

Being A Friend of Sinners

Have you ever wondered how to make friends simply by your influence? Each of us has an influence and a good, godly, winsome influence would technically draw others toward us, right? Isn't that how Jesus recommended we live?

I find it interesting that people will go to places and incorporate in their gatherings things that are questionable (sinful), in order, as they say, to win others to Christianity. When questioned as to why they do so, they say, "Jesus was a friend of sinners and I am simply following His example," which insinuates that Jesus took part in sin when He was here and would do the same today in order to make sinners feel comfortable and win them.

Jesus made it his business to seek out the lost. He mingled with sinners. And so must we. But have you wondered how to attend certain events and gatherings where you feel uncomfortable with what is going on? Are Christians to fit in and make the best of it (the sin), hoping that their influence will win others to a better way? Maybe we need to examine this more closely? Did Jesus take part in sin to win sinners? Would He do so today in order to make sinners feel comfortable and win them?

When Jesus was here He was a friend of sinners, that is a fact. But why was He a friend of sinners? How many people who were living at that time were not sinners? Paul says, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Romans 3:23. So, if everyone who Jesus came into contact with was a sinner, who was left to relate to if not sinners? And why did He come here anyway?

Look at what Luke says about Jesus' relationship with sinners. "Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." Luke 15:1, 2

"And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Matthew 9:10-13 Notice why sinners came to Jesus. They wanted to be free of their sin. They realized that He could save them from their sins.

Jesus was accused of receiving and relating to sinners by the Pharisees--those who saw themselves as being righteous and without sin. Jesus was calling sinners to repentance, to a new way of life. He was going down to their level to raise them up to His level, not to take part in their sin. Jesus 'related' to "sinners". They saw their need and responded readily. He didn't find this in the scribes and Pharisees. They chose not to see themselves as sinners or feel their need of change.

Are we at times confused as to how to be a friend of sinners? Do we want to excuse their sin and go their direction, momentarily, not wanting to condemn them? Jesus shows us another way. He influences and lets the chips fall where they may. He condemned **sin** wherever found. Yes, His very way of life was all it took and sinners got the message they needed. Those who wanted to change their ways came to Him, those who saw themselves as OK hated Him.

The book of John relates the story of Mary Magdalene, some Pharisees, and Jesus. See John 8:3-11. Jesus is our example. Look at how he relates to the two types of sinners. He listens to the accusations against the woman. He says nothing but begins to write in the dust for the benefit of the accusers. They press Him insistently and He addresses them and continues writing. They hear his words, "He that is without sin, let him cast the first stone." And they recognize themselves for who they are and abruptly leave the scene, not casting even one stone toward the woman. Self-condemned. Jesus was a master in handling individuals and sin. He let the self-righteous Pharisees feel their own guilt and shame. He respects their needs, writing personal things in the dust. He extends another opportunity for them to turn around. To every repentant sinner Jesus finds it sufficient to say to them, "Go [free], and sin no more." When Jesus told Mary that He didn't condemn her (she was very repentant) He told her to "go, and sin no more." Notice He didn't say, "Go and try not to sin anymore, or let's go and enjoy it together."

Yes, the needs of sinners matter. Jesus displayed sensitivity for their needs. He loved them with a redemptive love, not a love that made them feel comfortable in their sins. He was humble and approachable. He had a holy presence that caused sinners, looking for a better way, to be attracted to Him and they desired His company.

The sinners Jesus related to wanted to be rescued! Jesus got their attention by calling sinners out of darkness. He was noticed because he stood for something better. He dared to live differently and never blended in with the sinful scene, thinking His message would be more accepted if He toned it down a little. He wasn't interested in popularity (political correctness). Because He was so completely filled with God, He could meet the needs of the sinful world without sin infecting Him. The Pharisees looked down on Jesus not because He was taking part in the sins of the sinners but because His pure life condemned their sinful way of living.

The belief that allowing people to feel comfortable in their sins will not harm us, thinking eventually they will be drawn upward to a better way of life, is simply fooling ourselves. The only one who will be changed will be ourselves. This will not lead to a closer relationship with God but with the world.

“The mind of a man or woman does not come down in a moment from purity and holiness to depravity, corruption, and crime. It takes time to transform the human to the divine, or to degrade those formed in the image of God to the brutal or the satanic. By beholding we become changed. Though formed in the image of his Maker, man can so educate his mind that sin which he once loathed will become pleasant to him.” Adventist Home 330

“He was the Prince of heaven, yet He did not choose His disciples from among the learned lawyers, the rulers, the scribes, or the Pharisees. He passed these by, because they prided themselves on their learning and position. They were fixed in their traditions and superstitions. He who could read all hearts chose humble fishermen who were willing to be taught. **He ate with publicans and sinners, and mingled with the common people, not to become low and earthly with them, but in order by precept and example to present to them right principles, and to uplift them from their earthliness and debasement.**

“**Jesus sought to correct the world's false standard of judging the value of men.** He took His position with the poor, that He might lift from poverty the stigma that the world had attached to it. He has stripped from it forever the reproach of scorn, by blessing the poor, the inheritors of God's kingdom. He points us to the path He trod, saying, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." Luke 9:23.” Ministry of Healing 197

“Here is the apostle's mighty argument. It is not the commandment of Paul, but of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Son of God had left his riches and honor and glory, and clothed his divinity with humanity, that humanity might take hold of divinity, and become a partaker of the divine nature. He came not to live in the palaces of kings, to live without care or labor and be supplied with all the conveniences which human nature naturally craves. The world never saw its Lord wealthy. In the council of heaven he had chosen to stand in the ranks of the poor and the oppressed, to take his place with the humble worker, and learn the trade of his earthly parent. He came to the world to be a reconstructor of character, and he brought into all his work the perfection which he desired to bring into the character he was transforming by his divine power. **Nor did he shun the social life of his countrymen. That all might become acquainted with God manifest in the flesh, he mingled with every class of society, and was called the friend of sinners.** In himself Christ possessed an absolute right to all things, but he gave himself to a life of poverty that man might be rich in heavenly treasure. Commander in the heavenly courts, he took the lowest place on earth. Rich, yet for our sake he became poor. Though he was in the form of God, he "thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

"How great was the gift of God to man, and how like our God to make it! **With a liberality that can never be exceeded he gave, that he might save the rebellious sons of men and bring them to see his purpose and discern his love.** The Review and Herald, May 15, 1900 par. 8

Being a friend of sinners should always raise them to a higher level.