

Theme: Jesus did not come to shun those who were separate from God, but rather to seek them out so that they might return to God.

I. Francis Schaeffer and Fundamentalism

- A. Schaeffer was a key Christian thinker in my early days
- B. In 2020 I read 28 books by or about Schaeffer
- C. In biographies and some of his writings, I learned about his crisis of faith in early 1950s
- D. Description of Schaeffer and fundamentalism/legalism
- E. This fundamentalist tendency existed in Jesus' day!
- F. A look at Jesus and sinners (and the Pharisees!)

II. The Calling of Levi the Tax Collector

- A. Jesus and the crowds (again!)

Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. Mark 2:13

 - 1. Familiar refrain - Jesus tries to get away, the crowds find Him, and He teaches them!
 - 2. Mark is hammering this theme to show Jesus' life rhythm and His priority of teaching the Word of God.
- B. Jesus calls Levi the tax collector

As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him. Mark 2:14

 - 1. Jesus is walking and calls Levi to follow Him.
 - 2. This is the same call He gave to Peter and Andrew (and James and John), and Levi has the same response.

- 3. This is a radical response - he is giving up a lucrative career - and he can never go back!
- 4. There is some question about the identity of Levi
 - a. Levi is not listed in any of the lists of disciples
 - b. In Mark 3:13-19 there is a James the son of Alphaeus (also in Matthew and Luke)
 - c. All three list Matthew the tax collector
 - d. Levi could be either one of these two, or a different person whom was not one of the 12.
 - e. I think it is probably Matthew (double names were common - Simon/Peter/Cephas; Saul/Paul)
- C. Jesus calls Levi **the tax collector**

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 - 1. This might surprise us but tax collectors were not popular :)
 - 2. In the Roman system, you bid to become a tax collector, and then collected to cover your cost.
 - 3. This made them extremely unpopular for 3 reasons:
 - a. You made your neighbors/countrymen pay
 - b. You worked for the hated Romans
 - c. Your profit came from overcharging people!
 - 4. The religious authorities despised tax collectors
 - a. They were on lists with murderers and robbers!
 - b. Both Hillel and Shammai (who rarely agreed) said you could lie to a tax collector with impunity!

- c. The touch of a tax collector rendered a house unclean
 - d. A Jew who collected taxes was disqualified as a judge or witness in court, expelled from the synagogue, and a cause of disgrace to his family
5. In calling a tax collector to follow Him, Jesus is establishing a relationship with a social outcast who was universally despised. This should give me hope - Jesus can call anyone and use them!

III. Jesus and the “Sinners”

A. Jesus eats with Levi, other tax collectors, and “sinners”

While Jesus was having dinner at Levi’s house, many tax collectors and “sinners” were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. ¹⁶When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the “sinners” and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: “Why does he eat with tax collectors and ‘sinners’?” Mark 2:15–16

- 1. Instead of keeping this quiet, Jesus has dinner with a whole group of tax collectors and “sinners”.
- 2. It was customary for there to be a celebratory meal after someone was converted, and this appears to fit that description.
- 3. Jesus is sharing a meal with people that the Pharisees would not approve of associating or eating with.

B. Understanding the “sinners”

- 1. The term “sinners” in the Mishnah refers to gamblers, moneylenders, people who race doves for sport, people who trade on the Sabbath year, thieves, the violent, tax collectors, and shepherds!

- 2. This included people who violated God’s Law, but also those who simply could not follow all of the extra rules created by the oral tradition.
- 3. The Pharisees also derisively called such folks “the people of the land” and they refused contact and especially eating with such people because they did not ceremonially wash before meals.
- 4. The Pharisees thought that the essence of faith was to “separate” themselves from such people (the root of the name “Pharisee” refers to separation).
- 5. Before the Pharisees would even share a meal with them they demanded that such “sinners” clean themselves up and begin to try and live by Pharisaical standards.
- 6. Thus they are scandalized that Jesus would openly befriend and eat with such people!

C. The Son of Man and “sinners”

On hearing this, Jesus said to them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” Mark 2:17

- 1. Jesus uses proverbial wisdom to show the foolishness of the Pharisaical approach!
- 2. Would a doctor tell sick people to get well before he sees them? That would be foolish and go against what it means to be a doctor!
- 3. In the same way, Jesus, the Son of Man, has come to seek and save those who are lost
For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost. Luke 19:10
 - a. Jesus spoke these words on the occasion of him eating with another notorious “sinner” - Zacchaeus

- b. This was His paradigm - He did not come to shun those who were separate from God, but rather to seek them out to bring them back to God.
- c. Jesus did not come to build walls between Himself and sinners but rather to break down the walls between them and God.
- d. This is the mission of the Son of Man - to seek and to save those who are lost, to call sinners back to a relationship with God.

IV. Applying the Word

A. Do I see Jesus came to seek and save sinners like me?

1. Jesus did not come to condemn us - our sin had already condemned us!
2. Jesus came to seek us out, to call us to God, to forgive our sins, and restore us to full fellowship with our Father.
3. The only requirement is we recognize and confess our sin - and He is gracious and just to forgive us, to cleanse us, to remove sin's stain and power.
4. Do I openly recognize my sin, or do I try to spin it?
5. Do I humbly ask Jesus to forgive my son?
6. Do not live under the weight of guilt and sin! No sin is too great for God to forgive!
7. This story was recorded in Scripture for this very reason - to give us hope that Jesus will take us no matter our sins and struggles if only we will confess, repent, and follow Him.
8. Come, Ye Sinners Poor and Needy - receive grace, mercy, and forgiveness!

Come, ye sinners, poor and wretched,
Weak and wounded, sick and sore;
Jesus, ready, stands to save you,
Full of pity, joined with power.
He is able, He is able;
He is willing; doubt no more.

Come ye needy, come, and welcome,
God's free bounty glorify;
True belief and true repentance,
Every grace that brings you nigh.
Without money, without money
Come to Jesus Christ and buy.

Come, ye weary, heavy laden,
Bruised and broken by the fall;
If you tarry 'til you're better,
You will never come at all.
Not the righteous, not the righteous;
Sinners Jesus came to call.

Let not conscience make you linger,
Nor of fitness fondly dream;
All the fitness He requires
Is to feel your need of Him.
This He gives you, this He gives you,
'Tis the Spirit's rising beam.

B. Am I more like Jesus or the Pharisees?

1. Christians can embrace forgiveness in Christ - and then act like a Pharisee!
2. This was what Francis Schaeffer saw in himself and his fundamentalist companions - legalism.
3. This is especially a temptation in our current culture
 - a. We live in a lawless culture, so it is easy for us to focus on the Law of God at the expense of the Gospel and become legalists in the process.

- b. Our current culture war and politics make everything about division, demonizing those with whom we disagree and seeing them as beyond redemption.
- c. We get personal news feeds that give horror stories of what “they” are doing - even if it is not happening here and now!
- d. We are encouraged to make secondary issues (political and cultural) primary, and to shun those who disagree with our position - legalism.

- 4. This mindset causes us to view other people as the enemy and build walls to protect ourselves from them so that they don't infect us.
- 5. But Jesus knocked down walls and built bridges, believing that the Spirit and Word of God were more powerful than sin and that He would infect them with righteousness rather than them infecting Him with sin!
- 6. This is not about compromising or condoning sin - it is about a spirit that has freely received grace we did not deserve and extends it to others.
- 7. This is not about compromising or condoning sin - it is about a heart full of faith that God's Spirit and Word are powerful to open eyes and draw people to Jesus.
- 8. Is there anyone the Spirit is bringing to mind where I have thought or acted more like a Pharisee than Jesus toward them?
- 9. Is there someone the Spirit is bringing to mind whom I can reach out as Jesus did to the tax collectors and “sinners”?

C. The Table of the Merciful God

- 1. Christ is the Host of this meal where He welcomes and eats and drinks with sinners - you and me!
- 2. Come and receive forgiveness and freedom!
- 3. Let the Spirit work mercy towards others here as well!

The Son of Man and Sinners

Mark 2:13-17
 January 15, 2023
 Communion
 2 John 1:3

Teaching keywords: Jesus; Christology; sin; forgiveness; legalism

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and love. As you have been blessed with these, go forth and be a blessing to those you meet. 2 John 1:3

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