

## **The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector**

**(Luke 18:9-14).**

This Parable can also be titled **The Parable of Pride and Humility.**

**A Parable is a short story told by Jesus to teach a spiritual or a moral lesson.**

The parable is one of contrast and unique to the **Gospel of St. Luke.**

It contains common Lucan heroes and villains.

The hero is the **Tax Collector**, and the villain is the **Pharisee**.

**Jesus** is teaching us about the virtue of humility vs. the vice of pride.

The virtue exalted is "**humility**" while **Pride**, the vice, needs to be **avoided**.

### **What is the lesson contained in this Parable?**

It teaches us to "**rebuke**" those who are **prideful and self-righteous**—those who think they are better than everyone else and a gift to the world, or even those who believe that they are more catholic than a canonized saint!

1. **Why have the Pharisees become the target of this Lesson between Pride and Humility?**

The Pharisees were known to speak well but gave a "bad example." In other words, they preached nice long and moving sermons but unfortunately did not practice what they preached.

As a matter of fact, they would even pay the faithful to offer penances and sacrifices that they were supposed to offer! The Pharisees are those individuals that say,  
"Do as I say but not as I do!"

### Why is Jesus unmasking the sin of Pride through this Parable?

**Pride** is a very dangerous vice for at least 3 reasons:

- 1) Pride says to trust our own abilities rather than to trust in God.
- 2) Pride enables us to treat others with contempt and disrespect instead as children created equally by God.
- 3) Pride always comes before the fall. It blinds us from seeing the gifts and talents and the virtues of others.

### Let's examine this Parable?

1. It takes place at Israel's holy site—the Temple
2. There are two visitors sharing the space of this Temple and they are opposites on the social spectrum. The **Pharisee** is a respected religious member of an honored social group, while the **Tax Collector** belongs to a social professional group hated by fellow Jews.
3. Then the **Prayer** offered by each: its content and posture of the prayer. Both offer a different prayer with a distinct posture.

The **Pharisee** is absolutely sure that he is a blessing to God, when he says, *"I thank you that I am not like the other men—robbers, evil doers, adulterers, or even like this "tax collector." I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get."*

Wow, this man can become the **Poster Child for best Parishioner of the Year...no, I am wrong—of the century!** What this Pharisee is doing is reminding **God** how good he is and that his contribution is so valuable to the world.

### What's wrong with the Pharisee's Prayer?

Plenty!

First, it begins like a **Thanksgiving Psalm** in which **God** is praised for something **He** has done, but then it turns sour and twisted because the **Pharisee** is reminding **God** what he has done for **God** and how good he is. The focus is on himself and certainly not on **God!**

### **What is the Pharisee really saying with this prayer?**

He is simply exalting himself and his prayer is filled with pride.

**"God, I thank you that I am so marvelous for I fast twice a week. The obligation of an ordinary Jew was to fast one day a week. Then, he continues to remind God of his generosity by "tithing" on everything—probably to the smallest herbs.**

This prayer is also reminding **God** that he is a **self-made and self-sufficient man** who needs nothing from anyone including **God!** He has it all! At times, rich people talk like this!

The main problem with this **Pharisee** is that he offers **no honor** whatsoever to **God**, but he is inflating his ego with much pride. Pride is blinding him from seeing that no matter how much we have stored in the bank or have accumulated materially, we still need **God!**

### **What about the Prayer of the Tax Collector?**

- 1. The Tax Collector's** prayer is filled with **humility**.
- 2. The Tax Collector** knows that he is in the **Presence** of a **holy God** and thus, he keeps a **distance** and **remains in the back** of the **Temple**.
- 3. The Tax Collector** timidly expresses his awareness of being in the **Presence** of the **Holy of Holies**. He can't even raise his eyes to heaven, and they remain downcast. This is a **sign of humility**. Have you ever noticed how many statues of the **Blessed Virgin Mary** have her looking downcast?  
This is to show **Her profound humility!**
- 4. The Tax Collector** in his **humility** knows that he is a sinner.
- 5. The Tax Collector** in his **spiritual poverty** asks for **mercy**. He desires to improve his spiritual life and **does not** speak at all of what he does for **God daily but what God does for him**. He knows that the only way to reach **God is through the Divine Mercy of our Loving God:**

***"My God, incline your ear and listen...we do not rely on our good works, but we pour out our pleas before you, trusting in your great mercy. Listen, Lord! Lord, forgive! Lord! Act, my God, and do not delay..."*** (Daniel 9:18a-19a).

**Growth in spiritual life is never a personal success but a grace given by God!**

**What about the posture of these visitors to the Temple?**

The **Pharisee** **stands** in **front** and speaks to **Almighty God** with confidence relating all his accomplishments making himself feel righteous and justified.

Whereas the **Tax Collector** **kneels** in the **back** with his **head bowed** asking for **forgiveness and mercy** from **Almighty God! This is a true and sincere act of humility.**

**Last question.**

**How does Jesus evaluate the two prayers found in this Parable?**

For **Jesus** only **one petitioner** who came to the **Temple** goes home **justified!** That is, **"The Tax Collector."** His prayer was humble and sincere and honored **God, but the prayer of the Pharisee failed in both counts. Jesus** concludes with these words emphasizing the importance of **humility:**

***"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."***

**Jesus** desires that we pray like the **Tax Collector**, approaching **God** with a sincere humble heart and when we do so, **God will honor us!**