

Idols we never knew we had

8 – Religion



Introduction

How do you understand the term *religion*?

In your experience and opinion, what does it mean to be *religious*?

The Love of the Father

Read Luke 15:11-32

1. This parable is historically known as *The Parable of the Lost Son* or *The Prodigal Son*. According to verse 11, why is that an unfortunately inaccurate title? What would be better titles?
2. Why do you think English translators of the Bible have been inclined to name the parable the way they have (hint: how do people generally define *sin*)?
3. Read Luke 15:1,2. What was the occasion that prompted Jesus' teaching of the parables in this chapter?

Do you think he was trying to help his audience become more moral through these stories?

What does this tell you about the purpose of the parables?

4. What were *both* brothers initially looking for from the father?

How were they going down two different, yet similar, paths to get it?

What does this teach us about the two different ways that humans can be distant from God?

5. Most Bible commentators will acknowledge that the banquet with the father at the end of the parable is representative of salvation. Jesus ends the story with the younger brother at the feast and the older brother standing outside. This would undoubtedly have been provocative, shocking, and offensive to the Pharisees who would have clearly understood the point Jesus was making. In what sense might you say that, even today, older brother types are actually farther away from God than younger brother types?
6. Jesus' ministry seemed to attract many of the tax collectors and prostitutes (the moral dregs of society) and to repel the Pharisees. If our churches are attracting more Pharisees than tax collectors, what must we ask ourselves?
7. Reread verses 18,19. State the younger brother's three-tiered plan to get back in with his father. Notice, when he tried to make this statement to the father, the father, who had run out to meet him, cut him off after his second point. What does this tell us about our entrance into God's family?

8. How does Jesus fit into this parable?

Thought questions on the parable

1. What happens if churches only encourage people to repent of younger brother sins (sins of self-indulgence) and not of older brother sins (sins of self-righteousness)?
2. The United States has recently seen a historically unprecedented decline in young adults involved in churches. Does this parable offer any insights about this phenomenon?

Read Galatians 4:1-11.

3. What words in this text highlight the fact that our right relationship with God is entirely by grace, not by works?
4. Sometimes we're not only free to part from former "religious" practices, but we *must* depart from them. According to the apostle Paul, why might that be?
5. What is at the heart of everything we do as the church?