

Study Guide for
Accepted by God
Luke 18:9-30

Introduction: Each of these stories answers, in some way, the question “Who will be accepted by God and received into his kingdom?” As you read through them, notice how each of these stories answers this question.

Main Idea: *Acceptance with God is based on who God is and what he has done, not on who you are or what you have done.*

I. Those who are accepted by God are those who put their trust in God’s mercy rather than their own righteousness (18:9-14).

The Pharisee is trusting in his own righteousness and so thinks he deserves salvation because of his own goodness (9-12) while the publican is trusting in God’s mercy and expects salvation only because of God’s goodness (13-14).

The word translated “trusted” means “to put confidence in” or “to become convinced of.” People often convince themselves that they have no need to rely upon God to save them because their own inherent goodness (see below) will be sufficient to save them.

The Bible teaches otherwise by teaching that we are all sinful (Rom. 3:23) and under God’s condemnation (Rom. 5:16, 18, 6:23), that our works are tainted by our sin (Isa. 64:6) and that our righteous deeds are not enough to save us (Titus 3:5a).

Something to think about: Even Christians sometimes rely on their works when praying or measuring themselves against others. Examine your heart and ask yourself what you trust in and do you realize that even your good works are the result of God’s grace working in you (Phil. 2:12-13)?

Meditate on these verses from Proverbs: Prov. 14:16; 2 Cor. 1:9 (Many of the verses at the end of section II would also apply here).

II. Those who are accepted by God are those who humbly receive the kingdom as it is rather than making it what they want it to be or think it should be (18:15-17).

Children are characterized by certain qualities (e.g., trust, openness) and not by certain others (e.g., self-sufficiency). These child-like qualities are the ones that mark a person of faith. Too often we want the kingdom and its righteousness (Matt. 6:25-34) but on our own terms, as

the Pharisee did. The kingdom, however, is the Lord’s and so must come on his own terms and we, to be a part of it, must accept it on his terms.

The children here are to be equated with the tax collector of the previous story: trusting in another rather than self-reliant. The true believer shares these qualities.

Something to think about: Children often know and accept their limitations but sometimes, as they grow, they begin to think they can do everything by themselves. We, as children of God, often think we don’t need help from anyone. Think about the church and why God has placed us together. How can you offer help to others through the church and what offers of help have you turned down? Have you considered that when you separate yourself from the church that you are separating yourself from the very means God has set in place to give you the help you need?

Meditate on these verses about the folly of trusting in yourself or your strength: Psalm 20:7; 33:16-18; 52:7; Prov. 26:12; 28:26; Rom. 12:16

III. Those who are accepted by God are those who are occupied with God rather than their possessions (18:18-30).

The ruler has asked Jesus a question without considering his words. Jesus wants to know, “If you’re calling me good and only God is good, then are you equating me with God?” In pointing this out, Jesus is not only emphasizing his own deity, but is making clear the standard of righteousness by which God judges: his own holiness and righteousness. Someone who is not as holy as God has no hope of eternal life.

While this sounds discouraging, because no one is that righteous except for God himself (even the disciples were troubled by this in v. 26), v. 27 leads us to the point of what Jesus is saying: salvation is through God’s power and not our own power, wisdom, stature, influence, or wealth.

Something to think about: Read Psalm 49 this week (pay careful attention to verses 6-10 and 16-19). Also read 1 Tim. 6:17-19 for the proper perspective on how a Christian should think about money.

Meditate on these verses about the folly of seeking wealth: Prov. 18:11; 23:4-5; Eccl. 2:1, 4-8, 18-19; 1 Tim 6:17-19.

Also, consider what Jesus wrote to the church of Laodicea in Rev. 3:14-22, paying close attention to v. 17 and consider the fall of Babylon the harlot in Rev. 18:6-8.