

Welcome to Neighborhood! My name is Travis and I am thrilled to open God's Word with you. I invite you to join me in the New Testament - LUKE 18:9.

We continue in our series called ILLUSIONS. An illusion is something you believe is true, but it is fake. It looks real, but it's a counterfeit. The past 4 weeks, Pastor Bill has taught on the illusions of Humanism, Determinism, Popularity, and Worldliness.

Today's message from Luke 18 centers on a tricky illusion...one that's so sneaky because it's so subtle... and it's embraced by those inside and outside the church. But I'm not going to name the Illusion yet! I want us to find the illusion together in Luke 18:9-14. This passage contains a brief PARABLE of Jesus: A parable is a story...a made-up story that contains real truth. One guy said, "Parables are imaginary gardens with real frogs." Parables are not childish nor are they easy to grasp. They are designed to stimulate thought...to make us think! Parables are "Things That Make You Go HMMM..." They require reflection, investigation, contemplation. Jesus loved parables! More than a third of His saying are in the form of parables. Let's jump in!

Luke 18:9 (NKJV)

Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: The author, Luke, throws us a bone! He tells us a bit about the audience and why Jesus tells this particular story. To whom was this parable directed? To those who were confident in their own goodness and who looked down upon those who weren't as "good" as they were.

Luke 18:10 (NKJV)

"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

We have two characters here: A Pharisee & A Tax Collector. If you've been around the Bible for any amount time, you might NOT feel the impact of this story like Jesus' listeners would. We know that the Pharisees were called out by Jesus as religious hypocrites. We also know that Jesus extended grace toward a few tax collectors.

But set that knowledge aside for a few minutes...because to Jesus' listeners, *the Pharisee* was OBVIOUSLY the good guy. In your mind, give this Pharisee all the credit you can. He is a good man who obeys the law, is faithful to his wife, he is honest, and he is disciplined. He's the guy who coaches Little League Baseball for the kids in the neighborhood. And after his kids are grown, he keeps coaching! He's the guy who not only lends you his pick-up truck, but he helps you move your stuff!

But the *Tax Collector*, he is a crook...he is a traitor who works for Rome and robs his own Jewish people blind. The title "tax collector" is a derogatory term. It's usually joined with "sinners, prostitutes, and robbers." Think of this guy as someone who has swindled you out of your life savings and he is spending it on fancy cars, fancy parties, and fancy women. He's the guy that sits behind you in the movie theatre and talks on his phone! He lets his dog do its business on your front lawn and leaves it there. These two guys both go up to the Temple to pray. One guy who belongs in the Temple. And one guy who has no business being there.

Luke 18:11-12 (NKJV)

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men— extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.'

The Pharisee stands to pray...the normal posture of prayer. He says, "God I thank You..." that's a great beginning to a prayer. But he rather than give thanks for something God has provided...he gives thanks FOR HIMSELF...that he's not like other sinners! His prayer is in effect: "I thank You God that I am a good person." "I am not like the sinners...I am not like that tax collector." "*I fast twice a week*"(the OT law only required fasting once a year). "*I tithe on ALL I possess* (not just the crops required by the law). What is lacking in the Pharisee's prayer? There is no sense of sin. There is no mention of any need or dependence upon God. He is boasting of his own self-achieved righteousness. This is not really a prayer...it's self-advertisement.

Luke 18:13 (NKJV)

And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'

The crooked tax collector, this leech on society, approaches God differently than the upright and model-citizen Pharisee. He beats his chest (a gesture of extreme sorrow). He is fully aware that he approaches God as the sinner he is. There is no summary of his good deeds; no pleading his case for why God should accept him. There is BUT ONE RECOGNITION: his need for God's mercy. His appeal is not to his own good works, but to God's good work of forgiving sinners. His request: "God, be merciful to me..." is a word that means "*be propitiated*." PROPITIATION is "an offering or sacrifice that satisfies the wrath of God directed against sin." In effect, the tax collector is asking God: "let your holy anger be satisfied, be removed."

1 John 2:2 tells us that Christ is the PROPITIATION for our sins...he is the offering...the atoning sacrifice...for human sin that satisfies the holiness of God). There in the temple.....where the priests would continually offer sacrifices to God to atone for the sins of the people...this dirty, vile man longs that the atonement sacrifice might apply to his own sins. He knows what he deserves.....he cannot earn God's forgiveness, so he simply makes an appeal for God's mercy.

Luke 18:14 (NKJV)

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

The tax collector goes home JUSTIFIED: counted as righteous; declared good...good enough for God. Wait, What???

Jesus, you must have made a mistake because the tax collector is a horrible man...and YOU of all people must know that!

...and HE goes home justified before God? And the Pharisee doesn't? The hearers of this parable are left to reconsider how righteousness is achieved. Jesus points out the futility of trying to be good enough for God...to put yourself right with God based on your own doing. Jesus proclaims that righteousness is a gift of God made possible by the atonement sacrifice. Righteousness is received by those who are humble: who approach God as sinners trusting in His grace. Righteousness is not received by the prideful: those who exalt themselves and trust in their own good works. Both the Pharisee & Tax Collector are DEAD in their sin. The tax collector knows it...he admits his sinful condition. He has no confidence in his own merits...and this puts him in a better place to call out for God to save him. The

Pharisee...the “upright, moral man” doesn’t know he is dead. He is in a dangerous place: He is caught in an ILLUSION...Do you see it? What would you call this illusion?

I will call it: *The Illusion of MORALISM*

Moral means “conforming to a standard of right behavior; choosing right over wrong.”

What is Moralism?

The belief that the Gospel can be reduced to improvements in behavior. Moralism communicates to a lost world that God wants them to get their lives straight. Moralism promises God’s salvation if you will only behave and become a good person. Moralism reduces the Bible to a manual for good behavior. The moralist relies on his or her good works as the basis for their salvation: “If I don’t steal, kill, cuss...if I go to church, pray, and help the community...then I’m good with God.”

You know who I blame for pushing moralism in my day??? E.T. The Extra Terrestrial. You remember his parting words to the little girl before he went home? “BEEEEEEEE GOOOOOOOOOD” But that’s not enough! We need more than good people. We need JESUS. He is our only hope for salvation and the transformation we seek. We’re not aiming for a society of nicer people.

C.S. Lewis commented in his book “Mere Christianity”: “...we must not suppose that even if we succeeded in making everyone nice we should have saved their souls. A world of nice people, content in their own niceness, looking no further, turned away from God, would be just as desperately in need of salvation as a miserable world—and might even be more difficult to save.

...God became man to turn creatures into sons: not simply to produce better men of the old kind but to produce a new kind of man.”

What are the EFFECTS of Moralism?

The first effect of Moralism is:

A dangerous confidence and trust in our own merits. “I’m a good guy. I do the right things. Why would I need God’s mercy? He is pleased with the kind of man I am.” My good deeds outweigh my bad ones. This is the Pharisee. Blind to the fact that he, too, was a sinner in need of God’s grace. I don’t care how great of a person you might think you are, you can never be good enough on your own. *Isaiah 64:6 (NKJV) “But we are like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags;”*

The second effect of Moralism is:

A crippling despair from a performance-based relationship with God. If the Gospel is about being a good person, and trying to be good enough for God...we will be crushed under the weight of God’s disappointment in us. For many Christians, we think it is our good behavior that maintains God’s mercy...His love...His salvation...in our lives. And when we mess up, when we sin, we think God has removed His mercy from us. So we try to re-gain God’s love for us through self-improvement. This is NOT the Gospel!

Hello, my name is Travis Osborne. I am a recovering moralist. I have spent time suffering from both sides of the moralism illusion. In High School: I was the Pharisee. I did the right things. I avoided the public sins that many of my Christian friends were walking in. I put so much weight in my good works. I became upset with them, disgusted with their behavior, and I let them know about it anytime I could. In my prayers, I was blind to my own private sins and sure that God was lucky to have me on His side. I was a jerk. I was nothing like the God I claimed to follow. I really believed that I only needed a few drops of God’s mercy but my friends needed gallons of it...but as I continued to read the Bible, God began softening my heart, humbling me, conforming me more and more to the likeness of His Son Jesus. I

learned that it wasn't by my own good works that I was saved, but only by the good work of Jesus Christ who took my sins upon Himself and carried them to the cross...becoming the sacrifice that would set me free.

But then the other side of moralism afflicted me: I believed that it was God's grace that saved me...but I thought that I had to MAINTAIN my salvation through good behavior. But I always fell short. I was always screwing up and pleading with God to forgive me. "Never again, God. I'll be good this time." Fail. "Ok, God, I'm sorry. This time, I mean it. I'll be good." Fail.

It was in despair because I KNEW the difference between right & wrong...but I would still choose wrong. I developed this image, this picture of God that as He looked at me, He was constantly shaking His head: "Oh Trav, when are you going to get it right." "I'm about done with you." I was in the trap of a works-based relationship with God: He loved me when I was good; He didn't when I was bad. I pictured God's hand...not upholding me, not guiding me, not embracing me; I pictured the back of His hand ready to let me have it. Can anyone identify with this? Am I the only one?

LISTEN: God's kingdom is one of grace, not achievement. God's love is not earned; It is freely given to those who: Admit their sin to God. Believe that Jesus died on the cross for them. Choose to trust in Christ as their only hope for salvation. We did nothing to earn God's mercy, therefore there is nothing we can do to lose it.

So if Moralism is the Illusion, what is the Reality?

The Reality is we are saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8). Moralism tries to sneak "good behavior" in the equation, but God does not factor in our good behavior into the salvation equation. The moment we were saved: something was SUBTRACTED from us. Something was ADDED to us. Our SINS have been subtracted, removed from us. This is called ATONEMENT: Christ has taken our sins away. We are FORGIVEN...free from guilt and shame. At the same time, something was added to us: Righteousness (righteousness is "goodness"...goodness that is good enough for God). Not our own goodness that we manufacture, but Christ's goodness. This is called JUSTIFICATION: Moralism is an illusion that says WE must manufacture our own goodness. The Gospel says it is Christ's goodness that we need, not our own. Paul says in *Philippians 3:9 (NKJV)*

[that I may gain Christ] and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith. Now...what happens when we have our sins subtracted and Christ's goodness added to us? Jesus begins to change how we live! (We become better people!) The Holy Spirit lives in us and begins a life-long process of changing us, transforming us to be more and more like Jesus in our thoughts, our words, our actions. As we meet God regularly in His Word, as we talk with God often in prayer, and as we surround ourselves in Christian fellowship: We experience a growing distaste for sin and behaviors opposed to God's Word. We experience a growing hunger for good works, actions which are consistent with God's character. We walk in obedience to God's commands NOT to attain His forgiveness and salvation...but BECAUSE we are forgiven and saved! And even this is NOT our own work, but it is Christ IN us. Let us not approach God trusting in our own righteous deeds. But like the Tax Collector, let us approach God solely on the basis of HIS mercy & grace knowing in full assurance that God receives sinners. Let us escape the illusion of moralism by saying as King David said in Psalm 52:8 "I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever."