

Luke
See Jesus
“How to Be Right with God”
Luke 18:9-14

Grace Fellowship Church / Pastor Brad Bigney / April 16, 2023

I. Jesus Puts His Finger Right on Something that Every Human Being is Trying to Achieve

The drive and hunger for approval on a horizontal level from other people is really a symptom of a much deeper longing and unsettledness that we all have for approval or validation from our Creator God.

Romans 2:15 “They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.”

Jesus tells a parable that explains there are only two ways to go after trying to satisfy this hunger for approval from God.

II. You Can Knock Yourself Out Trying to Work on Your Own Righteousness

This approach could be summarized by the word “achieve.” You try to achieve righteousness by your own effort, thinking that as long as you’re good enough and get ahead of others, you’ll stand out to God and get His approval.

This approach leaves you with a nagging, uneasy sense of “But how good is ‘good enough?’ How much do I need to do? And how will I know when I’m done?”

A. You’ll Be Focused on Outward Behavior Far More than Internal Character and Heart

Luke 18:11 “God, I thank You that I’m not like other men – extortioners, unjust, adulterers...”

Notice how he stacks the deck with some of the most outward and obvious sins, where it’s easy to say, “Oh, I’m so glad I’ve never done any of that.”

He’s externally focused because his concept of sin is all about not breaking obvious or outward rules.

B. You Basically End Up Trusting in Yourself

Luke 18:9 “He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous...”

Romans 3:10-12 “...None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹²All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”

With the “achieve God’s approval” approach, you’re at the center of this whole spiritual endeavor.

When you’re busy trying to prove how good you are, you’ll be very touchy about any flaws or sins that anyone points out about you. You’ll be crushed and devastated, so that you either attack or react in tears, manipulation, or anger.

C. You'll Be Inclined to Pull Away from Other People You Think Aren't Doing as Well as You Are

Luke 18:11 "The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed..."

He stood away from everyone else—and so will you, if your approach to getting God's righteousness consists of you trying to achieve His approval.

D. Your Strongest Emotion Towards Other People Will Most Often Be Contempt Rather than Compassion

Luke 18:9 "...and treated others with contempt"

NIV – "looked down on everybody else"

Trusting in yourself that you're righteous automatically leads to despising others.

This approach of trying to achieve your own righteousness doesn't just screw up your relationship with God; it wreaks havoc on your relationship with other people around you. Since it's all about your own effort, you get no grace from God, and have no grace to extend to anyone around you.

III. You Can Humble Yourself and Receive God's Free Gift of Perfect Righteousness

This approach could be summarized as "Believe and Receive."

A. You'll Stop Comparing Yourself to Anyone Else and Be Gripped by Your Own Sin

Luke 18:13 "...God, be merciful to me, *the* sinner"

He uses a definite article in the Greek that indicates "*the* sinner." That's how he saw himself; he's not thinking about anyone else or making other comparisons.

B. You'll Beg God to Take Care of Your Sin Problem in a Way You Could Never Do on Your Own

In verse 13 when he says, "God, be merciful to me..." he doesn't use the Greek word "eleos" here that's most often used for "mercy," but instead uses the word "hilasterion" which means "atone for my sin."

Hebrews 2:17 "Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful (eleos) and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation (hilasterion) for the sins of the people."

When someone asks you if you think you're going to heaven, what comes out of your mouth? Does your answer have Jesus anywhere in it? What comes out of your mouth first and most is probably what you're really trusting in.

IV. Don't Miss the Stomach Punch of This Whole Parable!

Luke 18:14 "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other..."

That glorious word "justified" is followed by four of the most shocking words: "rather than the other."

That "other" approach of trying to achieve your own righteousness is an utter failure. Abandon it altogether and look to Christ!