

Parable Of The Two Sons

by Martin G. Collins

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Some parables are designed to convince people of their own sin. For instance, Nathan convinces King David of the seriousness of his sin with Bathsheba by using a parable (II Samuel 12:1). In the New Testament, Jesus Christ pointedly targets the evil of His adversaries with parables in a manner they cannot deny or refute. Such condemnatory parables are appeals to the offenders to repent, and they simultaneously judge them out of their own mouths.

In the Parable of the Two Sons (Matthew 21:28-32), Jesus fully intends to have the chief priests and elders of the people convict themselves. From the first words of His parable—"But what do you think?"—Jesus has them questioning their own thoughts and motives. Obviously, He wants them to react to His parable as David did to Nathan's, but as subsequent events show, they did not. Will we?

1. How do the character traits of the two sons differ? Matthew 21:28; Hebrews 3:8-13; Romans 10:2-4.

Comment: The character of each son is vastly different. One son is independent, disobedient, and insolent, but after thinking about his ways, returns to carry out his responsibility. The second is a big talker, full of promises but no action. In these two men, Christ describes, on the one hand, sinners of all types, who, when convicted by John the Baptist and Himself, turned away from their iniquities, repented, and obeyed God. On the other hand are the scribes, Pharisees, and other self-righteous people who feign a zeal for the law but will not receive the gospel.

2. Why does the first son regret his disobedience? Matthew 21:29; Job 24:1-25; Lamentations 3:27; Romans 8:7.

Comment: Both sons hear the same command: "Son, go work today in my vineyard." Parents should not raise their children in the destructiveness of idleness, and similarly, God commands His children to work, though we are all heirs. Generally, the first reaction of a sinner to God's truth is "I will not!" which shows the enmity between man and God. The disobedient son represents those who have no desire to make an effort to obey God. They neither fear God nor pretend to, seeing no immediate reward for their efforts. Although hypocrisy may exist in other areas of their lives, they are not hypocritical in their stance toward God—they flat out reject Him! Eventually, when called, they realize that true happiness is to work for God to produce eternally rewarding fruit.

3. Why does the second son not go to work in his father's vineyard? Matthew 21:30; 23:25-26; Job 8:13; 27:8-12; Luke 6:45; Galatians 5:19-23.

Comment: The second son deceitfully professes respect and obedience, but he never does his duty. The contradiction between his word and his work exposes his major

character flaw—hypocrisy. It is harder to convince a hypocrite of his true state than a flagrant sinner because, in deceiving himself, the hypocrite follows his own standards and form of godliness. Contrarily, the flagrant sinner *knows* he is evil.

Many in mainstream Christianity profess to know God but deny Him in their works. They appear pious at church, but their personal lives are riddled with sin. They are living a lie, and out of their smooth mouths their deceitful hearts speak. Their efforts produce the works of the flesh rather than the fruit of the Spirit. The second son does not go to work because he lives for the moment and never comprehends his father's ultimate plan, its wonderful results, and its long-term benefits.

4. Since both sin, why does the openly disobedient son eventually do the will of his father? Matthew 21:31; Luke 7:29-30; Ezekiel 18:30-32; Acts 3:19; Romans 2:4-11.

Comment: The sons' ultimate actions reveal their difference. The first son, after open refusal, repents of his sin—better late than never—and goes to work for his father. He overcomes and changes from bad to good. After experiencing the negative results of sin, he yields to God's instruction, changing direction and doing as his father commanded him—the fruit of his repentance.

The proof of our repentance comes to light when we comply with the Father's will and do good works with the help of the Holy Spirit. The result is the production of the fruit of the Spirit.

5. Why do the Pharisees not recognize true righteousness? Matthew 21:32; Luke 7:36-50; Revelation 3:16-17.

Comment: John the Baptist proclaimed the truth and lived it, but the Pharisees rejected John's witness and professed their own righteousness while living unrighteously. In this parable, Jesus distinguishes those who generally knew the way of God (Jews) from those who did not (Gentiles). The Jews initially appeared righteous, having the revelation of God and the ordinances of justice established among them. The Gentiles were initially ignorant of righteousness—the way of God—and were sinful in all their conduct. From this, we can learn that those who feel they are knowledgeable and need nothing more fail to realize their spiritual bankruptcy and see no need to change. They may appear righteous, but being deceived by Satan, they believe their own righteousness will save them. Therefore, because they see no sin in their lives, they see no reason to repent.

But God's true church—the Bride of Christ—makes herself ready by repenting and overcoming sin, by truly valuing and appreciating the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and by obeying and revering the Father and His Son. The long-term rewards for obeying the Father's command to work in His vineyard are tremendous.