

some things, and yet, difficult to live with. They are hardened toward need and harsh in judgement; they are loveless and they are unlovely. This is the root of self-love--that a person becomes loveless.

Thus, I think if we pursue this parable, this story, we are going to see two points here very clearly--one is the spiritual side that we need, and the other is the carnal--the carnal Christian may be a believer, yet in him is the self-life which is uppermost in his dealings with others. Carnal life is one of the continual diseases and struggling things that we have to combat. There is neither peace nor power, joy nor liberty, nor evidence of the spirit of God within him. I want us to diagnose this boy under at least three heads--first his carnal action, second, the possibilities of his carnal nature, and third, the results of his carnal life which he lived.

I. Carnal Action

Your heart goes out to the underdog, folks who have gone down in the fight. There are thousands who have lost their way, and there are people who walk up to them and say, "Well, I told you so."

His carnal actions are summarized in some of the following ways:

First of all, he left the Prodigal alone. Now you may shut yourself up to a person's needs. You may be passing by

Introduction

I would like to introduce to you the prodigal elder brother. We have just a banner acquaintance with him, but we have missed the point of the parable entirely if we fail to overlook this boy. Our Lord is seeking to convey some truth to the Scribes and to the Pharisees in this parable. He has told a moving story of the Prodigal Son--the boy who wasted his life and substance. He emphasizes the hogs and the husks and the homeward trip. The climax of this story--one-third of the total number of verses of the parable--are given to us concerning the Prodigal Brother.

Here are two types of Prodigal Sons--one is a backslidden son and the other is a Prodigal Son who has gone off. Both are sons of the father's house; neither have been renounced nor disinherited. Both of them receive the rightful share of the father's goods, but one of them went away from the fellowship of the father into a far country. The other son stayed at home and seems to be in fellowship with the father, but evidently, he is in secret sin. One son exhibits what the growth of outward sin will do in a life; the other what inward sin will do to the disposition of the heart.

We need to search our hearts before God concerning the

conditions which hinder the spiritual life--to see ourselves either as a prodigal or as a privileged son who stays at home and lays up sin inwardly, which is just as wrong.

It is so easy for us to pass over the elder son in the story because we do not want to see ourselves. In fact, Whyte, who has the famous series on Bible characters, does not even mention this character in the New Testament. Probably, if we were writing this story, we would end it with the words, "And they began to make merry." That's the way we like our stories to end--"And they lived happily ever after." It would seem a fitting climax to have music and rejoicing, but Jesus was true to life. He exposes the ugly reality for what it is.

It is strange that the (father's love) had an opposite effect upon these two boys. His love melted the heart of the son who had gone off after the passions of sin, but the same love hardened the heart of the son who remained at home--it drove him further away from his father and from his fellowship. How strange and how fearful that this is repeated by God's children.

Jesus faithfully portrays the human heart in all of the points here of deception and so forth. Most of us are familiar with the touch-up artist. You remember your graduation picture or your marriage picture. You looked at the proofs and decided

upon a dozen prints which would be enough for the immediate family. They were expensive enough. Then the photographs came back. They were all touched up. "My," you say, "I didn't realize that I was so handsome. I think I'll order two dozen more." And suddenly we think of others who undoubtedly would want such a photo.

But Jesus showed how different He looks at us. He shows the heart with its (inner thoughts) and motives. He makes havoc of our little gestures of virtues. By His standards our attitudes count more than actions; our inner characteristics count more than our outward deeds. Now if it were the custom of churches to portray the leading officers and figures in the church and put them up, I wonder if there would be one of the Prodigal's elder brother.

Here we can find a clue to our disappointment in Christian experience. Our Lord was so loving and sweet that He had words concerning this boy's disposition that were subtle, which asserted his pride. This is needed among Christians today--this element of his being lived as in life, this pride, this conceit, this jealousy, envy, and ambition.

Crises such as the return of the Prodigal can bring out the touchiness among people--unkindness, meanness, stubbornness. How some men can nurse a grievance or a resentment and become absorbed with the frifle! They may be outwardly correct in

one's love for his father? I would think so. Now look at him! Outwardly this boy had all the privileges, industrious, conscientious, correct. Probably in much of his dealings, his father called him "son" without ever questioning his life or his conduct. The trouble was that the elder son was satisfied with his own integrity. He was perfectly adequate.

He was complacent in a settled relationship. What a lovely spectacle! There he stood--angry, jealous, and suspicious of his father. The younger son had eaten the husks of the world.

We would have expected him to have reacted differently when his brother returned. "Oh, how glad I am to hear the news," he might have said. "To think that after all these years our prayers have been answered and my brother is home again. How my father will rejoice with joy! I must see his face; we shall laugh and rejoice together! I wouldn't blame my daddy if he did celebrate and had a great feast."

But he will have no part of his father's joy whatsoever; it's distasteful. He's angry--Luke 15:28; he had contempt for his brother. So a good son who becomes a poor brother becomes at last a poor son as well.

The elder brother only had eyes to see the threat to his own place in the father's house. He thought his brother was a competitor, but he had the same privileges for any other who might be a son. His sin was tragic and is repeated

on the street, and someone has a need, and you ignore him. It seems to be the spirit of the age. Here the cry of this selfish Pharisee on earth, "I must look out for number one; charity begins at home; I am not responsible; every man for himself; he made his bed hard, let him lie on it; I've done my duty; he had his chance."

This is one of the sins of the church. It is not hard to get people to join the church, but they come in one door and go out another, and we set them loose in the church with grave clothes upon them like Lazarus and their last condition is worse than the first. We need to take the child and train him. To take a new-born soul into prayless, Christless, passionless church is like trying to convert a lamp-post.

Just letting someone alone is not enough. For example, a preacher once owed a merchant \$300. Of course, later it was discovered that the church owed the preacher \$1000 in back salary. He resigned and the church paid him up; he paid the merchant up, but he was all too late. He had forfeited the respect of the businessman in the city. He had broken his back and his spirit, and finally he had to go to the hospital. All that time there was not a deacon or a member who called on him; they just let him alone. How, in the judgement day, is the church going to escape such!

A person sins today, and we just kick him out--we ignore him. No one tries to talk to him and win him back. You just can't leave the other fellow alone; you just can't shut yourself up because God in heaven will not stand for it.

His carnal action led him to criticize. It seems that this is not a day of give and take, but a day of (dismembering, dissecting, censoring, castigating)! How do you like this rule for the tongue: (Never say a word against anyone and you will never have anything against anyone. But this elder brother--this Prodigal Brother--was always criticizing. Do you remember when Saul died and his false friends came to David and said, "Saul is dead. This is your chance to strike back. Think how he has embarrassed you. Why don't you just get even with him?"

David replied, "Is there anyone left in the house of Saul to whom I may the spirit of kindness?"

We see again this carnal action in that he probably told some lies about the Prodigal. Criticism always ends in lies usually. The elder brother told two or three about his brother; he told some about his father. There are few people today who can confirm "I am a George Washington". There are a thousand ways of telling a lie without moving your lips. We live in an age in which people may tell a lie by the way they

dress, by the way they speak, by the dishonest day's work they do, by broken vows. If you don't believe this is an age in which this seems to be in style, look at the signs in our cities: "Going out of business--Must vacate--Selling at low cost--Can't pay the rent--etc."

This carnal action led him to slander his brother. He said he had spent all of his money with harlots. Well, there are many who are guilty of slander, whispering, and idle talk. Too many have the inside dope. "A gossiping tongue is the fire of hell," so James said; Sam Jones said that there were some people he knew with tongues so long that they could sit in the front room and lick the skillet in the kitchen.

"I believe," someone has said, "that the devil fumigates prudence everytime slander passes trying to be something higher than a grave digger, a society scavenger, a keyhole reporter, or a gutter dweller."

II. Possibilities of his Carnal Nature

There are three possibilities that we discover in this man's carnal nature and they are tragic.

First, he has a place of sonship, but he refuses the responsibility and obligation of it. Can a proper son be an improper brother at the same time? Can a loving son be an unloving brother? Will lovelessness toward a brother affect

singing with joy because his lost son had returned. They were sufficiently close to the father to be happy with what made him happy. The elder son's happiness was restricted to that which fulfilled his own desires. He could not be happy simply with what made his father happy.

It is always a tragedy when God's own people find themselves limited to happiness that comes when their own little wishes are fulfilled. They become so restricted by self that they have no capacity to be happy at other times. Do we not see that a good son who is a poor brother becomes a poor son as well. It cannot be otherwise. One who does not share the father's burden cannot share the father's joy. While the Prodigal was a great way off, the father saw him coming home. The elder son did not see the Prodigal come home because for one thing he was too busy to see him. Through the years he had prayed for nothing; he had looked for nothing; he had expected nothing; and he saw nothing.

Now Peter talks to the Christian about adding to one's faith--"Virture, and to virture, knowledge, temperance, patience, Godliness, brotherly kindness, and love." He says, "But he that lacketh these things is blind and cannot see afar off and hath forgotten that he was purges from his old sins." (II Peter 1:9) Now this man could not see what his father could see, and the heart of the story shows that he had most

a thousand fold in the church--maybe blameless and correct, but there are the pangs of jealousy. Here is a boy returned penniless. Could it be that you who are quick to discern and condemn particular sins in others cherish a secret desire to taste those very sins? Do you secretly resent the fact that your spirituality keeps you from indulging in secret desires? Here was a hardening process. The elder son's spirit had never been broken; he had never been humbled before his father. How then, could he be grateful for the return of his brother? One of the curses of self position--and it always marks the carnal Christian--is the inability to know or to express gratitude.

If one seriously ponders it, here is a base sin in gratitude toward God. God gives His blessing. Surely the father was more grieved by the heartlessness of the elder son than he was the weakness of the younger. All the excesses of the younger could not have at last kept him from coming to the father. The spirit of God could not get through to the man with the full life, but how ready He is to fill the empty life!

Here is his wrong relationship with his brother and it brought the elder son to a wrong relationship with his father. Indifference toward his brother--he was hardened toward his father; angry toward his brother--he was rebellious toward his father. The younger son was at the very heart of the father's interest; the elder son could not turn away from the brother

without at the same time turning away from his father. Now the Christian might see their sin against the heavenly Father in every refusal to be concerned for others who are equally His beloved children. For we remember that Peter looking at John said, "Jesus, Lord, what shall this man do?" (John 21:21) Once again Jesus had a rebuke for him, "What is that to thee; follow Thou Me."

Let me ask you, Christian friends, out of your Christian experience how do you see yourself in the light of this tragic possibility? You assume the place and privilege of a son, but you refuse the obligation of loving a brother.

Second here is servicing the father and refusing fellowship.

This was due to his carnal nature--he felt worthy of serving his father, but he was not really in fellowship with him and it suddenly appeared to be a burden. He said, "These many years have I slaved for thee." Evidently, he had been serving, but he had been serving himself. He discloses his attitude toward his father. All persons, both the weak and wayward brother, receive from the Father. How unworthy of his father to do such a thing! If they had only consulted him, he would have saved his father from this sentimental state! Now, it requires but little to show the true nature of our services for God--whether in the spirit of sonship or whether in the

spirit of just being hard. The carnal Christian secretly works for his own welfare. Was this elder brother busy with any important matters? It was not enough; he was diligent. How easy it is for one who is a model workman in God's vineyard to imagine this son taking to himself and saying, "This has been the greatest year we have ever had. The flocks have more than doubled; look at the employees on our payroll. But how do I account for father? Here I give myself to his work, and now I understand my father." No, he didn't say that. That's how easy it is to go astray. Here was one doing a great deal for his father, but yet not fulfilling his father's interests.

True service can only be in love and devotion doing the thing that the father desires. Now Christian friends, how does that find you. Are you everlastingly busy doing something for God? Do you proudly lift up your head and say, "I may be weary in well-doing, but I am not weary of well-doing. The joy of the Lord is my strength." Are you doing it just because it is expected of you? Are you doing it because you are in direct communion and fellowship with Him?

*Oldest man in N.C. town - 87 yrs - Boys' Scouts -
Never tasted whiskey, smoked, bid at 10 - over eat,
Movie, tooth Movie, going to celebrate birthday -
One young man said, "how!"*

In the third place, there is a possibility of great joy and yet we fail to possess it. This was another point in this Prodigal Brother's life. Here was a feast that had been prepared and he had the liberty to rejoice. His father was

this thy brother in verse 32, the elder son spoke this thy son in verse 30. He is thy son, but he is not my brother is what he was saying. He was ready to speak of the sins which his brother had committed but evidently he had no concern beyond condemnation.

What a tragedy for two Christians to lose fellowship. The elder son had asked the servant the meaning of the music he heard; he couldn't even guess it. "What was the real reason for the fuss," he requested.

He was told that the father was treating the son tenderly and patiently. In verse 31 he pleaded with him, "Thou art ever with me." This is obvious--that he could have been satisfied, but it is difficult to reconcile a jealous, bitter Christian moreso than a penitent sinner. You get a glimpse of some people today. Are you waiting for an apology or something like this? Is some trifle, personal hurt of more importance than the harmony of the church? Will you let a Sunday School class go limping without a regular teacher? What a fortunate thing for the Prodigal that he did not meet his elder brother first or else he would have turned around and gone back into the far country! Perhaps that is why many are turning around today.

Over sensitiveness to personal sights is a common mark of some people today. They want undue recognition and

certainly forgotten that he had been purged from his sins.

Here is a businessman who returns home at the end of the day. He declines to venture out again, but there was a service going on at his church and it was his habit to attend. At first, he decided to stay home; he thought he ought to go. When he returned from the meeting, he exclaimed excitedly to his wife "Dear, you know little Johnny for whom we have been praying recently! Well, he came to the meeting tonight and responded to the invitation to trust the Saviour. Why, I wouldn't have missed that for anything." But he almost did. It is easy to miss out--not once but often--until one develops the habit of being absent when the blessings of God come. One soon loses the sense of expectancy and with it goes the joy of a vital relationship with his Lord. He never prays for anything; he never looks for anything; he never expects anything to happen in his church, and thus he never sees anything good happening.

III. The carnal results

What made the elder son this way or that way? It is of utmost importance to Jesus that we understand the cause and the course of such spiritual decline.

The fact that his father had a surplus beyond all possible means of the family was not a conviction of this boy's heart. Even the servants had enough and to spare for

every hungry heart today, every man, every woman in the world. Yet, there are Christians who are content to defer to just help and let me get my personal satisfaction and that's enough for me. The elder son felt no need that this surplus should be distributed to others.

How different was the case of the little boy who was looking in the restaurant window when a gentleman entered for an evening meal. The man said to the boy, "Would you like to come in and have supper with me?" The little boy couldn't really believe that it was an invitation. When he was persuaded to go inside, he would not order until the man encouraged him that it would be free. He sat looking at his food, but not eating. "Come now son, enjoy it. It's yours," said the man. But the little fellow replied, "Billy is my pal and he doesn't have any supper, and he wouldn't eat without me. I can't eat without him."

Is that the way you feel about the privileges of the knowledge of Jesus Christ or do you just find it easy to become engrossed with these privileges alone. There is no need to share with others is perhaps some of our attitudes.

Dwight Moody when he was young in the days when the church had pews which were rented, took over one whole pew and saw that it was filled every Sunday with people that he

brought with him. Then he made himself responsible for two full pews because he said he could not enjoy being in the Lord's house without the knowledge that others were sharing the good news of God with him.

The reason for empty seats in the church today is not the power of competing interests. It is not because the sermons are not good, but it is because of the spirit of the elder brother. Those who profess and yet they care so little.

This elder brother never talked things over with his father about the burden his father had for the Prodigal, and he never talked to him or else the father would have perhaps said to him, "Why don't you go off and learn the whereabouts of your brother?" See if you can locate him. Encourage him to come back home. Maybe he needs something, and you can help him." With that kind of commission he would have been a different kind of brother. Yet, he did not seek his face to learn his father's will. He went on with an uneasy conscience.

He did not use his influence to bring his brother home. He avoided the fellowship with his father and his brother because he had no hard hunger to rise above a carnal experience which had brought him away from a spiritual life. Could it be today that we need to create a greater spirit. We choke it off!

We rationalize things by saying, "Well, I witness by my life. That's about all I can do." When the father spoke about

return. You never give any presents; you exchange them.

"So," the elder brother said, "lo"--he should have called him father but nowhere did he call his father father. How like some of us in certain respects.

First, we think that if we serve God so much we can earn the robe, the ring, the shoes, and the fatted calf, but this is an awful mistake. You can't bargain with God. We do not understand the heart of God. We think Him at times unjust, unkind, unfair, and we say, "Lo these many years but here is just misfortune."

Second, he slandered his brother. He accused his brother. Where did he get his information. He insults him. Now love thinks no evil, and love covers a multitude of sins. God hates sin. We all must know a little bit about the far country, but not perhaps as much as the Prodigal Son did. He never tried to win this Prodigal back. There is too much conversation about the church and preaching today and too little conversation about Christ and lost men. If we aren't careful we will be singing in the church as the chain store and the value of a pastor in proportion to his ability to operate it efficiently. Do we really want Christ to head the church? He did nothing to bring his brother back. Do we talk to lost people about Christ? No, we wouldn't do that, and he couldn't do it. People

appreciation. The dissatisfaction with the success of the church whenever it is not elevated to them along with the attitude, "Well, you know where to find me when you want me" instead of "Glad to offer our services." Complaining about every little thing and their failure to express appreciation for the kindness given makes such people difficult to live with at home and elsewhere. They create constant tension by imposing exactly the requirements of other members of the household and withholding any sympathy at all.

We are not told whether the elder brother at last went in with the rest or not. I am quite sure that the Father in heaven would have delighted to let us in on that fact had it happened.

Perhaps the truth about the spiritual condition of the church is better expressed by the lingering doubt that the elder son did humble himself and join in. God had to deal with his self-centeredness, and in verse 39 he used the word "I" to accent his position three times. He had to deal with his self-righteousness; he had to deal with his self-pity for he felt that he was not getting enough attention. "Thou never gavest me a kid" in verse 29; you never looked after me in this way. It is evident that the sins of the spirit are far uglier and more difficult to discern than those of the flesh. Paul makes a list in Galatians. The first six the elder

brother was not guilty of, but when you come to the seventh, which is hatred, he was surely guilty of that; the eighth--rath; the ninth--strife; the tenth--envy. He was guilty of those too. Furthermore, he lacked the fruit of the spirit--a sign of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, self control. What about you? Now the reason for defeat and despair we should take note of in verse 31. The cure for carnality!

What did the father say to this elder son--to come into the house and join the feasting with the returned brother.

*Don't think No more makes a man than
Colossians 2:9-10
going to bank makes one rich - what you
have on deposit there!*

As I think about the results of this carnal experience, I think that here we have represented a hypocrite in the house of God. Here we have one who outwardly was decent, self-satisfied--the mirror of self-righteousness, a real Pharisee. We have sometimes wondered if the elder brother's part of the story was not the chief object for the parable.

One of these boys, we discover, was carried on by passion, the other by cold convictions. One was a Publican; one was a Pharisee. The younger came to himself like David who was sorrow for his sins, but the other was a model of uprightness. Within the house there was a feast going on. The news spread quickly and the neighbors came; he came in from the

field and said, "What is the meaning of this?" The servants said, "Your brother is safe."

Did he rush in, throw his arms around his brother? Not he! The yellow that was in him began to show itself. The feast and the joy had no part for him--nothing for the labor of love. His real nature now reveals itself. With words of poison, the elder brother is still an enemy. It is said that every man has his good points, but it is no more than fair to say that the elder brother certainly had some good points, but the results of his carnal life were summed up in at least two or three things.

First, he upbraided his father. He shows that in his heart his service was not in love. Now, if he had been a lawyer and in the Prodigal's place, he would have come home with a document something like this: "To all men by these presents: That I, party of the first part, do hereby covet and agree to return to the house or home of my father, party of the second part, provided that party of the second party conveys, and relinquishes all right and title to the following property to wit: one death robe, one seal ring, one pair of shoes, and one fatted calf. Everything is on the cold, legal ground of work and reward."]

Some men are meaner in their religion than others are in their sin. If you give a little charity you do it with a kick. If you invite it is because you expect to be invited

will do nothing to bring people to Christ, but for a political candidate they will go to voting places morning, noon, night, and midnight, and even after they are closed to be extended and to do it.

In the last place, I think the results of his carnal spirit was that he bragged about himself. He was proud of his self sufficient soul. He declared that during all the years he had not transgressed the Commandments. What he was saying was, "I am worthy; I only am worthy. I have not committed all this that my brother has done." He trusted in himself. "I have never transgressed." There are some people who like to get a lot of credit for a lot of things that ought to be in jail.

Now Jesus said, "Inasmuch as you have done it unto the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto Me." That's true religion, and it's grand, and it's great, and it's glorious. But here was one who was proud. He was good enough. Our own righteousness and our own morality which we have manufactured is not much proof of this.

As a man in the closing night of a revival in Missouri in a college town said there was a young man who came forward to accept Christ. His father owned a hotel where the preacher was staying. The next morning the preacher said, "That was a wonderful thing (your son did last night.) You should be very happy."

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The hotel man said, "What did he do? He told me good-bye when he left for college this morning and that was all." The preacher said, "Yes, I doubt that he would have told you about it. He probably thought that you would not be interested in it. While your son was giving his heart and life to Christ in the First Baptist Church last night, you and some other men who have their names of the church roll were playing poker behind the desk. Your son knew it. Why should he think that you would be interested in his becoming a Christian?"

Dr. Bernardo of London says that he was standing outside one day at his front door when a little ragged boy came up to him and asked for an order of admission to the orphans home. The good doctor, pretending to be a little rough, said to him, "How do I know that what you are telling me is true? Have you a friend to speak for you?" "Friend," the little fellow cried; "friend; no I don't have any friends, only these rags" and he held up his garments. "If these rags won't speak for me, then nothing else will."

We ought to listen to that for just a minute. You may be what this world calls good; you may seem to tower above some of the average people like a mountain, but you may be just the praise for your bounty. You may have lived in such a way that you would not be like a Prodigal. But wasn't it splendid that Jesus said, "Ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance

and we remember why should we not be glad to see the Prodigal come home. It was the concern of Jesus for such that caused the self-righteous Pharisees to criticize Him and slander Him. Is it not after all your brother and mine who needs forgiveness? Why, of course, it is.

As the story of the storm off Scotland's coast when the ship goes to pieces and the lifeboat comes in, but they say that there is another man left out there. A fine Scotchman came forth and said, "I'll go and row out." His mother said, "No, don't go John. Your father perished at sea and last year when your brother went to see was the last time we saw him. John, you're the only one I have left. Don't go," his mother begged. But he said, "Mother, I must go. A man is perishing. I feel like a coward not to go. God will take care of us." He sprang in a boat and went out against the elements. He called to the man in the distance and he found the man standing up in the end of the boat. Rowing back, the crowd shouted to him and he called back, "Yes, we saved him. You can tell mother it's brother William."

There was joy, but not so with the Prodigal Brother.