

Parables of Jesus, pt.23, 12.7.03

The Parable of the Pharisee & the Tax Collector

Instructions to Approach God

There is always a right way to do everything. Following instructions in putting together Christmas toys or furniture.

Find out how many follow directions (80–100%); see it as a guide(30–80%); almost completely disregard (Under 30%).

Following instructions are important You cannot follow the instructions, and maybe get it right and maybe not.

(VC and discovering we aren't doing such a good job in following the instructions we've laid out)

Why did Jesus tell this parable – to give us instructions on how to approach God. They thought they knew the instructions on how to approach God. These instructions came from their own thinking and it really warped everyone's view of what was pleasing in God's eyes.

Read story.

Do you remember when someone challenged a set of values or beliefs of yours. They called into ? something you believed and they were right. This must have been a shocking story. It was something no one had ever imagined or stated. This like when blacks were given an equal voice and treated as equals under the law. No one had ever challenged the way the religious establishment was telling the people how one approached God.

Look at the Pharisee: He compares himself to others and then goes on to brag about his spiritual behavior – fast and tithe.

If we want to approach God: we must

**Not compare ourselves to others.** – 18.9–11. Middle class, Upper/middle class snobbiness. We as individuals and a church have to have a humble awareness of our own sin.

If you're here today and haven't put your faith in Jesus, you may have this problem. You are confident in your own goodness. You compare yourselves to others and note the similarities or vast negative differences and you think, "I'm as good as him" or "I'm not as bad as her."

Are there some people you're morally better than? Worse than? Is there anyone in your natural condition as pure as God? The standard is God. Whether you're a seeker or a follower of Christ, it's like a 6th grader comparing his height to a kindergartner & a senior in HS when the standard is Yao Ming.

Architecture of the church. The feet and legs of Jesus – where at His feet, worshipping him, he's right here with us, the cross is central, he's the standard.

It may come out like your concerned, but actually you enjoy hearing about the difficulties of others. One of the dirty little secrets of the pastorate is you silently gloat when you hear of difficulties in other churches or with ministers. Here's another dirty little secret, it's the same with us all. Whether you hear that a fellow student didn't make drill team or a coworker didn't get the promotion or a friend's child didn't get picked for select ball team or gifter & talented, we silently rejoice for they didn't get one up on us.

Give God permission this week to alert you when you start comparing yourself to others. If you want to know God,

**Not Be confident in our own good behavior & good works. – looking at how good you are – 18.12.** WE hate this when we see it exhibited in the lives of others, i.e., touting racial superiority, or class superiority there is a howling outcry.

What if I started talking about the superiority of WDBC?

When people do this at school and work we get nauseated. (talk about all their experience, knowledge, successes, awards, recognition, etc) This same is true when we flaunt our own either religious behavior or

moral standing. A superiority attitude. This Pharisee didn't go to pray but to inform God and those around him how good he was.

If we want to approach God it's based completely upon what Jesus did for us on the cross, not what we did.

To the seeker, some of you say, "I'm not only pretty good, but I don't do any bad stuff. In fact, I help others, etc." You cannot come into relationship with God, b/c of your good behavior or actions.

**Approach God in openness and humility.** - 18.13. As a tax collector, he was considered a robber. He not only took the governments portion but his too. "God, here I am in all my sin, immaturity." We know we can't fake God out and he wants us to admit it. Don't minimize it, deny it, try to make a deal, just own up to it!

My wife and I have friends whose son, in his middle teens, rebelled against them and against God. For four years he protested the innocence of his conduct and made innumerable promises to "straighten up." But each excuse was unjustified, and each promise was broken.

So much pain, embarrassment, and discouragement had been inflicted on these parents that the wife confided to us that she did not know if she loved her son anymore. Her heart had grown hard against her own child. What melted it again was a cry of desperation.

After another escapade, followed by more protests of innocence from the son, the mother walked away. As the young man sat alone on the sofa in the family room, he began to leaf through a family photo album. The pictures of better and happier days filled him with increasing emotion. One picture struck him with greater poignancy than the rest, and he called his mother back into the room to look at it.

The photograph showed the son as a young child under the approving smile of his mother. The teen now pointed to the photo and said, "Mom, when I see this picture, I understand why you don't know if you can love me anymore. In the picture, hope fills your eyes as you look down at your little boy. But I dashed all your hopes, Mom. Please forgive me for dashing all your hopes."

And what did the mother do? Her hardness broke and she embraced him with a heart renewed in love for him. What moved her were neither protests of innocence nor fresh promises to do better. Rather, she was moved by his statement of absolute desperation. The Bible tells us that this is what moves God also. *Citation: Bryan Chapell, Holiness by Grace (Crossway, 2001), pp. 26-27; used by permission of Crossway Books, a division of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois, 60187*

The result of openness & humility is “justified before God.” He found favor.

**Seek God’s forgiveness.**– 18.14a. This man understood he needed forgiveness. He understood the consequences of his sin, didn’t try to justify it, and confessed his need for forgiveness. It’s not the publican God accepts, but the repentant publican.

As long you **DON’T** see the seriousness of your sin problem you will never see your need for Jesus. Why do children, poor people, those with serious problems in their lives come to faith in Christ? Why do affluent, middle class, educated, etc people not come to faith in Christ? One group understands their sin problem, whereas the other doesn’t. One group compares their sin to that of others and doesn’t see the graveness of their own condition.

CS Lewis quote: When a man is getting better, he understands more and more clearly the evil that is still left in him. When a man is getting worse, he understands his own badness less and less. *Citation: C. S. Lewis, Leadership, Vol. 7, no. 4*

The man was justified – he found favor with God. He was clean. This is Good News for everyone, but especially for those who struggle with addictive sins or committed terrible sins or lived a rough life.

You have to own up to your sins.

The banner headline across the top of one *Chicago Tribune* read, "Guilty Plea Sets Inmate Free." The picture showed the freed man embracing his sister, and the article told how a man imprisoned for eight years cut a deal with the state's attorney's office in which the time served satisfied his sentence.

What struck me was that headline. My first reaction was, "Another criminal gets off with a plea bargain." Then I realized that was what happened to me: "Guilty plea sets inmate free." Freedom is not in a plea of innocence but in the admission of guilt. My story is different, but the headline fits perfectly. *Citation: Lee Eclov, Lake Forest, Illinois; source: Chicago Tribune (8-2-00)*

If you want to enter into a deeper relationship with God:

- You must not compare yourself to others
- You must not trust in your own good behavior and works.

- You must approach God in openness & humility
- You must seek God's forgiveness

**God will exalt the humble and humble the exalted.**

