

Luke 15:28

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him.

Analysis

And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. The elder brother's response reveals his true heart: anger (ἀργίσθη, ὅργισθη) toward grace. The verb indicates passionate, indignant wrath—not mild displeasure but burning resentment. His refusal to enter (οὐκ ἤθελεν εἰσελθεῖν, οὐκ ἔθελεν εἰσελθεῖν) publicly dishonors his father, shaming him before assembled guests. In Middle Eastern culture, such refusal by the eldest son would be scandalous, a profound insult demanding response.

Yet remarkably, "his father came out, and intreated him" (ό δὲ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ ἔξελθὼν παρεκάλει αὐτόν, οὐδὲ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ ἔξελθὼν παρεκάλει αὐτόν). The verb *parakaleō* (παρακαλέω) means to exhort, encourage, plead with, comfort—the father begs his older son to join the celebration. Just as the father ran to meet the returning prodigal, now he leaves the feast to pursue the resentful elder son. God's grace pursues both the flagrantly sinful and the self-righteously religious.

This verse reveals that self-righteousness can be as alienating as scandalous sin. The elder brother's anger exposes his loveless, joyless service. He's kept all the rules but missed the father's heart. His refusal to celebrate his brother's restoration demonstrates that he never understood grace—he viewed his service as earning favor, not expressing love. Both sons need the father's grace; both sons have broken his heart.

Historical Context

The eldest son's public refusal to enter would shock all witnesses. His duty was to co-host with his father, welcoming guests and facilitating the celebration. His absence would be noted and discussed, bringing shame on the family. The father's coming out to entreat him publicly demonstrates extraordinary patience and humility—leaving his own feast to plead with his rebellious son reveals the same undignified love he showed the prodigal.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. What does the elder brother's anger reveal about the dangers of viewing obedience as earning rather than expressing love for God?
2. How does the father's coming out to entreat the elder son demonstrate that God's grace pursues both kinds of sinners?
3. In what ways might believers today refuse to 'go in' to celebrate God's grace toward those they deem undeserving?

Interlinear Text

ἀργίσθη	δὲ	καὶ	οὐκ	ἵθελεν	εἰσελθεῖν	ό	οὖν
he was angry	And	and	not	would	go in	G3588	therefore
G3710	G1161	G2532	G3756	G2309	G1525		G3767

πατὴρ	αὐτόν	έξελθὼν	παρεκάλει	αὐτόν
father	him	came	and intreated	him
G3962	G846	G1831	G3870	G846

Additional Cross-References

Jonah 4:9 (Parallel theme): And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death.

1 Samuel 18:8 (Parallel theme): And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom?

Isaiah 65:5 (Parallel theme): Which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou. These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day.

Isaiah 66:5 (Parallel theme): Hear the word of the LORD, ye that tremble at his word; Your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let the LORD be glorified: but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed.

Luke 15:2 (Parallel theme): And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.

Luke 7:39 (Parallel theme): Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.