

# Pharisee And Publican

## Lesson 4.11

The parable of the Pharisee and publican finds God eternally judging two men by their hearts and prayers, by their motivations and words. How will you fare when he judges you?

Please read [Luke 18:9-14 ESV](#) before beginning free Bible study lessons, #4.11

Previous Lesson: [Parable Of The Rich Fool #4.10](#)

Preliminary Bible Study Questions:

1. What is a Pharisee?
2. What is a Publican?
3. Based on their prayers, which of the two did God forgive?

The Pharisee and tax collector (aka publican) entered the Temple one day for apparently similar reasons, but the two were praying to different Gods. Let's discover the striking differences in how people pray, and the results that occur.

### Pharisee And Publican Parable Setting

Jesus' Pharisee and publican parable was spoken immediately after the parable of the persistent widow ([Luke 18:1-8](#)). These two parables definitely belong together. The message from the first parable is that a person should always pray with the right attitude of mind and heart, and pray without giving up hope. **The parable which we're studying today is concerned with how we view ourselves before God, and why our prayers are heard by God.**

Jesus was teaching directly to a group of hypocrites at this point in time. Luke made that clear by the way in which he introduced them ([Luke 18:9](#)). Jesus' Pharisee and publican parable is a fictional story, not a real circumstance. **It was told, however, to address a very real problem: The ultimate effects of self-righteousness.**

These people were self-righteous because they built up a moral standard for themselves based upon the lowly sinful actions of others and their own noble deeds. The two things go hand-in-hand in creating hypocrites: by looking at the sinful actions of others compared to one's own noble actions, the hypocrite will naturally loathe the others, because he focuses on their badness, over against his own goodness.

**The judgmental hypocrite totally discounts their virtues and he totally discounts his own shortcomings.** So a gulf developed between the hypocrites and other people, leading the hypocrites to detest regular people. **These hypocrites were Pharisees who thought others amounted to nothing.** Somehow, the Pharisees were esteemed by the common people.

### What Is A Pharisee And Publican?

The contrast is the importance here - a religious man versus a sinner man. The religious man is named a Pharisee. The name itself means "separated ones." **The Pharisees were Jewish priests, who learned, lived, and taught Judaism.** They took great pride in observing the 613 "laws of God," which were interpreted by them. The Pharisees were self-righteous by virtue of building themselves up, while tearing others down. They were bad people who pretended to be saints. They were nothing but play-actors. But the people honored them.

**Jewish publicans were looked down upon by society because of their disloyalty to the Jews.** They collected various taxes for the Romans who occupied the Judean region. These publicans were basically the Roman IRS! Not only that, but they collected much more than they should, because that's how they were paid, so, the more money they collected the higher their wages. They were greedy, scheming men who forced financial woes on people's lives, being thusly hated by the people.

The Pharisee and publican parable, then, was a shocking story to the listeners. **Jesus turned the public's view of these very public men upside down. Jesus exposed the two men for who they were in God's eyes.** This Pharisee and publican parable is an incredibly interesting story.

### **The Pharisee's Prayer**

In the Pharisee and publican story Jesus shared the prayer of the Pharisee, "O God, I thank you that I'm not like the rest of the people - robbers, cheats, adulterers - or even like this publican. I fast twice a week; and I give offerings from all my income."

Breaking this prayer down is fairly easy. **The Pharisee was offering this prayer of thanksgiving for how great of a man he was. He had a very high view of himself, making him pious.** He was comparing his life to the life of bad sinners, basically congratulating himself in the process. The wording actually introduces him as praying "to himself." In other words, he began the prayer with the word "God" but then spoke with himself. Jesus pointed this out because God doesn't listen to the prayers of hypocrites ([Matthew 6:5-8](#)), so when a hypocrite prays, no one is listening, and the result is that he talks to himself. Funny, I know.

**The Pharisees' prayer was also mean-spirited.** In front of the publican, he audibly thanked God that he wasn't as despicable as the publican. This pompous Pharisee was self-deceived and was actually talking about himself to himself.

**Finally, the Pharisee had to inform all the hearers in the temple how great his deeds were.** He fasted twice per week even though God's law only called for fasting once per year during the atonement. He added that he also pays tithes on everything that enters his house, not simply on his priest's salary. He tithed on everything he brought into the house in case the person from whom he bought the items didn't pay a tithe on it. The Pharisee thought the common folks needed to know how spiritual he was.

### **The Publican's Prayer**

The Pharisee and publican parable now turns to the publican's prayer. Jesus said that the publican prayed thusly, "O God, be merciful to me, *the sinner*." In few words, very few words, this man revealed a humble heart that respected God and viewed himself properly. We'll see soon that it is the perfect [sinner's prayer](#).

First of all, the publican didn't look at heaven out of respect for his holy God. Like Isaiah, the man of unclean lips, he realized his utter sinfulness compared to his righteous God ([Isaiah 6:5](#)). Like St Paul the Apostle, the publican considered himself the worst of all sinners ([1 Timothy 1:15-16](#)). The publican's personal shame, resulting from his guilt ([Ezra 9:6](#)), brought him to his knees, head bowed, beating his chest. **He beat his chest because of the extreme anguish he experienced from his sinfulness.** It was a cultural tradition that revealed a penitent soul.

## The Pharisee And Publican Judgment

The Pharisee came to the Temple to boast to other people; the publican came to meet God and pour out his heart in repentance. The Pharisee revealed a heart full of pride; the publican revealed a heart full of humility. **The Pharisee and publican prayed to different Gods.**

The parable then finds Jesus issuing an eternal judgment on the Pharisee and publican. Jesus says, "I tell you, this man, *i.e.* publican, went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted." This verse is where it all comes together.

The lowly, thieving traitor - the publican, receives forgiveness, the prized jewel of Heaven and God Almighty - **FORGIVENESS**. The pompous, religious snob, *i.e.* the Pharisee, returns home unforgiven, the prized jewel of Hell and the Devil - **UNFORGIVENESS**. The Pharisee and publican each received what they sought out of life. What is important to you?

The publican will hear these beautiful words from Jesus on Judgment Day, "Well done, thy good and faithful servant." The Pharisee, as he finally bows the knee before King Jesus, will hear, "I never knew you, depart from me wicked servant, into the flames prepared for the devil and his angels."

In the end, all that matters is how God views you. He'll see you as a Pharisee or publican, justified or guilty; as righteous or unrighteous; as wise or foolish; as a sheep or a goat. There are only two types of people according to the Bible, and these are some of the ways the two are depicted. Which of the two are you?

Because of his humility in coming to God by repentance and faith, this publican stands perfectly righteous before God. The perfect life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ was applied to his life by the Father. This act is called imputation, and fulfills a person's need of [atonement with God](#). And when Jesus' life is imputed to a sinner, the Holy Spirit indwells the person, sealing his soul for the day of redemption.

[The Pharisee](#). He's got a rock in his heart because he loves casting the first stone at a sinner. And he has a fire on his tongue because he loves hurting people with his words. He loves himself and

those just like him. Hypocrites travel in packs. **Jesus calls them a "brood of vipers."** They'll soon end up in the perfect snake pit, though, so take heart. God views the hypocrite as prideful, arrogant, and sinFULL. There isn't a good bone in the hypocrite's body. **He will be judged in the same way as he judged other people - that's a guarantee from Scripture ([Luke 6:37](#)).**

## **Grasp This!**

The Pharisee and publican were on trial before God Almighty at the Temple. **God eternally judged them based on their heart's attitudes and prayer words.** The two men didn't know they were auditioning for heaven, but the Greek language and final judgment by Jesus Christ clearly indicates that is what happened.

Hypocrisy is one of the many things that can keep you out of heaven. God will not justify, *i.e.* save, a religious hypocrite. **You can't come to Jesus with a proud, self-righteous attitude and get saved.** It's not possible, because your faith is in your SELF, not in Jesus Christ. Learn from the parable of the Pharisee and publican.

Look into the mirror of the 10 Commandments and confess your sins. **The 10 Commandments aren't there for you to obey and earn your way to God; they are there for you to understand that you cannot live up to God's standard.** Pharisees attempt to earn heaven through their obedience to the commands, but publicans know that perfectly obeying God's command is impossible, and therefore a Savior is needed.

Read the commands, and then you will realize your need for the life of Jesus Christ to be applied to your account. Apologize for the error of thinking you can earn God's love, and place your faith totally in the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to save you. Once he forgives you, there will be one less hypocrite, because when a person trusts in Jesus Christ, God no longer views him as a hypocrite.

Hypocrisy is one of the many things that can ruin your spiritual walk with God. A true Christian can become a hypocrite over time as he fixes himself to the study of Scripture and builds a system of behavior for himself, but eventually begins to hold other people accountable to his own system. He judges others by what God has shown him for himself. What a Christian needs to do is to stop holding other people hostage to his or her own moral standards. **Christians need to treat others with mercy, grace, and love - you know, just like God treats us.**

[Romans 12:9](#) says, "Let love be without hypocrisy." You cannot truly love God, or other people, or your church, with a hypocritical attitude. The love is blocked by a wall you cannot see. You can't love if you judge and condemn others. You can't love if you cannot forgive others. Stop looking at other people's shortcomings. Do something about your own spiritual walk. **Judge yourself by Jesus Christ and his word.**

Read the Bible and repent of your hypocrisy. The sooner you see that you're in error, the better chance you have of truly apologizing to God and him accepting it. Are you "THE" sinner, like the publican; or, are you simply "A" sinner, like everyone else, making it no big deal? Pharisee or publican, who will you spend your time with for an eternity?

## Next Lesson: Parable Of The Mustard Seed #4.12

### Bible Study Questions:

1. Modernize this Pharisee and publican parable by replacing the characters with the most highly esteemed and lowly denigrated members of society. Who did you put in place of the Pharisee and publican?
2. What is the attitude difference between one calling himself "a sinner" or "the sinner"? Consider the related danger of using [Romans 3:23](#) out of context, or without proper knowledge of the human condition.
3. Is a person truly saved if they aren't disgusted with their actions and ashamed of their own sin(s)?

### Inspirational Bible Verses:

So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood. [Isaiah 1:15 NASB](#)

If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear. [Psalm 66:18 NASB](#)

And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. [Matthew 6:5-8 NIV](#)

"Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord GOD, "when I will send a famine on the land — not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD." [Amos 8:11 ESV](#)

### Prayers Of Thanksgiving:

Dear Father, the Pharisee and publican parable explicitly tell us that our prayers matter. What we say to you, and how we say those things have great meaning. Our lives have to be in submission to you before you give us an ear. God rid us of the ignorance of our ways. How foolish we've been to think that you hear us when we don't listen to you. The first prayer out of our mouth should be, "Lord, be merciful to me, THE SINNER." God, help us stop being foolish and ignorant. Show us your holiness and our sinfulness. Help us communicate with you in a respectful manner. Thank you. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

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