

**The Wisdom of Christ**  
**Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector**  
**Bible Study 9 - Luke 18:9-14**

**Goals:**

- 1) To be able to describe the core truth of each parable in a sentence.
- 2) To be able to explain crucial cultural and literary facets of each parable.
- 3) To be able to describe how each truth challenges the way you live your life day to day.

**Expectations:**

1-2 hours of prep work (reading the parable, answering the questions and preparing to discuss your findings and create a plan for real life application)

**Note:**

Much of the information in this study, especially the cultural observations, was taken from Kenneth Bailey in his books *Poet & Peasant* and *Through Peasant Eyes*. Both would be wonderful for additional reading.

**Suggested Homework:**

- 1) Print out these studies or have a way of filling them out and accessing them on your phone.
- 2) Read Luke 18:9-14 before completing this study. When you finish the study, reread the passage again.
- 3) Complete the following questions after the introduction.
- 4) Come to the group with 2-3 observations from the text/study and 2-3 ways you need to apply the lesson.
- 5) Read the parable three times this week. As you read through it, connect it to your experience of God's grace and seek to focus on that this week.
- 6) Meet with another member of the group to discuss issues of accountability and growth this semester.

**Introduction:**

**DISCUSS:** What was a point of victory this week in your life?

**DISCUSS:** How has God shown Himself strong through your circumstances this week?

**DISCUSS:** What do you think humility looks like? Why would you describe it that way?

**Review:**

Background for Luke: The original reader- Written to Theophilus, a patron who wanted to know more of Jesus Christ. Luke compiled Luke and Acts as the answer to how the Church got started and who Jesus was.

Purpose: **Luke's purpose is to show that Jesus is the Son of Man, who came to save the world through his death.** The parables we will study this semester will articulate different parts of that main thrust- the Son of Man's sacrificial death for all as Savior. The Son of Man is a distinctive title of note as well. It comes from Daniel, Son of *Man* focuses on the unique ONE of mankind who ultimately fulfills God's purpose of being the visible representative of the invisible God and in the process redeems the rest of humanity. There is only one OF US who has fulfilled God's plan. There is only one OF US who redeems us. And those who by faith express their solidarity with the SON OF MAN will also be redeemed to fulfill God's purpose for humanity. Luke contains a distinctive approach to humanity in the book (as noted below), and consequently an emphasis on Christ's humanity as the human Messiah.

Audience: Luke is writing specifically to Theophilus, and more broadly to Gentiles, especially those who are disenfranchised or ostracized by society. **Luke wants those people to know that the Son of Man cares for and died for them.**

Luke shows particular attention on the oppressed, unfavored and gentile recipients of Jesus' ministry, such as Samaritans, women, Romans, gentiles, children, tax collectors and other non-religious elites. Luke wanted to show that Jesus is the Son of Man, come to save all.

Luke 9-19 has been recognized as a great chiasmic artistic/poetic masterpiece. Known by many names, this account of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem is laden with brilliant poetry and magnificent composition of the parables and anecdotes within. Parables from this passage will be the central focus of this study.

**Review Questions:**

- 1) Summarize the main point of Luke's gospel in your own words.
- 2) Describe the person Luke is trying to teach.
- 3) What was one truth from last week's parable that you had the opportunity to apply this week? Did you take advantage of that opportunity?

**Text: Luke 18:9-14 ESV**

9 He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt:

10 “Two men went up into the temple to pray,  
one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus:  
‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men,

Extortioners, unjust, adulterers,  
or even like this tax collector.

12 ‘I fast twice a week;  
I give tithes of all that I get.’

13 “But the tax collector, standing far off,  
Would not even lift up 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,  
but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

**Summary Form:**

(Introduction)

Two go up, a Pharisee and a Tax Collector

His Manner and Prayer

The Tax Collector (Pharisee’s perception)

Self-Righteousness

The Tax Collector (True reality)

His Manner and Prayer

Two go away, a Pharisee and a Tax Collector

(Conclusion)

**Literary Background**

In this parable, our interpretation is directed by both the inverted parallelism which accentuates the main feature and the introductory and concluding statements (one by Luke, the other by Jesus). In this parable, both the literary features and expressed purpose of the author give clear direction for the audience to follow. In understanding the literary facets, our understanding is prepared for the truth the parable teaches and its application for each of us.

### Inverted Parallelism

In the inverted parallelism, the **middle term or section is accentuated**. The reason why an author includes an inverted parallelism is to draw our attention to the middle feature. This is used commonly in Luke and helps us to understand the meaning of the overall discourse. This is seen below in the whole of the Jerusalem travel document, but it is easier seen at first in small examples. Look for common words (I will italicize this when I give you these). Once again, the goal is that you know what an inverted parallelism means, that the **middle term or section is accentuated**, not necessarily that you can now find them on your own.

My silly example of an inverted parallelism

- A I love eating Chocolate chip *cookies*  
B Their *chocolate chips* are delicious  
C My tummy is filled with *warmth* when  
D I think of my mom and the times she made them for me  
C' I am *warmed* by the memories as  
B' The *chocolate chips* melt in my mouth  
A' and the *cookies* are eaten.

In this case, the point is not the cookies, but the fact that mom made them. Each of the supporting phrases should be understood in regard to how they relate to the central item (D). Remember, the inverted parallelism focuses our attention and the **middle term or section is accentuated**.

**QUESTION:** Where do you see this literary device in the parable (draw arrows/add notes to the text)?  
What is significant about the usage of this device?

**QUESTION:** How do the introductory and concluding statements highlight the main point, to which the chiasm is also directing our attention?

### **Cultural background:**

--Please highlight two sentences in this section you found particularly interesting or that helped your understanding of the parable.

**Prayer:** In order to delve into the parable and see clearly the story as it was told, it is important for us to understand and envision clearly what has happened. We are told in the verse 10 that both men go up to the temple to pray. Unlike the English way of usually expressing private devotions with the

word pray or prayer, the traditional Mid-Eastern framework saw prayer as a description of both private and public worship. If a Middle Eastern Muslim said even today, “I am going to the mosque to pray,” it would naturally be understood that he is intending to join public worship, not just to do his private devotions.

The temple was also seen by the people as a place of public worship, and the two men both come and go to their homes at the same time, all clues that point to the occasion of our story taking place in a public worship context, not merely within their own private devotions. The phrase “standing some distance away” in verse 13 also takes on a specific sense. This could easily refer to his position in regard to the Pharisee only, but more likely refers to the other worshippers. This man has removed himself from the rest of the assembly during the time of prayer in a public worship setting.

### **The Pharisee’s “Righteousness:”**

The phrase “by himself” is a difficult one in this passage. In Greek, prepositions are rather fluid and the one used here can mean either “to himself” or “by himself” and can refer to either his praying or his standing. Based on its placement within the phrase, it is more likely that this Pharisee isn’t praying to himself, but standing by himself. This further would develop a comparison/contrast to the tax collector. The Pharisee has separated himself from others who are unworthy in his estimation, yet the tax collector removes himself from the assembly because he believes himself unworthy. The Pharisee by way of his posture and position in relation to the other worshippers makes clear statements about how he sees himself. His words follow the example of his posture and attitude, as we will see below.

The Pharisee has already shown through his actions that he is self-righteous and believes himself acceptable to God, clearly in contrast to the company he finds himself surrounded by. He begins his prayer, not with petitions or thanksgiving at the character of God, but a statement of his own righteousness. In verse 12, the Pharisee details the reasons he believes this righteousness is credited to his name. He says “I fast twice a week and I give tithes of all I have.” In fasting twice a week, he is truly going beyond most devoted Jews. Few could truthfully make this claim.

In this declaration, the center of the chiasm, is Jesus’ portrayal of the self-righteous religious person. He trusts in his religion to save him. Both the religious leader and the tax collector do something, one of whom is justified for his action. We see played out quite vividly that religion will not help this leader. For only the one humbly coming to the Lord asking for atonement to be made for him or her, the sinner, sees justification.

### **The Tax Collector’s Righteousness:**

Once again, our character is set apart from the rest of the assembly; however, the reason for his separation is completely different from the Pharisee. He separates himself, likely because he believes himself unworthy, or at the least, because he is only concerned with his position with God. We are also told that this man beats his breast, which is an odd expression to the American observer. Understanding the significance of this action heightens the contrast in his posture and highlights the message of his prayer.

In the Ancient Middle East, one would beat their breast as a display of extreme sorrow. However, the most common users of this action were women. If a Middle Eastern man beat his breast it was a sign of the utmost anguish and sorrow. In the New Testament, we only have two occurrences of a man beating his breast. At the crucifixion of Jesus, we are told that many went home beating their breasts. This “many” would have included men and women. The only other occurrence of a man beating his breast is in this passage. This man is so moved by his sinful state and his need for God’s working that his posture even is controlled by his sorrow over his sin.

His words follow the pattern of his great sorrow over sin and petition for God to make for him atonement. It is also notable that Jesus draws a contrast between the two prayers in terms of their



**ANSWERS: (spoiler alert)**

- 1) Those who humble themselves and trust God will be exalted and justified. Jesus came as Son of Man to save mankind because we needed him to save us. We could not please God or attain to the standard he had set. We needed Christ, the only savior of any person justified by God.
- 2) Answers will vary
- 3) Answers will vary
- 4) Answers will vary