

Divine versus Human Love



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Love Thy Neighbor

Jesus commanded His disciples to love every single person with whom they came into contact. He told them to do this in the exact manner that He had loved them, so it was vital that they recall *how* He was able to do it. If they remembered precisely they would have considered that Jesus loved them even when He did not approve of or was frustrated at their, or anyone else's, behavior.

"A new commandment I (Jesus) give to you: that you love one another. As I have loved you that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (JOHN 13:34-35)

"Whatever you want men to do to you do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." (MATTHEW 7:12)

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor as yourself and hate your enemy,' but I say to you, 'Love your enemies. Bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in Heaven, for He makes His son rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For, if you love those who love you what reward have you?... if you greet your brethren only what do you do more than others?... Therefore, you shall be perfect just as your Father in Heaven is perfect (Ephesians 5:1)." (MATTHEW 5:43-48)

For example, Jesus still loved Peter, as well as continued to allow him to travel with the group after He had called Peter Satan, for giving in to worldly thinking about His mission on the earth. (*Matthew 16:23*) He still loved Judas even when he was leaving to betray Him to His enemies in exchange for some money to refill what he had embezzled from their funds for the ministry. (*John 13:18-30, 12:4-6*) Jesus loved Thomas after he would not believe the disciples' testimony about His resurrection without tangible proof. (*John 20:24-29*) Jesus loved all twelve of His disciples when He fed 4000+ people and they doubted that He could do it even though they had seen Him do the same thing before with 5000+. (*Matthew 15:32-39; Mark 8:1-9*) He loved them after they had doubted for their safety in a violent storm at sea and His ability to fix any predicament. (*Matthew 17:17, Mark 4:36-41*) No matter how frustrated He became at their disbelief and conduct Jesus loved and remained faithful to people and never abandoned a single individual.

Jesus loved the multitudes although He knew their thoughts, the hardness of many of their hearts, and that numerous of them either gossiped about (*Matthew 16:13-14, Luke 9:18-19*) or even plotted to invalidate His ministry. (*Mark 3:5, Luke 6:7-8*) He loved the Israelites when a Gentile believed in Him although they, his people did not. (*Luke 7:9*) He even loved and forgave every single person connected to His suffering and death. (*Luke 23:34*) In short, Jesus always forgave and loved everyone, no matter what they said about Him or did to Him or His Father. He taught that this was how people should respond to each other--act as they wanted to be treated not as they were treated by people. God the Father did so and Jesus always followed His Father's examples. Therefore, if we truly want to be Jesus' disciples, we must do likewise, always.

The Good Samaritan--Who Was Their Neighbor?

"A certain lawyer stood up and tested Him saying. 'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal Life?'

He said to him, 'What is written in the Law? What is your reading of It?'

So he answered and said, 'You shall love the Lord Your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself,' and (Jesus) said to him, 'You have answered rightly. Do this and Live.'

But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'

Then Jesus answered and said, 'A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jerico and fell among thieves who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. Likewise, a Levite, when he arrived at the place came and looked and passed by on the other side. But, a certain Samaritan as he journeyed came where he was and when he saw him he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine, and he set him on his own animal, brought him to inn and took care of him.'

'On the next day when he departed he took out two denarii and gave them

to the innkeeper and said to him, "Take care of him; and, whatever more you spend, when I come again I will repay you.' So, which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?' and (the lawyer) said, 'He who showed mercy on him.'

Then Jesus said, 'Go and do likewise.'" (LUKE 10:25-37)

The person who ^{questioned} Jesus was a lawyer, probably quite skilled at debating an issue and accustomed to out-maneuvering his opponent verbally. However, Jesus did not answer the man's inquiry and let Himself be caught up in a debate about God. Rather, He responded with a question of His Own. When the lawyer cited what the Scriptures said Jesus merely agreed with them and did not add additional information. The man did not let Jesus have the last word though; he countered Him with yet another question, which Jesus did clarify. Unlike the parables though, He used a true story to demonstrate His position. How do we know? Jesus never lied and He said that His narrative involved certain people, and Jesus never used a word that was not true.

Who were the four men to whom Jesus referred? The first person that Jesus mentioned was an individual who was attacked and robbed on a certain highway. The next two men were determined to be very religious and Godly in the Jewish society--a priest and a Levite. The third, however, was an unbeliever who was not thought to be affected by God's Law. Jesus' listeners would have considered a Samaritan to be beneath the others in both stations in life and behavior. He, however, was the only one of the three individuals who responded to the needs of the unfortunate person. Who of the people that came across the unfortunate individual would the Jews have expected to show God's love? That is to say, who outwardly was the most "religious" of the three men? It certainly would not have been the Samaritan.

The priest and the Levite both noticed the unfortunate man. Yet, they each not only ignored his plight but even crossed the road to proceed on their journeys untouched and unmoved by the tragedy. Apparently they were not even inspired to show any sort of compassion, or even curiosity. Selfishly, they only wanted to avoid becoming involved in the man's predicament. The Samaritan, however, not only helped him but also took him to a place where he could recover and promised to return and make sure that he was well cared for. The Samaritan even offered to pay for everything needed to restore the man. This story could not have been looked upon favorably by a totally Jewish audience.

Jesus reaction at the end of His narrative was to ask the lawyer who had challenged Him another question. He wanted to know which of the three individuals mentioned considered the unfortunate man to be his neighbor. The lawyer said that the person who showed mercy and unselfishness was the correct choice. Jesus told the man to go and do the same thing to everyone that he ever encountered. Consequently, that was how to demonstrate God's love. What, then, was the answer to the lawyer's original question? Your neighbor was every single person other than yourself and remains so today.

It Was Harmful to Covet or Envy

'Take heed and beware of covetousness for one's life does not consist in the

abundance of the things he possesses." (LUKE 12:15)

"(Pilate) knew that (the Pharisees) had handed (Jesus) over for envy."
(MATTHEW 27:18)

Why? Because Jesus had been providing the Scriptural teaching about God to the people that the religious leaders should have been supplying all along. This made them look rather ineffectual, and therefore, possibly even not at all privy to God the way they claimed to be. Jesus had no credentials as a religious guide, nor did He possess any elevated status or position in that society. Even the people in His hometown of Nazareth rejected Him as being a prophet, let alone their Messiah.

"(Jesus) went out from there to His Own country, and His disciples followed him, and when the Sabbath had come He began to teach in the synagogue, and many hearing Him were astonished, saying, 'Where did this Man get these things and what wisdom is this which is given to Him that such mighty works are performed by His hands? Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary and Brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon, and are not His sisters here with us?'

So, they were offended at Him but Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house.'

Now, He could do no mighty miracles there except He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them, and He marveled at their unbelief. Then He went about the villages in a circuit teaching." (MARK 6:1-6)

Since Jesus had neither prominent rank nor special religious educational training, and did not actively seek to attain either He was considered by many people to be quite unusual. Unlike the established religious leaders, He never considered His Own welfare over that of other people. Jesus truly acted like a Servant to the masses and constantly and freely gave of His time, energy, and resources without ever seeking reimbursement for them. The comparisons made the formal leaders madder every time He spoke or did anything at all. Finally, the situation became so intolerable for them that they even found a legal way to put Jesus to death in order to get rid of Him and His influence, or so they thought.

Evicting Profiteers from the Temple in Jerusalem

"The Passover of the Jews was at hand and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers doing business. When He had made a whip of cords He drove them all out of the temple with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money, and overturned the tables, and He said to those who sold doves, 'Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchants!'

Then His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up!'" (JOHN 2:13-17)

"They came to Jerusalem. Then Jesus went into the temple of God and began to drive out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of those who sold doves, and He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple, and He taught, saying to them, 'Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer' but you have turned it into a den of thieves!'

Then the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple and He healed them, but when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, 'Hosanna to the Son of David!', they were indignant and said to Him, 'Do You hear what they are saying?' and Jesus said to them, 'Yes.' Have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of babes and infants you have perfected praise'?

And, the scribes and chief priests heard it and sought how they might destroy Him, for they feared Him because all the people were astonished at His teachings. When evening had come, then He left them and went out of the city to the city of Bethany and He lodged there." (MATTHEW 21:12-17 & MARK 11:15-18)

Jesus drove away people who only were in the temple in Jerusalem to conduct business on at least two separate occasions. The Bible records that He did so once near the beginning of His ministry and another time near its completion, and He used whatever force was necessary to get them to leave God's house of prayer. Additionally, Jesus knocked over the tables where these people had been keeping the money they acquired while doing their unfair transactions. These men had not come to the temple to draw closer to God but to line their own pockets by selling birds or animals to worshippers who had come to the temple to make sacrifices to and pray to God. However, these merchants were not concerned about the welfare of people's souls. The only thing that they took into consideration was their personal wealth and commerce. It offended Jesus so much that He took drastic measures to show His displeasure.

As soon as Jesus cleared the temple of the people who had been charging others for what God gave freely, Jesus was able to teach and heal. As usual, His actions had two effects: people either were drawn to Him or they became offended at how He reacted to a situation. It never seemed that anyone was neutral about Jesus; they either loved or hated Him and what He taught and did. Curiously, it seemed that the people who had studied and claimed to understand the Law and the Scriptures were the ones who plotted against Jesus the most. He was able to demonstrate God's love and compassion, as well as His righteousness judgment simultaneously.

"The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever." (PSALM 103:8-9)

"Be angry and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your wrath nor give place to the devil.... Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another even as God in Christ forgave you." (EPHESIANS 4:26-27, 31-32)

"I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the Judgment and whoever says to his brother, 'Empty headed! shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore, if you bring your gifts to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift (to God)." (MATTHEW 5:22)

The Master and His Unforgiving Servant

"Simon Peter came to Him and said, 'Lord how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times? '

Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants and when he had begun to settle accounts one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But, as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold with his wife and children, and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me and I will pay you all.'

Then, the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him and forgave him the debt, but that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!' So, his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will pay you all,' and he would not but went and threw him in prison till he should pay the debt.

'So when his fellow servants saw what had been done they were very grieved and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant just as I had pity on you?' and his master was angry and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay off all that was due to him. So My Heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you from the heart does not forgive his brother his offenses." (MATTHEW 18:21-35)

Why did Peter ask Jesus exactly how many times God expected a person to forgive another's offenses? He wanted to test the limits of something that Jesus would

expect of them all in the future. Peter evidently did not like the idea of forever having to excuse everyone for anything at all and he must have preferred the Scriptures that taught about avenging ourselves for a crime. Jesus explained a fuller dimension to those Scriptures for they only had been given by God in the first place to keep people's behavior in check, as was the Law. However, once Jesus came to the earth, He was able to open the *spirit* behind God's Law to a world that previously only was able to understand its most basic commands.

"You have heard it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth', but I tell you not to resist an evil person but whoever slaps you on your right cheek turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic let him have your cloak also, and whoever compels you to go one mile go with him two. Give to him who asks you and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away."

"You have heard it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy,' but I say to you love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you be sons of your Father in Heaven, for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and the unjust. For, if you love those who love you what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore, you shall be perfect just as your Father in Heaven is perfect."

(MATTHEW 5:38-48)

Jesus had been instructing his followers this notion of unqualified forgiveness right from the beginning of His ministry. God always was merciful to people who sought to know and please Him and Jesus invariably imitated His Father. Therefore, for us to maintain a complete relationship with God without any differences whatsoever we must do likewise. Accordingly, when Jesus told Peter to forgive a person 'up to seventy times seven', He did not mean for people *literally* to count sins and stop forgiving one another after 490 offenses. Rather, Jesus implied that even if the amount of insults became that great He still expected us to forgive. Why? As pointed out, both God the Father and God the Son did, too.

"Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." (MATTHEW 6:12)

"Whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone forgive him that your Father in Heaven may also forgive you, for if you forgive (people) their offenses (against you) your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But, if you do not forgive (people) their offenses neither will your Father forgive your sins." (MATTHEW 6:14-15 & MARK 1:25-26 --- Note: This command is placed in the Scriptures both immediately after the Lord's Prayer--Matthew 6:9-13--and teaching about receiving from God--Mark 11:22-25.)

In order to clarify His teaching so that His listeners could grasp its meaning

thoroughly, Jesus again told them a story to illustrate His message. Notice that He did not use a parable, but related a true event that happened to a certain king. In this instance the king represented God the Father and the servant any average person. The king pardoned a debt that was so great against him that the individual was not able to repay it ever. So, the king demanded whatever he could, including all of the man's possessions, as well as his entire family's lives as slaves forever. However, when the man begged the king for mercy, the king had compassion on him and his situation, forgave him, and canceled all of his debts. The king lost what amounted to a huge sum of money.

Unfortunately, that servant went away and seemingly purposely found another servant who owed him money. Although the second man's debt to him was far lesser than the former's had been to the king, the first man accosted him and demanded repayment immediately. When his peer asked for the same clemency the first man had received he who just had been forgiven an immense debt either did not recall or ignored the gift that he had just received. Instead of remembering and imitating the king's behavior, that man not only confronted the other but also actually had him imprisoned. Evidently all or some of the rest of the servants found out about the two opposing reactions and went and told the king. The king changed his mind about pardoning the first man and treated him as he had dealt with his fellow servant. This is precisely how God will react whenever we do not forgive others for every single thing that they do that has offended us, no matter how severely they affected our lives.

People do have to live with the consequences that their actions have instigated however. For example, God will forgive a murderer after he confesses and truly repents of the sin. Nevertheless, whoever was killed remains dead, and other people still will be affected by the death. Some will mourn while others rejoice. Often the police will have to become involved and the extent of their connection will spread to families and friends. The corpse will have to be treated and buried, thus involving people unconnected to the dead person. Nothing ever transpires in a vacuum, and God will have to deal with it all. He may be vilified or consulted for answers. No matter what we ever do, no matter how seemingly trivial at the time, our actions ultimately will entangle people that we could not even imagine being touched. Therefore, it is far, far better for us to imitate what God would do than to reject His instruction and example.

The Creditor and Two Debtors

"One of the Pharisees asked (Jesus) to eat with him and He went to the Pharisee's house and sat down to eat, and behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil and stood at His feet behind Him weeping, and she began to wash His feet with her tears and wipe them with the hair of her head, and she kissed His feet, and anointed them with the fragrant oil.

Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this he spoke to himself, saying, 'This man, if He were a prophet would know what manner of woman this is who is touching Him for she is a sinner,' and Jesus answered and said

to him, 'Simon, I have something to say to you.'

So he said, 'Teacher, say it.'

'There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii and the other fifty, and when they had nothing with which to repay he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?'

Simon answered and said, 'I suppose the one he had forgiven more,' and He said to him, 'You have rightly judged.'

Then He turned to the woman, and said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I entered your house and you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil; but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, but to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.'

Then He said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven,' and those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, 'Who is this who even forgives sins?'

Then He said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.'"
(LUKE 7:36-50)

Jesus went where he was invited to go, whether it was an invitation to heal or visit and eat, regardless of the person's station in life. He fellowshipped and dined with tax collectors whom the Jews considered to be traitors because they helped the Romans to assess the people's possessions. Jesus also went to the house of the Pharisee named Simon mentioned above. Some woman, a sinner who could not possibly have been invited, somehow followed Jesus into the Pharisee's house and into the dinner party and stood and cried behind where He sat. As if that weren't strange enough behavior, she had brought her own oil and started anointing Jesus' feet with it in front of witnesses--the host and at least several others of the Pharisee's friends, family, or colleagues. Not only did this woman pour the oil on Jesus' feet, wiped them with her hair and even kissed them.

Her actions must have been extraordinary for another reason also. Jesus' feet had to have been dirty because He wore open sandals and walked everywhere in a land with little or no indoor plumbing. Therefore, everyone's feet had to have become quite filthy at times. What she did was not like touching the feet of a person after taking off their shoes and socks. Jesus Himself even demonstrated how humble this conduct was when He Himself washed His disciple's feet before their last dinner together. It was a pure act of humility and love towards all of them, including Judas, the man whom Jesus knew was about to betray him into the hands of His enemies.

"Before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His Own who were in the world He loved them till the end. And, supper being ended, the devil already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him, Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands and that He had come from God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments,

took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciple's feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.

Then He came to Simon Peter and Peter said to Him, 'Lord, are You washing my feet?'

Jesus answered and said to him, 'What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this.'

Peter said to Him, 'You shall never wash my feet!'

Jesus answered him, 'If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.'

Simon Peter said to Him, 'Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!'

Jesus said to him, 'He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you', for He knew who would betray Him. (Therefore, He said, 'You are not all clean.)

So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord and you say well, for so I am. If I, then, your Lord and Teacher have washed your feet you also ought to wash one another's feet for I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you."
(JOHN 13:1-15)

"This is My command: that you love one another as I have loved you."
(JOHN 15:12)

According to this story, Jesus responded to the unvoiced thoughts of both His host as well as the other guests who gossiped about Him or the woman. As He did with the story of the master and his unforgiving servant (*Matthew 18:21-35*), the beggar Lazarus and the rich man's deaths (*Luke 16:19-31*), as well as the tale of the prodigal son seen below, Jesus did not tell Simon a parable but a true story involving a real situation. The record does not reveal whether the people who had the uncharitable thoughts about Jesus also have been able to overhear His comments. However, when Jesus turned to address the woman the rest of the dinner party most certainly heard His words, for they criticized His statements. It must have been quite a provoking, yet awkward evening.

Criticism -- Never Judge Anyone

"Judge not and you shall not be judged. Condemn not and you shall not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven, for with what judgments you judge you will be judged. Give and it will be given to you good measure, pressed down, shaken down, and running over will be put into your bosom, for with the same measure that you use it will be measured back to you.'

And, He spoke a parable to them: 'Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch? A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher. And, why do you look at the

speck in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the plank in your own eye? Or, how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye,' when you yourself do not see the plank that is in your own eye? Look, a plank is in your own eye! Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye and then you will see clearly to remove the speck in your brother's eye."
 (MATTHEW 7:1-5 & LUKE 6:37-42)

We will receive the same treatment from both God and men that we ourselves choose to demonstrate. Every action produces an equally powerful and parallel reaction. Whenever we attempt to modify another's conduct we must consider our own beforehand. People lead and influence other people by the examples they set more than the words they say for the two can contradict each other. It is very hypocritical to teach one way of doing things while we are acting the opposite. Who will avoid sinning if they see others seemingly profit by doing it? We have to look to God and Jesus as our examples of good behavior for only They can see clearly the *far-reaching* consequences of sin. Otherwise, we will be like a blind person being led by another blind person, most likely into a ditch.

The Tale of the Prodigal Son

"(Jesus) said, 'A certain man had two sons and the younger of them said to his father, 'Father give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So, he divided to them his livelihood, and not many days after the younger son gathered all together and journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with wasteful living, but when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country and he sent him into his fields to feed swine and he would gladly have filled his stomach with the food that the swine ate and no one gave him anything.

But, when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father and say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before you and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants (John 15:15),' and he arose and came to his father.

But, when he was still a great way off his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him and the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against Heaven and your sight and am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and sandals on his feet, and bring the fatted calf here, and kill it, and let us eat and be merry for this my son was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found.'

Now his older brother was in the field and as he came and drew near to the house he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant and he said to him, 'Your brother has come

and because he has received him safe and sound your father has killed the fatted calf.'

But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore, his father came out and pleaded with him. So he answered and said to his father, 'Lo, these many years I have been serving you. I never transgressed your commandment at any time and yet you never gave me a young goat that I might make merry with my friends! But as soon as this son of yours came who has devoured your livelihood with harlots you killed the fatted calf for him!' and he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad for your brother was dead and alive again, and was lost and is found.' (LUKE 15:11-32)

A man had two sons who seemed to be polar opposites in how they viewed the world around them and appreciated it. The elder was a responsible man who worked hard to please his father and helped their father prosper. The younger thought only about his own personal desires. He did not want to keep their family united, but divided so that he would be free to go and do his "own thing". His only consideration was to himself and his own hedonistic pleasures. Additionally, the former had an attitude of giving and the latter only of taking.

The younger son asked for his inheritance while his father was still alive without giving any thought to how this would affect their family. He wanted be free to live without considering the consequences of his decisions and actions, which at home he obviously had to account for up until that time. Although he was a totally *self*-centered human being his father acknowledged his son's freewill and grant his request. The father had to have carefully thought about what would happen to his younger son. However, he also had to have recognized that his son was mature enough to start being accountable for his decisions. So, the father allowed his son to have his way and leave home even though it might lead to his destruction. As with any paternal relationship, at some point the choice to act like a trustworthy adult had shifted from parent to child.

When left completely unsupervised with money, the younger son started to squander it with little or no thought about the future. He became obsessed with seeking only pleasure and spent his new fortune as if it were endless. He became totally undisciplined, and since he never invested the funds or worked to replace them eventually he had nothing. Therefore, when a sever famine struck that land he was in deep trouble. As a consequence, that son was forced to go to work or starve. However, he joined up with a man who was not a relation so he had to toil with none of the benefits that he would have had if he had remained with his family. His hard labor provided little else but meager food and shelter.

One day it dawned on him that even his father's servants had more nourishment and comforts than he did. He decided to swallow his pride, return home in defeat, and beg his father to hire him as a servant. This son expected nothing more than to be treated thus by his father. He probably even anticipated being ridiculed and rejected. However, as the younger son approached his former home his father saw him coming from far away. Instead of ignoring his disobedient and foolish child or denying him entrance to the land the father ran to greet him and embraced him. The younger son, however, did not take his father's affection for granted as he had before he left home.

Rather, as his father was kissing him the son kept trying to repent of his previous behavior for he was ashamed of those choices and actions. He finally had learned to humble himself under the more mature and wiser authority instead of thinking that he was superior to all that his father represented.

To the son's further surprise, as they got near enough to his former home so that his father could command the servants he told them to minister to his son. The father said to bring the *best* clothes and put sandals on his son's feet. Additionally, his father demanded that a ring be placed on his son's finger, most likely symbolic of his relationship within that family. The younger son was not dealt with as he had expected. Instead, he was treated like the son he always had been previously, even after he was disobedient. Apparently, his father never had ceased to love him or hope that he would return to join his family one day.

Not only did the father welcome his younger child's return he celebrated it joyfully. As this was unfolding, the elder son had been working in the field as he evidently had continued to do when his brother abandoned their family. When he was apprised of the situation he most definitely did not respond with welcome as their father had. Not only that he even got mad at his father for being what he considered to be completely unjustified and unfair treatment to both sons. After all, the elder had remained faithful and persevering the entire time the younger was out gallivanting around and neglecting their family. Clearly the elder son felt ill-treated in comparison.

Interestingly, this story parallels Jesus' relationship to God the Father, but Jesus never has resented anyone's return to God, so the elder son did to the younger. In contrast, although Jesus denied or rebelled as mankind did, He welcomed and even celebrated our restitution. In fact, the only reason He even was born as a human being was to restore the rest of humanity to our rightful home and relationship within God the Father's family and Kingdom. Jesus purposely lived and died for our liberation from the ravages of rebellion, not His Own. Since He never disobeyed God's will, Jesus did not have to redeem Himself; until He came to the earth as a Man He had been completely invulnerable.

When the elder son explained his resentment, his father explained that he could have received identical treatment any moment that he had desired it. Everything that the father owned had been his son's also the entire time, so he *could* have requested the best robe and a party whenever he wanted them. Apparently, he had never asked his father for these things. Although he had indeed stayed with his father, like his younger brother he, too, had not completely appreciated or taken full advantage of their familial relationship. Jesus differed from the elder son in His story in that regard for He always accepted and took full advantage of whatever His Father had to offer.

The elder son was very jealous of the fact that his younger brother had sinned greatly but had been forgiven and restored into the family fold. He was envious because in his opinion his sibling figuratively "had gotten way with murder" unscathed. In the elder's eyes, how his father was treating them both was unfair and unjustified. The elder son forgot to show mercy and compassion for a lost soul, as Jesus would have. The Bible tells all likewise not to envy someone for material things for they are temporal. God looks at the heart; as his ambassadors and followers of His Son, we must, too.

