was a Pharisee (as was his father, per Acts 23:6), although he grew up in Tarsus, a city in the Roman province of Cilicia, about 355 miles north of Jerusalem. The Pharisees were zealous for keeping the Law of Moses with exacting detail. In addition, Pharisees were concerned with a body of unwritten regulations, sometimes called "the tradition of the elders" (Mark 7:5). This was understood as oral tradition that was delivered to Israel by Moses at the time the written law was received, and the Pharisees believed it was equally authoritative. A great concern of the Pharisees was to be "faultless" when it came to the law (Philippians 3:6). Even so, the Pharisees of Jesus' day were targets of his teaching regarding hypocrisy (Luke 12:1). Jesus knew that while the Pharisees went to great pains to appear to be righteous keepers of the law, the hearts of some were far from righteous (Matthew 23:27). Luke portrays them as covetous (Luke 16:14).

Compared with Pharisees, tax collectors were at the opposite end of the approval spectrum. They had entered into the employment of the hated Roman overlords to collect various taxes and tolls from fellow Jews. While the Pharisees were held in high esteem by the common people, tax collectors were universally reviled and hated. They were not seen as civil servants but as collaborators with the enemy—traitors. Their reputation was further sullied by the way they went about their task, for they were known to use their positions of authority to extort, keeping the extra for themselves (compare Luke 19:1-8, lesson 13). The Romans overlooked this corruption as long as sufficient tax money flowed into their coffers. As a result, tax collectors operated without fear of prosecution or punishment. Like some of the Pharisees, tax collectors tended to be wealthy (example: Luke 19:2). But unlike Pharisees, tax collectors had no incentive to give even the appearance of righteousness. Some lived a riotous lifestyle of heavy drinking and keeping company with prostitutes, for tax collectors had little to lose in the court of public opinion. Jesus received condemnation from Pharisees for consorting with tax collectors (Luke 5:30; 15:1, 2). Jesus even chose a tax collector to be an apostle (Matthew 9:9; 10:3; Luke 5:27, 28).

## Major Theme Analysis

*(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)*

### **Humble Faith Tested By Trust (Luke 18:9)**

9 Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

#### **Trust not in self (9)**

*Trust not in self by knowing that God knows the heart and justifies (Luke 16:15)*

He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.

*Trust not in self by knowing that competence is only through God (2 Cor 3:4-6)*

4 Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. 5 Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. 6 He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

*Trust not in self by knowing that in weakness God's strength makes us strong (2 Cor 12:9-10)*

9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

*Trust not in self by knowing that God works in us according to His good purpose (Phil 2:13)*

for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

*Trust not in self by knowing that all our strength comes from Jesus (Phil 4:13)*

I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

#### **Trust not in own righteousness (9)**

*Trust not in own righteousness because righteousness is only through Jesus (Rom 10:3-4)*

3 Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. 4 Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

*Trust not in own righteousness because we shouldn't boast of anything of ourself (1 Cor 1:26-31)*

26 Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things-and the things that are not-to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him. 30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God-that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. 31 Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

*Trust not in own righteousness because righteousness comes from faith in Jesus (Phil 3:8-9)*

8 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

### ***Humble Faith Versus Worthiness (Luke 18:10-12)***

10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.  
11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men--extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.  
12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.'

### **Worthiness comes from God (10-11)**

*Worthiness comes from God's calling (Eph 4:1-2)*

4:1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love

*Worthiness comes from a renewed attitude of the mind by God (Eph 4:22-24)*

22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

*Worthiness comes from being transformed by God into being a citizens of Heaven (Phil 3:20-21)*

20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

### **Worthiness is a result of faith (12)**

*Faith to live a life pleasing to God (Col 1:10)*

And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,

*Faith that clothes us with godly attitudes (Col 3:12)*

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

*Faith that comes from humbly accepting the word of God (James 1:21)*

Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

*Faith that comes from having the wisdom of God (James 3:14-17)*

14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. 15 Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. 16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. 17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

### ***Humble Faith Through Examining Self (Luke 18:13-14)***

13 And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat 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 everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

### **Examining self to ensure we fear God (13)**

*The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom (Ps 111:10)*

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise.

*Humbly fearing God helps purify from things that contaminates (2 Cor 7:1)*

Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

*Humbleness comes from a reverence for God (Eph 5:21)*

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

*Fearing God is one of man's duties to God (Eccl 12:13)*

Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole [duty] of man.

*Fearing God and walking humbly with Him is one of God's requirements of man (Mic 6:8)*

He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

*Fearing God brings about His favor (2 Chron 33:11-13)*

So the LORD brought against them the army commanders of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh prisoner, put a hook in his nose, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon. 12 In his distress he sought the favor of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. 13 And when he prayed to him, the LORD was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea; so he brought him back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD is God.

### **Examining self to realize that without God, we are sinners (13)**

*Realize that all have sinned and fallen short of God's requirements (Rom 3:23)*

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

*Realize that the whole purpose of Jesus coming was for sinners (Matt 9:12-13)*

12 On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 13 But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

*Realize that sin makes us unworthy of being God's child (Luke 15:20-22)*

20 And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet.'

*Realize that we deserve punishment as a sinner (Luke 23:39-41)*

39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" 40 But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? 41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."

*Realize that if we cannot claim to be without sin (1 John 1:8-10)*

8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

### **Examining self to ensure we are depending on the justification of God (14)**

*Justification through trusting God (Rom 4:5)*

However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.

*Justification because God is the only answer for justification (Job 25:4)*

How then can a man be righteous before God? How can one born of woman be pure?

*Justification through faith to have peace with God (Rom 5:1)*

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

*Justification through God's sanctification (1 Cor 6:9-11)*

9 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders 10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

*Justification through submission to God (James 4:7-10)*

7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

## Conclusion and Other Thoughts

### *Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh*

There are a number of critical differences in this second paragraph when compared with the first. Both paragraphs share the common theme of prayer, but the differences are great. In the first paragraph, the disciples are addressed; in the second, it is the self-righteous. These are those “who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else” (v. 9). While this category includes more than Pharisees, it certainly does include the Pharisees. In the first paragraph, it is the character of the One Who is petitioned that is in focus; here, it is the character of the one praying who is highlighted. In the first paragraph, it is justice that is sought; in the second, it is mercy and forgiveness.

There are three characteristics of this group Jesus is addressing:

- (1) They were trusting in themselves and not in God.
- (2) They were trusting in their own righteousness, not in God’s mercy and grace.
- (3) They were looking down on others.

Jesus painted a verbal picture of two men, teaching a lesson by way of contrast. Both men came to the temple to pray. The first man was a Pharisee. He was clearly the one who displayed all three of the characteristics described by our Lord as outlined above. The other man was a tax-collector. By all outward appearances and in accordance with the value system of the Pharisees, there was no question as to who was the righteous man and who was the sinner, no doubt as to who would enter the kingdom and who would be excluded.

Jesus had a surprise in store for His audience, as usual. He went on with the story, beginning with a description of the prayer of the Pharisee. This Pharisee came to the temple and stood in prayer, as was the custom, and as the publican did also (v. 13). The Pharisee stood some distance from the publican (v. 13) and from all that we know from other contexts (e.g. Luke 14:7), I would suspect that this Pharisee found a very prominent place, while the publican found a place out of the public eye. The Pharisee wanted to be seen and approved by men (16:15); the publican did not, not even daring to look upward towards heaven (18:13).

The words attributed to this Pharisee are not, as I understand our text, the words which he spoke but rather those which he thought to himself. Jesus knew the thoughts of men (5:22; 6:8; 12:16-19) and could thus reveal them. The Pharisee was too shrewd to say what he was thinking. His words were not pious-sounding enough. He wished, hypocrite that he was, to appear to be very pious and godly to those who could only view the outward appearance of things. Thus, in Matthew’s account we read this accusation from our Lord:

“Woe to you; scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widow’s houses, even while for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you shall receive greater condemnation” (Matthew 23:14).

Jesus stripped all this away by revealing what the Pharisee was really thinking as he appeared to be praying. Luke therefore tells us that this Pharisee was “praying thus to himself” (v. 11). From all outward appearances, the Pharisee could have appeared to be repentant. From the length of his prayer, one might have thought he was confessing many sins or at least praying for the “many sins” of others. It was not at all as it appeared.

Consider with me several characteristics of the “prayer” of the Pharisee:

- (1) **The attitude of the Pharisee was one of self-trust, self-righteousness, and contempt for others.** These are the very attitudes which Jesus underscored at the beginning of the parable. These were the attitudes which characterized Jesus’ audience and the Pharisee.
- (2) **The standard by which the Pharisee judged righteousness and unrighteousness was external, focusing only on outward deeds rather than on the heart.** It was a very selective list of sins which the Pharisee listed, just as the “righteous deeds” were selective. It is no surprise that this man chose to major on **what he thought to be his strengths and to minimize or ignore his sins.**
- (3) **The Pharisee judged himself in terms of those sins which society found unacceptable, rather than in terms of what offends God.** Put differently, the Pharisee thought in terms of “crimes” more than in terms of “sins.” Swindlers, unjust, adulterers, and tax-collectors were all looked upon as “crooks.” Once again, human standards are in view. The things which the Pharisee looks down upon as sin are those things which society shuns as unacceptable (cf. Luke 16:14-18).
- (4) **The standard which the Pharisee used was comparative, not absolute.** The Pharisee did not use the Law as his standard of measuring righteousness; rather, he compared himself with the publican. He saw himself as righteous simply because he was, in his opinion, better than the publican.

**(5) The Pharisee boldly approached God, seemingly without regard for His holiness or with a sense of his own unholiness.** He almost seems to expect God to be grateful for his presence and prayers.

**(6) The Pharisee thanked God for nothing other than what he was, in and of himself.** There was no mention of God's graciousness, no realization of having been blessed by God. All this Pharisee thanked God for was that which he had achieved for himself.

**(7) The Pharisee did not ask God for anything, because he did not believe that he lacked anything.** The Pharisee was self-sufficient. He trusted only in himself, and he found himself sufficient; thus he asked nothing of God. While some of us may ask for too much or too often, this man didn't ask at all.

**(8) This Pharisee not only saw himself as fully complying with the law, but he actually thought he had gone beyond it.** The law did not require all that this Pharisee claims to have done for God in the keeping of the law, with respect to his outward acts of religious worship and service. Here is the epitome of arrogance. The law was given as a standard of righteousness, to show all men they are sinners. The law presents men with an impossible standard, which shows that works cannot save and that men must cast themselves upon the mercy and grace of God. But this Pharisee not only gets an "A" in obedience to the law, he thinks he has an "A+."

**(9) This Pharisee is overflowing with self-love but is desperately lacking in love for God and love toward man.** In our day we are being taught and told that man's problem is that he thinks too little of himself. Low self-esteem has been identified by some as the cause of virtually every human malady. This Pharisee has more than his fair share of self-love, but he has all too little love for either God or man. Those who tell us that we must first love ourselves, before we can love God or our fellow-man, may need to look again at their creed.

The tax-collector is just the opposite. He seems to have avoided public notice, and his only audience so far as he is concerned is God. He dares not look up to heaven. He knows he is a sinner, and he is genuinely repentant. He is one of the blessed who presently "mourns," as our Lord has said in the Sermon on the Mount (Luke 6:21). He looks not at any righteousness which he has earned, but only for that which God may grant out of grace and mercy. He offers nothing to God, except his penitence. He asks God for mercy and forgiveness of his sins. He is neither conscious of the Pharisee who is present afar off, nor of any other. He has no comparisons to make between himself and others. He only sees himself against the standard of the Law and of the holiness of the God in whose presence he stands. Indeed, he sees his sin as so great that he refers to himself as "the sinner." In his mind, there is none who compares with him in his fallenness, while in the mind of the Pharisee, there is none to compare in his righteousness. The publican does not even dare to make any promise as to what he will do in the future. Here indeed is humility, honesty, and genuine repentance.

Just as Jesus could speak, revealing the thoughts of man, so He now will speak for God. The Pharisee will go home just as he came, proud, self-righteous, and condemned. The penitent tax-collector will go home justified, because he has come to God as a sinner on the basis of His character—His grace, His mercy—and His provision (of salvation through atonement).

According to Jesus, no man is too sinful to be saved, only too righteous. The Pharisee not only does not want God's grace, He disdains it. The reason, in his mind, is that he does not need it, for his righteousness (in law-keeping as he defines it) is sufficient, indeed, more than enough. The penitent sinner goes away justified, by grace, while the Pharisee goes away condemned, by his own works and words.

*(Adapted from URL: <https://bible.org/seriespage/piety-persistence-penitence-and-prayer-luke-181-14>)*

### **Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentator**

While Jesus used polar-opposite characters in the parable to make his point, there is nothing that precludes a person who lives in a righteous manner from being humble. Likewise, there is nothing about a grossly sinful lifestyle that automatically engenders humility. Humility is a matter of the heart and of understanding our relationship with the Lord. We should never presume his mercy, just as we must realize we can never earn it. Any attempt to justify ourselves by pointing out our many good deeds will fall short. Paul reminds us that no one is righteous through personal effort (Romans 3:11, 12). What should we do then? What hope do we have? Our only hope is found in humbly trusting God and his mercy. This is the essence of Christian faith: the recognition that we cannot save ourselves. The best efforts of dedicated people like the Pharisees, people obsessed with keeping the law, fall short. May God be merciful to us, for we too are sinners.

***Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator***

1. All self-righteousness is a matter of vastly misplaced trust (Luke 18:9)
2. If we look down on others with contempt, we can be sure our righteousness is not from God
3. Praying to ourselves could be an apt description of what we do if we are not careful (vss. 10-11)
4. Too many public prayers are little more than thinly veiled bragging sessions (vs. 12)
5. We cannot approach a holy God without recognizing our need for mercy (vs. 13)
6. Humility is needed to avoid humiliation (vs. 14)