

# THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP: THE LOST SINNER OUT IN THE WORLD LUKE 15:01–07

## ***Introduction***

Chapter 15 is one of the most important chapters in all the Bible. It includes three of the most famous parables ever told. The parables deal with the lost sinner and the great love of God in seeking and receiving the lost sinner when the sinner repents and returns home. The first parable is that of the Lost Sheep in the wilderness of the world.

- I. Tax collectors and sinners drew near Jesus (w. 1-3).
- II. The sheep was lost (v.4).
- III. The sheep was lost because of self (v.4).
- IV. The sheep was lost “in the wilderness or open country” (v.4).
- V. The sheep was sought until found (v.4).
- VI. The sheep, once found, brought great joy (w.5-6).
- VII. The sheep represented a repentant sinner (v.7).

## ***I. Luke 15:01–03 Separation; Spiritual Hunger***

Tax-collectors and sinners drew near Jesus. Note they “all” drew near to Him. This shows two things.

1. They were hungry for His message. They were not coming out of curiosity, nor to observe, nor to seek physical blessings; they were coming out of a spiritual need, out of the need to receive His message of salvation.
2. They acknowledged their great need. Publicans, that is, tax-collectors, worked for the Roman government, the nation that had conquered Israel. Therefore, they were considered traitors to both Israel and God. Consequently, they were despised by the people and were cut off and shut out by the religionists. Sinners were the rank immoral and unjust who did not keep the law, such as harlots (see Mt.21:32), liars, thieves, murderers. All these were *sinners*, traitors to both God and man, and they knew it. So when Christ came along preaching deliverance from sin and hope of the Kingdom of God, they flocked to Him.

The attitude of the religionists was tragic. They grumbled against Jesus because He associated and ate with such terrible sinners. They felt it was beneath the dignity of any respectable person to associate with such vile sinners. Note an important point: Christ was *not of the world*, but He was *out in the world* trying to reach men for God. It is this that is often overlooked by both the liberals and the separatists.

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- The true believer is to “come out from them [the world] and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.” (2 Cor. 6:17-18). He is not to be out in the world with sinners doing worldly things and carrying on worldly conversation (Eph.4:29; Col.4:6).
- The true believer is to “go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation [sinners]” (Mk.16:15). The believer goes; he does not sit back and wait on sinners to come to him and the church. He goes out where the sinners are.

**Thought 1.** If the *whole gospel* — *all of the good news* — were preached today in power and authority, how many would be flocking to hear...

- the gospel of salvation from sin and death?
- the gospel of the hope for the Kingdom of God See *Kingdom of God*, Mt. 19: 23-24)

Christ answered the religionists by sharing three great parables. The first parable is one of the most-loved stories ever told, the parable of the lost sheep.

## II. *Luke 15:04 Sheep*

The sheep was lost. The sheep represents the unbeliever, the sinner who wanders out in the wilderness (open country) of the world, the person who has gone astray and is lost to God. Note the meaning of the word lost.

### LUKE 15:04 LOST (APOLLUMI)

Lose means to perish, to destroy, to lose, to lose eternal life, to be spiritually destitute, to be cut off. ☐

## III. *Luke 15:04 Lost Sheep, Lost Man*

The sheep was lost because of self. A sheep loses itself in one of five ways.

1. The sheep is attracted by something out “in the open country (wilderness),” away from the flock of the shepherd. What the sheep sees is more attractive and appealing. It tempts and seduces him, and he lusts after it (“the cravings of sinful man, the lust of the eyes,” 1 Jn. 2:16).
2. The sheep is aimless, not paying attention to what is going on. It aimlessly wanders off, and while it is *getting lost*, the sheep does not know it is losing its way. The sheep is already lost when it finds it has lost its way.
3. The sheep refuses to heed the warnings of the shepherd and the example of the other sheep (“the boasting of what he has and does”, 1 Jn.2:16).

4. The sheep is not attached enough to the shepherd or to the other sheep. There is not the bond or union there should be. Therefore, he stays off by himself, eating and resting and working alone until eventually he wanders off without anyone's knowing it, including himself (Heb.10:25).
5. The sheep does not trust the shepherd. It does not think the shepherd will take care and see that there is satisfying food. It goes astray *in search of greener pasture and more satisfying food* (Note Mt.18:14 for the help of others needed by the shepherd to care for the sheep).

**Isa 53:6** *We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

**Prov 21:16** *A man who strays from the path of understanding comes to rest in the company of the dead.*

**Prov 27:8** *Like a bird that strays from its nest is a man who strays from his home.*

**Lam 4:14** *Now they grope through the streets like men who are blind. They are so defiled with blood that no one dares to touch their garments.*

**Jer 2:13** *“My People have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.”*

**Jer 15:6** *You have rejected me,” declares the LORD. “You keep on backsliding. So I will lay hands on you and destroy you; I can no longer show compassion.*

**Mat 24:12** *Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold.*

**Heb 10:38** *“But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.”*

**2 Pet 2:15** *They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness.*

**Jude 1:13** *They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.*

#### **IV. Luke 15:04 Open Country, Wilderness — World, Worldliness**

The sheep was lost in the open country or wilderness. The open country had an excitement about it. The unknown and the risk aroused the emotions; but once the sheep ventured out into the open country, he found its terrain rugged, full of narrow ridges and deep ravines and crevices. It was rough going, heavy with thick underbrush, pricking thorns, dangerous footing; and, if the way out were never found, it would sap the sheep's strength and age him ever so rapidly. Eventually the open country would take its life.

The open country and thrills of the world do attract a person. The world has much to offer.

1. The world gives a man...

- occupation and purpose
- ego and self-esteem
- more and more honor
- plenty and wealth
- authority and power
- lifestyle and acceptance
- recognition and privilege
- position and image
- opportunity and satisfaction

2. The world stimulates and arouses a man, causing...

- his blood to rush
- his heart to beat faster
- goose bumps
- butterflies
- escape
- cravings
- desires
- relaxation

**1 John 2:15-16** *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world.*

**Gal 5:19-21** *The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

**Jer 50:6** *“My people have been lost sheep; their shepherds have led them astray and caused them to roam on the mountains. They wandered over mountain and hill and forgot their own resting place.”*

**Ezek 34:6** *My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them.*

**Mat 9:36** *When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*

## **V. Luke 15:04 Seeking the Lost**

The sheep was sought until found. Note four things.

1. The lost sheep was sought (v. 4). The shepherd left the ninety-nine to seek the one lost sheep. The ninety-nine were safe; they were already in the shepherd's fold. But the one sheep was lost. It was the one that needed to be sought. It was this sheep that needed the attention of the shepherd and was to occupy the time, energy, and effort of the shepherd. As long as the sheep was lost, seeking it was the primary purpose and reason for the shepherd. (What a lesson for the church and ministers!)

2. The search was urgent. The shepherd went after the lost sheep (v.4). He was gripped with concern. He went after the one lost sheep as though it were the only one. Note the shepherd's dedication and commitment to seeking the lost.
3. The shepherd sought until he found the sheep. He did not seek complacently or slowly, as though there were plenty of time. Nor did he give up, despite the difficulties that lay along the rough terrain and the weariness of the long hours and the tediousness of running into dead end after dead end. He sought and kept on seeking until he found the lost sheep. He never slackened, never backed off, never gave up.
4. When the shepherd found the sheep, he embraced the sheep and threw it over his shoulders. He received it...
  - with arms wide open
  - embracing it
  - rejoicing in heart
  - supporting and carrying it to his home (v.6)

*Isa 53:5-6 Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

*1 Pet 2:25 For "you were like sheep going astray," but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

*Psa 119:176 I have strayed like a lost sheep. Seek your servant, for I have not forgotten your commands.*

## **VI. Luke 15:05–06 The Result: Salvation**

Once found, the sheep bought great joy. Note what the shepherd did.

1. He called all his neighbors together. He wanted everyone to know that the lost sheep had been found. Everyone had been so concerned-praying, hoping, waiting. They wanted to join in the rejoicing.
2. Everyone rejoiced because the shepherd's labor was not in vain.
3. The shepherd tenderly called the lost sheep "which was lost." It was his, no matter how dirty, filthy, unclean, destitute, depraved, ugly or lost it had been. It was still the shepherd's sheep.

Note that God did not send an angel as a servant, but He sent His Son to seek the lost (see Isa 53:4-6, 10-12).

**John 3:16** *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

**1 Pet 2:24-25** *“He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” For “you were like sheep going astray,” but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

**Luke 19:10** *“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”*

## **I. Luke 15:07 Repentance**

The sheep represents a repentant sinner. A sinner must repent (See *Repentance*, Acts 17:29-30).

**Acts 2:38** *Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*

**Acts 3:19** *Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.*

**Isa 55:7** *Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.*

**Ezek 18:21** *“But if a wicked man turns away from all the sins he has committed and keeps all my decrees and does what is just and right, he will surely live; he will not die.”* ■

# THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON: THE LOST SON LUKE 15: 11-24

## ***Introduction***

The parable of the Prodigal Son is the greatest and most-beloved story ever told in human language. God loves and reaches out to the most prodigal of men, and He runs to embrace any prodigal son who *repents and returns home*. God forgives His prodigal son and restores him, no matter how terrible the sin and failure of the prodigal.

- I. He said, "Give me" (vv. 11-13).
- II. He met the day when he suffered and was in need (vv. 14-16).
- III. He came to his senses and snapped out of his insanity, back to reality (vv. 17-19).
- IV. He got up and returned to his father (vv. 20-21).
- V. He was accepted when he returned to the father (vv. 22-24).

## **I. *Luke 15:11-13 Selfishness and Desire for Independence***

The prodigal said, "Give me." Note the son was a child of the father's by birth. He belonged to the estate (world) of the father's by natural birth. But it is clear from what follows that the son did not belong to the father *in heart, mind, or spirit*. The prodigal wanted two things.

1. He said, "*Give me* my inheritance." He wanted money and the things and possessions of the estate (world) which he was to inherit. He wanted to get all the Father would give him so that he could enjoy it now.
  - a. He had not earned it, not yet; therefore, he did not deserve it.
  - b. He was selfish and self-centred, rude and unkind. He said, "Give me," not "Please" nor "May I have." The effect upon his father and the estate was of little, if any, concern to the prodigal (the lost son). The father could be hurt and the estate could suffer from the loss of the money and goods; it mattered little to the prodigal.

**Mark 4:19** "*But the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.*"

**Luke 12:15** *Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."*

**1 Tim 6:9-10** *People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.*

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**2 Tim 3:1-2** *But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy.*

**1 Jn 3:17** *If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?*

**Hosea 10:1** *Israel was a spreading vine; he brought forth fruit for himself. As his fruit increased, he built more altars; as his land prospered, he adorned his sacred stones.*

**Jer 6:13** *From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit.*

**Zec 7:6** *And when you were eating and drinking, were you not just feasting for yourselves?*

2. He said, “Give me my independence.” This is what the prodigal, the lost son, was really after, the right to his own life. He was tied down to the father’s property and was held responsible for the care of the property. He wanted to *cut loose - to be away* from the father and to be relieved of the responsibility of the property. He wanted to live his own life, to do his own thing (Lk. 15:12).

The prodigal rejected and turned from the father and his way of life because he felt the father would...

- demand and require too much work
- curtail and limit his freedom
- disallow and restrict his fun and pleasure
- be unfair and not understand
- control and discipline too much
- keep an eye and hand upon him

Note a crucial point: the father gave the son his freedom and possessions. The son was able to do what he wanted with his life and goods (abilities, talents, money, things). All was placed into the son’s hands. He could use his life and what he had as he wished without any interference from the father. Since he was an adult son, he wanted to be free from the father and the father respected his adulthood. The father could do nothing about the choice of life chosen by the son. He had to let him go and live as he wished.

**Acts 7:51** *You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!*

**2 Pet 2:10** *This is especially true of those [the wicked] who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority. Bold and arrogant, these men are not afraid to slander celestial beings [authority].*



**Exo 32:9** *“I have seen these people,” the LORD said to Moses, “and they are a stiff-necked people.”*

**2 Chr 24:19** *Although the LORD sent prophets to the people to bring them back to him, and though they testified against them, they would not listen.*

**2 Chr 30:8** *Do not be stiff-necked, as your fathers were; submit to the LORD. Come to the sanctuary, which he has consecrated forever. Serve the LORD your God, so that his fierce anger will turn away from you.*

**Isa 28:12** *To whom he said, “This is the resting place, let the weary rest”; and, “This is the place of repose” — but they would not listen.*

**Isa 30:15** *This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: “In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it.”*

**Psa 32:9** *Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you.*

**Prov 28:14** *Blessed is the man who always fears the LORD, but he who hardens his heart falls into trouble.*

**Prov 29:1** *A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed — without remedy.*

**Isa 46:12** *Listen to me, you stubborn-hearted, you who are far from righteousness.*

**Isa 48:4** *For I knew how stubborn you were; the sinews of your neck were iron, your forehead was bronze.*

**Jer 44:16** *“We will not listen to the message you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD!”*

**Jer 32:33** *They turned their backs to me and not their faces; though I taught them again and again, they would not listen or respond to discipline.*

**Jer 44:16** *“We will not listen to the message you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD!”*

**Zec 7:11** *But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped up their ears.*

**Mal 2:2** *“If you do not listen, and if you do not set your heart to honour my name,” says the LORD Almighty, “I will send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have already cursed them, because you have not set your heart to honour me.”*

3. The prodigal, the lost son, wasted his life in wild living.
  - a. He left his father — he rebelled and revolted and journeyed to a *distant country*. He chose a country that was drastically different from his father's, a country that was full of carousing and drunkenness, partying and immorality, selfishness and greed, sin and shame, death and hell.
  - b. He lived a worldly, fleshly life — living for the pleasure of this life only. "Wild living" means loose, reckless, wild, extravagant living. It means...
    - careless spending      • carousing in the forbidden bed      • drunkenness
    - being loose              • telling off-coloured jokes      • cursing
    - drinking                  • gluttonous eating              • partying
    - dressing to attract      • having a foul mouth

**Luke 8:14** *"The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature."*

**Luke 12:19** *And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."*

**Gal 5:19-21** *The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

**1 Tim 5:6** *But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives.*

**2 Tim 3:1-2, 4** *But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.*

**Titus 3:3** *At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.*

**James 5:5** *You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter.*

**2 Pet 2:13** *They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, revelling in their pleasures while they feast with you.*

**Isa 47:8** *Now then, listen, you wanton creature, lounging in your security and saying to yourself, 'I am, and there is none besides me. I will never be a widow or suffer the loss of children.'*

## LUKE 15:12 INHERITANCE

By law the younger son received one-third and the older son two-thirds of a father's estate when the father died. However, if the father wished, he could make gifts to his children throughout his life. The prodigal son was asking for a huge gift amounting to what his final inheritance would be. □

### II. *Luke 15:14–16 Worldliness: Enslavement and Bondage*

The prodigal son met the day when he suffered and was in need. He suffered five things.

1. He suffered being *destitute*. He “spent everything.” He squandered and wasted and misused...

- his money
- his property
- his talents
- his purpose
- his opportunities
- his mind
- his thoughts
- his hands
- his body
- his soul

He misused all these in the lust of his flesh (sinful nature). Note: all these things, ranging from his money to his soul, came from God. They had been given to the son from the Father, either through nature at birth or through a direct gift. The son owed everything to the Father. He should have been working to hold up the name of the Father, serving and repaying the Father for all His marvellous gifts. But instead, the son became a rebel, a prodigal and “spent everything” upon “wild living.”

The point is this: the prodigal had nothing on earth to help him. He had wrapped his life up in the pleasure and security of the world; but now, when they were all gone, there was nothing left to help him. He stood *bare, empty, alone, and destitute*. All that he had based his life upon was now gone. He now knew that the world was corruptible and that it passed away. Note: he had cut himself off from his Father (God), so he had no security from God. He was completely void of the confidence and spiritual strength that God would look after him and help him recover. He had not looked to God nor trusted and honoured God with his life and goods. Therefore, he was destitute of all spiritual help, left out in the world all alone, having “spent everything.”

**Rom 6:21, 23** *What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our LORD.*

**Prov 11:19** *The truly righteous man attains life, but he who pursues evil goes to his death.*

**Eph 2:12** *Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.*

**Rev 3:17** *You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.*

**Psa 73:2** *But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold.*

**Isa 1:28-30** *But rebels and sinners will both be broken, and those who forsake the LORD will perish. "You will be ashamed because of the sacred oaks in which you have delighted; you will be disgraced because of the gardens that you have chosen. You will be like an oak with fading leaves, like a garden without water."*

**Jer 5:3-4** *O LORD, do not your eyes look for truth? You struck them, but they felt no pain; you crushed them, but they refused correction. They made their faces harder than stone and refused to repent. I thought, "These are only the poor; they are foolish, for they do not know the way of the LORD, the requirements of their God."*

**Hosea 10:13** *But you have planted wickedness, you have reaped evil, you have eaten the fruit of deception. Because you have depended on your own strength and on your many warriors.*

**Amos 8:11-12** *"The days are coming," declares the Sovereign LORD, "when I will send a famine through the land — not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD. Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the LORD, but they will not find it."*

2. He suffered *natural disaster*. A famine struck. This refers to all the severe trials and disasters in life because of the very nature of the world. It may be storm, sickness, accident, death. Whatever it is, it is disastrous and causes great loss. Again, the prodigal son was all alone without God's presence; therefore, he had to face the disaster without God's care and help.

**Mat 7:26-27** *"But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."*

**1 Cor 3:13** *His work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work.*

3. He suffered *enslavement and humiliation* (See *Sin*, Lk. 15:15).
4. He suffered *hunger*. The world's garbage (wild living) will always leave a man empty and hungry. The world, its pleasures and wealth and styles, will please the body but leave the soul empty. The world cannot permanently...

- |           |           |          |
|-----------|-----------|----------|
| • satisfy | • provide | • fill   |
| • supply  | • nourish | • please |

The world will leave a man (deep within, within his soul)...

- dissatisfied      • empty      • unfulfilled
- unsupplied      • unnourished      • displeased

In contrast, only the man who hungers and thirsts after righteousness will be filled and bear the fruit of God's Spirit (See *Righteousness*, and *Abundant, Filled Life*, Mt. 5:6; Gal. 5:22-23)

**John 4:13-14** *Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water [earthly water, pleasures] will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."*

**Mat 4:3** *The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."*

**Rev 18:14** *They will say, 'The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your riches and splendour have vanished, never to be recovered.'*

**1 Cor 6:13** *"Food for the stomach and the stomach for food" - but God will destroy them both. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.*

**Job 15:23** *He wanders about - food for vultures; he knows the day of darkness is at hand.*

**Eccl 6:7** *All man's efforts are for his mouth, yet his appetite is never satisfied.*

**Isa 44:20** *He feeds on ashes, a deluded heart misleads him; he cannot save himself, or say, "Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?"*

**Isa 55:2** *"Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare."*

5. He suffered *the loss of friends*. The *so-called friends* who surrounded him when he had plenty were now gone. Note two things.
  - a. When he had plenty and was able to maintain the same social class as his friends, they were all glad to call him friend. But when he was not able to *keep up* with their standard of living, he was not welcomed. They were *above* him, and he was *below* them. He was, in fact, an embarrassment to them. They did not want him around lest others associate them with a person who was unsuccessful and a failure.
  - b. The friends, at least some of them, were feeling the pinch of the famine as well. Note the selfishness of the world: "no one gave him anything." How like the vast majority of people today! And so many have so much that could be given!

**Job 19:19** *All my intimate friends detest me; those I love have turned against me.*

**Psa 38:11** *My friends and companions avoid me because of my wounds; my neighbours stay far away.*

**Psa 102:7** *I lie awake; I have become like a bird alone on a roof.*

**Psa 142:4** *Look to my right and see; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life.*

**Micah 7:5** *Do not trust a neighbour; put no confidence in a friend. Even with her who lies in your embrace be careful of your words.*

### LUKE 15:15 SIN

*“So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs.” **Luke 15:15***

A Jew was forbidden by law to be attached to a Gentile, a man of a “distant country.” But even disregarding this prohibition, the humiliation of cleaning hog pens was a horrible pain for a formerly fine rich young man to suffer. There are three pictures here.

1. The picture of being spiritually and emotionally and mentally drained. He ran out of spiritual strength, spent his inheritance.
2. The picture of attaching himself and becoming enslaved to a person of a “distant country.” Being spiritually drained, he sought refuge with a man of a “distant country,” a man away from God.
3. The picture of sin’s leading and enslaving a man to the “hog pens” of the world.

**John 8:34** *Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.”*

**Rom 6:16** *Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey — whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?*

**Rom 7:23** *But I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind [which tells me better] and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.*

**2 Pet 2:19** *They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity — for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him.*

**2 Tim 2:21** *If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.*

**Prov 5:22** *The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast. □*

## MATHEW 05:06 RIGHTEOUSNESS

*“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” Mathew 05:06*

What is righteousness? In the Bible “righteousness” means two simple but profound things; it has a double meaning. It means *to be* right and *to do* right. It may be said another way: *to be good* and *to do good*. This is critically important in the Bible.

**Rom 3:10** *As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one.”*

**Mat 19:17** *“Why do you ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.”*

**Rom 3:23** *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

What is being said is that God alone is righteous; He alone is perfectly good. Man is not perfectly righteous; he comes short. How then can a man become perfectly righteous? What is the answer? The answer is what Christ says: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness: for they will be filled.” What happens is this.

God takes a person’s “hunger and thirst for righteousness” and *counts* it as righteousness. The person is not righteous, but God counts him righteous. This is the great love of God. A man hungers and thirsts for righteousness; therefore, God fills him.

Several things need to be said about righteousness.

1. Righteousness is explained throughout Scripture in the word *faith*. Faith is believing God and trusting the goodness of God to take our faith and count it as righteousness. “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists, and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” (Heb. 11:6)

It is the person who *diligently seeks God* who really believes God. The man who *so hungers and thirsts for God and His righteousness* shall be counted righteous and shall be filled.

2. The righteousness of God has been shown to man. Just what God wants man *to be* and *to do* has been demonstrated perfectly in Jesus Christ. This is the love of God. God has not given man just the written Word describing His righteousness; He has given man a life — the life of His own Son — to show what He means by righteousness. Jesus Christ is perfect righteousness; He did nothing but good. This is what the Bible means when it talks about Christ’s being “the righteousness of God.” Christ is the picture, the expression, the pattern, the very image of righteousness — of *being right* and of *doing right*.

**1 Cor 1:30** *It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.*

**2 Cor 5:21** *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

**Phil 3:9** *And be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ - the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.*

3. Righteousness involves the mind. Scripture says involves being “made new in the attitude of your minds” (Eph. 4:23), and being “renewed in knowledge” (Col. 3:10).

This means that the man who seeks God is “created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” He “puts on the new self or the new man” and is “made new in the attitude of [his] minds” (Eph. 4:23).

In other words, the man who seeks God has “taken off [his] old self with its practices and [has] put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator” (Col. 3:9-10). □

### MATHEW 05:06 ABUNDANT, FILLED LIFE

*“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” **Mathew 05:06***

The believer who hungers and thirsts for righteousness is wonderfully filled with both abundant life and eternal life.

1. He is “full of goodness, complete in knowledge” (Rom. 15:14).
2. He is “filled to the measure of all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:19).
3. He is “filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18).
4. He is “filled with the fruit of righteousness” (Phil. 1:11).
5. He is filled with “the knowledge of His [God’s] will” (Col. 1:9).
6. He is “filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 13:52) □

### III. **Luke 15:17–19 Sin; Repentance — Thinking**

The prodigal came to his senses, snapped out of his insanity, back to reality. Note the words “came to his senses.” Jesus considers a person away from God to be *mad, insane, living in an unreal world.*



**Eccl 9:3** *This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all. The hearts of men, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead.*

Two things are indicated about repentance.

=> Repentance is the beginning of sanity and reality, the very basis for building a sound life.

=> The beginning of repentance is thought, thinking about one's need to repent and turn back to God.

Note the words, "When he came to his senses, he said"; that is, he began to think to himself. He thought long and hard upon these things.

1. He thought upon his Father (God) and His enormous provision.
  - a. The Father's "many hired men" would be the believers, the children of God.
  - b. The Father's "food" was enough to feed all, and then there was even more to spare.

The prodigal remembered how his father had been able to provide for all. He remembered the sense of belonging, of being a family and of fellowshiping together among all the servants of God, the great provision of love and joy and peace, of purpose and meaning and significance. His father had it all and more to spare.

2. He thought upon his plight: "I am starving to death!" (v. 17). The meaning is both now and future.
  - a. He was starving now: empty, lonely, unhappy, humiliated, destitute, without purpose, meaning, or significance, without family or friend.
  - b. He was doomed to starve, to perish eternally (Jn. 3:16; see *Death*, Heb. 9:27).
3. He thought about humbling himself. Humbling himself would involve two significant steps.
  - a. Repenting. Note the prodigal would have to "get up," that is, turn from and leave the distant country, and go to his father. These are the steps involved in repentance...
    - arising, getting up
    - turning away from one's sinful life
    - turning toward and moving toward God

Note that repentance is simply a changed life, a life that turns from sin to righteousness, from self to God, from this world to heaven, from the temporal to the eternal.

- b. Confessing. The prodigal would have to confess...
  - his sin
  - his unworthiness to be called God's son

**Thought 1.** Note that the prodigal was only thinking of these things, not doing them — not yet. However, the desire and longing to return to his father was gnawing at his heart deeply.

**Mat 5:6** *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. (see Lk.6:21)*

**John 7:37** *On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink."*

**Psa 143:6** *I spread out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land. (see Ps.42:2; 38:9; 63:1; 119:174)*

**Isa 55:1** *"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost."*

### HEBREWS 09:27 DEATH (THANATOS)

The basic meaning of death is *separation*. Death never means extinction, annihilation, nonexistence, or inactivity. "Death is the separation of a person from the purpose or use for which he was intended." (H.S. Miller. Quoted by Lehman Strauss. *Devotional Studies in Galatians and Ephesians*. Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Bros. Copyright 1957 by Lehman Strauss, p. 137.)

The Bible speaks of three deaths.

1. Physical death: the *separation* of a man's spirit or life from the body. This is what men commonly call death. It is when a person ceases to exist on this earth and is buried (1 Cor. 15:21-22; Heb. 9:27).

**1 Cor 15:21-22** *For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.*

**Heb 9:27** *Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.*

2. Spiritual death: the *separation* of man's spirit from God while he is still living and walking upon earth. This death is the *natural state* of a man on earth without Christ. Man is seen as still in his sins and *dead* to God (Eph. 2:1; 4:18; 1 Jn. 5:12).

Spiritual death speaks of a person who is dead while he still lives (1 Tim. 5:6). He is a natural man living in this present world, but he is said to be dead to the Lord Jesus Christ and to God and to spiritual matters.

- a. A person who wastes his life in wild living is spiritually dead.

**Luke 15:32** *"But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."*

- b. A person who has not partaken of Christ is spiritually dead.

**John 6:53** *Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*

- c. A person who does not have the spirit of Christ is said to be spiritually dead.

**Rom 8:9** *You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.*

- d. A person who lives in sin is said to be spiritually dead.

**Eph 2:1** *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.*

**Col 2:13** *When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins.*

- e. A person who is separated from God is said to be spiritually dead.

**Eph 4:18-19** *They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.*

- f. A person who sleeps in sin is spiritually dead.

**Eph 5:14** *For it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."*

- g. A person who lives in sinful pleasure is dead while he lives.

**1 Tim 5:6** *But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives.*

- h. A person who does not have the Son of God is dead.

**1 Tim 5:6** *He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.*

- i. A person who does great religious works but does the wrong works is dead.

**Rev 3:1** *"To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead."*

3. Eternal death: the *separation* of man from God's presence forever. This is the second death, an eternal state of being *dead to God*. (1 Cor. 6:9-10; 2 Th. 1:9). It is spiritual death, separation from God, that is prolonged beyond the death of the body. It is called the "second death" or eternal death.

**Rom 6:23** *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

**Rom 8:6** *The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.*

**2 Th 1:9** *They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power. □*

#### **IV. Luke 15:20–21 Repentance: Confession, God Seeking Men, Contrition**

The prodigal got up and returned to his father. This was the greatest of moments for the prodigal, the most momentous event in the life of any sinner. It is the summit of human experience. The prodigal returned to God: he sought reconciliation with his Father.

1. He repented: he did get up and turn from his sinful life and go to his Father. He was no longer just thinking about it; he was now repenting and going to the Father.

**Mat 5:4** *Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*

**Acts 3:19** *Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.*

**Acts 8:22** *Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart.*

**2 Cor 7:10** *Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.*

**Isa 55:7** *Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.*

**Ezek 18:31** *Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel?*

**Ezek 33:11** *Say to them, ‘As surely as I live,’ declares the Sovereign LORD, ‘I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?’ (see Joel 2:12)*

**Zec 1:3** *Therefore tell the people: This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘Return to me,’ declares the LORD Almighty, ‘and I will return to you,’ says the LORD Almighty.*

2. He was accepted even before he confessed. This is a significant point to note. Repentance is the sign that we are sincere when we confess, and God knows we are sincere when He sees us actually turn from our wicked ways. He forgives when we repent, when we truly want Him to forgive. This is the reason the Father runs to meet His son. The son had turned away from the distant country and *had come* to the Father. Note:

=> the Father’s eyes were merciful and compassionate: no matter what He had seen, He wanted to have mercy.

- => the Father's heart was merciful and compassionate: He wanted to reach out in compassion to the sinning son.
- => the Father's feet were merciful and compassionate: He wanted to run and meet and *escort* the sinner home.
- => the Father's arms were merciful and compassionate: He wanted to embrace the prodigal son and weep with him.
- => the Father's lips were merciful and compassionate: He wanted to welcome the prodigal son home with all the tenderness of a true Father.

***Psa 34:18*** *The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.*

***Psa 51:17*** *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*

***Psa 66:2*** *Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious!*

***Joel 2:13*** *Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.*

3. He confessed. He needed to confess his terrible evil: that he had rebelled, rejected, and sinned against the Father. He had sinned against heaven, all that heaven stood for in all its righteousness and godliness; and sinned in the sight of God, going against all that the Father stood for and knew to be best.

***1 John 1:9*** *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

***Ezra 10:11*** *“Now make confession to the LORD, the God of your fathers, and do his will. Separate yourselves from the peoples around you and from your foreign wives.”*

***Prov 28:13*** *He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.*

***Jer 3:13*** *“Only acknowledge your guilt — you have rebelled against the LORD your God, you have scattered your favours to foreign gods under every spreading tree, and have not obeyed me,” declares the LORD.*

***Job 33:27-28*** *Then he [God] comes to men and says, ‘I sinned, and perverted what was right, but I did not get what I deserved. He redeemed my soul from going down to the pit, and I will live to enjoy the light.’*

## **V. Luke 15:22–24 Forgiveness and Restoration**

The prodigal was accepted and restored. But note: he would not have been accepted and restored if he had not returned. The key to being accepted by God is *repentance*. We must always remember this fact, a fact which determines our eternal destiny.

1. The father restored him.
  - a. The “robe” restored him to a position of sonship and honour. It symbolized being clothed with the righteousness of Christ.

*2 Cor 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

*Rom 13:14 Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*

*Eph 4:24 And to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

*Col 3:10 And have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*

- b. The “ring” restored him to a position of authority. The son was now to represent the father and his kingdom.

*Gal 4:6-7 Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.” So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.*

*Rev 3:21 To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.*

*Rom 8:15-17 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*

*Titus 3:7 So that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.*

- c. The “sandals” immediately restored and elevated him above servanthood, which means he became a *free man*. The son was now fitted with sandals to carry the gospel of peace wherever he went (see Eph 6:15).

*John 8:32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*

*Rom 6:18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.*

**Rom 8:2** *Because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.*

**2 Cor 3:17** *Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.*

**2 Cor 8:9** *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.*

**Gal 5:13** *You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.*

**Eph 6:15** *And with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.*

**1 Pet 2:16** *Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.*

- d. The “celebration” pictures reconciliation, full acceptance, and the great joy of the occasion.

**Titus 3:4-7** *But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.*

2. The father fed the son and celebrated his son’s return. Both facts are important. All that the son needed was fed to him. He was fully accepted into the family; therefore, all the food of heaven was laid out before him. It was there to nourish him. But even more: there was celebration and great joy over the son’s return. The whole household celebrated in joy.

**Eph 2:7** *In order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.*

**Phil 4:19** *And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.*

**1 Tim 1:14** *The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.*

**Prov 8:18** *With me are riches and honour, enduring wealth and prosperity.*

**Prov 10:22** *The blessing of the LORD brings wealth, and he adds no trouble to it.*

3. The Father proclaimed His son’s new life.

- a. He “was dead and is alive again.”

**John 3:16** *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

**John 5:24** *“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”*

**Eph 2:1** *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.*

**1 Pet 1:23** *For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.*

b. “He was lost and is found.”

**Isa 53:6** *We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

**Luke 15:6, 9** *And goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbours together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’*

**Luke 19:10** *“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”*

**1 Pet 2:24-25** *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. ■*



# THE PARABLE OF THE OLDER SON: THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS RELIGIONIST

## LUKE 15:25–32

### *Introduction*

This passage is about the second son of the father (v. 11, 25). The older son represents the self-righteous religionist — the moral, the just, the good — the man who has never committed gross and visible sin. He is religious and does religious works; therefore, he feels and believes he is acceptable to God. (Lk. 11:37-54; 18:9-12; Rom. 2:17-29.)

Most people feel they are *religious*. For this reason, the religious person needs to pay close attention to what Jesus is saying in the passage. The religious person needs to examine his heart and life to make sure his religion is genuine. In this parable Jesus pointed out five faults with the self-righteous religionist.

- I. Fault 1: he was in the field away from home (vv. 25-27).
- II. Fault 2: he shut himself out (v. 28).
- III. Fault 3: he was self-righteous (v. 29).
- IV. Fault 4: he lacked compassion and the understanding of sinners (v. 30).
- V. Fault 5: he failed to see two critical facts (vv. 31-32).

### **I. *Luke 15:25–27 Errors of the Religionists***

The first fault of the religionist is his tragic position. He was “in the field” away from the house. He was in the field of religion, but not in the house of salvation. He was unaware of his father’s affairs (vv. 26-27).

- 1. The older son was *in the field* of his father. He was working diligently, looking after the responsibilities of the field. So it is with the religionist. He is working diligently at the field of religious things: services, rituals, ceremonies, ordinances, prayers. He even uses religious talk and terms in his daily conversation. He attends services and prays and talks as much as he needs to satisfy his conscience.

The point is this: the religionist is “in the field” of religion. He professes to know God and to be a follower of religion. Just how much religion he practices depends upon how much religion he needs to save his conscience and to feel acceptable to God. Most men want to feel acceptable to God, so they do whatever amount of religion makes them feel acceptable.

**Thought 1.** How much religion does a man need to save his conscience and make him feel acceptable to God?

- 1) Some men sense the need for *very little religious activity*.
-

- 2) Other men sense the need for *a great deal of religious activity*, even to becoming professional ministers.
2. The older son was in the field, not in the house of his father.
- => He did not know what was going on in the house (of salvation and repentance), only what was happening in the field (of religion).
- => When he looked at the *celebration* of repentant sinners, he questioned. He did not understand.
- => He had to ask what the celebration meant (what the celebration of repentance and salvation meant).

**2 Tim 3:5** *Having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.*

**Mat 23:23** *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees [religionists], you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices — mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law — justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.”*

**Gal 4:10-11** *You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.*

**Eph 2:8-9** *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast.*

**2 Tim 1:9** *[God] who has saved us and called us to a holy life — not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.*

**Titus 3:4-7** *But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.*

## **II. Luke 15:28 The Tragic Rejection of God**

The second fault of the religionist is his tragic rejection of God. He shuts himself out. Note the son in the field became angry at the repentant son who was now in the father's house. He did not understand repentance, how a man who had been so immoral, dirty, and unclean could change so much. The claims of being safe and secure and the sound of celebration and testimony disturbed the son from the field. So it is with the religionist. He does not understand such claims as...

- being saved
- being filled with power
- being delivered *immediately* from enslaved habits (such as alcohol, smoking, immorality, cursing, covetousness, selfishness)
- being healed
- being saved *by God Himself*
- being filled with joy
- being indwelt and given power by the Holy Spirit

The religionist reacts against such claims. How? He wants nothing to do with such a *house of repentance and salvation*. He shuts himself out. Sometimes he even talks against and criticizes such a celebration and house.

**Mat 23:13** “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.”

**Isa 29:14** The Lord says: “These people come near to me with their mouth and honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men. Therefore once more I will astound these people with wonder upon wonder; the wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish.”

**Mal 2:7-8** “For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction — because he is the messenger of the LORD Almighty. But you have turned from the way and by your teaching have caused many to stumble; you have violated the covenant with Levi,” says the LORD Almighty.

Note a significant fact: the religionist *shut himself out*. God does not shut him out. The father “went...out and pleaded with him” to come in. The father does even more for the religionist in that he comes seeking him, whereas the prodigal had to return home before the father could run out to meet him. The father came out and begged the religious son to understand repentance and salvation and to come in. (The religionist is already in the field of religion and close to the gospel, whereas the prodigal son is out in the field of the world far removed from the church and the gospel.)

Note the terrible jealousy and envy in the heart of the older son. He was jealous of the treatment, of the fruit and blessing’s being given to the prodigal son. (See *Fruit Bearing*, Jn. 15:1-8; see Gal. 5:22-23.)

### JOHN 15:01–08 FRUIT-BEARING, ABIDE

There are four stages of fruit-bearing given: (1) no fruit (v. 2), (2) fruit (v. 2), (3) more fruit (v. 2), and (4) much fruit (vv. 5, 8).

What does it mean to say a Christian is to bear fruit? It means to bear converts (Rom. 1:13), to bear righteousness (Rom. 6:21-23), to bear Christian character or the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). Note also the conditions for bearing fruit in life: cleansing (v. 3) and abiding or remaining in Christ (v. 5), and obedience (vs. 10, 12). A true Christian is a person who really does abide in Christ (1 Jn. 2:10). John said that to abide or remain in Christ means eight things.

1. A person walks in open confession before God. He walks through life opening up his life to God; he confesses all known sin. He does not walk in sin, and he does not allow any sin to go unconfessed (1 Jn. 1:6-10).
2. A person walks and fellowships with Christ. He lives and moves and has his being with Christ. He communes and lives in a consciousness of God's presence, and from God's presence, he learns of God and he draws the strength and authority to live victoriously day by day (1 Jn. 2:6; 2:27; see Psa. 16:11; Prov. 3:5-6).
3. A person continues in the church; he has not gone out from the church (1 Jn. 2:19).
4. A person possesses confidence, an unashamedness in life, that prepares him for eternity (1 Jn. 2:28).
5. A person does not walk in continuous sin (1 Jn. 3:6). He experiences constant victory over sin.
6. A person actively surrenders himself to obey God's commandments (1 Jn. 3:24).
7. A person experiences the indwelling presence and witness of the Spirit (1 Jn. 4:12-13).
8. A person dwells in love and unity and fellowship with all other believers (Jn. 17:21-23; 1 Jn. 4:16; see 1 Jn. 4:20). □

### III. *Luke 15:29 Religionists and Self-righteousness*

The third fault of the religionist is his tragic self-righteousness. Note the older son claimed three things.

1. He claimed to be religious: "I've been slaving for you." A religionist does serve God through religious things: he worships, prays, tithes, witnesses, reads his Bible, and teaches.
2. He claimed to be moral and just: "[I] never disobeyed your orders." He never committed immorality, not any other dirty or unclean act that could be visibly or publicly seen. He never stole, cheated, lied, or cursed. He was obedient to his parents and responsible in his work and duties both to God and man.

3. He felt he deserved more, that he was not recognized enough: “You never gave me even a young goat,” that is, the spiritual food of power, love, joy, peace, confidence, joy, and the absolute assurance of heaven and eternal life. He felt he did not get enough, that he deserved more than those who were now filled with so much spiritual food and celebration.

Note what the religionist lacks: *faith* (Mt. 23:23). He just does not *trust* the Father’s love and judgment, His plan of salvation and repentance *for all*.

**Jer 2:35** *You say, ‘I am innocent; he is not angry with me.’ But I will pass judgment on you because you say, ‘I have not sinned.’*

**Mat 7:22-23** *Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’*

**Gal 2:16** *Know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.*

**Mat 23:25** *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.”*

**Mat 23:28** *In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.*

#### **IV    *Luke 15:30    Self-righteousness and Lack of Compassion***

The fourth fault of the religionist is his tragic lack of compassion and the understanding of God’s spiritual feast. Note three things about the older son.

1. He did not call the prodigal son his brother. He said with arrogance, “this son of yours.” He felt *above* and *better* than the prodigal son, despite the change of heart and life that existed within the repentant son. He felt no compassion or joy whatsoever. But note something: his statement was true. The repentant son was *God’s true son*.
2. He focused on the prodigal’s faults, especially his immoral past. He ignored the prodigal son’s repentance, his return home, and the glorious reunion. He ignored God’s...
  - great love      • great forgiveness      • great joy
3. He did not understand God’s spiritual feast. The fatted calf would symbolize the spiritual food God gives to the repentant sinner.
  - a. There was the food of absolute assurance of salvation and eternal life.

**Rom 8:15-17** *For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*

**Gal 4:4-6** *But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.”*

- b. There was the food of love, joy and peace.

**Gal 5:22-23** *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*

**1 John 3:18** *Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.*

**Mat 7:21** *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”*

**1 John 3:23** *And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.*

## **V. Luke 15:31–32 The Tragic Blindness and Unbelief**

The fifth fault of the religionist is his tragic blindness. He fails to see two critical facts.

1. The religionist has the same privileges as the repentant prodigal. Note the words, “Everything I have is yours.” He has the worship, the Word, the promises, the preaching, and the teaching. He has constant exposure to all that is God’s (Rom. 9:4-5). He can enter God’s “house of salvation” anytime. All he has to do is repent, turn from trusting the field of religion, and enter God’s house. He simply needs to believe in and trust the love of God. He is to stop opposing God’s love to the prodigal sinner and come in himself.

2. The salvation of the repentant prodigal was real.

=> This brother of yours was dead, but he is now alive.

**John 5:24** *“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”*

**Eph 2:1** *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.*

**1 Pet 1:23** *For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.*

**John 3:16** *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

=> This brother of yours was lost, but now he is found.

**Isa 53:6** *We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

**Luke 15:6, 9** *And goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbours together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’*

**Luke 19:10** *For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.*

**1 Pet 2:24-25** *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. ■*