

The Parable of the Two Sons

[Matthew 21:23-32](#)

When we draw a box around our faith and limit the gospel to a set of rules or cultural customs, we minimize the power of God to transform and redeem us. As followers of Christ at this point in history, we still find ways to try to shape our lives into religious form rather than a personal relationship with God meant to transform. In reading the Parable of the Two Sons, we can be challenged by reflecting on the ways in which we diminish his power in us.

Application

1. In Matthew 21, Matthew reveals to us the spiritual blindness of a religious person who fights for moral rules and demands God justify himself to them based on their own terms. In what ways do you identify with the religious person? How might you take the posture of demanding God justify himself to you?
2. The point is not that Jesus loves immoral people more than moral people; it is that he does not see things the way we do. God desires for us to be desperately aware of our brokenness and humbly willing to repent. What has repentance looked like with your sin struggles? Is there anything you currently need to repent of?
3. How have you contented yourself with religious form and image over the power of God? What types of religious structures or customs do you uphold in order to count yourself in good relationship with God? What steps of obedience do you need to take to move away from that and towards an authentic, personal relationship with God? *“For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”* —Romans 14:17
4. When we commit willful sin and then refuse to repent and be comforted, we are being prideful because we want to be good enough without Jesus. If God said to you, “What my son did on the cross was enough for me, why is it not enough for you?”, what would that change about your life? In what ways can you preach the gospel to yourself rather than listen to yourself?

Key Points

- We don't need to be about a *form* of religion. We need to be about an authentic relationship with God that is personally transformative.
- How we react to circumstances that do not go our way will reveal whether or not we truly meet God on his terms.
- God desires for us to be desperately aware of our brokenness and humbly willing to repent.
- This parable reveals to us a tragedy, a warning, and hope—we have to recognize the **tragic** nature of the human condition, the **warning** that settling for religious form will not sustain us if we are content apart from the power of God, and the **hope** that we can receive the message of Jesus as offered to us and depend on it no matter who we are or what we have done.
- The good is what God is responsible for, and the bad is what we have done to the good that he has given us.
- The hope of the gospel is not that those who live the “right life” will inherit the kingdom of God but that the revolutionary nature of Jesus’ words are that the prostitutes and tax collectors get to the front of the line ahead of people who follow all the rules and customs. Those who receive the message as offered, have a willing heart that is constantly repenting and moving towards holiness, and depend on Jesus for everything are those who are living in the freedom of Christ.
- God is far more willing to forgive us than we are to be forgiven.

Other Scripture References

[2 Timothy 3:5](#)

[Romans 14:17](#)