



# TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Articles

## “The Gospel of God’s Grace”

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*“... the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of God’s grace” ~ Acts 20.24 NASB*

Exploring similarities between Luke-Acts and Paul’s writings is a rewarding study, suggested by the understanding that Luke, one of Paul’s co-workers, wrote Christianity’s two-part origin story. That inference is drawn from noting the unnamed author’s presence with Paul in the we-sections in Acts (Acts 16.10-17; 20.5—21.18; 27.1—28.16) and determining that he is the most likely of Paul’s associates to have authored the writings (cf. Col 4.14; 2 Tim 4.11; Phlm 24).

Paul’s influence may partially explain Luke’s unique inclusion of stories that emphasize that outcasts were also permitted access to Jesus and his mercy (see Luke 7.36-50; 10.25-37; 15.1-32; 17.11-19; 18.9-14; 19.1-10). It may also be part of the reason for the emphasis in Acts on God’s gifts (Acts 2.4, 38; 4.12, 29; 5.31-32; 11.17-18) and grace (Acts 11.22-23; 15.11; 20.24).

Some comparable passages by the two authors sound like they are more than compositions of two writers who happened to address the same themes. For example, in Philippians 3.3-8 Paul recalls his pre-Christian life as a blameless-under-the-law-Pharisee whose zeal led him to persecute the church. He gave up that misguided righteousness for the sake of Christ. It’s hard not to hear an echo of Paul’s self-assessment in Luke’s introduction to the parable of the Pharisee and tax collector which he said Jesus told “to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt” (Luke 18.9). The echo grows louder when we notice that the same Greek word (*peithō*) is translated “trust” in Luke 18.9 and “confidence” in Philippians 3.3-4.\* It grows louder still when we hear the Pharisee’s prayer in Luke 18.11-12. When we read Philippians 3, it’s not hard to imagine Saul the Pharisee praying that prayer.

In addition, in Luke 18.13, the tax collector stood far off, would not lift his eyes to heaven, and begged for God’s mercy as “the sinner” (*tō hamartōlō*). In 1 Timothy 1.12-16, Paul wrote that, as “a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor” he “was

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shown mercy” and given “abundant” grace despite being “foremost” (*prōtos*) among sinners. It’s hard to come up with anything that sounds more like the tax collector’s prayer in Luke 18.

Isn’t it good to know that Saul the hard-hearted Pharisee experienced essentially the same feelings as the scorned tax collectors? Doesn’t it encourage you to remember that tax collectors and others who were similarly ostracized also experienced abundant grace (see Luke 5.27-32; 7.29-30; 15.1-2)? Don’t you find comfort in recalling that, even though we may never forget who we once were, who we used to be need not dictate who we are now in Christ Jesus (1 Tim 1.12-16)?

“But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are” (Acts 15.11).

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*\* It is of interest that of the 52 times *peithō* appears in the New Testament, the most are in Acts (17) and Philippians (6); it appears 4 times in Luke.*