

God Gives Mercy to the Contrite in Spirit

International Bible Lesson

Luke 18:9-14

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“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’” (Luke 18:13).

As King David confessed his sins, the Holy Spirit moved him to pray and record these words: “My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise” (Psalms 51:17). Through the prophet Isaiah, God declared that He accepted the prayers of the broken and contrite: “I live in a high and holy place, but also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite” (Isaiah 57:15). In Jesus’ parable, the tax collector prayed in ways similar to King David. He expressed grief and shame because of his sins. He would not even look up to heaven as he confessed he was a sinner and prayed to God for mercy. Jesus declared that this tax collector went home from the temple right with God. If this were more than a parable, we also have the assurance that God would have gone home with him to revive his spirit and heart as He promised through Isaiah. When Jesus came preaching good news, He assured people that God meant what He had promised through the prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures. If sinners would humble themselves, repent of their sins and place their faith in Him as their Savior, then God would be with them. Furthermore, after His death and resurrection Jesus would fill them with the Holy Spirit so they would be empowered and guided from that day forth to live supremely for God and free from slavery to sin.

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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?