

Considering the Prodigal Son

That Parable of two sons and their differing Personal Characteristics is a Very Well-Known Story in the greater Christian community. But, Have we fully comprehended the Subtleties of its Message?

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In response to another article, titled “*The OTHER Five Virgins*”, the following response was received from a former WCG educated Church member. The first response presents his take on the point of the parable of the Ten Virgins, while the second response gives a view of a typical interpretation of the parable of the Prodigal Son as it might cast light on these oil-deficient other five invitees.

To make the reader aware of the fundamental point posed in that previous article: “*The OTHER Five Virgins*”, it takes issue with the traditional view that these two groups represent a ‘saved versus lost’ situation. That article considers the contrast being between individuals with sufficient supply of God’s Spirit allowing them to be seen as **ready** to be a part of Christ’s Bride, as opposed to those apparently in preparation, who were called to the wedding, but who are **not** sufficiently ready by the time of the cut-off date. The other five aren’t lost, necessarily, as most presume the point to be, but just are not yet ready for that special relationship when the time comes for the marriage to occur.

But here’s the reply received from a reader, whom I find to be quite representative of many who were ‘brought up’ in the former WCG doctrinal culture.

A Reader’s Response

1). Revelation 3:9 ~ Those of the Philadelphia era -- who represent the five faithful and enduring virgins who has sufficiency of God’s Holy Spirit -- will be worshipped by those of the synagogue of Satan (the WCG apostate leadership, for one group) -- and they also will be those qualified to be in the Marriage Party. Those other 5 virgins, though not part of the marriage party, some may have to go through the great tribulation, to cause their repentance; before they become part of the 1st resurrection group, or become part of the instantly-changed

group; both groups thus considered “first-fruits” into the Kingdom. (At least, this view allows the possibility of the other five eventually being fully converted.) *(Reply to reply: This succinctly represents the perspective long taught by the WCG and held by its membership. We thought nothing of interjecting components into the picture that aren’t really there! The contrast between the sixth Church era and the seventh factors a lot into of how other organizations are regarded. What is far more logical is to realize that among the “Philadelphians”, there are some sufficiently endowed with God’s Spirit to be “Bride ready” and another contingent within it that aren’t. The above stated position tends to foster a reticent complacency that causes the membership to remain in a slumbering condition. We preferred to place the negative assessment over onto those deficient “Laodiceans”, seeing them as people unworthy of our fellowship and mutual support.*

However, that parable places the two groups together as a single entity. WCG’s theological position was both a cause of and manifestation of our “Exclusivist” tendencies. Reading the parable more carefully, one can see that there are ‘Bride quality’ individuals within the group (not two separate groups in proximity). A careful study of the Laodicean Condition will show that the WCG definition of who and when that era is generates some difficult questions which lack logical answers. ((As taught, it would have been the shortest era of all. Traveling evangelist Gerald Waterhouse boldly placed the era between the start of the Great Tribulation and the Second Coming.) See my article on “Considering Laodicea” listed in the website.)

2). Luke 15: 12-32 ~ The parable of the prodigal son: The 5 foolish virgins could also be likened spiritually to the “prodigal” [wasteful] son, who had placed no long-term value upon his inheritance portion of his father’s estate; but rather foolishly squandered what was given him. Conversely, the five faithful virgins are likened to the other son, who stayed loyal to his family

and to his father; and who eventually inherited the entirety of his father's remaining estate. We are thus **admonished to be like** this faithful son (according to our works and Christian conduct); as well as admonished not to be like this same son (attitude-wise) – but rather be overjoyed, compassionate, and hospitable (like the parents of these two sons) upon the repentance and return of all the wayward brethren who had departed the core membership of WCG, and then afterwards, when God grants them "light", and sufficient humility is learned, they returned to God's spiritual family.

(Reply to reply: Interesting comparison! IF we read that particular narrative without the typical WCG orientation, we'll see that the so called 'faithful' son had a problem of his own! Smugness regarding his own worth and situation. In fact, the prodigal son came back better experienced, more fully aware of his own personal flaws and more thoroughly repentant than his so called 'good' brother. Guess which one enjoyed the better regard by his father and exhibited the better regard toward his father. Wasn't that the other son's complaint? That the son who did all the repulsive things ended up back in better stead with his father than himself?)

This narrative presents us with an important lesson of its own! We should re-evaluate the lesson contained within this parable not so much on the basis of a 'Philadelphia / Laodicea' context, but on a 'converted / religious' context, or a Christian / Jewish context. The full Christian experience creates an attitude more like the prodigal son, while the established Jewish religious point of view, exhibits a smug self-righteousness resulting from seeing ones' self doing what the law requires. (It was the evident Jewish attitude back in that day, but it isn't limited to just them! The world is filled with people with high self-assessment, who feel their rote performance is sufficient.) (Thus, no grace is needed.) The true point of this lesson is to make the hearers aware that there is more that needs to happen to remedy the human condition. There is no equivalent experience to true repentance in just faithfully keeping the law!

Which son does the parable commend, the prodigal or the loyal son? Both had their faults and their commendable characteristics, especially the one who learned from and repented of his sins. But the essence isn't inheritance so much as it is the love of the father. The unanswered question is, when did the loyal son repent of his personal smugness? Keep in mind, the elder son in that culture had preferred station in any inheritance, from birth, and the younger would always be subordinate to his elder brother. The elder son may

have enjoyed the respect of his father, but the younger enjoyed the greater love! (And, a love that after the repentance worked both ways!)

Consider another question, which one would you rather serve under in the Family of God? The repentant one, or the loyal but smug one?

What's the Lesson?

So what is the underlying message intended with the parable of the prodigal son? Have we considered that message adequately, or has our old Philadelphia / Laodicea perspective caused it to be mis-perceived or at least clouded to some degree?

Luke chapter 15 verse 10 sets the perceptual stage for us. "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." We should view the narrative of the parable in this context. Does the representative view posed above present that take on it?

"And he said, A certain man had two sons: 12: And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. 13: And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. 14: And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. 15: And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16: And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. 17: And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! 18: I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, 19: And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants."

20: "And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. 21: And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. 22: But the father said to his servants, Bring

forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: 23: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: 24: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry."

An Unhappy Reception

*25: "Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. 26: And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. 27: And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. 28: And **he was angry**, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. 29: 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: 30: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf."*

31: "And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. 32: It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found." Again, repeating the lead-in verse: "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

With Whom do We Identify?

Perhaps the more insightful question for us is to ask which son is it we identify with in this parable? Do we see ourselves in the father's love on account of our personal goodness, or are we appreciative of His love on account of having experienced deep and heartfelt repentance? Providing us with the opportunity to make that identification could be the greater point contained within this story.


We can see above that the responder and the Church body whose doctrinal position he relates, identifies with the 'faithful' son. If we want to call-in the Philadelphia / Laodicea assignment here, and use it as a way of interpreting the message, which of the two was 'rich and in need of nothing'

in his own self-assessment? Which of the two was 'blind' to his own condition?

The above reply also states we are admonished to be like the faithful son, when in fact, the narrative is silent on that subject. There is no real recommendation that we entirely imitate the older son! But it's an interesting self-test to see who it is we are more inclined to identify with: the one who hit the reality wall and realized his condition and repented as opposed to the naturally hard-working son, who hadn't found anything particular in himself to repent of? The text does suggest noteworthy character flaws: self-centeredness, jealousy and lack of brotherly love. For certain, he didn't possess the outlook that the heavenly angels do, nor the unconditional love that the father did!

How many among us are effective Laodiceans, but who prefer to cast ourselves as being among that other more faithful congregation? Certainly not in need of any serious remediation!

While the parable addresses itself to the one son, it doesn't here really address the condition of the other. We shouldn't presume from silence that no fault exists. Just that here we see illustrated powerfully, that there is special joy in Heaven, ..."*there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents.*" The elder son immediately saw a personal injustice as it regarded his relationship with his father! That was his first reaction!

And, how many of us are squandering the heritage we are given by being reticent, refusing to step out of the shadows and make a real difference in our part of the world, when opportunities arise? Our 'Philadelphian' organization(s) (as we define it (or them)) tend to suppress any such expression. Is it they we strive to please, or our Father? 

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