

# **ONLY ONE WAY**

LUKE 18:9-14

JESUS IS GOD'S ONLY ANSWER TO THE SIN PROBLEM

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# Only One Way

Luke 18:9-14

Let me just remind us where we are as we start this morning's message. We are working our way through the "Four Spiritual Laws." Law #1 stated, "God **loves** you and offers a wonderful **plan** for your life." We fleshed that out by saying that Jesus wants us to enjoy full abundant lives in Him. Further we defined full abundant lives as enjoying the peace, joy, and contentment that comes from being in a right relationship with God and with others.

Law #2 stated, "Man is **sinful** and **separated** from God. Therefore, he cannot know and experience God's love and plan for his life." In other words, because we were born into sin, because we have a natural bent towards sin, because we have willfully sinned against God and continue to sin against Him, we have separated ourselves from God and His wonderful plan for our lives.

That all sounds like pretty bad news. We find ourselves helplessly and hopelessly separated from God, His life, and His love. The news is going to get even worse this morning. We are going to find out that there is nothing we can do to fix that break. But Law #3 will go on to explain the good news to us. "Jesus Christ is God's **only** provision for man's sin. Through Him you can know and experience God's love and plan for your life."

This morning we are going to examine attitudes that will keep us from understanding and accepting God's provision. It seems to me that we have bought into society's lie that we earn our way to heaven by being good and doing good. In other words, if when I die, God weighs out my good deeds and bad ones, if my good deeds outweigh my bad, then I will go to heaven. This is so against the truth of biblical Christianity, this attitude will keep us from a restored relationship with God. We church people have come to think of ourselves as pretty good people who do pretty good things. We have so blinded ourselves that we actually think that we are good.

However, if we honestly took a good look at ourselves, we could easily see that we are not much different from the non Christians around us.

A saloon owner sold his old tavern to a local church. Enthusiastic church members tore out the bar, added some lights, gave the whole place a fresh coat of paint, and installed some pews.

Somehow a parrot which belonged to the bar owner was left behind. On Sunday morning that colorful bird was watching from the rafters. When the minister appeared, he squawked, "New proprietor!" When the worship team took their place the bird squawked, "New floor show!" When he looked out over the congregation he screeched, "Same old crowd!"

If we ever forget who we are and start to think of ourselves good in any way or doing good in any way, we cannot receive the Good News of the Bible. In fact, we separate ourselves from God.

The main idea of this morning's message is that **JESUS IS GOD'S ONLY ANSWER TO THE SIN PROBLEM**. I have said this before in this series, but I think it needs to be repeated often. The Gospel message is not just for non Christians. We need to preach the Gospel message to ourselves every day. If you were to pick up any of Jerry Bridge's book, I'm pretty sure you would find this thought stated very clearly several times. If we ever come to think that we are now good and not in need of the Gospel, then we have separated ourselves from God.

## I. THE WRONG ATTITUDE

**Pride And Arrogance Keep Most People From Being Reconciled With God.**

Let's look at someone who exhibited the wrong attitude. **PRIDE AND ARROGANCE KEEP MOST PEOPLE FROM BEING RECONCILED WITH GOD.** Let me start out by asking us this question, "Do think you are a decent person? Do you think you are a pretty good person and do some pretty good things?" If we answer yes to any of those questions, then we need to look at the first person in this morning's text.

## **A. PRIDE**

The first attitude that keeps us from the Gospel is pride. We meet a Pharisee in verse 11. The word Pharisee meant "separated one." In other words, they viewed themselves as devoted followers of God. They were very careful to keep all sorts of religious laws and avoided contact with people who didn't follow God's laws as strictly as they did. In his books, Phil Yancey compares modern day church people with the Pharisees. The Pharisee entered the temple with a very proud attitude. He stood up and prayed about himself. The Pharisees compared themselves with common everyday people and even members of their own Jewish religion. The Pharisees took their religion seriously. And because they pursued their religion so zealously, they prided themselves in being a cut above everybody else.

This is one of the biggest sins the modern day church faces. This is one of the biggest sins you and I face. We compare ourselves to drug dealers, prostitutes, evil business people, and even politicians. We compare ourselves to our friends, coworkers, classmates, and neighbors. We come to church on Sunday while they stay home, sleep late, and read the Sunday News Paper. They watch pornography and cheat on their spouses. They are divorcing their spouses and don't spend much time with their family. They don't give much volunteer time to the community and are generally only interested in their own pleasure. We think we are pretty good because we come to church every Sunday, we throw a few dollars in the collection plate, and we even volunteer in programs at church. And we come to think we are pretty good. That is exactly the attitude of the Pharisee in this morning's text.

When we come to church on Sunday, do we have the same attitude as the Pharisee? Do we come to church with an attitude that God is happy to see me because I have been so good this week? Do we somehow come to think we are doing God a favor by our presence or by doing stuff in church? We enter this sanctuary week after week with a pretty cavalier attitude. We come here with pretty proud attitudes.

## **B. STATUS**

Status is the next attitude that keeps us separated from God. The Pharisees not only held a high religious status, they occupied a high social status as well. Most of us here have gone to school, have pretty good jobs, are relatively successful, and have achieved a great deal. Most of us have come from immigrant families, have assimilated into American culture and are doing well. I know there are some who are in the transition process but because of your educations and work ethics, I'm pretty sure you will be there as well. If you were to visit Suburban evangelical churches, you would find most people to be very successful and very out of touch with disenfranchised people. The problem with being successful is that it becomes very easy to forget that everything we have an all that we are come as a direct result of God's blessing. None of what we have or have become are direct results of our hard work and intelligence. Listen to what God told the Hebrews through Moses:

*"<sup>11</sup> ... Beware that in your plenty you do not forget the LORD your God and disobey his commands, regulations, and laws. <sup>12</sup>For when you have become full and prosperous and have built fine homes to live in, <sup>13</sup>and when your flocks and herds have become very large and your silver and gold have multiplied along with everything else, <sup>14</sup>that is the time to be careful. Do not become proud at that time and forget the LORD your God, who rescued you from slavery in the land of Egypt. ... <sup>17</sup>He did it so you would never think that it was your own strength and energy that made you wealthy. <sup>18</sup>Always remember that it is the LORD*

*your God who gives you power to become rich, and he does it to fulfill the covenant he made with your ancestors" (Deuteronomy 8:11-18 / NLT).*

### **C. DOING GOOD**

And then the attitude of doing good will keep us separated from life in God. When I talk to people about God, they often respond, "I'm not very religious," to which I answer, "I'm not very religious either." This confuses them and they usually respond, "But you're a pastor!"

Let me explain this. Religion is human being's attempt to reach God and get themselves right with God. In other words, people follow particular rules and try to do good works in order to earn acceptance with God and entrance to heaven. In history, misguided Roman Catholics joined the Crusades in hopes of earning their salvation. They believed that if they died in holy battle, they would immediately earn heaven. Modern day Muslims believe that by blowing themselves up and killing others, they will earn God's love and blessings. If you study religion, you will immediately notice that they are designed to enable human beings to become good enough to earn entrance into heaven or a heavenly state.

Biblical Christianity is the exact opposite. The Bible makes it very clear that we can never do enough good works to earn God's love. Let's take the Pharisee for example. Look how he justifies himself in verses 11-12:

*"<sup>11</sup> ... I thank you, God, that I am not a sinner like everyone else, especially like that tax collector over there! For I never cheat, I don't sin, I don't commit adultery, <sup>12</sup>I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income" (Luke 18:11-12 / NLT).*

The Pharisee made sure to live better than the society in which he lived. He didn't commit any more sins. He avoided adultery, he didn't cheat or lie or steal. He kept all sorts of religious laws. He went to the temple every day to pray. He fasted twice a week and gave a tenth of all his income to the church. These guys were religious guys. Let's ask ourselves this, "Do I measure up to this Pharisee when it comes to being good and doing good? Do I go to church every day? I'll bet not many of us read our Bibles every day. Do we give a tenth of all the money we make? Studies show Christians don't even give 2% of their money to church. Are we extremely conscious not to commit any little sins or do we just avoid the biggies?" These Pharisees were serious about keeping all their religious responsibilities.

Let me point out the fallacy of thinking we are good or do good. Let's start from this point. God is absolutely perfect. There is no imperfection in Him. In order to be with God, one must be perfect as well. God cannot accept anything less than perfection. In talking about the possibility of being perfect, James the brother of Jesus put it this way:

*"<sup>10</sup> And the person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as the person who has broken all of God's laws" (James 2:10 / NLT).*

It is impossible to match God's perfection. So to try and be good enough or do enough good things to earn God's love or respect or relationship is futile. Actually it is arrogant to even attempt this.

People may say, "Then why should I even try to be good or do good?" The answer is simple, "Because God commands it!" Where did we in the United States ever get the idea that we should be rewarded for doing the right thing? About 10 years ago my brother-in-law came over our house and showed us a check he got from work. He got a bonus check for being on time to work every day for a month. I couldn't believe it.

Let me just go over a few things. Since I don't handle or look at money issues at church I don't know this for sure, but I'm guessing that many of us tithe by giving a tenth of our income to church. If we think this is something to get credit from God for, listen to what Jesus said:

*"<sup>41</sup> Jesus went over to the collection box in the Temple and sat and watched as the crowds*

*dropped in their money. Many rich people put in large amounts. <sup>42</sup>Then a poor widow came and dropped in two pennies. <sup>43</sup>He called his disciples to him and said, 'I assure you, this poor widow has given more than all the others have given. <sup>44</sup>For they gave a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she has'" (Mark 12:41-44 / NLT)*

Should we ever come to think of ourselves as being good or doing good for giving money, no matter what the amount? No, especially when Jesus pointed to the poor widow who gave everything she had.

I know many of us give a lot of money to the church and to the poor, but to think of ourselves as good in any way would be arrogant and to spit in the face of Jesus. We give because we are supposed to give. We give because the money we have is a gift from God. We should not expect any rewards or pats on the back for giving.

We don't get any rewards for not committing adultery. We shouldn't expect a pat on the back for not stealing. When we serve in any way at church, we should not expect any notoriety, nor should we think of ourselves as doing the church or God a favor. We do these things because God commands us to do these things. In fact, if we are not giving or serving, or if we are not pursuing holiness by reading the Bible, praying, etc. ... then we are sinning. Think of it this way, keeping in mind that we are the church. God has given us the church as a gift in which we have many opportunities to keep the commands He has given us. To think of ourselves as good in any way, or to think we do good things that earn God's love in any way is to be proud and arrogant to the point we will never be reconciled to God nor will we find His abundant life. As we have said in this series before, we are safe only when we can say, "I was a piece of garbage, I am a piece of garbage, and I'll always be a piece of garbage. And all my righteous deeds are like filthy rags." Please be frightened as we think about this because **PRIDE AND ARROGANCE KEEP MOST PEOPLE FROM BEING RECONCILED WITH GOD.**

## **II. THE RIGHT ATTITUDE**

### **Humility and Truth Prepare People to Hear God's Remedy for Sin**

However, the right attitude can prepare us to hear and receive God's answer to the problem of sin. **HUMILITY AND TRUTH PREPARE PEOPLE TO HEAR GOD'S REMEDY FOR SIN.** I don't think I can say this enough. People must be humble enough to accept the Bible's definition of who we are. We must clearly accept the bad news before we can hear the good news.

#### **A. HUMILITY**

Genuine humility is necessary to be reconciled with God and to remain in a right relationship with Him. We are next introduced to a tax collector in Jesus' story. The tax collector didn't think of himself as worthy to even enter the temple. He stood at a distance and didn't even dare to raise his eyes. Again, I don't see that attitude among church going people. We come to church week after week and waltz around church as if we belong here and have a right to be here. I don't sense the fear of God in modern day Christians. Think about how we come to church and act in church. The Bible says that we are to come boldly into God's presence but it does not say to come before God cavalierly. People come to church with the attitude that we have every right to be here. People feel free to gossip in church, to be divisive, and to cause problems without any fear that God may kill us on the spot. Most of all, God does not tolerate hypocrisy. For a period of time, I did not take communion here for fear that God may kill several people in the congregation, including me.

Let me straighten us out here and now. We have no right to come to church or to be in church. The only right we have is to go to hell for an eternity. The only reason none of us are killed each Sunday we come here is because of God's grace. Please never forget that. If we truly examined

our lives, we would be like the tax collector, keep our eyes down, and enter God's presence with fear and trembling.

Secondly, people mistakenly think that God only killed people in the Old Testament. A couple in the New Testament church was being phony. They pretended to give more money than they actually gave. God killed them right there in church. In the Corinthian church people were getting sick and dying because they were taking communion while causing division and problems in the church. I hope I never to see this happen in a church I'm pasturing so let this be a warning to us. The humility to submit to God and God's laws are critical to understanding the Gospel message.

## **B. ACCEPTING THE TRUTH**

Humility will allow us to accept the truth about ourselves. The tax collector went into the temple, beat his breast and simply said, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." The tax collector had no problem understanding the huge gap between God's holiness, God's expectations, and his own sinfulness. The tax collector didn't go into the temple and say to God, "I'm a pretty good guy. I haven't cheated anyone, or killed anyone. I gave this poor person a couple of dollars to buy dinner. I threw a hundred dollars in the collection plate. He went there and said, "Have mercy on me, a sinner." He knew he was no good; rotten through and through.

## **C. NO ONE IS GOOD**

He realized what the Pharisee refused to realize, no one is good. Even though the Pharisee kept all sorts of religious rules, went to temple every day, prayed, fasted, tithed his money, and avoided sin, he was still infinitely separated from God because of his own pride, arrogance, and sin. Until you and I come to realize that we are rotten through and through, until we can come to admit we are horrible people, we cannot receive the Gospel. Let me just make an aside comment. If I was an unbeliever, and a self-righteous Christian presented me the Gospel message, I wouldn't receive it because I wouldn't like to be like them. Many of us witness to unbelieving friends and family. Perhaps we need to examine ourselves and admit that perhaps they are not becoming Christians because we are the stumbling block. Perhaps they don't want to become like us. And that would be a huge revelation to us. Perhaps we are presenting a false Christianity to them. Perhaps we need to humbly receive the truth about ourselves before presenting Christ to others. The point is this. **HUMILITY AND TRUTH PREPARES PEOPLE TO HEAR GOD'S REMEDY FOR SIN.**

Let's review the bad news. Because of our sinful natures, and because of our willful rebellion against God, we have separated ourselves from God and His abundant life. Because of our pride and arrogance, we remain separated from God's love. No matter how good we are, no matter how many good things we do, and no matter how religious we are, we can never repair our broken relationship with God. And because of this we are helplessly and hopelessly lost. The only way to understand the good news is to accept the fact we are totally rotten through and through.

## **III. JESUS IS THE ANSWER**

**The Life and Death of Jesus Is the Only Way God's Relationship with Human Beings Can Be Restored.**

But the Good News is this. Jesus is the answer. In other words, **THE LIFE AND DEATH OF JESUS IS THE ONLY WAY GOD'S RELATIONSHIP WITH HUMAN BEINGS CAN BE RESTORED.**

Remember, we said that religion is Human Being's attempt to reach God. Christianity on the other hand is God reaching out to human beings in love. Christianity is all about God restoring the broken relationship with us by sending Jesus.

## **A. JESUS WAS FULLY GOD AND FULLY MAN**

The first truth is that Jesus was both fully God and fully human. Listen to how the Gospel of John demonstrates this fact:

*<sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was with God in the beginning.*

*<sup>14</sup>The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1-2, 14 / NIV).*

The Apostle Paul put it this way:

*<sup>9</sup>For in Christ the fullness of God lives in a human body" (Colossians 2:9 / NLT).*

There are several reasons why Jesus took on human flesh and came to earth. First of all, it is only God Who could take the initiative to solve the sin problem. There is no human being who could solve the problem.

That is the primary reason Jesus comes to earth. But further, think about what the Apostle Paul wrote to the young pastor Timothy:

*<sup>5</sup>For there is only one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and people. He is the man Christ Jesus. <sup>6</sup>He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone. This is the message that God gave to the world at the proper time" (I Timothy 2:5-6 / NLT).*

Jesus is the perfect mediator because He is the God/Man. He understands the perfect holiness of God and the righteous demands of God. On the other hand, He entered the human experience and can empathize with all we go through and all we struggle with in life. He can mediate with God the Father because He understands human suffering first hand. He can mediate with us because He is the embodiment of God's perfect holiness and love. Jesus came to fix the rift between God and human being. He came to fix the rift between God and you, between God and me. He is the only One Who understands both the divine and human predicament first hand.

## **B. JESUS LIVED A COMPLETELY SINLESS LIFE**

Jesus lived a completely sinless life. If sin is what separates human beings from God, Jesus would have to live a perfectly sinless life in order to fix our sin problem. It never ceases to amaze me that Christians with the most screwed up lives and relationships are always trying to fix other people's problems and giving others advice. Jesus was perfect in every way. The Bible makes it clear that even though Jesus suffered and was tempted in every way that we are, He lived through it all without sinning once. He was the perfect man, the only perfect human being in all of history. This becomes important for two reasons. First of all, it leaves us without excuse for our sins. I hear people say all the time, "But I'm only human. I can't help it." The Bible's response is, "Jesus was human and lived a sinless life."

## **C. JESUS DIED FOR OUR SINS**

But the second and most important reason is that Jesus died for our sins. In other words, we learned that the penalty for sin is death. If we are already dead, then we can't die for our own sin. If we remind ourselves what death means in the Bible, the death of Jesus becomes even more horrific. We deserve death because of our sin. That means that we deserve to be eternally separated from God in hell. When Jesus died on our behalf on the cross, He experienced eternal separation from God in hell for each one of us. How horrible could it be for God the Father to

have to turn His back on Jesus the One and Only Son? How horrible would it be for Jesus to experience the wrath each one of us deserve, to be alienated from His Father? And how horrific was it for God the Holy Spirit to be caught in the middle? God's remedy for our pathetic lives was to send Jesus to rescue us, redeem us, and to set us free. This was truly an extreme solution to an extreme problem. Religion cannot solve the sin problem because it always involves sinful human beings trying to reach a perfect and holy God. It becomes amazing to think about the incredible love of God:

*"<sup>8</sup>But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners" (Romans 5:8 / NLT).*

Please do not miss this. Salvation is God's initiative. He demonstrates His love for us by sacrificing Himself while we were His enemies. **THE LIFE AND DEATH OF JESUS IS THE ONLY WAY GOD'S RELATIONSHIP WITH HUMAN BEINGS CAN BE RESTORED.**

#### **IV. EPILOGUE**

It both saddens me and frightens me to hear the stupid things so called Christians think and say. There are not many ways to God. We cannot make our own rules for living. We cannot be good enough nor do enough good to make us right with God. **JESUS IS GOD'S ONLY ANSWER TO THE SIN PROBLEM.**

The Bible is the only place to find God's remedy for sin. People say things like, "Me and God are okay," but the truth is that there is only one way to be right with God:

*"<sup>6</sup>Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me" (John 14:6 / NLT).*

Please, I'm begging you, be humble and receive the truth about salvation. The Four spiritual laws go on to explain this truth like this:

*"God has bridged the gulf that separates us from Him by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross in our place to pay the penalty for our sins."*

This truly is Good News that Jesus repaired the damage we have done and yet cannot fix. That is the definition of God's love.