The Elder Son Disease

(Luke 15:25 - 32)

The Lord Jesus Christ presented many powerful truths to the publicans and sinners who gathered to hear Him. We are grateful to God that these teachings of our Lord are eternally recorded in the fifteenth chapter of the book of Luke. Lessons on repentance, restoration, and rejoicing are all highlighted in this wonderful chapter. The compassion of the Lord Jesus Christ is demonstrated greatly by the story of the prodigal son.

As much as we would enjoy closing the chapter with the celebration surrounding the prodigal's return, the story does not end just yet. There was another son left to be expounded upon. The publicans and sinners surely smiled as the Lord spoke of mercy and compassion for struggling sinners. However, the Pharisees and scribes had to be taught a lesson on what real love consists of. The story of the sanctimonious elder brother would certainly cut them to the heart and cause them to scowl at the Lord's convicting teaching.

Much preaching has been focused upon the sinful actions of the prodigal son. Unfortunately, many hyperfundamentalists are afraid to address the sinful attitude of the elder brother. Their congregations are filled with religious hypocrites who are grossly infected with the elder son disease. Their unforgiving spirits reveal that they are not the true children of God!

"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love."

(I John 4:7 - 8)
AMEN Brother John!

The attitude of the elder brother is an abomination in the eyes of God. It does not reflect the heart of our merciful Saviour, Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, the elder son disease is very contagious. It is spreading throughout the churches of our land like a massive plague. By the grace of God, this disease must be detected and defeated!

I. The Elder Son was ANGRY!

"And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him."

(Luke 15:28)

"This particular elder brother was on his way home from the field. Doubtless, he was thinking about his supper to be followed by a restful evening. Then his ear caught an unfamiliar sound. Someone was throwing a party. His brother had come home from the ends of the earth and was thoroughly repentant! Suddenly, the elder brother realized how much he hated his younger brother. He hated him most not for running away with a large slice of the family fortune and not for the wild excesses in the far country, but for coming back home. ‘He was angry,’ Jesus said, ‘and would not go in’ (15:28)."

(J. Phillips)

The elder brother put his sinful heart on display with this outburst of anger toward his repentant brother. His refusal to go in and celebrate reflected that his heart lacked compassion and mercy for others. He despised knowing that his repentant brother was presented with a robe, a ring, and a new pair of shoes. He would have much rather seen his brother banished to a barn and given cast-off clothing.

The angry attitude of the elder brother reminds us too well of many members of a multitude of churches. Their disgusted looks and frowns upon folks with a bad past reveal their infectious condition. Church people who grow angry when a sinner gets right with God have a terrible case of the elder son disease!
II. The Elder Son was ARROGANT!

"And he answering said to his father, 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."

(Luke 15:29)

This elder brother was one of those pious hypocrites who never run away and commit criminal acts in the flesh, yet their hearts are filled with sinful desires. They somehow manage to spread their own sanctimonious gloom over everyone else around them. They are spiteful, touchy, self-righteous, and bad-tempered.

An attitude of arrogance is wicked in the sight of God. The Bible is true in declaring that "most men will proclaim everyone his own goodness" (Proverbs 20:6). People who often proclaim their own self-worth have failed to realize their unrighteous condition before a perfect and holy God. The elder brother's assessment that he had never transgressed the commandments of his father was in direct opposition to the clear teachings of God's Word.

"As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one."

(Romans 3:10)

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

(Romans 3:23)

"For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."

(James 2:10)
III. The Elder Son was ARGUMENTATIVE!

"But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf."

(Luke 15:30)

A. He Argued over his Position.

"this thy son"

The elder brother refused to verbally recognize the prodigal son as his brother. He simply referred to him as "thy son." Though this elder brother had remained in the father's house, he certainly did not have the father's heart. He was as far from God in his spirit as his younger brother had been in the flesh when he was hundreds of miles from home.

*People who refuse to call God's children their brothers or sisters in Christ have a bad case of the elder son disease!

B. He Argued over his Past!

The elder son somehow found it necessary to bring up his brother's sinful past. The phrase, "which hath devoured thy living with harlots" was an insulting jab at his brother's sinful ways which had already been forgiven by his father. His refusal to forgive and accept his brother only revealed the wickedness of his own heart!

Church members who refuse to forgive their brothers and sisters in Christ have a severe case of the elder son disease. Unforgiveness abounds among people who claim to believe the Bible. How sad it is to know that folks do not esteem the blood of Jesus Christ powerful enough to cleanse a repentant person from ALL their sins! They teach and preach the doctrine of total forgiveness, but refuse to practice it in real life situations. Just as it was with the elder son, we must consider the fact that refusal to forgive our brother puts us in serious trouble with our Father!
"But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

(Matthew 6:15)

"How tragic it is that many people who claim to follow Jesus Christ do not believe that He meant what He said! While they linger in their judgmental spirit of unforgiveness of others, their sins remain unforgiven before God. If one refuses to forgive, He will not be forgiven! This is the plain truth of God's Word, and those who refuse to accept it will be held accountable before His holy presence.

C. He Argued over his Party.

"thou never gavest me a kid..." (v. 29)

"thou hast killed for him the fatted calf." (v. 30)

The elder son could not understand why his Father would rejoice over the return of his brother. He could not see why the repentant prodigal should be instantly forgiven and restored. He certainly did not feel that his brother was worthy of a party. This proves that the elder son knew nothing about sacrificial love.

Just as the elder son stayed outside the father's house and refused to rejoice with his brother, the Pharisees and scribes who were listening to Jesus were guilty of the same. Because they did not understand the love of Christ, they knew nothing of showing compassion and mercy on others. May God help the Pharisees who fill the church pews today to see their foolish condition. They have allowed the jealousy of their hearts to rob them of the joy of seeing somebody get right with God.

*May God deliver us from the elder son disease!!!

-Rejoice over Sinners that are Regenerated!
-Rejoice over Sons that are Restored!