

AF A9 BIBLE STUDY: “A Pharisee and a Tax Collector” Luke 18

Scripture of Lesson: Luke’s Gospel 18: 9-14

1. **The Pharisee: his works and his spirit before God**

- A. Lord Jesus knew the works of this Pharisee: He fasted twice each week and paid tithes on all his possession, not just on his income. Even if he was tithing once a year, his entire possession would all be given to God if his tithe was based on his possession. So, Lord Jesus knew the dishonesty in this Pharisee.
- B. The Pharisee also regarded himself morally superior than others, such as extortioners, unjust people, adulterers and tax collectors. Perhaps he was leading a morally clean life. Yet, his self-righteous attitude before God did not make him righteous before God. In fact, his attitude brought disapproval and displeasure to the Lord.
- C. Lord saw that this Pharisee was trying to justify himself with his works and he was dishonest about his works. A number of religions and some Christian denominations teach people that they can gain salvation and be justified before their Creator through their works. Lord characterized the hypocrisy of the Pharisees as follows:

But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. [Matt 23: 5]

- D. The frequency or regularity of fasting is not important but how you fast. Lord Jesus taught the true fasting as different from the hypocritical fasting of the Pharisees:

Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the [a]hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face [Matt 6: 16-17]

- E. Apostle Paul made it clear that we are not justified by our works but by our faith in Jesus Christ. He had come to the realization that, although he had learned the ways of the Pharisee doctrine of justification by works in accordance with the Mosaic law tradition, God extends His invitation to forgiveness of sins and justification as His children through the innocent blood shed by His Son on the cross:

knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. [Galatians 2: 16-17]

2. **The Tax Collector: How was he justified?**

- A. The humble attitude of the tax collector was evident to the Lord. He could not even come close to the front of the temple where people preferred to offer their prayers, often to be seen of other people. He stood far from the front area, could not even lift his head toward God, beat his chest in remorse and repentance, crying “God be merciful to me, a sinner.”
- B. No doubt the tax collector was one of the extortioners mentioned by the Pharisee. Perhaps this tax collector was Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector who welcomed Jesus into his house. When he met Jesus, he realized right away that he had to repent of his past wrongdoings. And he wanted to show his repentance by making proper restitutions to the victims of his extortions.

Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.” [Luke 19:8]

- C. Lord Jesus loved the humble, broken-hearted spirit of the tax collector. God does not honor the lofty hearted person, but honors and welcomes those who show true repentance and genuine humility of spirit:

*The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart,
And saves such as have a contrite spirit.* [Psalm 34:18]

3. **Difference between ‘works for salvation’ and ‘works because of salvation’**

- A. Does God need our works? God is the sole Creator of the whole universe. He is far richer than the sum of all wealth of this world combined. The wealth of Bill Gates times one million will not even come to be a significant

amount in God's eyes. Therefore, we must never think that we must do good works to be saved. ***Salvation by works is a false doctrine, which must be kept out of pure Christianity.***

- B. The evil of the salvation by works doctrine is that those religions that espouse this wrong doctrine have used it to coerce people into giving material things to the church in exchange for assurance of their salvation and even of their relatives. They monopolized the gospel of Christ as something only they can offer to the people, whereas Christ died for all humanity and the curtain into the Most Holy room in the temple of God was torn open so that any repentant soul can enter into the throne of God directly through Jesus Christ without having to rely on adjudication of a priesthood.
- C. The hymn, Amazing Grace, expresses how God forgives a repentant sinner by His amazing grace:
- Amazing Grace, How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now am found
T'was blind but now I see
T'was Grace that taught my heart to fear
And Grace, my fears relieved
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed
Amazing grace, Howe Sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost but now am found
T'was blind but now I see
Was blind, but now I see.*
- D. But, God wants us to do good works because of our thankfulness and appreciation. We are born again in Christ Jesus to do good works according to the good will and pleasure of God. God provides all resources and help for us to perform the 'good' works, not in men's standards but of God's good pleasure and purpose:
- For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.* [Ephesians 2: 10]
- E. So, let us not despise those Christians who do marvelous good works for the humanity and for the kingdom of God. Rather, we should pray for them so that they do not become proud but keep themselves in God's hand. In addition, let us learn to do good works with what God has given to us. When we are proven to be faithful in the little things God has put in our charge, He will give us more for His good pleasure.

Topics of discussion:

- 1. Let us discuss the meaning of God's grace.*
- 2. How did God bless my life to do good works for Him? Please share your personal story.*