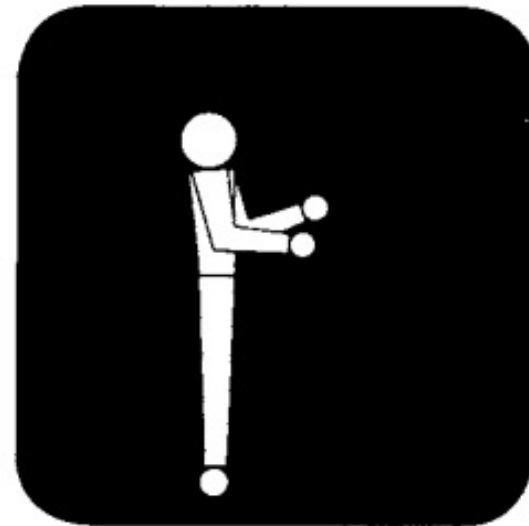



# **Lesson 4-1: Perspective—Grace**

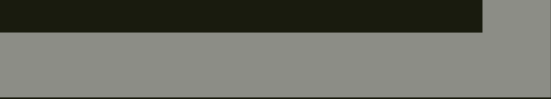


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Romans 5:1-2  
Luke 18:9-14  
1 Corinthians 15:10



**S**piritual growth should do something to our self-image. It did something to Paul's. When he wrote to the Corinthians in about A.D. 59, Paul called himself "the least of the apostles" (1 Cor. 15:9). Four years later, he had grown to the point that he saw himself as "the least of the saints" (Eph. 3:8). A few years—and many tribulations—later, writing his last letters to the young pastor Timothy, Paul declared himself to be the worst sinner in the world (1 Tim. 1:15).



As he matured and his intimacy with Jesus Christ deepened, Paul saw both God and himself more clearly. Instead of causing him to feel better about himself, growth opened Paul's eyes to the fact that his sin nature was worse than he had ever imagined; it was incorrigible. He saw with greater clarity every day the depth of his need for grace from God. And that was the secret of his greatness.

■ Philippians 3:7-8

■ 1 Cor. 3:21-23

*Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand. (Rom. 5:1-2)*

We stand in grace or we do not stand at all. Grace is all that God is free to do for mankind on the basis of the work of Jesus Christ. It is a resource that can never be earned or deserved, but only received as a gift. We are saved by grace through faith; we grow in the Christian life by grace through faith.

No one can work his way to God or earn God's approval through human effort. Paul, the former Pharisee who had been found "blameless" by the strictest standard of righteousness that had ever been devised (Phil. 3:4-7), knew about trying to work his way to God. He understood how the legalistic mind sets itself against grace, refusing to accept the fact that in man there dwells no good thing (Rom. 7:18).

Isaiah 64:6 ∨ Holman Christian Standard Bible ∨

- 6 All of us have become like something unclean,  
and all our righteous acts are like a polluted<sup>[a]</sup> garment;  
all of us wither like a leaf,  
and our iniquities carry us away like the wind.

Luke 18:9-14



True righteousness is a matter of confidence in God rather than self (Isa 8:17; 2 Cor 1:9; Heb 2:13), but the gifts of grace in the life of a believer easily tempt one to an attitude of superiority rather than humility and gratitude.

**This parable is about that temptation.**

Exoutheneo means "to make of no account, to despise utterly." This is the mental attitude sin of scornfulness-the basis of hatred, hostility, enmity. The word translated "others" is loipos. It means "the rest." As far as these men were concerned, everyone who was outside of their little sect was not worth spitting on.

The men to whom Jesus directs this parable look at themselves from the standpoint of all their virtues. They are preoccupied with all the wonderful things they do. But when they look at others, they minimize anything that might be worthwhile and magnify the flaws they see. They measure themselves by comparing their strengths to other men's weaknesses. Of course, by this kind of comparison they tower above others. So of course they look at others with contempt.

The Pharisees were pillars of the community. They were respected and honored. The name "Pharisee" means "the separated ones." The Pharisees were, first of all, separatists. They stood apart, aloof. They wore special clothing to make sure that everyone would be properly impressed with who they were. They were legalists, preoccupied with keeping not just the Mosaic Law but the thousands of regulations that had been added to it through the years. Especially they liked to concern themselves with the externals like tithing and ritual purity.

Pharisees thought they could meet God's standards by keeping all the outward rules. Like all legalists, they were very proud of themselves, of their association, of their own righteousness. They expected to be looked up to.

Tax-collectors, on the other hand, expected nothing but contempt. They did, after all, work for the hated Roman conquerors. The Romans did not pay the tax collectors, but gave them total freedom in collecting taxes from their fellow Jews. Everything they could weasel out of people above what was owed to the Romans was theirs.

Notice that Jesus says that the Pharisee was praying to himself. It is no wonder, because in his mind he really was god. He was convinced that God was made in his image; he was convinced God held his standard. The Pharisee said "thank you," but there was no thanksgiving here. He was thankful that he was not like other people, which of course was a bold-faced lie. He was exactly like other people.

He made no request of God. Why would he ask God for anything when he was unconscious of any need? He did not feel that he needed anything; he was very content with himself. He had no praise for God. In the place of praise was exaltation. He congratulated himself first for all the things he did not do and for being such a fine individual.

As he prayed, he looked around, because he had to look around at other people to remind himself of how wonderful he was. As his eyes fell on the tax-collector, he reminded himself how much better he was than all the others. Of course, he measured himself and others by the human standard of relative righteousness.



■ His prayer echoes Ps 26,

I have led a blameless life;

I have trusted in the Lord and have not faltered.

Test me, Lord, and try me, examine my heart and mind;

for I have always been mindful of your unfailing love....

I do not sit with the deceitful, nor do I associate with hypocrites.

I abhor the assembly of evildoers and refuse to sit with the wicked

- This man had a system based on two things: what he did and what he did not do. But nowhere was there a place in his system for what he was. Everything he was concerned with was external; there was nothing inside-no relationship with God, no fellowship, no faith.

- The tax-gatherer-hated, rejected, an outcast in his own nation-stood in the temple and uttered seven words. The fact that he felt he must stand apart from God, as well as from the Pharisee, indicates that he knew he was an outcast. He did not have any inflated ideas about being good enough for God.

- Beating his breast, he cried for mercy. Everything about this man said that he was defeated, ashamed, grieved. He saw how great his need was, and he knew that nothing but God's mercy could sustain him.

- “Two men went up to the temple to pray, but only one of them prayed.” The Pharisee mentions God, but does not pray to God, for he rests his case on his catalog of virtues. Jesus earlier instructed disciples, when they had done all they were commanded to do, to say “We are unworthy servants, for we have only done our duty” (17:10).

- The prayer of the tax collector is one of absolute dependence on God's mercy; as such, he anticipates the later NT doctrine of justification by faith.<sup>138</sup> The Pharisee, imagining himself “justified by works, has something to boast about—but not before God” (Rom 4:2). The tax collector has no works to boast about, “but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, and his faith is credited as righteousness” (Rom 4:5).



Every good thing in the Christian life grows in the soil of humility. Without humility, every virtue and every grace withers. That's why Calvin said humility is first, second, and third in the Christian faith.

— *John Piper* —

AZ QUOTES



For the Christian, humility is absolutely indispensable. Without it there can be no self-knowledge, no repentance, no faith and no salvation.

— *Aiden Wilson Tozer* —

AZ QUOTES





Real spiritual growth is always growth downward, so to speak, into profounder humility, which in healthy souls will become more and more apparent as they age.

— *J. I. Packer* —

**AZ QUOTES**

Galatians  
2:11-21

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What was the sin Peter  
had committed?

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What teaching did Paul  
have to give to the church?

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What lessons can we  
apply to our own lives?