

Am I a True Son or Just a Servant?

Most of us are familiar with the parable of the Prodigal son. (Luke 15:11-32). Not as many are aware of the heart condition of the son who remained at home. There is also a group of individuals that the parable doesn't touch on at all. First, I would like to look at the son who stayed and 'faithfully' worked with his father and, in light of his attitude, we will see there is another group, the true son.

Let's look at the story as found in Christ's Object Lessons, pages 207-210.

“Thus far in the Saviour's parable there is no discordant note to jar the harmony of the scene of joy; but now Christ introduces another element. When the prodigal came home, the elder son "was in the field; and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in." This elder brother has not been sharing in his father's anxiety and watching for the one that was lost. He shares not, therefore, in the father's joy at the wanderer's return. The sounds of rejoicing kindle no gladness in his heart. He inquires of a servant the reason of the festivity, and the answer excites his jealousy. He will not go in to welcome his lost brother. The favor shown the prodigal he regards as an insult to himself.

When the father comes out to remonstrate with him, the pride and malignity of his nature are revealed. He dwells upon his own life in his father's house as a round of unrequited service, and then places in mean contrast the favor shown to the son just returned. *(And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. Luke 15:29, 30).* He makes it plain that his own service has been that of a servant rather than a son. When he should have found an abiding joy in his father's presence, his mind has rested upon the profit to accrue from his circumspect life. His words show that it is for this he has foregone the pleasures of sin. Now if this brother is to share in the father's gifts, the elder son counts that he himself has been wronged. He grudges his brother the favor shown him. He plainly shows that had he been in the father's place, he would not have received the prodigal. He does not even acknowledge him as a brother, but coldly speaks of him as "thy son."

Yet the father deals tenderly with him. "Son," he says, "thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." Through all these years of your brother's outcast life, have you not had the privilege of companionship with me?

Everything that could minister to the happiness of his children was freely theirs. The son need have no question of gift or reward. "All that I have is thine." You have only to believe my love, and take the gift that is freely bestowed.

One son had for a time cut himself off from the household, not discerning the father's love. But now he has returned, and the tide of joy sweeps away every disturbing thought. "This thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found."

Was the elder brother brought to see his own mean, ungrateful spirit? Did he come to see that though his brother had done wickedly, he was his brother still? Did the elder brother repent of his jealousy and hardheartedness? Concerning this, Christ was silent. For the parable was still enacting, and it rested with His hearers to determine what the outcome should be.

By the elder son were represented the unrepenting Jews of Christ's day, and also the Pharisees in every age, who look with contempt upon those whom they regard as publicans and sinners. Because they themselves have not gone to great excesses in vice, they are filled with self-righteousness. Christ met these cavilers on their own ground. Like the elder son in the parable, they had enjoyed special privileges from God. They claimed to be sons in God's house, but they had the spirit of the hireling. They were working, not from love, but from hope of reward. In their eyes, God was an exacting taskmaster. They saw Christ inviting publicans and sinners to receive freely the gift of His grace--the gift which the rabbis hoped to secure only by toil and penance--and they were offended. The prodigal's return, which filled the Father's heart with joy, only stirred them to jealousy.

In the parable the father's remonstrance with the elder son was Heaven's tender appeal to the Pharisees. "All that I have is thine"--not as wages, but as a gift. Like the prodigal, you can receive it only as the unmerited bestowal of the Father's love.

Self-righteousness not only leads men to misrepresent God, but makes them cold-hearted and critical toward their brethren. The elder son, in his selfishness and jealousy, stood ready to watch his brother, to criticize every action, and to accuse him for the least deficiency. He would detect every mistake, and make the most of every wrong act. Thus he would seek to justify his own unforgiving spirit. Many today are doing the same thing. While the soul is making its very first struggles against a flood of temptations, they stand by, stubborn, self-willed, complaining, accusing. They may claim to be children of God, but they are acting out the spirit of Satan. By their attitude toward their brethren, these accusers place themselves where God cannot give them the light of His countenance."

*Okay, let's reflect upon the third group of individuals, those who see themselves as sons. They understand who their Father is and that everything He wants to give them is **a gift**. They don't have to work for it. The work that they do is not the work of a servant, but a son. They are not working for a reward. They understand that the reward is already theirs, simply because they are sons. It is a gift that is freely given them by the Father.*

These sons work for their Father with no thought or worry about where their next meal will come from or how the bills will be covered. They know that their Father will take care of them because they are His sons. But the 'sons' who actually see themselves as servants, look down on them, and with jealous hearts, criticize and deride the true sons because they are not 'working' for what they get. They believe that it is unreasonable of them to trust the word of their Father when He told them:

“...take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added (given) unto you.” Matthew 6:31-33.

They become offended and accuse the true sons of being lazy and presumptuous, classifying him as misguided, scolding him for believing in these promises so literally. Some even go so far as to deny the evidence when the Father does what He says He will do and provides for all the needs of His true sons.

Are you a son or just a servant?