



Christ's Commission Fellowship

Los Angeles

DISCUSSION GROUP GUIDE
MARCH 9, 2014

WORD: **Luke 15**

Over the past few weeks we have been talking about God's grace, obedience to God's word, becoming Christ-like and even having a fantastic finish. All these have been in preparation for the coming kingdom — but God's kingdom is ready although not quite here. In the meantime, as we await the coming we have to continue to prepare and continue to work for God's plan for us.

The biggest roadblock or hindrance to Christ-likeness. . . to living out the Christian life — is sin. Luke 15 shows us Jesus discussing to a group of Pharisees and sinners three parables. This is still the biggest problem of church today — we continue to misunderstand what sin is.

So what is SIN? Sin is a problem of the heart more than just behavioral. Jeremiah 17:19 says “*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick: who can understand it?*” Our hearts are not fixed, it is fickle so that the apostle Paul even says “*For i do not understand my own actions. For i do not do what i want, but i do the very things I hate.*” This proves to us the just how complex sin really is.

This complexity of sin is illustrated in Luke 15.

1. The Parable of the Lost Sheep - tells us that we are sinners by nature. It is an inherited nature to be predisposed to sin.
2. The Parable of the Lost Coin - tells us that we are sinners due to circumstances. This simply means that because we live in a fallen world, filled with sinful people we are in a situation where we will inevitably sin.
3. The Parable of the Lost Son - tells us that we are sinners by choice.

It is important to become aware of this various aspects of sin, since a better understanding of sin will give us a better grasp of its meaning and give us better leverage to fight against it.

The story of the Prodigal Son tells us of two kinds of lost-ness. The first is the younger brother lostness and the other the elder brother lostness.

Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them. “Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ So he got up and went to his father. “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ “But the father said to his servants,

'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate. *"Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'*" *"The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'"* *"My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'*" (Luke 15:11-31)

More often than not when we talk about this parable, we tend to focus only on the younger son but when we do that we lose the richness of Jesus' parable. There are three characters in the story — the father and his two sons. Here Jesus is showing us that there are in fact two ways of being lost. Two ways we can sin and be alienated from God.

The Younger Brother Lostness.

The younger son did his father a terrible insult by asking for his share of the estate even while his father was alive. It was like saying "Father, I wish you were dead so that I can have your money". By doing this, he was asking his father to tear the family apart, to destroy the family for his pleasure. In today's scenario, the younger brother lost-ness represent the people who want the good things of life apart from God. It is the desire to continue to receive goodness from God but not having to build a relationship with Him. It can also refer to Christians who continue to sin because they believe that God will forgive them anyway.

This is in fact easier to identify, easy to spot it because it is obvious since it is observable.

The Elder Brother Lostness.

The elder brother represented the Pharisees. He represented the good son, the obedient son who stayed at home with his father. On the surface it seems that only the second son was lost, but the older son was lost too. True, he did not go off and squander his money, he didn't sleep with prostitutes. . . but the elder brother symbolizes the less obvious lost-ness. He represents the religious, those who work in ministry, those who work in church, those who follow all the rules but they are doing it for the wrong purposes. They do all these because they believe that in doing so they will remain in favor with the Father and will continue to receive his blessings. The emphasis is not on the giver but on the gifts.

He was angry when he found out that the father had a feast for the younger son, his angry was founded on the reality that he loved the father's possession more than he loved the father.

Here we can see that that we can sin in two ways: to completely reject God and turn our backs at Him, break all His commandments and live apart from Him. But another way is to be seemingly very obedient, to follow all His commandments because we believe that when we do this He will give us the things we want. . . sometimes we also do it out of self-righteousness and not out of a genuine love for God.

Elder brother lostness is much more subtle, more difficult to spot than the younger brother lostness. . . and much more dangerous.

The True Elder Brother.

To understand the True Elder brother, we have to look at all three parables - the parable of the sheep, the parable of the coin and the parable of the prodigal son. In the first two parables, there was much rejoicing when the lost sheep or coin was found, while on the last parable the elder brother was not rejoicing. In the Hebrew culture, the eldest son is responsible for the family. . . so when the younger brother was lost, the eldest brother should have gone out looking for him.

That elder brother did not rejoice when his lost brother came home, but there is an Elder Brother who will rejoice when the lost younger brother comes home. Jesus Christ is our true elder brother who came to seek out the lost. In a later chapter in the gospel of Luke, Jesus says “ the son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost. He did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for all.

Philippians 2:6-11 “who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. and being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

This is what Jesus did for you and me. We are the younger brother lost and in slavery. Jesus came and gave His life for us to save us from sin and slavery. He bought us with a high price — His death on a cross. We are all sinners, undeserving of this gift but because of the Father’s great love for us — we have been given grace. We have been given salvation, our way out from eternal death and a means to rebuild a relationship with Jesus and the Father.

What then should we do?

We need to focus of spiritual disciplines on Christ and not on merit. We should continue to preserve to joyfully seek out Christ. To keep our eyes focused on the Giver and the gifts. To keep our eyes focused on God.

Works: Journaling task

1. Read: The Parable of the Lost Sheep
 The Parable of the Lost Coin
 The Parable of the Prodigal Son

Which of the three parables spoke to you the most? What is God’s message to you in these parables?

2. The Younger Son and the Older Son. Which are you?

3. The True Elder Brother. Do you believe that Jesus is your elder brother?
 Are you focused on the gifts or on the Giver?
 What is your motivation to pursue a relationship with Jesus?