

Text: Lk 18.9-14

You have given me lots of great questions. Some of them will require more than one message for an answer, and our schedule is getting a little jammed up. Next month, every Sunday has something happening so I won't get to answer any more questions until March.

A question came this week that I thought I ought to answer today.

I'm going to paraphrase the question from memory.

Approaching a store last week, I saw someone standing outside with a young child, apparently a father and son. The father was standing their smoking marijuana with his son looking on. I felt I should say something to him, but thought I would be so angry at what he was doing that he wouldn't hear me.

The question: How do we relate to sinners in our world, especially when they are doing something obviously wrong?

There are a lot of things that go on in my mind in reaction to this question. I can't think of a passage that directly answers it, so we are going to have to develop some principles rather than direct teaching.

I want to start with a well-known parable that is somewhat related to our topic, although its main teaching point is about salvation.

That is the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican in Lk 18.

Read Lk 18.9-14

Proposition: To communicate the gospel, we must learn to view sinners the way God views sinners, and remember we are sinners too.

I. The dramatic contrast of attitudes (Lk 18.9-14)

- A. The point of the parable: to highlight the folly self-righteousness (9)
 - 1. The parable paints two extremes; it might be exaggerated for effect
 - 2. The parable points to some specific people (probably Pharisees)
 - a. They saw themselves as righteous
 - b. They viewed others with contempt

B. A secondary point of the parable: to highlight the only way to heaven (13-14)

1. The tax-collector calls for God to be merciful

- a. The word is “propitiation”
- b. Propitiation is where God makes a way for a man to be accepted
- c. In the OT, the Day of Atonement propitiated God so that God was willing to hear the prayers of the people for another year
- d. Here, the tax-collector acknowledges he has no right to claim that God should hear him: he throws himself on the mercy of God

2. Jesus declares: this man went to his house justified (“having been made righteous”)

- a. The only way we can be saved is by God’s mercy
- b. He is the one that makes us righteous, not we ourselves

C. An application to our lives when living with sinners

1. Which man was more sinful?

a. We tend to think that the Pharisee was more sinful

“Many modern Christians have heard this parable so often that they immediately associate Pharisees with self-righteous hypocrisy and tax collectors with humble piety. In Jesus’ day the Jews viewed them differently. It was the Pharisees who were the models of righteous behavior, and it was the tax collectors who epitomized sinfulness. Therefore this parable undoubtedly made a great impact on the disciples.”¹

b. Both were equally sinful, but they were not equally justified

1) Many noticeable sins are physically and socially degrading

Alcohol, drugs, tobacco, immorality — people who indulge themselves in this way often become physical wrecks over time.

¹ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Lk 18.14.

2) The Pharisee's pride (graphically on display) is really just as ugly as the public sins of the tax collector

2. The first thing to remember about sinners is this: I am a sinner

You will not reach the heart of anyone if you hold on to any thought that you are better than them.

II. The constant attitude of our Saviour

Mt 9.11-13 When the Pharisees saw *this*, they said to His disciples, "Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?"¹² But when Jesus heard *this*, He said, "*It is* not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick."¹³ "But go and learn what this means: 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Mt 9.35-38 ¶ Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.³⁶ Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd.³⁷ Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few."³⁸ "Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."

Mt 12.5-8 "Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent?"⁶ "But I say to you that something greater than the temple is here."⁷ "But if you had known what this means, 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT A SACRIFICE,' you would not have condemned the innocent."⁸ "For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

Mt 14.13-14 ¶ Now when Jesus heard *about John*, He withdrew from there in a boat to a secluded place by Himself; and when the people heard *of this*, they followed Him on foot from the cities.¹⁴ When He went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick.

Mt 20.29-34 ¶ As they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed Him. ³⁰ And two blind men sitting by the road, hearing that Jesus was passing by, cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" ³¹ The crowd sternly told them to be quiet, but they cried out all the more, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!" ³² And Jesus stopped and called them, and said, "What do you want Me to do for you?" ³³ They said to Him, "Lord, *we want* our eyes to be opened." ³⁴ Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him.

- A. We can multiply example after example
- B. One more, pointing to a large group of people

Mt 23.37-38 ¶ "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. ³⁸ "Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!

III. Cultivating the heart of an evangelist

- A. The good news can change anyone

1 Cor 6.9-11 ¶ Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

B. The good news changed me

Tit 3.1-7 ¶ Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed,² to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men.³ For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.⁴ But when the kindness of God our Savior and *His* love for mankind appeared,⁵ He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,⁶ whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,⁷ so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life.

Conclusion:

1. We have to constantly remind ourselves that we are the same as the sinners we meet — we are not better than them.
2. We have to think about how to address sinners in a way that might spark a response *towards* God, not away from God.

Many years ago, when I was in school, I was doing some evangelism with a fellow student. We ran into a couple of young guys who were smoking in their car, but were willing to talk to us.

My friend lit into them (ha!) about their smoking, telling them how bad it was, how they shouldn't be doing it and so on, calling them to repent and get right with God.

Needless to say, nothing much happened after that.

Which would be more important, that those guys quit smoking or that they get saved, and work on the smoking later?

3. We need to pray that the Lord will cultivate a heart of compassion in us so that we can love sinners (even if we don't love their sin... *at all*)
4. We also have to realize that we can't reach everyone — no matter how wise and compassionate our words are.