

HATE SIN BUT NOT THE SINNER!

Today's Text: Lk 15: 1-10

Extracts:

Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to [Jesus] to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them." So He spoke this parable to them, saying: "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing... I say to you... there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance" [Lk 15: 1-7]

When an Anti-Homosexuality Bill was proposed in Uganda in 2009, David Kato and his Sexual Minorities Uganda Group (SMUG) campaigned against it and the bill had to be dropped due to international pressures.¹ However, a local newspaper had published the name, photograph and address of Kato, following which he received death threats. Recently, a man reportedly entered his home and beat him to death. A suspect has been arrested but the motive remains controversial. While SMUG sees it as hate killing, the police are of the opinion it could be random.

Kato's story is not far-fetched. There are numerous stories of persons that have been killed or hated for doing what others regard as immoral. For example, women caught in adultery are stoned to death in some societies while most of us would hardly share our neighbourhood with a suspected pedophile. What is common in all those cases is our tendency to hate those we regard as sinners.

In this week's study, the Pharisees and the scribes complained against Jesus for mixing with tax collectors and sinners. In other words, He was showing love to sinners instead of hating them. Jesus gave them an answer from which we can gain true insight into how to relate to those in our midst that we regard as sinners.

¹ Based on "Uganda gay rights activist David Kato killed," *BBC News*, 27 January 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12295718>

1. Background: Jesus confronts hypocrisy clothed in self-righteousness!

The Pharisees and the scribes were supposed to be versed in the Law of Moses. Therefore, they considered themselves suitably placed to judge the conduct of others against their understanding and practices. In this week's Bible text, they complained that Jesus "receives sinners and eats with them" [Lk 15: 1-2]. To receive sinners and eat with them suggests that He was mixing with people that He ought to avoid. In studying the Lord's response to them, we need to pay attention to the following key points:

a) *The said sinners came of their own volition to hear Jesus*

Tax collectors had a bad reputation among the people. For example, when some tax collectors came to John the Baptist by the Jordan to be baptized, and asked him what they should do, he replied, "Collect *no more than what is appointed for you*" [Lk 3: 12-13]. Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector in Jericho. When Jesus offered him the privilege to host Him, people complained, saying, "He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner." Zacchaeus overheard it and said, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by *false accusation*, I restore fourfold" [Lk 19: 1-8]. So, tax collectors then and now tend to practise extortion. But in the story, we are told that "*all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near*" to Jesus "*to hear Him*" [Lk 15: 1]. In other words, the move came from the so-called sinners to hear God's word. Should Jesus turn back those who desired to be led to His Father?

How often have we turned our backs on well-known criminals and prostitutes or back-slidden Christians even when they have shown credible evidence of remorse or repentance? For example, after Saul's encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, leading to his conversion (from persecutor to believer), "when he had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple." It took the faith and boldness of Barnabas to take Paul to the apostles and to vouch for his authenticity [Acts 9: 26-27].

b) *God loves a repentant sinner*

Jesus used two parables to illustrate to the scribes and Pharisees how important repentance is to God. In the Parable of the Lost Sheep, a man had a hundred sheep out of which one was lost. He left the ninety-nine in the wilderness to look for the missing one. Having found it, he lifted it on his shoulders and invited his friends and neighbours to rejoice with him because he had found that which was lost [Lk 15: 3-6]. In the Parable of the Lost Coin, Jesus told the story of a woman who had ten silver coins out of which she lost one. She lit a bright lamp and swept the house and

searched carefully until she found the missing coin. In like manner, she would invite her friends and neighbours to rejoice with her because she had found the piece that was lost [**vv. 8-9**]. Jesus used both parables to drive home to the scribes and Pharisees the point that there is more joy in heaven over one sinner that repents than multiple others who need no repentance; that there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents [**vv. 7, 10**].

The concept used here by Jesus is similar to what economists use to determine the optimal value (price and quantity) of factors that affect supply of or demand for a product or service. They use such elegant terms as “marginal utility” or “elasticity.” In simple terms, they are saying that if a level-playing field were possible, such and such would be the best values to be obtained. They use such terms as “all things being equal” or “holding all things constant” to represent a level-playing field. So, all things being equal, was the lost sheep more mischievous than the ninety-nine that did not go astray? Was the lost coin the worst coin among the ten? In like manner, what makes us superior to other sinners? Are we all not sinners that have fallen short of the glory of God [**Rom. 3: 23**]? Therefore, God loves a repentant sinner because of his/her marginal utility to God’s salvation plan for He is “not willing that any should perish but that *all* should come to repentance” [**2 Pet. 3: 9**].

In sum, Jesus loved the tax collectors and sinners who came to Him but He did not thereby condone their sins. Rather, His love stemmed from the fact that they came to hear Him, that is, to have the chance to repent and be saved. However, we also know that some sinners came to Jesus not to hear Him or be saved but He equally loved them. For example, the woman caught in adultery did not come to hear Jesus. She was escaping from death by stoning. After Jesus had saved her life, He said to her, “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more” [**Jn 8: 1-11**]. How then do we apply Jesus’ example to those around us?

2. Why you should not hate the sinner

Can you love a sinner but hate his/her sins? You can and should for the following reasons, among others:

a) You could be worse than other sinners!

Some people behave as if they are angels and others are devils. Rather than give people the benefit of the doubt, we judge them before we find out the truth. The disciples saw a man born blind and they asked Jesus, “Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” [**Jn 9: 1**]. Yet, among those same disciples was Judas Iscariot who was a thief [**Jn 12: 6**]. In the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, both men came into the temple to pray. The Pharisee stood with confidence and prayed

thus, “God, I thank You that I am not like other men- extortioners, unjust, adulterers, *or even as this tax collector* (the publican)” [Lk 18: 9-11]. He put himself on the judgment seat over the tax collector that he hardly knew! Yet, when some scribes and Pharisees wanted to stone to death a woman caught in adultery in accordance with the Law of Moses, Jesus challenged any of them without sin to cast the first stone. None of them was without sin and they walked away in shame [Jn 8: 3-9]! Most of us are like that- in fact, we could be much worse than those we condemn for their sins.

Recall the story of Judah and his daughter-in-law, Tamar. Following the death of her husband, Er, and Onan, his brother, Judah told Tamar to remain a widow in her father’s house and promised to give her as wife to his surviving son, Shua. In due course, Judah’s wife also died but he did not keep his promise to Tamar. One day, he visited a place near her father’s house. She veiled herself and posing as a prostitute, Judah solicited and obtained her services, leaving her his signet and staff as a pledge. Later, he heard that Tamar was pregnant by harlotry and he said, “Bring her out and let her be burned!” Happily, Tamar had convincing evidence to prove who the father of her baby was- Judah! He acknowledged with remorse, “She has been more righteous than I” [Gen. 38: 1-26]. So, in condemning Tamar, he was actually passing judgment on himself!

That is why we should not rush to judge or hate those we consider sinners. When you point one accusing finger at others, the rest are pointing back at you as if to say, “How about you?” If other people can still love you in spite of your sins, you should extend the same “privilege” to fellow sinners like you.

b) You could be vicariously liable!

In one way or the other, we may find ourselves sharing the blame for other people’s sins. That can come about in several ways, such as:

- Out of *fear*, some people condone error and go along with it in order to save their lives or to protect their selfish interests. For example, when Moses delayed coming down from Mount Sinai, the children of Israel prevailed on Aaron to make them gods that would go before them. As somebody who had worked closely with Moses during the days of the plagues in Egypt and as the man whose lineage God had chosen for the priesthood [Ex. 28: 1], he should have had the spiritual courage to refuse their request. Instead, he gathered gold rings from the people and made them a gold calf which the people treated as their god, saying, “This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!” [Ex.

2: 1-4]. When Moses returned and saw the abomination in the camp, he asked Aaron, “What did this people do to you that you have brought so great a sin upon them?” Aaron replied, “Do not let the anger of my lord become hot. You know this people, that they are set on evil” [**vv. 21-22!**]. Whenever you choose to be politically correct and refuse to defend your faith, you are in this category. You are vicariously liable for the error or sin that you openly condemn.

- Some people are actual *collaborators or partners in sin*. By acts of omission or commission, they encourage people to remain in sin as long as they are benefitting from it. For example, it takes two consenting adults to commit adultery or engage in fornication or perpetrate corrupt practices. A believer who runs a brothel is an active partner with the prostitute-inmates. A pastor who takes fat tithes from people without proven or legitimate means of livelihood is a cooperating recipient of stolen property. A public servant who colludes with the political head of his/her department or with contractors and suppliers to defraud the government loves sin and those involved in it. A Christian doctor who runs an abortion clinic cannot hate his clients, especially those who keep coming back. They are being brand loyal!

c) *The offender could be family!*

The offending party or sinner could be related to you by blood as parents, children or siblings, among other relatives. You may not come at such sinners from an accusatory or holier-than-thou posture, as self-righteous people tend to do but from deep empathy and a willingness to be part of the solution. Parents play that role for their children. No matter how bad children may be, their parents will always love them. They continue to believe in them and pray for them, even when respite does not look possible or imminent.

For example, even though David’s son, Absalom, had rebelled against his father whom he had forced into exile, David continued to pray for his safety in the hands of his troops. After Absalom’s rebellion had been crushed, all that David kept asking the news bearers was whether the young man Absalom was safe. When the king learnt that his son had been killed, he went into his chamber and wept, “O my son, Absalom- my son, my son Absalom-if only I had died in your place! O Absalom, my son my son” [**2 Sam. 18: 1-33**]. Jesus used the same parenthood metaphor when He lamented over Jerusalem, saying, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” [**Matt. 23: 37**].

When you realize that that murderer or thief or sexual pervert could be your parent or child or sibling, you will not rush to condemn or hate people suspected of or convicted for such offenses.

In summary, here are some general principles that we can learn from the study:

- ***We all are sinners in need of Christ's saving grace.*** Therefore, when you understand your situation, you can empathize with fellow sinners
- For that purpose, ***you should have the attitude of the lamb, not that of the pig.*** When you throw both animals into a swamp, the lamb sees itself in a wrong place and is always struggling to get out. The pig, on the other hand, is in its natural habitat! Nobody hates a sinner who is trying to change for the better. So, be the lamb, not the pig!
- ***See a fellow sinner as a person who needs help.*** Therefore, correct rather than condemn. As the word of God puts it, God corrects those He loves as a father the son in whom he delights [**Prov. 3: 12**]
- However, ***there will be sinners who refuse deliverance or correction but you still must not hate them because love suffers long and endures all things [1 Cor. 13: 7-8].*** Even God cannot force people to accept and worship Him, yet He makes the sun to shine on both the good and the evil and the rain to fall on both the just and the unjust [**Matt. 5:45**]. Everyone will account for his/her actions.

3. Conclusion: Jesus will never cast you out!

Jesus has promised, “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and *the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out*” [**Jn 6: 37**]. Jesus was crucified between two thieves. The one on His right asked for forgiveness and Jesus assured him, “Today, you will be with Me in Paradise.” The other one mocked Him and did not repent [**Lk 23: 39-43**]. But Jesus did not condemn him because God did not send His only begotten Son into the world to condemn it but that the world might be saved through Him [**Jn 3: 17**]. That second sinner cast himself out of Christ's saving grace. Yet what Jesus said on the cross applies to one and all, “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do!” [**Lk 23: 34**]. He loves the sinner but hates his/her sin.

To love another sinner is to love your neighbour as yourself because you are not any better. However, you must never condone the evil that others do so that you do not become vicariously liable.

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