

A Declaration of Those Things Which Are Most Surely Believed Among Us

An Expositional Study of **The Gospel According to Luke**
Chapter 18- Luke 18:9-14

289- What Jesus Taught about Justification- Part 3

September 13, 2015

Luke 18:9-14

9 And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed 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 stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

12 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'

13 "But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'

14 "I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

To the Glory of God

So the *real* problem with Humanity is *not* a lack of effort to obey, it is *not* a failure to exercise more will power to submit to God's Perfect Standard, and it *isn't* that we fall short on decision making. None of those things is what causes us to be sinners. No, the *real* problem with Mankind is that- because of the Fall of Adam in the Garden- we do not love. We do not love God and we do not love other people either. We love ourselves and we love sin. Jesus said that this is what was wrong with people:

John 3:19-21

19 "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.

20 "For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

21 "But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."

And so the fallen emotion that we call "love" and that we talk about all the time and sing about all the time is- most of the time- very self-centered and very sinful, and is actually the exact opposite of true love. True love – loves and values and seeks to glorify God. And true love seeks to selflessly reach out to our neighbor with the same degree of care and concern and urgency that we tend to ourselves.

And so that emotion that *caters* to self, that *enjoys* sinning against God, that *delights* in excluding God, and that does *not* value God- *that* emotion isn't really love at all. In reality- *that* emotion that we *call* "love" is actually *self-centered, sin-loving hate*.

And so Jesus came and lived a sinless life here on the earth- fulfilling all of God's Righteous Requirements- *perfectly*. So the Righteousness that God *established* in the Commandments was *fulfilled* in the sinless Life of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's why Jesus had to do all the things He did while He was alive, and that is why He told John in **Matthew 3:15b**:

... Permit *it* at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.

... Jesus *didn't* need to be forgiven- He was sinless. But He *did* need to fulfill all Righteousness. And He did that- by living a sinless life.

Okay- good for Him. He fulfilled all righteousness by living a sinless life. But, what about us? How does this affect us? We are *not* righteous. We have *not* fulfilled all righteousness. So how are we made Righteous? How are we justified?

Well, after Jesus lived a perfectly sinless life and fulfilled all Righteousness- He died on the Cross and rose from the dead so that we could love- so we could love God above and beyond anything related to self and sin, and so we could love each other. The Apostle John said in

1John 4:19:

We love because He first loved us.

And this love- *cannot* be produced through human effort, and it *cannot* be manufactured by rubbing the two sticks of human willpower and decision together. And we do not already possess this kind of love in and of ourselves. No, this love must be *given*, it must be *granted*, it is a gift. So we must understand that our love *for* God is a gift *from* God. Nobody possesses love for God on their own. So this is an *external* love that God grants to those whom He saves.

And so another way to define Salvation is that it is the granting of love for God- by God- and at great cost to God- (the death of His Son)- so that those to whom this love is given- will then love God.

And the physical and visible and tangible *manifestation* of this true love- the *results* of having it, the *fruit* of it- is humble and joyful obedience to God. Look what Jesus said in **John 14:15:**

If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.

And again in **Luke 6:46**

Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?

So Salvation is all about the radical transformation of lost sinners by and through what God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit did- to the degree that we now love God to the extent that we find the fullness of Joy in gladly obeying Him. And that is why it is so wrong to suggest that saved people do not need to obey God, or that obedience to God is somehow *optional* to believers.

So Righteousness is defined then as our joyful *obedience* to God's Commandments to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbor to the very same degree that we love ourselves. And nobody does that in our fallen state. And that means that we are *unrighteous*. And the Bible says that the unrighteous *cannot* inherit the Kingdom of God. So, on the one hand- John says:

1 John 5:17a

All unrighteousness is sin...

And on the other hand- Paul teaches:

1 Corinthians 6:9b

... do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?

And so what I want you to take away from this Message today is that it isn't merely that the "unforgiven" will not inherit the Kingdom of God- but that the "unrighteous" will not inherit the Kingdom of God. And so to be "justified" is to be "made righteous"- that is what the term means. So being "justified" means much more than merely being forgiven. It also means that we have been made righteous.

Now we might want to stop right here because we have now defined Righteousness. It is loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and loving our neighbor as himself. And we also know that Jesus Christ fulfilled the Righteous Standard that God established. Okay. So now that we have defined Righteousness- we all need to get busy so we can labor very diligently to reach this Perfect Righteous Standard of Divine Love- right? Wrong.

Here is the problem. And here is why I have spent the last two weeks talking about this. Jesus told us in the first part of **Luke 18:14a**:

I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other...

... showing us that the issue at stake here is not merely that this man was forgiven- but that he went to his house "justified", meaning that he went to his house "righteous". So this Parable begins with this wicked and evil tax collector- a man who had betrayed his people by purchasing a tax license from the pagan Romans- so he could inflict great financial damage to his own people through the imposing and collection of taxes. So there was no way that a human being could be any worse off than this man. A tax collector in the 1st Century was the worst of the worst, the lowest of the low- a man who had no scruples, and no decency about himself.

And the imagery here is breathtaking. This man is a wicked and evil sinner in the eyes of both Man and God, and yet Jesus says here in verse 14 that he went to his house "justified", or in other words- he was "righteous". But how could this be?

This man has *not* been perfectly and joyfully submitted to God's Law. He hasn't obeyed God at all. He hasn't loved God at all. He is the very *epitome* of lawlessness. He is the very *epitome* of an unrighteous man. And so by definition- he was not righteous at all. And yet Jesus says here that he *is* "righteous" or he *is* "justified". So *how* did that happen?

In fact- I want you to notice that this man has not done *anything*. He has *not* made amends to those he had defrauded. He has *not* given back the money he stole. He has *not* gone to the Temple to offer a sacrifice. He has *not* done anything. This man hasn't done a single good or noble or righteous deed. All this man has done is to cry out to God. Look again at **Luke 18:13**:

But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'

Now by contrast- look at the many righteous acts that the Pharisee has done in **Luke 18:11-12**:

11 "The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

12 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'

Now before you throw rocks at this Pharisee- let me ask you some very serious questions that I want you to ponder this coming week:

- ✓ Isn't it good that he was not a swindler?
- ✓ Isn't it good that he was not unjust?
- ✓ Isn't it good that he was not an adulterer?
- ✓ Isn't it good that he was not like that tax collector?
- ✓ Isn't it good that he fasted?
- ✓ Isn't it good that he gave to God?
- ✓ Isn't it good that he gave God the Glory for all of it?

And let's turn these questions around and ask them another way:

- ✓ Would you call a swindler, "righteous" or "unrighteous"?
- ✓ Would you call an unjust man, "righteous" or "unrighteous"?
- ✓ Would you call an adulterer, "righteous" or "unrighteous"?
- ✓ Would you call a tax collector, "righteous" or "unrighteous"?
- ✓ Would you call a man who never fasted, "righteous" or "unrighteous"?
- ✓ Would you call a man who never gave to God, "righteous" or "unrighteous"?
- ✓ Would you call a man who gave God all the Glory, "righteous" or "unrighteous"?

And yet Jesus said that the man who was guilty of all these things and who did not give God any Glory was "justified" or "righteous". And Jesus said the man who *didn't* do the "bad things" here and did all the "good things" and who gave God all the Glory was *not* "justified" at all- meaning he was *not* righteous at all!

Now this is the great mystery concerning righteousness. At this point- most of the people of the entire world would ask, "So is it better to sin than not to sin?" And that is a good question. Because if we are not careful here- we are saying that Jesus is saying that living as ungodly as possible is better than striving to live godly at all. But that is not what Jesus was saying at all. And the key to understanding this great mystery lies in two things Jesus said:

Luke 18:9

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

Luke 18:14b

... for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.

So the way to understand this Parable is that there are two different *kinds* of "Righteousness":

1. Our own personal righteousness
2. The Righteousness of Jesus Christ

Now the Jews of that day believed and taught what was called an "*infused* Righteousness" whereby the personal, intrinsic righteousness of the individual was developed over time by obeying the Law and doing good works. And if you worked hard enough to be good and to do good things- Gods would see all your efforts and allow you to go to Heaven. And Jesus said that was entirely wrong. Another way of understanding this false teaching is that all your effort to do good and to be good is you trying to earn enough righteousness to justify *yourself*. And yet another way of understanding this is that you are trying to work hard to *deserve* Heaven. And that is the ancient heresy of a wayward group of men called "The Judaizers" called "Legalism".

And today- September 13, 2015- Legalism is alive and well, and is the single most understood and believed false doctrine in the world today. The entire system of Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and those who lead the apostate Roman religious system all believe and teach an *infused* righteousness- which is human beings developing their own personal righteousness through obedience and good works so they can earn God's Favor. And that is why we need to preach and teach the Biblical Gospel louder and clearer and more often now than ever before.

But here in this Parable, Jesus teaches what is called an "*imputed* righteousness" whereby God "makes" the believer "Just" or "declares" him to be Righteous by God taking the external Righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ and imputes it or credits it to the repenting sinner. And this broken and pleading sinner appropriates this Righteousness of Christ to himself- not by *working*, and not by *doing* anything- not even religious things- but simply by "believing" or by *trusting* in what God has done *for* him- in, by, and through Jesus Christ.

And this is called "Justification by Faith alone" or Biblical Christianity. And 500 years ago- Justification by Faith alone was summed up by the Latin phrase, "Sola Fide"- and it is the very heart of true, genuine Biblical Christianity. So if you remove or hide or confuse Sola Fide- you no longer have Christianity.

And so it was the issue of "righteousness" where the Jew was off base. They weren't confused about Grace or even about Forgiveness. No, the Jew was completely wrong about how a sinner obtains righteousness. And the best illustration of this is found over in **Romans 10**- please turn there with me:

Romans 10:1-4

1 Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for *their* salvation.

2 For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.

3 For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.

4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Now notice right off the bat- that the Apostle Paul taught here in verse 1 that the Jew who had rejected Jesus was not saved. And so he prayed for their Salvation. Now look again at verse 2:

For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.

Now the “zeal” that Paul is talking about here is the zeal that the Jew had for God. And Paul says that this zeal, and this passion, and this desire was completely misplaced- it was ignorant or “**not in accordance with knowledge.**”

Now look at *how* their zeal for God was ignorant and wrong. Look again at the first part of verse 3 as the Apostle shows us just where the Jew went wrong:

For not knowing about God's righteousness...

Now this is incredible! Paul says here that the Jew did not know, and they did not understand- they did not know... what?

God's righteousness

Now, we need to put this in perspective. Righteousness is the very thing that the Jew should have been an expert in. The Jew spent more of his time talking and praying and laboring and discussing righteousness than any other group of people on earth. And yet here, Paul says that they didn't even understand it.

And then based on their complete and utter misconception about Righteousness- look what they did at the end of verse 3:

... and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.

Now this is a perfect example of why false teaching is so wrong. Because the Jew did *not* understand the true Righteousness of God- they weren't satisfied with simply not knowing. They then went about to create or to establish their own "man-made righteousness". And keep in mind that the "righteousness" that the Jew *manufactured* was not merely *different* from the correct and genuine Righteousness of God- but it operated in complete opposition to the Righteousness of God- to the point where the Jew was excluded from being justified.

And this is why I tell you – you can't have it both ways. If we embrace Justification by Faith alone, If we embrace that Salvation is by Grace alone and through Faith alone in the finished Work of Christ alone, if we say that lost sinners are saved by what they *believe* rather than what they *do*- then what we believe matters. And that means that what we teach matters. And so false teaching is not simply people being off base or having a different opinion. No, false teaching will damn souls into eternal hell.

So even though the "righteousness" that the Jew invented was wrong- it became the "de-facto righteousness" that *consumed* the Jew both then and now as to everything they worked for and everything they prayed and hoped for. And Jesus said it was completely wrong. And when I say it was wrong- this goes way beyond merely being incorrect about a fine point of Theology. The Jew being wrong about Righteousness meant that they were also wrong about Salvation and Grace and Forgiveness as well.

In other words- a wrong understanding- about how sinful people are made righteous with God- results in those people *inventing* a completely *different* way of becoming righteous- a way that not only *doesn't* work- but which *dooms* them to hell.

Now keep in mind what we are talking about here. We are *not* talking about the *sin* of the Jew that he was confused about. We are talking about his righteousness. So understand that the Jew was *not* trying to justify adultery or blasphemy or lying or stealing. They weren't saying that their sin didn't matter to God. So the amazing mystery about all this is that it isn't the *sin* of the Jew that was

damning him into eternal hell- it was his *righteousness*! They were trusting in the *wrong* righteousness to justify them before God.

And this is the great confusion about righteousness that still dominates the thoughts of people in our day. It is the Righteousness of Jesus Christ that justifies. Period. You cannot develop your own personal righteousness enough to earn Heaven. You simply cannot get there from here.

And a lot of people understand that we are justified by Christ's Righteousness and not our own. And that is good. But what is *not* good on the other side is that many of these same people that understand Justification by Faith alone also do *not* understand Sanctification.

So what do we do with our own personal righteousness? Does our own righteousness matter at all? Is obedience to God important at all? Yes. Because it is our own personal righteousness that is *sanctified* by God- *after* we are justified.

And so the right way to understand the issue of righteousness is that lost sinners are made righteous with God by God imputing the Righteousness of Jesus to them by faith alone. And once that occurs- God the Holy Spirit causes our own personal righteousness to grow and develop- not to save us- but to bring God glory.

So there are many people who try real hard to do the right thing. And that is good in one sense- because it is better to do right than to do wrong. So, for example- it is better for a person who is committing adultery to stop. It is better for the liar to be honest. It is better for the thief to learn to give rather than to take. And those noble and good deeds help to develop our own personal righteousness into being better. And so from that standpoint- those are all good and wonderful traits that honor God and that bring Him glory.

But those good and noble deeds do not forgive a single sin and they do not save a single soul. And they do not qualify the sinner to be able to go to Heaven. And these good works that develop our own personal righteousness do not qualify us for Heaven because they *cannot*. And so while a thief learning to quit stealing is good or a homosexual becoming a heterosexual is Good- it does *not* justify that sinner before God. And it does *not* justify because it has no power to do so.

Remember- the Righteousness that justifies must be a *perfect* Righteousness- not merely a *better* one. The Righteousness that

justifies is utterly spotless- not merely *improved*. And so no matter how improved or better we become by starting or stopping certain things- the righteousness that we develop from doing those good and noble things is still not a perfect and spotless Righteousness- and therefore it *cannot* and *does not* save.

So the way that this works is that lost sinners need an *external, alien, and foreign* Righteousness that is completely *outside* of any personal righteousness that they might have to justify them before God. And the Apostle Paul said in **Romans 10:4** that *this* Righteousness is found only in the Lord Jesus Christ when he said,

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

And notice how the lost sinner obtains this Righteousness:

... to everyone who believes

So the great mystery about Righteousness is that the Righteousness that it takes to justify lost sinners before God does *not* come from *inside* of us. It doesn't rise up from our hearts or our minds. It is not the product of our actions and obedience to God. The Righteousness that justifies is completely *external* to the lost sinner. It is the Righteousness of Jesus Christ- and it is *appropriated* to the sinner by *belief*- not by action. Please turn with me to **Romans 4:1-17**:

1 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?

2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.

3 For what does the Scripture say? "*ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.*"

4 Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due.

5 But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness,

6 just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

7 "BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED.

8 "BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT."

9 Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, "FAITH WAS CREDITED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."

10 How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised;

11 and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them,

12 and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised.

13 For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.

14 For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified;

15 for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation.

16 For this reason *it is* by faith, in order that *it may be* in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,

17 (as it is written, "A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU") in the presence of Him whom he believed, *even* God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.

So the Righteousness that justifies is *not* the many good religious works that a lost sinner will do to make *himself* more attractive to God- even though those works are indeed "righteous". But the Righteousness that justifies- is the Righteousness of Jesus Christ that is *credited* or *imputed* to the lost sinner by the agency of faith alone.

Now those deceived by Judaism and the Roman religious system would say, "*But the lost sinner is believing, he is trusting, he is exercising faith- and that is a 'work.'*" But the one who understands the

Bible counters that statement by saying, "*Not so. The faith that it takes to trust in God for the Righteousness of Jesus Christ is not a work at all - it is merely a response to what God has already done in that soul through the miracle of the New Birth!*"

So while it is true that the normal and natural inclination of all lost people is to try to "do" something to earn his Salvation- so too- it is just as normal and natural for the truly regenerate soul to trust in the living God for the Righteousness that he needs to enter into Heaven. So the key is being born again- *before* having faith. And so the Biblical equation that teaches this is:

Regeneration *Precedes* Justification

... or being "born again" comes *before* being justified.

Now many of us were taught that we must "believe" in order to be "born again". But that is impossible because the Bible teaches that in our normal fallen state- we are dead in trespasses and sins and do not have the capacity or even the inclination to believe or to trust in God at all- until *after* God sovereignly gives us spiritual life.

So being born again is *not* something that we do. It is *not* something that we ask for or cooperate in- or even want. God sovereignly regenerates all of His elect. In other words- God gives eyes to see and ears to hear and a heart to believe to *all* those that He set His Love upon from before the foundation of the world. And since at that moment we are incapable of even *wanting* this spiritual life- God brings about our new birth- all by Himself- or *sovereignly*.

And with those new eyes- we see that we are lost and in great distress with God. And with those new ears- we hear the glorious Good News of the Gospel. And with that new heart- we have both the power and the desire to believe or to trust in Jesus Christ alone for Forgiveness and Righteousness.

And so there are three normal and natural responses to already being sovereignly born again:

1. We are deeply and profoundly brought under conviction by God the Holy Spirit.
2. We despise our sin and cry out for Forgiveness and Mercy.

3. We believe and trust that what Jesus did on our behalf was sufficient to forever eliminate the Wrath of God against us and to make us Righteous.

... which is *exactly* what this tax collector does here in **Luke 18**. So, the fact that he is deeply convicted of his sinfulness, the fact that he so utterly despises his own wretched condition to the point where he is ashamed to even look up to God, and the fact that he cries out for Mercy rather than tick off the various good and noble deeds that he has done throughout his life- shows us that God the Holy Spirit is at work in this man's life.

And the fact that the Pharisee *does* list all of the "righteous" things he has done as reasons to trust in for his justification before God- shows us that he is completely deceived about both Righteousness and Salvation.

So here is what you do *not* want to do. You do *not* want to trust in *yourself* that you are righteous. In other words- what we must never do is be our *own* judge of whether or not we are righteous. And most people would end the sermon right here.

But in order for us *not* to do this- we must see clearly what this is. Because, there are an awful lot of people who are deceived about the issue of righteousness in our day. And we have to ask the question, "*What are these people doing? And what are they not doing? What is wrong with their hearts that they can be so deceived about this issue?*" And so if we hope to avoid being like them and this Pharisee- we need to see what Jesus is so against here. So I want to go a little deeper here. So please listen carefully and test yourself.

There are three things we need to see about this person who "trusts in himself that he is righteous."

1. His righteousness is *moral*.
2. His righteousness is *religious* or *ceremonial*.
3. He believes his righteousness is *the gift of God*.

So let's examine these.

1. His Righteousness is *Moral*.

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

11 "The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

Now the Pharisee was the man who trusts in himself that he is righteous. The tax collector was the man who had a terrible reputation for cheating the people. Now notice how the Pharisee describes his righteousness:

I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

In other words, he was saying, *"I am financially honest and just in all my dealings, and sexually faithful to my wife."* And those are honorable and good qualities to have. I wish everybody was like that. And that is what I mean by saying his righteousness was a *"moral righteousness"*. So this man was a morally upright man. He would make a good Muslim or a Mormon. And that is what Jesus meant when He said that this man **"trusted in himself that he was righteous"**. So this was a morally upright man.

So isn't that a good thing? Isn't it good that he was morally righteous? And yet Jesus said this man wasn't justified.

2. His Righteousness is *Religious* or *Ceremonial*.

Luke 18:12

I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.

Here we see that the Pharisee's righteousness was a *religious* righteousness or a *ceremonial* righteousness. Fasting and paying tithes are what you call "religious" or "ceremonial" acts. They relate to spiritual disciplines before God- but not so much how you treat other people. Yet this was part of the Pharisees' righteousness. So he was a morally upright and religiously devout man. And yet Jesus said he was *not* justified.

3. He Believes His Righteousness is *the Gift of God*.

Luke 18:11a

The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people...

So this man gives God the glory for making him upright and devout like he is. In other words, this man was *not* an atheist or a Pelagian- he doesn't believe that he can make himself righteous without God's Help. He may not even be what theologians call a semi-Pelagian—a person who believes that God's help is needed but the human will is decisive and can resist God's help. None of that is mentioned here. So that's not his problem.

The problem as Jesus describes it here is not whether the man himself has produced the righteousness he has or whether God has produced it. The problem is: He *trusts* in it. Verse 9:

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

Now please notice that Jesus didn't say that this man was trusting in himself to *make himself* righteous. No. Jesus says explicitly that this man is thanking God for that. So, he is *not* trusting in himself to *make himself* righteous. He is trusting in himself that he *is* righteous with the righteousness that God has worked in him. *That* is what he is trusting. And that is a fine point- but a very important one.

Now, as far as we know, this Pharisee was a total lover of the Sovereignty of God. As far as we know he would have said, "*Not I but the Grace of God in me has worked this righteousness.*" He says, "*I thank you, God, that I have this righteousness.*" So *that* was not his mistake. His mistake was that he trusted in this God-produced righteousness for his Justification. So when it came to Justification- because that is the issue here- as verse 14 shows- this man was trusting in the wrong thing. He was looking at the wrong *basis* for his righteousness before God. He was looking at the wrong *ground* for his righteousness before God. He was looking at the wrong *person*, and ultimately, the wrong *righteousness*. He was looking to his *own* righteousness.

But this righteousness was his own personal righteousness- not because he *created* it, but because he *acted* it. It was in his will and in his heart and in his actions. It was *his*, and he believed that it was put there by God. And *that* is what he was trusting in.

Also, notice that this Pharisee is *not* presented here as a Legalist- who is somebody who tries to earn his own Salvation. That is *not* the issue here at all- even though that is how this Parable is often preached and taught. Here is the issue:

- ✓ This man was morally upright
- ✓ He was religiously devout
- ✓ He believed God had made him so
- ✓ He gave thanks to God for it

... and so who he was- who he said God had *made* him- *that* is what he looked to and trusted in for his righteousness before God- for his Justification. And he was dead wrong- *eternally* wrong.

And so are so many people today- who are turning *away* from the Doctrine of "Justification by Grace alone through Faith alone on the basis of Christ alone". They are preaching *another* "gospel" that cannot forgive a single sin and cannot save a single soul.

So what Jesus wants us to see here is that how righteous you are, or how moral you are, or how religious you are, or whether God has produced that in you or you have produced that in yourself- that is *not* the basis of your Justification before God. That is *not* how you are accepted and declared righteous in God's Law Court.

So the issue is:

Are you looking totally *away* from yourself?

When you see yourself standing before the holy Judge, and you know that to escape eternal Damnation you must be found righteous in this all-knowing, infinitely-just Court- what are you going to look to and trust in? Because there are two different "Righteousnesses" in play here:

- ✓ The Righteousness that Jesus has in Himself
- ✓ The "Righteousness" that Jesus is working in us

The Righteousness that Jesus has in Himself is the Righteousness that Jesus personally earned as He lived 33-1/2 years here on earth without ever sinning a single time. That Righteousness is Jesus' Own Personal Righteousness that belongs to Him. And that is the Righteousness that is imputed to us after we are justified that allows us to go to Heaven.

And that Righteousness is Christ's very Own Personal Righteousness- it is not ours. It is *never* ours. It *doesn't* belong to us. It will *never* belong to us. And after we have been in Heaven for ten billion years- that Righteousness will still not be ours. It is *never* our own Righteousness. God takes Jesus' Righteousness and He *drapes* it over us- He *credits* us with it. So it is an *imputed* Righteousness. And it is a *foreign* Righteousness- an *external* and *alien* Righteousness- it is *foreign* and *external* and *alien* to us.

And that knowledge causes us to continually look away from ourselves and look to the Grace and Mercy of God in the Lord Jesus Christ. And, so, yes, you're supposed to actually obey God after you are saved, and yes, you're supposed to follow Jesus and do what He said. But *after* you obey and *after* you follow and *after* you serve and *after* you sing and preach and teach and lead- after you have developed your own personal righteousness to be *better* than it was- you must right then- look entirely *away* from yourself and look to Jesus and His Righteousness as the only basis by which you are justified.

So after we are saved- God absolutely *does* develop our own *personal, intrinsic* righteousness. And that righteousness absolutely gets better with time. And it is ours. We do become more obedient, we do become more loving, we do become more forgiving, we do become less wicked, and less sinful- and we give God glory for that.

But what we have to understand is that this righteousness that God develops in us will never be good enough to allow us entrance into heaven- even though it *does* glorify God. And so- on the one hand- we are to develop our own personal intrinsic righteousness through spiritual disciplines and obedience. And on the other hand- we are to constantly remind ourselves that *none* of that justifies us before God- even after we do them.

So the Righteousness that Jesus [and God the Holy Spirit] is working in us after we are saved- is the Righteousness that allows us to

obey God and follow after God, and which prompts us to fast and to give and to love and to serve the Lord and others. And without that change, without that transformation- we have no reason to think that we are saved at all. And as we see this ongoing transformation in ourselves that is wrought by God- we are to act just like the Pharisee here and we are to thank God alone for Him developing this righteousness in us where our lives are measurably different than they used to be.

But we need to always remember that the righteousness that God is developing in us- that change and that transformation and that obedience that we absolutely do see in ourselves- that righteousness is *never* what allows us into Heaven. Only Christ's Righteousness allows sinners into Heaven.

And so I am pleading with you on behalf of Jesus this morning that for your Justification- that as you labor hard to obey and follow God now that you have been justified by Jesus Christ- that you also *never* look at or trust in the Righteousness that God has worked in you after you have been saved. But that you look at and trust in Christ's Righteousness Alone and all that God is for you in Him.

And I say it like that, because I know how this Parable ends. I see the shadow of the Cross over this Parable. But we see the clear pointer to this end in the way the tax collector is justified before God. Look again at verses 13&14:

13 "But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'"

14 "I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

What did the tax collector do? He looked *away* from himself to God. He trusted in *nothing* in himself. He trusted *only* in God. And Jesus said, "*God declared him righteous in His Law Court.*" And that's exactly what "justified" means.

Now, on *this* side of the Cross, we know even more. We know *how* God provides Righteousness for sinners who are not righteous.

2Corinthians 5:21

He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

By trusting Christ alone, and all that He did for us, and all that He is *for* us- we are united to Him. And because we are "in Him," what He is- absolutely counts for us, His Righteousness, His Morality, His Devoutness. (See **Philippians 3:9; Romans 3:28; 4:4-6; 5:18-19; 10:3-4; 1 Corinthians 1:30; Galatians 2:16**).

But we must be careful lest we say, *"Well, of course, the tax collector looked away from his own righteousness to God for mercy- he had no righteousness at all."* Because that's *exactly* what the Pharisee was saying about him. *"He doesn't look to God like I do for help in becoming righteous. So he has none, but God has made me righteous, and I will not scorn the gift of God but trust in it that I am righteous with the righteousness that God has worked in me. And this is the righteousness that I will present in the law court as the basis of my justification. It is God's righteousness because He created it in me. And that is the basis for my Justification."*

Don't miss the terrifying four words in the middle of verse 14 for this Pharisee,

I tell you, this man [the tax collector] went to his house justified rather than the other [the Pharisee]...

The Pharisee, the righteous one, the one thanking God for his righteousness- WAS NOT JUSTIFIED! He was condemned! This is why I spend so much time denouncing the many teachers in the modern church today who are *replacing* "the Righteousness that Christ has in Himself" with "the righteousness that Christ creates in us"- as the basis for our Justification. So many people have told me that I am just being semantical or splitting hairs. But, I'm not. Jesus said that people who trust in the righteousness that God has worked in them after they are saved- for the basis of their acceptance and acquittal and justification *do not go down to their house justified!* People who really believe that the righteousness that God helps them do in this life after they are saved- is a sufficient *basis* for their Justification, Jesus says, *will not be justified!*

My friends- this is serious. We are absolutely commanded to obey and follow God after we are saved. And that following and that obedience absolutely will develop your own personal righteousness to be better than it was. And if that isn't happening- then you are probably not saved. And we are to thank God for that development of our own personal righteousness when we see it and rejoice at the change God has worked in us.

But as good as that is- that is *not* the basis by which we are going to Heaven. We are *not* justified by the righteousness that Christ works in us *after* we are saved- but by the Righteousness that Christ Himself alone is for us- that is imputed to us by faith alone.

So will you receive this, and glory in this, and pray toward this, and stand for this? I summon everyone in the hearing of my voice: Give Jesus Christ His full Glory- not half of it! Give Him the glory- both as the One Who is Perfect Righteousness for us- which we have by faith alone- and the One Who, on the basis of Justification, works progressive righteousness in us.

But don't rob Jesus of the Glory of His role as your Righteousness. He is your Righteousness. And because He is your Righteousness, He can, and will in time, make you more righteous. So look to Christ alone, trust in Christ alone- not your righteousness- for your right standing in God's Court and your acceptance with Him.

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.

