

Luke 18:9-14

An Expository and Literary Discussion on the Parable on the Pharisee and Tax
Collector

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Abstract

In the third Gospel of the New Testament, Luke consistently writes about the Pharisees and their piety pronouncing woes and judgments upon them. Representing the religious leaders of that day, they exalted themselves above everyone else and most of all, tax collectors, who are the epitome of sinners. However, the principle of the great reversal is a prominent theme in Luke's Gospel, in which the exalted are humbled and the humble are exalted. Multiple times Jesus uses this principle to completely transform peoples' mindset on who is greatest in the world.

This thesis will offer an extensive exposition on the well-known parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:9-14, where the principle of the great reversal is most prominent. With the focus on Luke 18:9-14, this thesis will examine the literary structure of the parable as it fits into Luke's progress in teaching theology throughout the whole Gospel. Having themes of prayer and kingdom of God surrounding this parable, righteousness and justification are the dominant factors that Luke addresses.

Luke 18:9-14

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Introduction

Luke purposely uses accounts of Jesus to better explain and focus on themes that he believes are important. Luke uses the Gospels from Mark and Matthew, which the narrative is organized chronologically, to give him a guide, yet Luke's agenda is different. Instead, he arranges the narratives of Jesus accordingly to provide the audience with theological principles by which the Holy Spirit inspired. He does not want another chronological account, like Mark and Matthew, so several parts of the Gospel of Luke are neither in historical order nor may not even be written in the other gospels. Luke 18:9-14 is one account that Matthew and Mark do not have, so there is more of an incentive to ask, "Why did Luke place this parable here?" This question will be answered in the concluding remarks of this thesis.

Interpreting Parables

Parables are one of Jesus' favorite ways to communicate and clarify his teachings to the audience.¹ After teaching a certain principle, Jesus usually shares a parable that illustrates the principle. It helps the audience relate to the truth that Jesus gives. In the parable of the Pharisee and tax collector, the original audience can identify with the characteristics of each parable, such as the temple, traveling by foot, each character in the parable, standing in the temple, tithing, or fasting. Despite this identification with the parable, it still holds a certain complexity in their meaning that, at times, not even the

1. J. Scott Duvall & J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 259.

disciples could understand (Luke 8:9). The complexity comes from knowing when a detail in the illustration has meaning and what the meaning actually is.² Small parables, like the one with the mustard seed, are not complex as those that are long, such as the Good Samaritan parable. Small parables still require a great deal of thought, but they do not contain the amount of details that a long parable does. Since some parables contain many details and others few, the complexity differs between each parable.

The solution for interpreting parables begins with understanding the process behind giving meaning to details. In the history of the church, early Christians consistently interpreted parables allegorically by attributing every detail with a “deep” meaning that was contradictory to the context of the parable.³ This type of allegorizing, called spiritualization, enabled parables to have a more “spiritual” or hidden meaning than what was actually intended. The early Christians mistakenly understood the parables to contain meaning that was futuristic to Jesus’ original audience. This hidden meaning was never intended by Jesus and was obviously impossible for the original audience to grasp.⁴ Indeed, Jesus and the each author of the Gospels used individual parables to teach specific truth and theology that their audience would understand.

When Jesus gives a parable, he uses the details to enhance a story.⁵ Hence, the larger and more dramatic a parable is, the more details will be present. Out of the details

2. Ibid., 259.

3. Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1990), 15.

4. Duvall and Hays, *Grasping*, 260.

5. Ibid., 261.

present in a parable, parables only consist of no more than three main points.⁶

Understanding the points of a parable would be similar to determining the “moral of the story.” However, it is easy to get carried away by coming up with numerous points that the author never intended. In *Grasping God’s Word*, J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays gives a healthy interpretive guideline to parables that each main character or groups of characters deserve only one main point.⁷ This guideline is consistent with Jesus’ usage of parables, which is especially seen when the interpretation is given after the parable (Luke 6:39-41, 43-45, 47-49; 8:4-15; 12:16-21; 14:8-11; 15:3-7, 8-10; 18:1-8, 9-14). The Parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector would, thus, be a two-point parable based on the number of characters. Jesus actually gives these two points at the end of the parable (9:14). Despite only having two points, the other details in the Parable of the Pharisee and tax collector should not be discarded as meaningless.

The problem with older hermeneutics was its tendency to go to the extreme and give special meaning to everything in a parable, just like the example of the Parable of the Prodigal Son. On the other side, the issue with modern hermeneutics is the tendency to neglect the author’s usage of literary techniques, such as repetition, parallelism, comparison, contrast, and structure. Authors use literary techniques to help develop meaning of the text. For instance in Luke 18:9-14, Luke uses a literary comparison by writing that “two men *went up* into the temple” and the tax collector “*went down* to his house” to emphasize that the tax collector walked away justified as opposed to the

6. Blomberg, *Interpreting*, 21.

7. Duvall and Hays, *Grasping*, 261.

Pharisee.⁸ Luke uses these two details of the Parable of the Pharisee and tax collector to add more light with what he wants to communicate. Therefore, there must remain a healthy balance as to not fall into either extreme of hermeneutics.

Themes in Luke 18:9-14

Luke writes both the Gospel and Acts with intentionality recording his purpose in the first verses of each book. His first book describes the events of Jesus before his ascension; whereas, his latter book is what happens to the apostles and believers after Jesus' ascension. In sticking to his original purpose, Luke's intentions are also to communicate sound theology through everything he narrates. He starts in the beginning of his Gospel and develops his theology as he progresses through the book. As Luke was writing his narratives from start to finish, he would consistently add more understanding to his theology. This progressive development in Luke's theology would create ongoing themes in his narratives that addressed issues such as the kingdom of God, prayer, and the well-known great reversal. Luke's consistency in implementing these themes shows that they were essential to his purpose for writing in the first place. Evidences of these themes can be found in almost every portion of Luke-Acts. However, some themes are more evident and emphasized by Luke at different moments. With the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, the emphasized themes are the great reversal, justification, judgment, and prayer. With the main theme being righteousness, all the other sub-themes seem to fall underneath it.

Righteousness and Unrighteousness

8. John Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 878.

Luke's introduction to the Pharisee and the tax collector in verse 9 focuses on the theme of righteousness by describing people in Jesus' audience as "those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous." Even though prayer is significant within the parable, the central theme is righteousness.⁹ The problem that Luke addresses is that people have the wrong perspective on righteousness. Certain people of that day, like the Pharisees, thought righteousness could be something attained by their works. In accordance with Luke 11:39, they pretended to be righteous on the outside but were evil on the inside.¹⁰ The Pharisee's problem is that he deceives others and himself that he is righteous. He intentionally sets himself apart from the other non-Pharisees and specifically the "unrighteous" (Greek *adikoi*). The reverse of thinking that Luke tries to implement is the opposite of the Pharisee's thinking. The unlikely tax collector is the one that becomes justified. Both the Pharisee and the tax collector go to the temple to pray, but by their words and actions, their motives are completely different.¹¹

With conveying the theme of righteousness and unrighteousness, Luke's principal point in the parable is "righteousness" (Greek *dikaiosyne*, 18:9, 14), which is expressed in several forms. This word bookends the parable with two different forms: "righteous" as a noun and "to justify" as a verb. Since Luke begins and ends with this theme, it is obvious

9. Allison A. Trites, "The Prayer Motif in Luke-Acts," in *Perspective on Luke-Acts*, ed. Charles H. Talbert (Virginia: Association of Baptist Professors of Religion, 1978), 176.

10. Stephen I. Wright, *The Voice of Jesus: Studies in the Interpretation of Six Gospel Parables* (Eugene, Oregon: Paternoster Press, 2000), 45.

11. Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Verlyn D. Verbrugge (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 649.

that Luke would frame the parable to establish some theology regarding righteousness, hence the explanation for Luke to include the “unjust” (Greek *adikos*) in the list of sinners (18:11) when it is such a rare use of the word.¹² *adikos* has only twelve occurrences in the New Testament, three out of Luke-Acts, translated either “unjust” or “unrighteous.” The three times Luke uses the word always embrace the theme of righteousness and unrighteousness (16:10; 18:11; Acts 24:15). In fact, in the context of 16:10, Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees about righteous (*dikaios*) living versus unrighteous (*adikos*) living (16:10-15). The Pharisees display the same attitude about justifying themselves as the crowd listening to the parable of the Pharisee and tax collector. Both groups believe themselves to be proven just in front of men, and Luke connects the two passages by using forms of *dikaiosyne* and *adikia*.

Furthermore, these two passages are only one example of many when Luke addresses the issue of righteousness to fully develop sound theology.¹³ Luke uses Jesus’ words that attack the specific group of the Pharisees to come to a moral about justification that God knows the heart of every person (16:15). This same moral is not only taught in the parable of the Pharisee and tax collector, but the parable also builds on the theology of justification. Thus, God is not only discerning of the heart’s true intentions but is a worthy judge who brings his blessings upon those with a penitent and contrite heart, just like King David’s Psalm 51 reads. Peter Toon, an Anglican priest and theologian, comments on righteousness in the Gospel of Luke:

12. *The NIV Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words*, ed. Verlyn D. Verbrugge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 53.

13. Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, New American Commentary, Volume 24 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 451.

Jesus does allow that conformity to the norms of the scribes and Pharisees is a certain kind of (inferior) righteous living, but he contrasts it with the proper righteousness he exhibits, proclaims, and looks for (Luke 5:30-32; 15:7, 18:9) in the disciples in the kingdom.... The righteousness of the kingdom of God is practical and reverses the standards of the regular social order (3:11, 14; 6:20-26). At the last day it will be those who have been genuinely righteous in terms of doing the will of God who will be declared just (14:14).¹⁴

Kingdom of God

One of Luke's themes in his Gospel is defining what the kingdom of God is and those able to enter it. The "kingdom of God" is referenced forty-three times through parables and stories. The traditional way of thinking is that the righteous and prestigious Jewish leaders will enter the kingdom of God, but Luke's theme on the kingdom is a theme of reversal.¹⁵ Actually, it is the oppressed, widows, sinners, children, and broken in heart, who all respond to God in surrender and enter the kingdom of God. Luke writes that Jesus' purpose on earth is to proclaim the kingdom (Luke 4:43), and the disciples are sent to proclaim it as well (Luke 9:2). Then in chapter twelve, he discusses how one should respond to the gospel by giving up all possessions and seeking after the kingdom first. In that same chapter and the previous one, Luke is showing the weakness of the Pharisees and how they do not enter the kingdom (Luke 11:52). In chapter seventeen, Luke reveals how to enter in the kingdom of God, by "losing your life" for the sake of Jesus Christ (Luke 17:33; 18:28-30). Looking at chapter eighteen (the one that provides the parable of the Pharisee and tax collector), Luke continues to discuss the kingdom. The

14. Peter Toon, "Righteousness," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 1996), 687-88.

15. Walter L. Leifeld, & David W. Pao, *Luke*, in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, eds. Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 277.

first parable (18:1-8) is about the relentless prayer of a widow, but one should note how it concludes with a question of faith. The faith question is going to be answered by the next three sections illustrating how those who enter the kingdom of God by faith come from a position of inferiority.¹⁶ The first of the three sections demonstrates the humble response of the unclean tax collector, where the other two focus on the limitations of children (18:15-17) and relinquishing of self and possessions (18:18-30).

Exposition

Verse 9

Thinking literarily, Luke begins this passage with the connective word “also,” which is designed to link the preceding material to the present passage.¹⁷ When any connective word used in Scripture is encountered, it is implied by the author that one passage relates to the next in some way. Therefore, Luke intends the reader to ask for what reason he has placed “also” before the parable.¹⁸ In the context of the previous parable of the persistent widow, Luke writes that the persistent widow encounters an unrighteous judge. The widow seeks justice by consistent prayer and finally receives it after much deliberation. Then Luke records Jesus’ thoughts on the parable, which focuses primarily on justification rather than prayer. Thus, this parable centers heavily on both prayer and justification, which are reoccurring themes in the next parable.¹⁹ 18:1-8 reveals what a judge should not look like, and 9-14 hints at what a righteous judge looks

16. Nolland, *Luke*, 874.

17. Green, *Luke*. 645.

18. Duvall and Hays, *Grasping*, 35.

19. Stein, *Luke*, 447.

like. Also, both passages share the common interest of the humbled and oppressed being justified and lifted up. However, Luke is still starting a new literary section (18:9-30),²⁰ but this does not eliminate the fact that 18:1-14 are not connected in some way. He is tying together the two passages by the themes that run through them placing them in consecutive order. Luke separates Luke-Acts into literary sections, but his theological themes run throughout all of his writing. In addition, he begins this parable by providing the setting in the opening verse.²¹

Luke uses the same phrasing as he had before in other points of his Gospel (15:1-2; 18:1; 19:11) by establishing the setting and reason why Jesus shares a certain parable.²² Jesus is always concerned with those around him and their spiritual state. In almost every occasion of his ministry, Jesus, being aware of his surroundings, takes the opportunity to teach others, whether to a Pharisee or a disciple. In 17:20, Jesus' attention is directed toward the Pharisees, but it turns abruptly to his disciples in the next two verses. Jesus discusses the rapture in the last days to his disciples, and then shares the parable of the persistent widow. Jesus' audience starts to widen as to include the Pharisees at 18:9.²³ Luke does not specify to whom the parable is directed toward, but it should not be presupposed that the "some" only refers to the Pharisees.²⁴ Even though the Pharisees are consistently in opposition to Jesus and should partly be seen as negative

20. Nolland, *Luke*, 874.

21. *Ibid.*, 874.

22. Stein, *Luke*, 448.

23. Nolland, *Luke*, 875.

24. Green, *Luke*. 644.

characters in Luke-Acts²⁵, it would be bad hermeneutics to identify the “some” without first looking at the literary context.

Luke sees those that Jesus speaks to as comparable to the Pharisee in the parable.²⁶ Just as this Pharisee trusts in his own works for righteousness, Jesus directs this parable to those of the same mindset. Luke never records that Jesus was speaking directly to the Pharisee like he did in previous passages. However, the crowd around Jesus probably consisted of Pharisees but it is not sure if they are the majority. In addition, the Pharisee justifies himself by his works and claims he is not among the “unjust.” With the tax collector in sight, the Pharisee declares that he is more righteous than he, which would fit the imagery of those who despised others.²⁷ The Pharisee’s declaration of self-righteousness is emphasized by Luke’s use of dialogue, which in any case is a literary technique for emphasis.²⁸ The point of the dialogue is the self-pronounced righteousness. In the Luke-Acts context, Luke references the Pharisees as “those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your heart” (16:15). This reference strongly suggests that the Pharisee in the parable is a close representation of the actual Pharisees in Jesus’ day. With this earlier reference and the use of the Pharisee in the parable, it is fair to characterize those Jesus is speaking to as Pharisees.²⁹ However, Luke’s purpose for the

25. Robert C. Tannehill, *The Shape of Luke’s Story: Essays on Luke-Acts* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2005), 258.

26. Nolland, *Luke*, 875.

27. *Ibid.*, 875.

28. Duvall and Hays, *Grasping*, 49.

29. Stein, *Luke*, 449.

parable is directed at humbling one's mindset by embracing righteousness and prayer, rather than discrimination against a particular group of people.³⁰

In Luke's introduction to the parable, he describes Jesus' audience as those who think that they are righteous. He writes that they trusted in themselves using the conjunction, *hoti*, that can be translated "that" or "because." "That" is a better translation than some versions, which replace "that" with "because." Luke's usage of the "that/because" along with a participle is best translated "that."³¹ It changes the meaning of the text if the Pharisees trusted themselves "because" they were righteous since "because" implies a cause and effect situation. Rather, "that" answers what the Pharisees trusted themselves for, which was their state of righteousness. The meaning of "trusted" is used several times in the New Testament, but the general meaning of the word is having confidence in self. This same word is used in 11:22, when discussing how a man had confidence in his armor and a stronger man comes to take it away. The armor was trusted to protect the man but it failed in doing so. Luke uses the same imagery with the Jesus' audience, who instead trust in their righteousness and not God's. Just like the armor failing the man, their righteousness will fail them also. This would obviously foreshadow the meaning of the parable, where the Pharisee trusts in his righteous deeds but fails to be justified. Luke is contrasting "righteous" with the word "unjust" pointing out how much the Pharisee thought of himself compared to sinners.³² Luke concludes his narration by saying they despised all others, which is clearly illustrated in the parable.

30. Green, *Luke*, 646.

31. Stein, *Luke*, 449.

32. Nolland, *Luke*, 875.

Verse 10

Jesus sets the parable to take place in the temple, where two men would come to pray. Luke's theme of prayer seems to run through the entire Gospel and even into the book of Acts. He makes prayer the most prominent theme at some points (Luke 1:13, 9:28-36; Acts 1:14, 5:31), where at other times, prayer is more in the background. In the parable of the Pharisee and tax collector, prayer is primarily a background theme which connects the sequence of parables.³³ Even though prayer plays a part in the parable, Luke has already given his audience the primary reason for the parable— the self-righteousness of the surrounding crowd. He addresses the theme of righteousness, which also runs through the entire Gospel, more significantly in this parable than he does prayer. Since the parable does slightly mention the prayer theme, the only development in the theme would be showing how one ought to pray with humility.³⁴

According to the parable, both the Pharisee and the tax collector went to the temple to pray while standing, which a normal posture for prayer.³⁵ The righteous Pharisee probably went into the courts where ritually pure Israelite men went to pray. The unclean tax collector could not have gone where the Pharisee was and stood far off from the courts of the righteous. The contrast between the Pharisee and the tax collector would have been readily apparent to the original audience of Jesus. The difference of an impeccable religious hero versus a severe sinner is one of the greatest contrasts in the

33. Stein, *Luke*, 447.

34. Trites, "Prayer," 176.

35. Morris, Leon. "Luke." Tyndale New Testament Commentary. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1974). Pgs 289.

New Testament. The “righteous” Pharisee going up to the temple would have been expected, but the unclean tax collector going up would have been shocking. The temple is always a place for specific times of corporate worship and private prayer in the Scriptures.³⁶ In modern day thinking, the idea of prayer remains a more private matter, whereas traditionally, worship is a corporate matter. This was not so, however, in the first century when prayer could be used interchangeably for corporate and private.³⁷ In the Luke-Acts context, Luke lists “prayer” as the activity in the fellowship of believers (Acts 2:42). He also speaks of prayer as a communal place for public worship (Acts 16:13, 16). Thus, determining whether the prayers of the two men were public or private is difficult, but pinpointing the time of day they prayed can offer some insight.

Since the temple was mentioned as the place of the parable, there is good reason to believe that the prayers were offered during corporate worship. In *Through Peasant Eyes*, Kenneth E. Bailey discusses this issue of how the temple gives these certain cues.³⁸ First, the temple represents the place for public worship throughout the Lukan context. Second, the two men approach the temple at the same time, which usually happens at the specific time of corporate worship in the temple. Since there was this specified time, it was very necessary for the first century Jews to gather at the temple. Third, the specified time for corporate worship was during one of the two atonement sacrifices that happened throughout the day. The tax collector was probably at the temple for one of these

36. Green, *Luke*. 646.

37. Kenneth E. Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 145.

38. *Ibid.*, 146.

sacrifices because he displays his need for atonement in his prayer. Since the tax collector cries out to God to expiate his sin³⁹, he probably does this because it was at the time of the sacrifices. Even still, these qualifying reasons only add to the probability that the prayers were at public worship. Both men's prayers were connected to their need for atonement from sins. However, there is a possibility that the two men went to the temple for private worship.⁴⁰

The first occurrence of the atonement sacrifices was at dawn and the other at three in the afternoon.⁴¹ Though private prayers could take place at any time of the day⁴², it is in between these two times that it was more natural for private prayers to happen.⁴³ Once peoples' sin was atoned for at the first sacrifice, it was more appropriate to approach God with prayer. Whether the two men went to the temple during the sacrifices or in between them, Luke wants to show the connection of their prayers and the atonement sacrifices.

One of the characteristics of the Pharisees that will attribute some understanding to the parable is its adherence to the Torah. The Pharisees' objective was to work toward obtaining holiness by obeying the Mosaic Law. First, they determined that the Torah had 613 commandments divided into 248 positive and 365 negative. Next, they formed more strict laws in order to protect them from ever getting close to breaking the Torah, whether

39. The Majority Text Greek New Testament Interlinear (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, [2007]), 288.

40. Nolland, *Luke*, 875.

41. Stein, *Luke*, 449.

42. Nolland, *Luke*, 875.

43. Bailey, *Through*, 146.

accidentally or ignorantly. Thus once convinced that they were interpreting the Torah correctly, they made sure it would be passed down in history and claimed it as the “tradition of the elders” (Mark 7:3).⁴⁴ In the parable, the Pharisee went up to the temple to pray, which may suggest there is a special time for prayer.

Scholars and commentaries differ on the question, but the answer resides in both boasting and conscientious living. In several incidences of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus refers to the Pharisees as hypocrites (Mat. 6:2, 5; 23:15-29) because they were standing in the street praying or giving money in order for everyone to see them. They did this in order to be praised by others because of their “righteousness.” At the same time, one must tie in a Pharisee’s devoutness to obtaining righteousness. They sought to please God by their strict regulations, just like the Pharisee in the parable. This Pharisee wanted to prove his righteousness by practicing two pharisaic over-and-beyond standards: fasting twice a week and tithing everything. Both of these practices are publicized by actual Pharisees who are present in the Luke’s Gospel (5:33, 11:42). Obviously going beyond the Old Testament Law, these standards accurately describe the Pharisees of that day and not some individual accomplishment.⁴⁵ In the same way, the original readers saw the tax collector as historically accurate and not just a caricature.⁴⁶

In the New Testament, the tax collectors were ceremonially unclean because of their involvement with stealing from people, repeated interaction with Gentiles, and

44. "Pharisee," *Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 1210.

45. Nolland, *Luke*, 876.

46. Stein, *Luke*, 450.

working on the Sabbath.⁴⁷ This fact helps one understand how the original readers would have comprehended the tax collector being in the parable. They would have had the same tendency to dislike the tax collector as the religious leaders, seeing him as the epitome of sinfulness and uncleanness. The Synoptic Gospels commonly listed the tax collectors alongside sinners, usually referring to Jesus' interaction with them. The authors would write "tax collectors and sinners" while several times linking the tax collectors to harlots, Gentiles, and lovers of self.⁴⁸ It is so frequent that one can only imagine how the people of that day hated the tax collector and considered that job despicable and impure. Furthermore, due to their uncleanness, they were not allowed in certain parts of the temple as religious leaders were.⁴⁹

In addition, the temple was built on a hill so the two men had to travel up to get to it. Luke writes that they "went up" together to the temple, which was probably at the time of corporate worship. This is paralleled with the ending of the parable where the tax collector "went down" to his home.⁵⁰ Literarily, Luke contrasts the beginning and the end of the parable. Both of them went up together to pray, but after the prayer, only the tax collector came down justified. However, the parable is designed to have the surprising ending that the unexpected sinner was justified. Before the characters reveal who they

47. J. H. Harrop, "Tax Collector," *Illustrated Bible Dictionary: Volume 3*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1980), 1520.

48. D.A. Hagner, "Tax Collector," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia Volume 4*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 742.

49. Stephen Westerholm, "Temple," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia: Volume 4*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 773.

50. Stein, *Luke*, 449.

really are by their prayers, he only has minor comparisons between them. First, he compares the two characters with the specific language choice of “one... and the other...” Because of the similar phrasing in 17:34-35, it is probably Luke’s own additional word choice to make this comparison.⁵¹ Although it is a subtle contrast, it allows the reader to know that the parable deals with contrasting characters. At this point, each character still has his cultural stereotype.⁵² The audience still views the Pharisee as the religious superior with the integrity and dignity attached to his title. The tax collector still remains the disliked fellowman, who Luke has previously listed with the prostitutes and sinners.⁵³ If the audience knew that one of the characters was going to be declared righteous, they would have consistently chosen the Pharisee.

Verse 11

In the parable, the Pharisee is standing by himself praying to God. Several translations have written that he prayed to himself, but on the contrary, God is addressed in the prayer. Praying to God, the Pharisee stands in the courts of the religiously pure praying about himself.⁵⁴ Luke places the phrase, “to himself” (Greek *pros heauton*), with either the verbs “standing” or “praying.” In previous translations, *pros heauton* modifies the verb “praying” because if it modified “standing,” the Greek would have to be *kath heauton*.⁵⁵ However, in Lukan parables, he introduces a soliloquy (such as a prayer) by

51. Nolland, *Luke*, 876.

52. *Ibid.*, 875.

53. Craig A. Evans, *Luke*, in *New International Biblical Commentary: New Testament Series* (Massachusetts: Hendricksons Publishers, Inc., 1990), 53.

54. Nolland, *Luke*, 876.

55. Bailey, *Peasant Eyes*, 147.

en heauto not *pros heauton* (7:39; 12:17; 16:3; 18:4). Thus, it is improbable that the Pharisee intentionally prays under his breath, but rather he prayed so that everyone could hear. The most prominent reason that “to himself” describes where the Pharisee stands is that the tax collector is told to have stood far off.⁵⁶ Having a literary parallelism of “went up” and “went down,” Luke continues to write parallels in the parable. Another literary technique is the contrasting aspect between the two characters. With this in mind, it is reasonable to think that Luke is simply adding a sharper contrast.

Establishing that the Pharisee stood by himself leads to a few implications. First, the two men go into the temple at the time of corporate worship. Standing around people would have been assumed and natural. However, both of the men seem to very conscious of where they are standing. The Pharisee is purposefully placing himself away from others, which Luke does not specify with the tax collector. The tax collector is only “far off,” but Luke wants to emphasize that the Pharisee separated himself from the rest.⁵⁷ Second, with the atonement sacrifices accentuating sins of the people, the Pharisee’s self-righteousness is greater emphasized. It would be as if today a man sees a picture of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross and claims that he has no sin. The Pharisee notices that sacrifices were made in the temple, but still pronounces his righteousness. Lastly, the Pharisee separates himself because of his religious superiority.⁵⁸ With his state of cleanliness, associating with sinners, especially tax collectors, was forbidden. Luke previously mentions that the Pharisees were perfect at making themselves look good (11:39). He

56. *Ibid.*, 148.

57. Green, *Luke*. 648.

58. Bailey, *Peasant Eyes*, 149.

also wrote that the Pharisees would not receive tax collectors like Jesus had (15:1-2).

Physical distance from the others in the temple would have represented the actual Pharisees well.

The Pharisee continues in his pious actions by separating himself verbally from sinners. He opens his prayer by referring to God, which shows that he was praying to God and not just speaking to himself.⁵⁹ He is appreciative that he is “not like other men.” He does not single himself out from the entire human race, but by “other men,” he means those who are not of the pharisaic sect.⁶⁰ He desires to completely segregate himself from sinful men.⁶¹ Even though he says he is thankful toward God, his following words simply do not show it. Rather, they show his dependency on himself for being righteous, just like Luke commented on those around Jesus (18:9). While already having the tax collector in sight, he describes him with three different types of sins. The first two, “extortioners” and “unjust,” are obvious terms defining what a tax collector is. In the Roman Empire, tax collectors were known to be extortionists or swindlers.⁶² Luke uses “unjust” (Greek *adikoi*) to match the term “righteous” (Greek *dikaioi*) that he used to describe Jesus’ audience.⁶³ Luke wants to build up the irony that the tax collector is the one who becomes justified and not the Pharisee, who puts him in the group of the “unjust.” Luke wants his readers to understand that the Pharisee was dependent on his own actions to

59. Nolland, *Luke*, 876.

60. *Ibid.*, 876.

61. Evans, *Luke*, 270.

62. Bailey, *Peasant Eyes*, 149.

63. Stein, *Luke*, 449.

keep him from being unrighteous. In other words, the Pharisee was confident in his own righteous acts that he could not be categorized in the same group with sinners. One may conclude that the Pharisee did not realize his need for repentance like the tax collector did.

After the Pharisee mentions the three distinct sins, he continues his prayer to blatantly point out the tax collector. For this to happen, the Pharisee must clearly have been looking around and noticing who is around him. This would confirm the pharisaic stereotype that Pharisee are concerned with comparing themselves to others (Luke 6:26). They are always seeking the best for themselves, even at the expense of others (11:43). When the Pharisee points out the tax collector, he uses the word “this” (Greek *houtos*) in a derogatory sense.⁶⁴ Luke most likely added *houtos* to the parable because he uses it several other times in the same derogative way (14:30; 15:2, 30; Acts 17:18). In the parable of the Prodigal Son, for example, Luke uses *houtos* when the elder son regards the younger son as “this son of yours” (15:30). In this instance, the elder son has contempt for his brother for wasting his inheritance,⁶⁵ just like the Pharisee has on the tax collector. At another instance, the Pharisees comment about Jesus saying, “This man receives sinners...” (15:2). Jesus is associating with the tax collectors, who are drawn to him. The Pharisees grumbled in contempt using the derogatory term *houtos*, just like those to whom Jesus is speaking (18:9).⁶⁶ In this setting, both Pharisees and tax collectors seem to act the same way as in the parable in chapter eighteen. The tax collector is drawn

64. Ibid., 407.

65. Evans, *Luke*, 237.

66. Stein, *Luke*, 449.

to God, and yet the Pharisee has contempt on others. In the parable, the Pharisee sums up his opinion in this phrase “even like this tax collector.”⁶⁷ The Pharisee’s disapproval comes forth from his own value system. He values the outward appearance rather than inward heart, and thus, the sinful appearance of the tax collector results in disapproval. After calling attention to the tax collector, the Pharisee begins his appraisal of himself.

Verse 12

In his prayer, the Pharisee mentions two commandments that he follows: fasting and tithing. Fasting was prescribed in Leviticus for the Day of Atonement only (16:29-31), but the Pharisees’ piety and zeal suggest their group practicing it more often. Luke records a previous event where John the Baptist’s disciples came to Jesus asking about his disciples’ commitment to fasting (Luke 5:33). When Luke’s account is compared to Mark’s (Mark 2:18), Luke has added “often and offer prayer.” Luke does not want to deny that Jesus and his disciples pray and fast, but to bring up the issue of fasting in order to discuss the following parable.⁶⁸ However, Luke does mention the Pharisees with those who often fast. Thus, it is very natural for the Pharisee in the parable to fast frequently, and this does not create a caricature for the Pharisee. Still, only strict Pharisees thought about fasting twice a week.⁶⁹ Thus, going beyond the Old Testament law, fasting twice a week should be considered part of the pharisaic practice and tradition instead of an

67. Nolland, *Luke*, 876.

68. John Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989), 247.

69. H.A.G. Belben, “Fasting,” *Illustrated Bible Dictionary: Volume 1*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1980), 503.

individual accomplishment.⁷⁰ The Pharisee's pride in this act, along with tithing, is congruent with his previous self-righteousness statement that he does not associate with "other men."

The Pharisee in the parable gives a tenth of all he gains, whether it was of something he owns or given to him. When a Pharisee would visit a house and have dinner with others, he could not be sure if his hosts tithed what he is about to eat. He would be very cautious about what people gave him because there was always the possibility that what was given to him was never tithed.⁷¹ This mindset produced a suspicion in a Pharisee's mind so that where they would question if their food were tithed. If there was any possibility that they were not tithed, the Pharisee would always be on the side of precaution. For this reason, the Pharisees would be hesitant on going to eat at the house of non-Pharisees.⁷² This is another reason why the Pharisees would grumble against Jesus when he would receive sinners (Luke 5:30; 7:34; 15:1-2). The strictness of the fasting and tithing are part of a devout Pharisee's life. Tithing originated in the Old Testament regulation where it was never as burdensome as the Pharisee made it. Any tithing efforts were placed on grain, wine and oil (Lev. 27:30; Num. 18:27; Deut. 12:17; 14:13).⁷³ Any other agricultural item did not need to be tithed, but obviously the Pharisees would tithe even that. Also, there were non-agriculture items that were considered exempt from the

70. Nolland, *Luke*, 876.

71. Stein, *Luke*, 450.

72. "Pharisees," *Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 1210.

73. Bailey, *Peasant Eyes*, 152.

tithing laws. Tithing such things represented the pharisaical view rather than the norm.⁷⁴ Pharisees thought they were interpreting and practicing the Old Testament Law as best a human possibly could, yet due to their ignorance (Acts 3:17, 1 Timothy 1:14), Jesus was their critic. The Pharisee was boasting in himself and his own righteous acts by living out the high calling of a Pharisee.⁷⁵

From the reader's perspective, the Pharisee is starting to match the typical Pharisee of that age. The parable continues as the character of the Pharisee develops. When the first comparison between the Pharisee and tax collector occurs, the Pharisee starts off as simply the moral leader between the two men. The audience would probably have put the Pharisee on a higher pedestal than the tax collector. As the story moves on, the Pharisee's inner character starts to come out into the light. Jesus' audience would begin to see how the Pharisee's attitude about himself and others matches those around them. The Pharisee's self-righteousness is what blinds him from seeing the spiritual needs of the sinful. His attitude drives him away from the needy losing any chance for ministry.⁷⁶ The Pharisee would rather keep his dignity and cleanliness intact by rejecting those of lesser status,⁷⁷ which is completely the opposite of who Jesus is.

Verse 13

74. S. Safrai, "Religion in Every Day Life," In *The Jewish People in the First Century: Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural and Religious Life and Institutions: Volume II*, eds. S. Safrai and M. Stern (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 825.

75. Nolland, *Luke*, 877.

76. *Ibid.*, 877.

77. Green, *Luke*. 648.

At this point, Luke transitions into the tax collector by employing a conjunction. Conjunctions are used by Luke to tell his readers that some contrast is coming up.⁷⁸ He prepares them that a subject change is about to happen that will somehow prove the opposite of what was previously said. The tax collector is sensitive about where he stands in relation to the sanctuary.⁷⁹ The parable's design is to compare the two characters down to the very details. Instead of separating himself from others like the Pharisee, the tax collector places himself in the back of the room because of his uncleanness.⁸⁰ Luke has previously recorded another situation in which the ten lepers stood at a distance from Jesus (15:12). Literarily, Luke could possibly be correlating the two instances, but even if not, the tax collector's attitude shows that he considers himself greatly unworthy. After positioning himself in the temple, the tax collector initially laments his actions.

The tax collector communicates his unworthiness by not lifting his eyes to heaven. Luke may be trying to communicate that the tax collector does the opposite of the Pharisee. The Pharisee looks around him and notices the tax collector across the temple sanctuary. Although it is hard to back up literarily, this could be a Lukan contrast in that the tax collector neither looks around to compare himself nor does he lift his eyes to heaven. Several other times in Scripture, people look up to heaven to pray (Mark 6:41, 7:34; John 11:41, 17:1; Psalm 123:1; Ezra 9:6). Looking up to heaven was to give God honor and praise due to him. However, the tax collector chooses to lower his eyes to display his humility, and instead, beats his chest. Luke uses the term "but" again to show

78. Duvall and Hays, *Grasping*, 35.

79. Stein, *Luke*, 450.

80. Evans, *Luke*, 271.

there is slight contrast going on. The tax collector humbly lowers his eyes and forcefully shows his passion with beating his chest. His actions display the same attitude in desiring to see God as in Joel 2:12.⁸¹ The LORD commands Israel to return to Him with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Without the mention of breasts beating, both the parable in Luke and Joel use the same idea of a humble approach to God.

The tax collector begins his short prayer by referring to God just like the Pharisee did. The tax collector desperately desires the mercy of God and to be received by Him. The mercy of God is a strong theme throughout the entire Bible which Luke reveals in this simple parable. Jesus Christ gives this same mercy and reception to sinners throughout His life on earth. The verb “to have mercy” also takes a meaning “to propitiate,” which is only used elsewhere in Hebrew 2:17.⁸² The mercy of God echoes the psalm of David when he calls out to God after his sin with Bathsheba (Psalm 51).⁸³ Luke does not emphasize the mercy of God as strong as these other passages, but clearly it is present in the parable of the Pharisee and tax collector. From now on, the development of the tax collector is revealed, but this still reinforces the typical negative views of a tax collector. Even still, the audience would empathize with the tax collector because of his willingness to humble and posture himself before God.

Verse 14

With two figures responding to God in different ways, Luke wants his readers to know which is the right response. In same moment, Jesus says the words, “I tell you,”

81. Nolland, *Luke*, 877.

82. Stein, *Luke*, 450.

83. Nolland, *Luke*, 877.

which he has used in the past when concluding other parables or finalizing a lesson.⁸⁴ Thus, in accordance with Luke's theme of reversal, the tax collector is the person going home justified, whereas, the Pharisee is going home self-satisfied.⁸⁵ Further, his justification is not grounded in his acts because the original readers knew how sinful the tax collectors were. The literary usage of "justified" is God pronouncing righteousness based on the faith of the tax collector. Luke makes the connection that the unlikely tax collector was declared righteous when the Pharisees were convinced they were already righteous. Yet, the Pharisee was still not justified at the end of the parable.

Finally, Luke concludes this section with the interpretation of the parable with two main points that are based on the two characters of the story. Luke unites the first main point with the Pharisee for he rejected the righteousness of God that comes through faith by seeking his own righteousness.⁸⁶ Luke's interpretation is that this approach to God is not just inaccurate but ends in God's wrath. He switches to the second main point through a contrasting conjecture to show the opposing approaches to the righteousness of God. In light of the tax collector, the second main point reveals the only path to receiving God's righteousness is by first humbling oneself. This approach to God is precisely the exhortation Luke uses to confront the issue of trusting in oneself for righteousness. He uses the same two main points in 14:11 when writing about how a wedding guest should sit in the lowly place and then be lifted up to the more exalted

84. Timothy A. Friedrichsen, "The Temple, a Pharisee, a Tax Collector, and the Kingdom of God: Rereading a Jesus Parable (Luke 18:10-14A)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* Volume 124 (Spring 2005): 98.

85. Warren W. Wiersbe, *New Testament*, in *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Colorado Springs: Victor, 1989), 249.

86. Stein, *Luke*, 451.

place to sit. The same principle is applied to both passages: that those who humble themselves will be exalted when the time comes. The self-exaltation of the Pharisee resulted in him being brought low. The unclean tax collector was brought high and given righteousness because he brought himself low before God.

Conclusions

The original readers of the Gospel of Luke did not live through the destruction of the temple, so for the present day, it is slightly a challenge to understand what it means “to stand” while praying and how that works. The major difference between the original readers and today is the absence of Pharisees and tax collectors. The people of that day already knew the stereotype of each figure in the parable. Luke was able to use that stereotype to help guide his readers into what he wanted. However, though there are neither Pharisees nor tax collectors, prideful religious leaders and outcast sinners are present today.

In Luke’s mindset, there are several themes attached to this parable, but there are only two theological principles in the parable because of the two main characters. Luke provides the theological principles at the end of the section. From the tax collector’s character, the theological principle is humbling oneself results in exaltation. This principle unfolds into a deeper meaning involving justification. All the character did was respond to God with faith and humility despite his severe uncleanness. Thus, justification has no necessary prerequisite to an obedient life of faith.⁸⁷ The second theological principle comes from the character of the Pharisee. He exalted himself, yet he was humbled. The Pharisee thought he was moral because of his obedience to the law,

87. Stein, *Luke*, 451.

but his heart was still haughty. He was never truly righteous except in his own eyes. These two principles show that a new standing before God is a prerequisite to the obedient life of faith.

The theological principles in the parable are also illustrated in the passage of Deuteronomy 26:1-15. The Israelites are about to enter into the Promised Land (1-4), but the response of the farmers is thankfulness, contriteness, and humility that God has brought them out of Egypt (5-11). This confession of humility that God is the one who is righteous comes before the declaration of good works (12-15).⁸⁸ This Old Testament passage gives the same principles in Luke 18:9-14.

The application of these principles does not require much insight. Luke uses parables like these as example parables for his readers to follow. In the case of the parable at hand, the believer should realize where his justification comes from and respond humbly before God. His reaction to God should be reverent at all times just like the tax collector, who would not raise his eyes toward heaven but beat his chest. Once a believer comes to God reverently, he should evaluate himself to God's standard realizing his drastic sinfulness.

In regard to the Pharisee, a believer should be careful never to fall into the same trap of having confidence in one's own righteousness. When observing how great one's works may be, the believer will start to be critical of others and hold contempt against them. Community is the centerpiece of Christianity, for by its love for another, the world may know Christ. The Pharisee's idea of community was criticizing others without caring

88. Frederick C. Holmgren, "The Pharisee and the tax collector," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible & Theology* Volume 48 Issue 3 (July 2004): 252-261.

for them. However, the application the believer should follow according to this parable is to always remain humble before God and others without seeking to be exalted.

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