

International Bible Lessons Commentary

Luke 18:9-14

New International Version

International Bible Lessons

Sunday, May 15, 2016

L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

The [International Bible Lesson](#) (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, May 15, 2016**, is from **Luke 18:9-14**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** discusses *Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further* to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. If you are a Bible student or teacher, you can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

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Luke 18:9-14

(Luke 18:9) To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable:

Because they consider their behavior better than others, some think they have earned and deserve acceptance by God. To emphasize their supposed superiority, they look down upon and even put down those who act differently. In Jesus' day, many religious leaders thought they were especially chosen by God and therefore better than others. They added to God's law or emphasized different parts of God's law and ignored other parts according to their self-focused standards. They emphasized who they were as religious leaders and the behavior they approved; instead of pointing people to God and serving as good examples by practicing the behavior God commanded and expected from true believers. Jesus' parable applies to those who trust in themselves and their behavior instead of in God, and who make their sin worse by thinking they are better than others based on their behavior. They are so confident of their own righteous deeds that they do not think they need God's forgiveness, grace, or mercy. Their prayers of thanks to God quickly turn into words of self-praise and thankfulness that they do not behave as badly as others.

(Luke 18:10) “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

The Pharisees knew and interpreted the law of God, usually to benefit themselves. They taught the law of God and expected others to conform to their interpretations. Along with their interpretations, they added restrictions and permissions unintended by God. They were well educated and looked down on others as they obeyed God’s law according to their self-centered interpretations. Few people liked tax collectors and most considered them traitors because they collected taxes for their Roman oppressors and were often accused of cheating. Matthew and Zacchaeus were tax collectors who became followers of Jesus after Jesus called them. Matthew became a disciples of Jesus, and Zacchaeus may have continued as an honest tax collector (the Bible does not say).

(Luke 18:11) The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned: “Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. ... And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full” (Matthew 6:1, 5). The Pharisee in Jesus’ story thanked God that he did not do some of the sins clearly forbidden by God’s law, and he gave himself the credit for his right behavior instead of the grace and power of God that restrained him from doing these bad things. He prayed aloud to be heard by others, and looked down on and condemned the tax collector. He received no reward (no justification) from God. He received what he really wanted; he was “seen by others” and there was no further reward for him to receive. He may have been seen by others, but it is unlikely that he received anyone’s love and respect.

(Luke 18:12) I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

The Pharisee did not look into the condition of his heart or did not reveal the intention of his heart when he prayed aloud. Jesus warned the Pharisees about the consequences of their hypocrisy: “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. ... Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean” (Matthew 23:23, 27). It seems this Pharisee did not love his neighbor or felt he was too

good to love “sinners”; such as the tax collector. He compared himself to the tax collector instead of what God’s law commanded. If he thought the tax collector was bad, he did not pray for the tax collector to repent and turn to faith in God to be saved.

(Luke 18:13) “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

By the grace of God, the tax collector saw his true condition before God: he was a man in need of God and God’s forgiveness. Both the Pharisee and the tax collector were sinners, but the Pharisee trusted in his good works and thought he was right (justified) with God; while the tax collector knew that he had not done everything right and could not do anything good to be right (justified) with God. Therefore, unlike the Pharisee, the tax collector called out to God for all to hear that he needed God’s mercy and forgiveness because he was a sinner. He anxiously desired that God would graciously cleanse him on the inside and free him from his slavery to sin (though he may not have known all that he truly needed God to do for him and Jesus did not elaborate about the man’s hopes). The tax collector in Jesus’ parable was in a perfect condition to hear the good news of Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord, and Jesus could cleanse him and free him from sin.

(Luke 18:14) “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Because the tax collector called out to God in desperate need of mercy, he showed that he hated the sins he knew he had committed and he did not want to sin any longer. He wanted God’s mercy to make him right with God and cleanse his conscience; therefore, he went home right (justified) with God. He did exactly what he should have done in the sight of God; he felt exceedingly sorrowful for his sins and too unworthy to even look up to heaven. God extended His forgiving mercy and lovingkindness to the tax collector, and Jesus’ parable declared what those who prayed as the tax collector would receive from God in answer to their prayers. The Pharisee asked for nothing from God because he trusted in the few things he had done right; therefore, he could not go home right (justified) with God. Jesus foretold that a time would come when people similar to the Pharisee would be humbled: people would see the kind of person they truly were and they would see themselves as God saw them. Also, those who feel sorrow for their sins so that they beat their breasts and seek the mercy of God will be seen as right (justified) with God by the grace of God, as blessed children in the family of God.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Describe some of the differences between being confident in your own righteousness and being confident in the righteousness of Jesus Christ.
2. What are some of the ways some people today are similar to the Pharisee in Jesus' parable?
3. What are some of the ways Christians can avoid the sins of the Pharisees?
4. What are some of the dangers involved when people measure themselves by the actions of others instead of living according to what the Bible teaches?
5. How can it benefit those who pray in ways similar to the tax collector?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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