

I. Read Luke 15:1-7

- A. In vs. 1 & 2, we read about a situation of which all Christians should take note. Jesus was hanging out with the wrong *kind* of people. What kind of folks found this especially objectionable?
The Pharisees and scribes or self-righteous religionists.

Why did they object?

They had no understanding of grace. To the scribes and Pharisees, religion was a matter of *doing or not doing certain things*. They failed to grasp the fact that true religion has always been *a matter of the heart*. One who fails to understand the transforming effect that grace has on the heart is likely to be cynical about the possibility of folks being changed by God.

What other reasons might the Pharisees have had for objecting to mixing with sinners?

Jesus was implicitly challenging their comfort zone and self-image. They were smug and self-satisfied. They had already discounted those *kinds* of folks. Then Jesus comes along and is obviously a righteous man and teacher, yet He is willing to befriend sinners. This threatened their understanding of what it meant to be religious.

- B. How do Christians often make the same error that the scribes and Pharisees made?
Most people like to find a comfort zone and build up walls around it. This means that we avoid folks who disagree with us and retreat to a kind of *believer's ghetto*. Though we may not approach religion as an *exclusive club* the way the Pharisees did, we still tend to establish conditions that must be met by those who would enter our world. Jesus challenges us to be willing to take some risks and become a bit uncomfortable!
- C. What are some things we could do right now to ensure that we do not become *Christian Pharisees*?
Practice hospitality. Open our homes to others. Reach out to folks in need. Refuse to limit our social circle to just a few folks but be willing to befriend others. Get involved in some ministry in the church that deals with folks who are needy in some way.

What are the danger signals I should look for in my life that might indicate I am becoming comfortably *pharisaical*?

Has it been a while since you had folks you didn't know well in your home? At church gatherings do you always seek the same person or friends to sit by or visit with? Do you become aware occasionally that there are a lot of people in church these days that you don't know? Do you only do what you enjoy in assuming ministry responsibilities, never allowing yourself to be stretched or challenged? If the answer to one or more of these questions is *yes*, you are becoming too comfortable!

- D. In vs. 3-6, Jesus uses the parable of *the lost sheep* to illustrate the need of aggressively pursuing unbelievers or the unchurched to share Christ with them. How might we do this in our day?
The simplest way is by bringing folks to church — not just inviting them, but bringing them! Most people who have little church background are very intimidated by the *church setting*. You can help them get over the obstacle by picking them up, bringing them to church, introducing them to folks, sitting with them, explaining what's going on if they seem confused, making sure they meet other folks after the service, taking them to lunch or having them over for lunch, and perhaps inviting church friends as well, and by anticipating questions they may have about the sermon, etc., so that you can help them work through their problems. Imagine if each family did this just one Sunday each month, what would happen at our church!

E. Do churches sometimes fall into the same *Christian ghetto* trap just as individual believers are apt to do?

Yes! Many good churches tend to become *ingrown* and inadvertently communicate to visitors that they are not welcome. Our church in particular must guard against this because we are a *teaching church* and hence may tend to forget about evangelism and outreach. We must also remember that many visiting our church and Sunday School may be unaccustomed to Reformed terminology and the depth of study we do here.

F. According to vs. 3-6, should our outreach efforts in church be aggressive or passive?

Insofar as we must be willing to *go out among the folks* (“leave the ninety-nine”), we should be aggressive in our outreach.

G. In verse 7, Jesus gives us a glimpse into the heart of God. He explains that there is great joy in heaven when a sinner repents. How should this truth affect us?

We should likewise rejoice as folks come to Christ. We should do all that we can to make this happen since it is our desire to please God, notwithstanding the fact that God must draw men to Christ (John 6:44).

H. Will you commit to begin to do some of the things discussed above?

*** Requires personal testimony.**