



A LETTER FROM YOUR PASTOR: MAY 2024

by Lee Shipp

WHY DO I HAVE TO BE BAD?

There is a picture trending on social media. I love it. It's a depiction of the Prodigal Son. I like to show the picture to people and ask them, "What do you see? Who is this man?" Every time, the response is, "That must be the Prodigal Son." True! However, my immediate reaction to the picture is that it is me. I see a DEPICTION OF ME! I see humanity in that picture. Honestly, it is us, all of us.

The anguish of the soul is powerfully captured. If a picture is worth a thousand words – this picture is worth it. It is a picture of a young man surrounded by pigs. He is kneeling in filthy muck and mire; his hands are almost in a prayer and pleading position. His face expresses the most resounding cry of the soul as he realizes where he is and how he got there. He has lost everything. He runs to his end, horrified that it is not where he wants to be. The only positive is that there is still time to do something about his demise. There is a way out. He has a merciful Father. There is a home where even servants are treated better than this. There is a chance, and he has no option but to take it. He can go home in the hopes of his Father's mercy.

THE STORY IN THE BIBLE

Jesus plays out this story on several occasions: the parable of the Prodigal Son and the parable of the Pharisee and Publican going into the temple to pray. The common element

in each story is that one bad man knows he is bad, and another thinks he is good. In the parable of the Prodigal Son, the elder brother believes himself to be good and faithful to his Father. I am sure he would not assume that he was perfect. Despite his flaws, he was certainly better than his prodigal brother, who had disgraced the family. Then, there is the parable of the Pharisee and Publican going to prayer. The Pharisee believes himself to be good and celebrates his goodness before God, rejoicing that he is not a sinner like the Publican.

A GREAT MISTAKE: DEFENDING OURSELVES BEFORE GOD

Most people will not admit they are bad. People like to imagine they are basically good, suffering from a few flaws in their nature. This belief that they are good will keep many people out of heaven, not because they are bad, but because they refuse to admit they are bad. People tend to protest before God; they feel compelled to find something good in themselves by which God will accept them and have mercy on them. People have a natural bent even to justify their loved ones before God on the basis they are not that bad and are deserving of God's leniency. When people are unwilling to recognize the truth of what God says about the human heart, they protest not only their innocence but also the innocence of their loved ones. This is the tragedy by which most will miss heaven.

We hate being convicted of wrong, and we hate to see our loved ones suffering conviction. We even hasten to defend them. We seek to comfort them and assure them that they are good. We are fighting against the Holy Spirit's work, bringing them to salvation. We do not want them to confess their badness. It is as if the police have detained our loved one; we cry to them, "Don't say anything. Be quiet. Take the fifth!" But JESUS is not a cop. And God already has the evidence. He knows. So, what are we doing trying to defend **them against God?** Instead, let them feel the weight of their bad. Let them cry to God, for there

is mercy with Him.

WHY DO I HAVE TO BE BAD

It is challenging for us to admit we are bad. It is much easier to admit we have sinned. But to admit we are bad is to confess that our sins are not an accident, but the intentional rebellions of our hearts against God and everything morally right. However, if you cannot admit you are bad, you have serious problems. If you cannot admit you are bad, you cannot go home! Confessing that you are bad is necessary. If you cannot confess you are bad, you cannot go to heaven. You cannot receive mercy.

Being bad is not easy because it must be real. You must know yourself, and that is hard. You must know God, and there is only one way. The Son must reveal Him to you; your opinions of yourself must be dropped. Your assessment of yourself must be abandoned. You must believe what God has said about Himself and what He has said about you.

God reveals that humanity is bad due to their fallen state: *"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked ..."* (Jeremiah 17:9). The Holy Spirit revealed through Paul that *"... works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God"* (Galatians 5:19-21).

Finally, Jesus said, *"For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a man ..."* (Matthew 5:19-20). Very few will come to this knowledge of God and self. The Bible reveals that few make it to heaven, and many will end up in destruction. It is not because they are so bad, but because they consider themselves too good. Hell is full

of bad people who thought they were good, and heaven is filled with bad people who knew they were bad. Convinced of their fallen state, they believed in God for grace and salvation and became new creatures in Christ; they were made righteous and holy by God. In Jesus' stories, it is the prodigal who enjoys the Father's love and gets joyful celebrations of his love and affection. It is the Publican who receives the justification. Both stories point to the bad sons getting the blessing. We don't want to be bad. We are afraid of being bad. But if we are not bad, we cannot be saved! Why does a good person need to be saved? Why does a healthy person need a physician? Why does the righteous need to repent?

GREAT LOVE

Like the Prodigal Son, people have great love and admiration for the Father who forgives all their sins. Loving God greatly is not the result of LITTLE SINS forgiven. Great love is produced from the experience of how much we have been forgiven. Who will love the Father more, the Publican or the Pharisee? The prodigal or the elder brother? Of course, the answer is the Publican and the Prodigal. *"There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged"* (Luke 7:41-43). Therefore, many religious people will not go to heaven because they will not admit they are bad; they are too good.