

Note the insulting, damning, accusing, mocking words: **this man, Jesus receives sinners and eats with them.** The grace of God stops short of no one. He welcomes sinners without discrimination, He comes not just for those who try to be good but for the worst.

You may fool others, even fool yourself; but God knows you too well. You haven't honored your Father's Name as you should. You desire pleasures of the flesh, feeding your vanity. You go off and waste His goodness. You hurt your family and others more than you realize. You aren't content with how your Father works; so you complain like a spoiled child. You're very much, can see yourself in those two sons.

Know this well: Absolution, forgiveness does not originate from repentance; it originates solely from Christ. The story of these sons; a beautiful picture how God treats you. Notice the father embraces a son before he can even get a word out...before he says 'I'm sorry'. Did you notice that? God doesn't receive you back, forgive you based on how well you repent, or because you work to show how sorry you are. Look what the father is doing here- forgiving, welcoming his child back into the family. Notice it's not partial restoration, not conditional or probationary until he proves himself again, no penance needed.

We're all like these sons. Forgiveness, given you here and now, is not earned. Absolution, alone the work of Jesus on the cross; the entire life of believers is one of repentance.

Conserve now a couple of things about "Being Christian" and "Being Happy." There's a great misconception, among believers, non-believers. People think 'being Christian' means 'being good.' Love to point out the scandals, "*look at that person who calls themselves Christian.*" People think the focus for Christian is how we live, making right decisions. So it fills the bestseller list of Christian books. You see it the focus for most Christian worship. Foremost 'being Christian' means being nice, living right, and behaving. ..They're wrong. 'Being Christian' -not about being good, which any man can do. Being Christian is about 'being a sinner'. Christianity is not centered on good works. Such a false idea will lead to focus on yourself instead of Christ, again note what passes for Christian worship and music today.

Sure we should be good, want to do good. All sin is damnable, take it serious; act in love because God's love to us, work harder on obeying God's law -but 'Being Christian' is recognizing you're sick- need a physician, need to be healed because you keep sinning. Jesus did not come for good people, **He welcomes, receives, sits down, eats with sinners.** Being Christian doesn't mean you have the perfect marriage, model family, whose kids never get in trouble or your family never fights, or that you don't struggle with the same sins

over and over again. 'Being Christian' foremost -seeking forgiveness from Christ. Living a repentant life.

No matter how shamefully we've lived; no matter how disgusting, still our heavenly Father eager to welcome us in His loving embrace. He made His own Son to be sin for us, to His cross that He would welcome us. Here's a place for every lost son and daughter eager for healing and restoration from so many failures. No limits to His love here; His forgiveness, no matter what.

Being Christian, the only way to confront the painful reality of failure, guilt, shame, suffering, and death --of lives filled with joys that will endure.

And this second point: Being Happy, how content are you? Neither of those sons are content with all they have, all their father's done and given.

A real problems for us and our entire world. Recent report notes over 50% of our neighbors are living lonely and even more living unhappy. With all that we have, all we can do, all the world has to offer, still loneliness and happiness are major issues.

C.S. Lewis, he really gets this, wrote. **God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing.** That's a warning, an encouragement. A reality. Even if they appear happy, so many living an illusion, so many lost, walking dead, looking for happiness, for fulfillment, contentment, the answer to this -apart from what you receive here. It's a futile endeavor. We are all in danger. St. Peter warns **our adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.** That someone means you. That we seek happiness and answers to life and what we want -in things that the devil will use against us, all the while it seems innocent, harmless, no real danger -to address our happiness and loneliness just like those sons -be on your guard. St. Peter tells us, warns us, **be sober minded, be watchful.** You are invited to the joys of repentances, living in this security, the joy of what the Lord provides. Nehemiah said it well, **the joy of the Lord is my strength.**

Being Christian. Being Happy. Seek where true joys are found. The opportunity the Lord has given His church in times such as this, of welcome here. So many loved ones, neighbor lost and dead. Hand those you love over to God in prayer. He loves them more than you do. He welcomes sinners home as valued members of His family. Here is how we celebrate and unite as a family, no one ever alone. Live repentant, gathered by the Lord Himself, to bask in His forgiving presence in His gracious Word and holy sacraments. Those insulting, damning, accusing, mocking words toward Christ are of sweetest, greatest comfort for you, **Jesus receives sinners and eats with them.**