

07.27.22 – A Weekly Word for Covenant Church

Title: “Sin, Self-Righteousness, or Both?”

Scripture Reading: [Luke 15:25-32](#) ; [Romans 2:1-16](#) ; [Romans 5](#) ; [Ephesians 2](#) ; [Luke 18:9-14](#) ; [Ephesians 3](#)

Reflection: Pastor Henry

Friends, what separates us and keeps us from the prodigal love of the Father? Our sin? Our Self-Righteousness? Or, both?

The first option, our sin, is a popular answer. Often what we do, our sinful thoughts, words, and actions, separate us from the prodigal love of the Father. The younger son in Jesus’ story, set off away from his Father and squandered what the Father gave him through wild living. He decided living for himself was better than living with his father. How often don’t we do the very same thing? The result of such choices was the separation of the son from the father’s love and provision.

Jesus however, through his story, also powerfully reminds us that our sin is not the only thing that can separate and keep us from the prodigal love of the Father. There is a second option as well. The thoughts, words, and actions of the older brother reveal to us that he was just as lost, if not more so than his younger brother. Pastor Doug in his message this past Sunday reminded us why the older son was also just as lost. Listen again to what Pastor Doug said.

“For the older brother, and everyone like him, there is only one thing that separates us from God – and it’s not our sin (the prodigal was the definition of sin and the father embraced him, kissed him, robed him, and threw a party). No, it is our self-righteousness that keeps us from God. God doesn’t swivel his chair away from us because of self-righteousness. We swivel our chair away from God! It is not our sin that continues to separate us from God. It is our self-righteous refusal to accept his grace.”

Friends, did you catch that? “It is not our sin that continues to separate us from God. It is our self-righteous refusal to accept his grace.”

What are we to do about this truth that Jesus highlights for us through the thoughts, words, and actions of the older brother in his story?

The irony of this powerful story of Jesus is that the older brother also decided that living for himself (albeit in a different way from his brother) was better than living with his father. His self-righteous living, Pastor Doug, reminds us, made him “...just as distant, just as lost, just as alienated from the father as his younger brother once was; he is still ‘outside’ the home. Only the difference is the elder brother doesn’t realize it. He doesn’t realize in his self-righteousness, i.e., in rejecting his father’s grace – the same grace granted to his younger brother, the elder brother is condemning himself.”

As soon as we begin to think, say, and act like our own righteous living is what is going to save and provide for us, we also separate ourselves from the prodigal love, kindness, grace, and provision of our Father in Heaven.

This makes us just as lost as anyone we label as unrighteous.

Is anything separating you from the prodigal love your Father in heaven wants to pour out on you? What do you need to do about it?

Prayer: (a prayer based on Philippians 3)

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit enable us to consider everything else worthless compared to the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord. Help us discard everything else but Jesus Christ, counting it all as garbage, so we can gain Christ and become one with him. Help us no longer count on our own righteousness through obeying the law; instead, allow us to become righteous through our faith in Christ. Help us embrace God's way of making us right with himself, a way that depends on faith in Jesus! We want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. We want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, so that one way or another we will experience the resurrection from the dead! AMEN.

Action Item for the Day/Week:

In light of our story for this week, pay attention to if/when you are attempting to earn the Father's prodigal love through your own righteous living.

If/when this occurs, what is God saying to you through our story for this week?

Songs for today:

[Everyone Needs Compassion](#)

[Lord, I Need You](#)

[In Christ Alone](#)

[By Grace, We Have Been Saved](#)