



We've come to the end of this short series examining some of the latent Pharisaism in all of our hearts. We've looked at various passages that have outlined different aspects, but each time come back to the gospel of grace and how it impacts day to day.

Today we were in Luke 15 examining the words of the elder brother in the story that Jesus tells of the Prodigal son. We noted that he tells the story to 2 groups of lost people (v1-2). The younger son represents the 'tax collectors and sinners' – both very different groups, but united by being outcasts in their society. The elder brother represents the 'pharisees and teachers of the law' – both very zealous for their faith, but it turns out they too were lost.

We noted that Jesus' words, although few, condensed in typical clarity the heart of a Pharisee. We saw 5 'symptoms' that are typical of the 'disease'... (forgive the alliteration!)

- 1) **Fierce Anger.** v28. Elder brothers are angry. Why are they angry? Because the story of the gospel is that God is gracious and kind to people who don't deserve it, and yet if we don't believe that then we seek to make ourselves righteous, and we'll become angry if that's threatened. He has 'put in the hours' for the Father, and yet the younger brother is honoured and valued. God's grace makes older brothers angry.
- 2) **Formulaic Obedience.** v29 shows the language of oppression and servitude: look how he's slaved for the Father and yet his dad doesn't even seem to notice! His status has *changed* from that of being a son to being a slave. The bottom line is elder brothers don't want a Father of unconditional love, they want a Father of conditional love who love those that perform well and work really hard. Yet how easily sonship slides into slavery. Delight goes out and drudgery comes in.
- 3) **A Frostiness to younger brothers.** if your tendency is towards performance and being accepted through earning it, you're going to struggle with those who know their sin and reliance on God's grace. You might seek to prove yourself by what you do (and especially by comparing yourself to them) – v29 he's kept a mental score-sheet of what he's done and how he's 'never' disobeyed his orders.
- 4) **A Famine of Assurance.** If it's about performance, how do you know you've done enough? He seems to have a lack of grasp of his Father's love. v29 – you never threw me a party!

- 5) **An Unforgiving spirit.** The final overarching symptom is a self-righteousness that means Elder brothers struggle to forgive. When our mindset is all about what I've done and the fact that 'I would *never* do that' – then we struggle to forgive those who do. Often Elder brothers hold grudges and cling on to past hurts.

We finished by noting that this parable is slightly different as we compare it to the other two in the chapter. In them (lost coin and sheep) there's something lost and someone who goes looking. In this parable it turns out that there are 2 lost sons and so the account is left open as we're asking the question – will the older sons return? Will they see they're lost and come into the party as sons, or will they stay outside as slaves?

Here are questions that might get things going, feel free to ignore / adapt for your group:

The reality is we're all elder brothers to a lesser or greater degree, yet this will vary depending on situations and circumstances.

Which of the symptoms we picked up on, do you see in yourself? When?

Why do you think **each** of these symptoms manifest themselves?

- Fierce anger.
- Formulaic obedience
- Frostiness to younger brothers
- Famine of assurance
- Unforgiving spirit

When do you see them in the church? When do you see them outside?

Why are some people's whole lives characterized by them persisting for so long?  
What is the solution?

For info here are all the passages / topics we'll be considering / have considered...

...We build foundations upon what we do. (Matthew 7v24-29)

...We compare ourselves with others. (Luke 18v9-14).

...We love money. (Luke 16v13-31)

...We do not see our own sin. (Luke 7v36-47)

...We feel like slaves rather than sons. (Luke 15v1-2, 11-32)