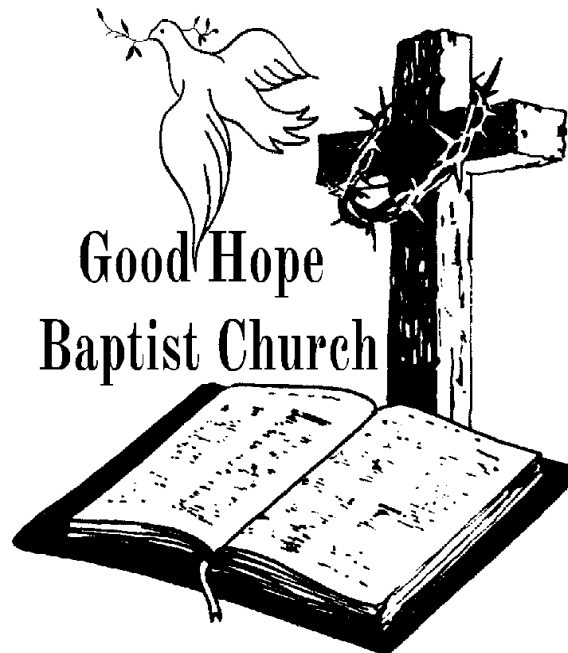


The Unpardonable Sin Of Self Righteousness

Part 2 of 2: Luke 15:1-2



Living Together In The Love Of God

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FOCAL Read Responsively Luke 15:1-2 Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. 2 And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, **This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.**

Opening A tourist on his way to Tuscaloosa, came to a fork in the road and stopped. There was no sign indicating which route went where. Seeing a little boy riding his bike, he called out to him, and the child came over. He asked, "Hey, kid, does it matter which road I take to Tuscaloosa?" The little boy replied, "Not to me it don't."

There were three prominent religious groups in Israel. There was the *Essenes*, who believed in absolute separation from their world. They were much like the monks of the Catholic Church, or the Amish of Pennsylvania. They stayed to themselves, and did little to change their world. Then there was the *Sadducees*, a very liberal group of believers. The Sadducees based their beliefs on the Books of Moses, the first five books of our Bible. Since *resurrection* isn't mentioned in the Books of Moses the Sadducees rejected the concept of resurrection. They believed that this life was all there is, and then you die. They had the attitude "**eat, drink, and be merry, (Luke 12:19) for tomorrow you shall die**".

The *Essenes* had no impact on the culture around them because they hid from it, whereas the *Sadducees* had no impact on their culture because they blended in with it. The *Pharisees* - at one time - were conservative believers who upheld the traditions of God's Holy Word.

In the first century the Levitical priesthood was corrupt, immorality was rampant, and the Greco-Roman culture that Israel was surrounded by threatened the very fabric of Judaism. Those who were devoted to the Bible and its teachings stood up for the Lord. The Pharisees believed that Israel needed to repent and return to the faith of their fathers. They read the Bible, defended the faith, respected tradition, called God's people to obedience, sought purity in their own personal lives, and were faithful Church goers.

What went wrong? Why is it that these people did not embrace the Lord Jesus Christ when the Messiah came from heaven to this earth?

Why would the Lord say of these believers:

Matthew 15:9 But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

Illustration "Imagine yourself moving into a house with a huge picture window overlooking a lake with a grand view of mountains beyond. Snow-capped mountains, beautiful mountains. You have a ringside seat, before all of this beauty, the cloud formations, the wild storms, the entire spectrum of sun illuminated colors, and the rocks and the trees and the wildflowers and the water. At first you're just captivated by this view. You sit and you stand and you look and admire; you catch your breath. Several times a day you interrupt your work and stand before this window to take in the majesty and the beauty. And then one day you notice some bird droppings on

the glass, and you get a bucket of water and a towel and you clean it. A couple of days later, a rainstorm leaves the window streaked and the bucket comes out again. One day some visitors with a tribe of small dirty-fingered children come, and the moment they leave you notice there are smudge marks all over the window. They're hardly out of the door before you have the bucket out again. You're so proud of that window, and it's such a large window. But it's incredible how many different ways foreign objects can attach themselves to that window, obscuring the vision, distracting from the vision. Keeping that window clean now becomes compulsive neurosis. You accumulate ladders and buckets and squeegees. You construct scaffolding outside and one inside; you have to get to all the difficult corners and heights. You end up having the cleanest window in North America, but it's now been years since you've looked through it.

You've become a Pharisee." (Eugene Peterson)

Focused on the Law and their traditions, the Pharisees didn't keep the main thing as the main thing. They forgot that their roots were in **Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob** - and they stopped caring whether others were on the right road to Heaven.

When God reached out to **Abraham** he was an unworthy unbeliever living in Ur of the Chaldees (ancient Babylon), a people who often practiced a horrendous system of child sacrifice. When God reached out to **Isaac**

he was a somewhat useless child. Can you think of *anything* that Isaac ever contributed in his *entire* life? **Isaac is forty years old and still has no wife. Abraham got tired of waiting for Isaac to find himself a wife, so he sends out his servant to find Rebecca (Genesis 24:1-8, 15-26; Genesis 24:63-67).** Isaac - the original momma's boy - lives his whole life being catered to. What about **Jacob**? His very name - "**Jacob**" - means "**he who pulls your leg, one who wrongfully or illegally takes the place of another**". Jacob was born trying to drag his brother **Esau** down, coming out of the womb holding fast, even then, to his brother's heel. Jacob - the chiseler and the con-man - stole his brother's birthright by deceiving his somewhat useless father Isaac.

"Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" is a phrase repeated twenty eight times in the Bible. None of these men were worthy in themselves. God reached out to them and invited them into His family. They accepted - and became worthy because God is worthy.

Self righteousness caused the Pharisees to forget this great truth: **no one is worthy**. Not you, not I, no one is worthy. Look through your Bible and you will find no one worthy enough on their own to be with God or go to His Heaven.

Illustrate A Sunday school teacher wanted to teach his class of six year old children the way to Heaven. He asked them, "**If I sold my house and my car, had a big garage sale, and gave all my money to the church,**

would that get me into heaven?" "No!" the children all answered. "**If I cleaned the church every day, mowed the yard, and kept everything neat and tidy, would that get me into heaven?"** Again the answer was, "**No!**" He went on. "**Well then, if I was kind to animals and gave candy to children and loved my wife, would that get me into heaven?"** Again they all shouted as kids will do, "**No!**" He asked, "**Well then, how can I get into heaven?"** A little boy in the back row raised his hand and shouted, "**YOU GOTTA BE DEAD!**" (Andy Stanley, *How Good is Good Enough?*)

That's true - and it's not true. If I want to get into Heaven I do have to leave this body behind. But Heaven is where life is, for Heaven is where God is.

If I want to get into Heaven, then I have to die to *myself*. I need to stop being the center of my universe and accept God's invitation to life. I need to realize that my worthiness is not in me, but in my relationship to Jesus Christ.

FOCAL Luke 15:1 Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. 2 And the Pharisees and scribes murmured

The publicans and sinners *drew near to Jesus to hear Him*. They realized who they were and who He was.

John 1:4 In {Jesus} was life; and the life was the light of men.

They realized that they were dead, and that their only

hope was faith in Jesus Christ.

1. Self Righteousness Makes Us Wander From Family, Friends, and Faith

Jesus continues to reach out to the Pharisees, trying to bring them home to the Gospel they once knew. This is the longest part of His sermon - but one of the best loved stories ever told in the human language. Jesus said:

Context Luke 15:11-12 ... **A certain man had two sons: 12 And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.**

Self righteousness always has **two sons**. One stays at home, and one wanders - but both are not where the Father wants them to be.

Jesus starts by talking about the wandering son. He doesn't want to be part of the family, but he wants all the blessings of the family. He says, "**Father, GIVE me the portion of goods that falleth to me**". He hasn't earned any right to an inheritance from the Father, nor is there any indication in the text that he deserves any part of the inheritance. He **rudely demands, it, though**. He doesn't say, "**Please, may I have it**", but "**Give it to me NOW!**" He has no concern for the Father, nor for the business of the Father. His world is himself - and nothing else.

There are people just like this young man all around us. I get calls from them all week long. They call up and say -

without blinking an eye - "**Will you pay my electric bill?**" They're not interested in God or His Family, the Church. They just want what we have. They're not interested in building the Kingdom of God. They may be on the "Church Membership Roll", but haven't been in Church in years - nor do they care.

I could tell you stories that would raise the hair on the back of your neck.

Illustrate I received a call one time from a woman I never met - ever. She said, "My husband **Ralph** is a part of your Church. He's in the hospital and wants you to visit." Well, of course I went. **When I got there I found two other Pastors standing there. This man was not only a member of our Church (by the books anyway), but was a member of two other Churches.** By the way, he had *never* set foot in Rock Hill Church the whole time I was Pastor there. I asked Ralph one time if he was saved. He said, "**I hope so - I'm a good person**". Ralph wanted me to pray for him, and wanted God to heal him - but he had no intention of ever living for the Lord or of telling others about Jesus.

There are many people like Ralph. They tell God, "**Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me**". Give me a good life. God, let my heart keep beating. Protect my health. "**I want the Garden of Eden - but I don't want to follow You, God, nor to be part of Your family.**" They think that they're going to Heaven because they are "good people" when they compare themselves to others.

Considering yourself "good" by comparing yourself with yourself is as foolish as trying to play yourself a game of checkers and then declaring yourself "the world champion" because you've never been beaten!

The farther you get away from God, the less good you are. This young man said "**give me the portion of good that falleth to me**". And notice, God in His goodness nonetheless blessed him. What happened next?

Context Luke 15:13-15 **And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. 14 And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. 15 And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.**

The young man left his family, left the Father, and struck out on his own. It wasn't long, though, before he found out he made a bad decision. **He wasted his substance with riotous living. He spent it all.** Then came a **famine in that land**. Things went from bad to worst in his life.

Illustrate I was out fishing the other day, and one of the men I was with shared this story with me. He said he was trying to catch fish, but couldn't get a bite. But near him he saw an old woman who was pulling in fish, one right after the other. He went over and asked her, "**How are you catching so many fish?**" She mumbled something, but he couldn't understand her. But he kept

watching her. Pretty soon she pulled in another fish, took it off the hook, and then *spit out a worm* and put that on the hook. She said, "**If you want to catch fish honey, you have to keep the worms warm**". She was keeping them warm in her mouth!

Yuk! I don't care how bad it gets, I don't think I'm keeping worms warm in my mouth! This young man, however, in order to survive has to take the worst job any Jewish person could take. **He got a job feeding pigs**. For a Jew it would have been more preferable to keep worms in his mouth! But that's not the worst of it.

Context Luke 15:16 **And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.**

What a wake up call suffering brings! **Feeding** hogs, he begins to **feed with** the hogs. Where are all his **friends**, those good buddy's who helped him spend his money? They're not interested in him now - he has no money.

Alone, living in a pig pen, eating like a pig - all his allusions are gone. Now he's ready. We read:

Context Luke 15:17-19 **... he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, 19 And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.**

I've met many people who have asked me, "How can a loving God _____", then they will put some type of suffering they have gone through in the blank. You know, I don't know how a loving God *couldn't* and *wouldn't* allow you to go to a place of suffering, if that suffering would cause you to repent and be saved. C.S. Lewis said: "**pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.**"

The suffering that he is going through causes this wandering soul to say "**I'm starving to death! My Father's servants live better than this. I will go to Him and say, *I am not worthy to be your son - please take me on as a servant.***" All of his self righteousness is gone. He has repented.

Repentance means saying "I am sorry" to the Father that you have offended. Confession of sin is necessary if you are going to be right with God.

The young man did just as he said. He came home. The Bible tells us that

Context Luke 15:20-21 ... **when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. 21 And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.**

The only thing that stands between the lost sinner and the saving Grace of God is that the sinner **repent and go to God!** Repentance means to acknowledge you need God more than God needs you. Repentance means to admit you are wrong. Repentance is to admit you have no worth, but the worth that God bestows on you. The Bible says:

Context Luke 15:22-24 ... **the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: 23 And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: 24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.**

When you bring yourself to God, you will always receive more than you give. The Bible says:

James 4:10 **Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.**

Come to God, trusting Him. He loves to save, to reach out to those in need.

1 Peter 5:7 **Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time ...**

When this young man return to God and bent his knees, the Father lifted him up and blessed him.

2. Self Righteousness Robs Us Of The Joy We Should Have In Our Lives

This is where many preachers stop - but they cut off the rest of the Lord's sermon. I'm not going to do that. The Bible tells us:

Context Luke 15:25 Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. 27 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. 28 And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him

The publicans and sinners that Jesus Christ reached out to were much like the first son of the sermon. The Pharisees were like the second son of Jesus' story.

This son stayed with his Father, and labored in the fields for his Father. Now this other, younger brother comes home. And he is mad! He says:

Context Luke 15:29-30 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: 30 But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.

Please notice what self righteousness does in a person.

a It puffs a person up. Note that he says, "**Many years have I served you, and I did not transgress your commandment at any time**". That's what the Pharisees thought about themselves. They thought, "We have kept God's Law perfectly - so perfectly, in fact, that we added more to it by our traditions and rituals. We are perfect in ourselves!

But, dear friends, no one is perfect. Every person in this room is a sinner. The Bible tells us:

Romans 3:23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God

Both Publican as well as Pharisee are sinners. We are all sinners, flawed, and need the Lord.

The mark of the **Publican's self righteousness** is *riotous living*. The mark of the **Pharisee's self righteousness** is bringing *a riot to a party*. None of us are righteous in ourselves - we need the Lord Jesus Christ.

b It causes us to demand that God give US an **accounting**. The older brother said to the Father "**YOU never gave me a kid, a fatted calf, so I could party with my friends**".

God doesn't owe any of us anything. We owe everything to Him. The Bible says:

Isaiah 64:8 ... O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand.

The older brother lived with his Father for years. His Father said:

Context Luke 15:31 Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.

The Father withholds no good thing from His children. The son could have killed a fatted calf at any time - and probably did. Nothing restrained him from doing so. But now there is a party going on inside the house, and the older Son is restricted from the party. He's not restricted because the Father won't let him go in. He's restricted because of his anger and self righteousness.

C Self righteousness causes a terrible hardening of the heart. We read:

Context Luke 15:32 It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

"It is fitting that we have a party". When somebody comes to Christ by faith, believing that He gave Himself for them, we ought to have a party! A soul has been saved from hell. The one who could be my brother or sister in Christ is now in reality my brother and sister in Christ. The Father said, "**this, thy Brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found**". The Pharisee sits back and murmurs at Christ: "**This man**

eats with sinners". They should have been happy that someone who was lost was now found.

Opening A tourist on his way to Tuscaloosa, came to a fork in the road and stopped. There was no sign indicating which route went where. Seeing a little boy riding his bike, he called out to him, and the child came over. He asked, "Hey, kid, does it matter which road I take to Tuscaloosa?" The little boy replied, "Not to me it don't."

Some of you might be thinking, "He's lost his mind. He started with that joke". I know. But it fits here, too. The hard hearted Pharisees are like the little boy of this illustration. They don't care about the lost, and don't care if they are on the right road or not. How terribly sad!

Illustrate Years ago at another Church I served, the Lord Jesus called to and won a young man from the pig's trough to the Kingdom. The young man had lived a rough life, and the tattoos on his arms told his story. Let's say that these tattoos were not by any means Christian. The young man came forward, gave his life to Jesus, and followed the Lord in baptism. I had the pleasure of not only preaching to him, but providing marital counseling for him and the young lady that he now calls his wife.

I standing in our new Christian Life Center one day when one of our local Pharisees came up. Every Church has them, by the way, though they don't always come to Church. Sometimes they sit at home and phone in complaints. Anyway, one of our Pharisees came up and started talking, loudly, about how he hated the ear rings

this young man was wearing. "If he's a Christian he ought to take those things out". Oddly enough, the young man had stopped wearing his ear rings. He was also standing in the kitchen hearing every word that the loud mouthed Pharisee was saying.

I thought the young man would leave, but he didn't. As a matter of fact, he called me just this week to share some good news with me. He's been studying his Bible and seeking God's will for his life. He recently surrendered to the Lord fully, and has begun to preach the Gospel of Christ. He told me, **"I have to wear long sleeved shirts, because the tattoos bother people and they both me, too. But there's nothing I can do about that now - I'll just cover them up."**

Jesus Christ said:

Matthew 5:20 ... I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

If we want to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, then our righteousness **must exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees**. It is not enough to God that you stay in proximity to the Temple or the Church. You and I both need the righteousness that is only available through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Thom S. Rainer is the current President of the Southern Baptist *Lifeway Christian Resources*. He said:

"A recent study conducted by Lifeway Research indicates that unbelievers are open to conversations about Jesus Christ. A research study of unchurched Americans revealed that while 72 percent of the people interviewed said they think the Church "is full of hypocrites", 71 percent of the respondents said they believed Jesus "makes a positive difference in a person's life." And an overwhelming percentage - 78 percent - said they would be willing to listen to someone who wanted to share what they believed about Christianity People are open to the Gospel." (Great Commission Resurgence, Page 9)

Why is it that nearly *three out of every four people questioned* feels that the Church is filled with hypocrites? Could it be because - too often - we are like that older brother. We forget that we are all sinners, and it's all about Jesus. When God looks at humanity and calls to salvation, He does not call "good people". There are no good people when compared to Him. No, dear friends, the Bible says:

1 Corinthians 1:26-31 Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things and the things that are not to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him. 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. 31 Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

Jesus saves the broken. He saves the tattooed. He saves the pierced. He saves the drugged out. He saves **all who come unto God by Him**. But Jesus cannot save the self righteous, the person who will not bend their knee and lower their ego for Him. When a person repents and comes to Jesus by faith, he comes home. The great Evangelist **Dwight L. Moody** once said:

"The only charge they could bring against Christ down here was, that He was receiving bad men. They are the very kind of men He is willing to receive."

Give yourselves to the Lord Jesus - He has given Himself to and for you. May God touch your hearts and lead you all to His side this very day!



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Matthew 15:9; Genesis 24:1-8, 15-26; Genesis 24:63-67; Luke 15:1; John 1:4

"**Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob**" is a phrase repeated twenty eight times in the Bible. None of these men were worthy in themselves. God reached out to them and invited them into His family. They accepted - and became worthy because God is worthy.

1. Self Righteousness Makes Us Wander From Family, Friends, and Faith

Luke 15:11-12; Luke 15:13-15; Luke 15:16; Luke 15:17-19; Luke 15:20-21; Luke 15:22-24; James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:7

2. Self Righteousness Robs Us Of The Joy We Should Have In Our Lives

Luke 15:25; Luke 15:29-30

a It puffs a person up. _____

(Romans 3:23)

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(Luke 15:32; Matthew 5:20; 1 Corinthians 1:26-31)