

Luke 15:30

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.

Analysis

But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. The elder brother's words drip with contempt and theological error. He refuses family language, saying "this thy son" (ὁ υἱός σου οὗτος, ho huios sou houtos) rather than "my brother"—he disowns the relationship. This dismissive pronoun "this" (οὗτος, houtos) expresses disdain, reducing his brother to an object of scorn. He won't acknowledge family connection, revealing how self-righteousness destroys Christian community and love.

The accusation "devoured thy living with harlots" (κατέφαγεν τὸν βίον σου μετὰ πορνῶν, katephagen ton bion sou meta pornōn) adds details not in the earlier narrative. While the father spoke of the son being "lost" and "dead" (v. 24, 32), the elder brother specifies sexual sin with prostitutes. Whether this is factual (learned from the servant) or assumed (contemptuous speculation), it reveals his judgmental heart. He maximizes his brother's guilt to minimize the father's grace.

The contrast "for him the fatted calf" emphasizes the perceived injustice—the sinner gets the feast, the faithful gets nothing. This exposes the fundamental error of merit theology: grace appears unjust to those who believe they've earned God's favor. The elder brother cannot celebrate because he's never understood that he too lives by grace, not merit. His perfect external obedience (v. 29) masked internal resentment, pride, and lovelessness—sins as deadly as the prodigal's prostitution.

Historical Context

Inheritance squandered on prostitutes represented the depth of covenant violation—not only wasting family resources but defiling oneself with sexual immorality, compounding rebellion with ritual uncleanness. The elder brother's emphasis on this detail appeals to Jewish law's severity toward sexual sin, attempting to justify his resentment as righteous indignation. However, his bitter spirit reveals that his objection is not God's holiness but his own wounded pride.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. What does the elder brother's refusal to call the prodigal 'my brother' reveal about how self-righteousness destroys Christian fellowship?
2. How does his emphasis on the prodigal's sexual sin while ignoring his own pride, anger, and lovelessness illustrate selective moral accounting?
3. In what ways do believers today resent God's grace to notorious sinners while minimizing their own subtle sins?

Interlinear Text

ὅτε	δὲ	τὸν	υἱός	σου	οὗτος	τὸν	καταφαγών	σου
as soon as	But	which	son	thy	this	which	hath devoured	thy
G3753	G1161	G3588	G5207	G4675	G3778	G3588	G2719	G4675
τὸν	βίον	μετὰ	πορνῶν	ἦλθεν	ἔθυσας	αὐτῷ	τὸν	
which	living	with	harlots	was come	thou hast killed	for him	which	
G3588	G979	G3326	G4204	G2064	G2380	G846	G3588	
μόσχον	τὸν	σιτευτὸν						
calf	which	the fatted						
G3448	G3588	G4618						

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 29:3 (Parallel theme): Whoso loveth wisdom rejoiceth his father: but he that keepeth company with harlots spendeth his substance.

Luke 15:32 (Parallel theme): It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

Luke 18:11 (Parallel theme): The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.