

Spiritual Growth Lessons

LESSON 18 of 32

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A SERVANT AND A SON

"So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (Luke 17:10).

This author will never forget the day Jesus taught me a very important lesson. My wife and I were riding a train to Singapore from West Malaysia. Whenever we drew near the station, we took our luggage and got as close to the exit door as we could, so that when the train stopped we could quickly jump off and make a dash toward Immigration like most of the other passengers would do. When the train stopped, I jumped off first and ran ahead to get an advantageous position in the line. My wife caught up with me a few minutes later, and before long we had passed through Immigration, and were walking toward Customs.

It was then that a strange feeling hit me--an emptiness. I thought for a moment, and then realized what it was. Nobody would be meeting us at the train station for the first time in a long time!

For several years it was the habit of my son, John, to meet us at the station in order to assist us. We never asked him to do this, but he knew that we were always very tired after having traveled as long as thirteen hours on the train. He would wait in the taxi line so that after we came through Immigration and Customs, a taxi would be waiting to take us to our home in Singapore. Otherwise we would have to wait as long as an hour or more for a taxi.

After John got married, he continued this kind act. While John waited in the taxi line, Cora, his wife, would meet us in the waiting area when we came through Customs. However, John and Cora had moved to America, and this was our first trip since they left us.

"Nobody will meet us today," I told myself. "Or will they?" I added, as I thought about Andrew, who was my assistant, and Patimah. This young couple stayed in our home, and were treated by us much like a son and daughter. In fact, it was their custom to call us "Mom" and "Dad." I cheered up a little when I remembered them. But the emptiness returned when I discovered that nobody had come to the train station to meet and help us. I was disappointed! Then a familiar voice spoke to me, "That's the difference between a servant and a son." It was the Lord!

Eliphaz the Temanite asked the question, *"Can a man be profitable unto God"* (Job 22:2). In days past, I would have quickly answered, "No way, Jose!" But after that experience I began to realize that it depends on a man's relationship with God.

We have studied in a previous lesson that we must have the attitude and character of a servant. After we have done all that is required of us, we are to say, *"I am an unprofitable servant"* (Luke 17:10). It is true that we are to have the humble attitude of a servant, but at the same time, we should remember, *"Beloved, now are we the sons of God"* (I John 3:2). A servant will do what he is required to do--what has been assigned to him--nothing more, nothing less. He does not have the same rank or relationship as the children of his master.

He eats alone, not enjoying fellowship and friendship with his master. He honors his master, but seldom does a servant really love his master, and serve him because of

that love. He serves him because of the pay he receives.

On the other hand, a good son considers the needs of his parents, and will often do more than that which he was asked to do. A good son will love his parents and receive their love in return. He will seek to do the things that are pleasing unto them.

Jesus wants us to enjoy this kind of relationship with Him. All that we do--praying, fasting, reading the Bible, attending church services, witnessing to people who do not know Jesus--He wants us to do it because we love Him, not because of a reward we will receive some day for faithful service.

There are many Christians who are servants of the Lord, but do not live as sons and daughters! They serve Jesus and strive to follow His Word, but they do not enjoy a close relationship with Him. Jesus is not satisfied if we only have a servant relationship with Him.

In Luke 15:11-32 He gives us the story of the prodigal son to illustrate this point. A certain young man demanded his inheritance from his father, and then left his home and his family. He traveled to a far country, where he wasted all of his inheritance with riotous living. He reached the point that he did not have sufficient money to buy food, and was forced to obtain employment feeding the swine, a task which was very repulsive to him, being a Jew. In his hunger, he was about to fill his stomach with the husks that the swine ate when he finally "came to himself."



" . . . he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants" (Luke 15:17-19).

The son did not feel that his father would ever want to be close to him again, because of the rebellious ways of his past life. This shows how little he knew his father. Since the day that he had left home, his father had grieved for him. His father had spent much time looking down the long, dusty road, hoping to see the return of his son--and finally it did happen. *" . . . 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" (Luke 15:20).*

One of the purposes of this parable was to teach us concerning God's love, compassion, and the forgiveness He offers the person who repents. It should have been evident to the son that his father had forgiven him, and he could now enjoy full sonship with him again. But he did not know how to receive his father's love. He had memorized his little speech, and he went ahead and gave it: *" . . . Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son" (verse 21).* What was the reaction of the father to these words? He ignored them!

"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: And bring hither the fatted calf, 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 . . ." (verses 22-24).

This beautiful parable conveys to us God's love and forgiveness, and His desire to have a love relationship with us (Ephesians 1:4). We have all sinned--and there isn't anybody who is worthy to be called a son of God. But God is not satisfied when we serve Him as a servant only. He wants us to have the humble spirit and attitude of a servant--but at the same time, a loving relationship with Him as a son! *ds*