

Parable

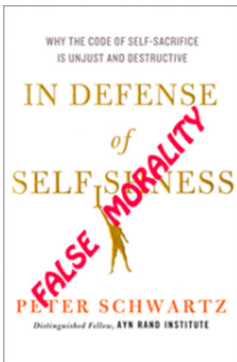
The Father & 2 Sons (Luke 15)

(Re: The younger son)

This parable is more than commenting about individuals. It also has relevance to the symptom of a godless morality (represented by the younger son) in the broader society and the attention on works absent grace (self-righteousness represented by the elder son) among Christians. Here, I share the parable's message through the younger son. I shall share at another time the parable's message through the elder son.

THE YOUNGER SON REFLECTING THE FALSE MORALITY AND THE SPIRITUAL TRUTH

(1) The demand by the younger son for an advance disbursement of his share of the inheritance is indubitably a selfish act. He thinks of himself; let me emphasise, on himself alone and nobody else.



“Nobody owes you a living!” – Does this statement sound familiar? An adverse perspective is that it encourages the idea that if nobody owes me a living, then **I own my happiness to myself and I owe no other.** “What is mine is mine. I want it. I need it. Give it to me – now!”

The unconstructive perspective is not just the misplaced view of some individuals; it is generally palpable in societies. There is even a provocative book titled “IN DEFENSE OF SELFISHNESS” by Peter Schwartz, extolling the virtue of selfishness.

The younger son's attitude conjures up the sense of entitlement that is pervasive as a new morality in societies.

- (2) "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country ..." – v. 13a

It must feel good to the young man to be free from the hard work in the family field (where his elder brother works) and from the annoying control of his father.

"Freedom is cocaine to a teenager. It's intoxicating. It's addictive. And it is often their biggest motivator. They will do anything to get it, and they are terrified of losing it," said Dr.

Julie

Carbery,

an

adolescent

and child

psychother

apist.²

"I have the right to do anything," you say
—but not everything is beneficial.
"I have the right to do anything"
—but I will not be mastered by anything.

1 Corinthians 6:12

The individualist thirst for absolute freedom, freedom without restraint, is unexceptional among the young.

The younger son's attitude reflects the real situation of young people entertaining misconceived ideas of absolute freedom without being aware of the grief it will bring.

- (3) By going far away, the younger son totally discarded any love for his father and elder brother whom he would leave alone – out of sight, out of mind! The father's authority over him, the brotherly affection and the basic pull of conscience were all wiped clean from his soul. In a nutshell, faith in his father and whatever that bound the existing relationship in a body (family) with its inherent

² <https://www.familylife.com/articles/topics/parenting/ages-and-stages/teens/freedom-the-teen-addiction/>

assurance was totally broken off by the absolute freedom that the younger son sought and got.

“I believe in my own idea of moral right and wrong. No one has the authority to define my conduct.” – The younger son’s father-forsaking act is not just about himself, but reflects some philosophical morality about the absence of a higher authority to define one’s behaviour.

(4) In the distant country, the younger son “squandered his wealth in wild living.” – *v. 13b*

It is no good thing to have absolute freedom without regulation. Clearly, the bad experience of the younger son showed up the folly of rebelling against the father’s restraint and control.

Note that the young son in desperation hired himself out to feed pigs, but his employer



did not give him proper food and so he had to make do by eating the pods that the pigs were eating. (Lk 15:15-16) How pathetic a situation

he found himself in, perhaps rightly justified by the sense of absolute

freedom his employer had

without moral constraints or a higher authority’s control to even give the workers a basic decent meal! So, the younger son got his just desserts.

The younger son came to his senses not because of direct words of wisdom from his father, but through the “generosity”

of the father in granting his wish to taste the thrill of absolute freedom. The “hidden wisdom” of the father ensured that he would taste the post-thrill bitter pill of truth and thereby come to his senses.

The suffering of the younger son reflects the spiritual truth in a whole range of believers’ experience through rebellion against God and the consequent troubles they face.

- (5) The distant country was a “desirable” happening place to the younger son who found much pleasure to indulge in his profligate lifestyle without a care. His money and the fun were inexhaustible, so he thought. However, unbeknownst to him, the attractions of the “wonderful place of carefree fun” would soon melt away, and so would his cash all burn up.

There are these sayings that “all that glitters is not gold” and “all that is gold does not glitter.” The land of dreams (land of plenty) that the younger son ran to turned out to be a land of delusions (land of hunger). In contrast, the land of industry where his elder brother slaved became a land of promise that provided enough for a celebration feast. What irony!

The repentance of the younger son reflects the truth in the statement by Martin Luther that “man must utterly despair of his own ability before he is prepared to receive the grace of Christ.”³

Morris L. West (1916 –1999), an Australian Roman Catholic writer, speaks evocatively as a character in one of his novels that explores the meaning of Faith:

³ <http://bookofconcord.org/heidelberg.php>

“I was lost a long time, without knowing it. Without the Faith, one is free, and that is a pleasant feeling at first. There are no questions of conscience, no constraints, except the constraints of custom, convention, and the law, and these are flexible



enough for most purposes. It is only later that the terror comes. One is free—but free in chaos, in an unexplained and unexplainable world. One is free in a desert, from which there is no retreat but inward, towards the hollow core of oneself. There is nothing to build on but the small rock of one’s own pride, and this is nothing, based on nothing ... I think, therefore I am. But what am I? An accident of disorder, going nowhere ...”⁴

The story of the younger son (through his awful adventure and wise repentance) is not simply about the foolishness that lies at the feet of individual sinners.

The broader reach of the message is into the worldly ethos of self-centredness that is pervasive in this era of high-intensity developments that drive people to focus on covetousness so much so that they have little energy to probe the spiritual pitfalls of running away from God for ephemeral indulgences with unfettered freedom.

John Lee

⁴ Morris West, *The Devil’s Advocate*, (Fontana Books, 1977)