

Luke 18:9-14

Aim of Lesson

To show that God is displeased with those who are proud, and pleased with those who humbly confess their faults.

Background study

Study the sect of the Pharisees, and the work of the tax collectors (publicans, AV), in order to have a clear picture of the role of each in New Testament times. It must be remembered that not all Pharisees were hypocrites, nor all tax collectors dishonest!

Suggested outline of lesson

Introduce the lesson by showing the children that Jesus met and preached to people from all walks of life - rich and poor, religious and worldly, young and old, ailing and strong, those in authority and those in servitude. Among those he met were Pharisees and tax collectors. Since these words are difficult for children to understand, some clarification will be necessary. The children must appreciate that the Pharisees were regarded by the Jews as leaders in religious matters and had, until this time, gained the respect of ordinary men and women. Throughout their history they had insisted on strict conformity to the law. However, Jesus exposed the pride that had developed within the sect and saw through the veneer of respectability.

In Palestine the Romans employed Jews as tax collectors, some of whom were notorious for exacting more money from the people than was due. By their dishonesty they made themselves rich, and were despised and hated by their fellow Jews.

Having paved the way for the story, explain to the children that you are going to tell them a story that Jesus told in order to teach people how to pray. The word parable can be introduced at this point. Explain that Jesus often told stories in order to teach lessons, and that these stories were always about people or events familiar to the hearers. Men prayed in the temple every day, so that as soon as the story began the listeners would have been able to identify with the situation. Relate the story vividly, portraying the pride of the Pharisee by suggesting what was going on in his mind as he looked for a prominent position, and adopted a pious stance. Paraphrase his words and demonstrate his manner, even overplaying the part to make the point clear. Children will appreciate how despicable it is to display such bragging and conceit. The Pharisee was not only intent on impressing others with his superiority, but was at pains to belittle those he considered outside the circle of God's favour.

By contrast, convey the sincerity and genuine humility of the tax collector, who longed for forgiveness for the wrongs he had done and which troubled his conscience greatly. He was unaware of the presence of others, being concerned only with communicating his repentance to God. His posture revealed his contrition and the words he said were intended for God alone. The tax collector was not interested in comparing himself with other men; he knew only that his actions fell short of what God required of him and that, therefore, he needed God's forgiveness.

By means of leading questions, try to glean from the children their impression of what it was Jesus was teaching through this story. Ask which of the two men had pleased God by his prayer, and how each man would have felt after praying. Find out if the children can identify the essential difference between the attitudes of the two men, guiding them to a realization of the implication for us today in seeking to be reconciled to God.

Relevance to the children's lives

Have you ever met people who remind you of the tax collector or the Pharisee? Some children are honest enough to admit that they are not always good, while other children pretend they never do anything wrong. Which kind of children do you think please God more?

Worksheets

These should be self-explanatory.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, please forgive us for all the wrong things we have done, and help us not to think we are better than anyone else. We know that you see what we are really like. Amen.

Memory verse

"When you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you." (Matthew 6:6).