

# Was Jesus a Friend of Sinners?

The Pharisees and lawyers scorned Jesus Christ, claiming:

'Behold, a gluttonous man, and a drunkard, a friend of tax-gatherers and sinners!' (Luke 7:34)

Yet in graphic intensity, the Apostle James warns fellow Christians against friendship with the world:

You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (James 4:4)

Was Jesus a comrade of those who were unrepentant? Do we find Christ schmoozing with the ungodly? Did our Lord and Savior perhaps seek out friendships, social connections or ingratiation with impious human leaders – with the “gatekeepers” of society? To restate these questions in plain Biblical terms: Was Jesus Christ an enemy of God?

Quite to the contrary. Scripture establishes that our Savior was “tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). Thus, we can understand immediately from the above passage recorded by James, the fact that **Jesus could not have been any “friend” of the world**, any more than He could have been a glutton or a drunkard. (See 1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

What then, was Jesus’ relationship with sinners?

Moreover, how does Christ’s interaction with sinners provide an example for us, as Christians, to model in our own daily living? Let’s take a closer look.

## The Richness of His Mercy

In examining Christ’s relationship with sinners, we see first that the Bible frequently testifies of the richness of Christ’s overflowing love and mercy toward **us** as sinners. Here are just two examples:

God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

And the Pharisees and their scribes began grumbling at His disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with the tax-gatherers and sinners?"

And Jesus answered and said to them, "It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." (Luke 5:30-32)

Here we have seen the documented evidence of Jesus' active compassion toward each one of us as sinners.

## **Righteous Separation**

Yet we find that King David, "the sweet Psalmist of Israel," pleaded his uprightness to God, significantly on the basis of his own refusal to commingle with sinners:

Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity;  
And I have trusted in the LORD without wavering.  
Examine me, O LORD, and try me;  
Test my mind and my heart.  
For Thy lovingkindness is before my eyes,  
And I have walked in Thy truth.  
I do not sit with deceitful men,  
Nor will I go with pretenders.  
I hate the assembly of evildoers,  
And I will not sit with the wicked.  
I shall wash my hands in innocence,  
And I will go about Thine altar, O LORD,  
That I may proclaim with the voice of thanksgiving,  
And declare all Thy wonders. (Psalm 26:1-7)

God emphatically warns us against companionship with evildoers, by the words of His prophet Asaph:

But to the wicked God says,  
"What right have you to tell of My statutes,  
And to take My covenant in your mouth?  
For you hate discipline,  
And you cast My words behind you.  
When you see a thief, you are pleased with him,  
And you associate with adulterers...

"These things you have done, and I kept silence;  
You thought that I was just like you;  
I will reprove you, and state the case in order before your eyes.  
Now consider this, you who forget God,  
Lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver. (Psalm 50:16-18,  
21-22)

In the same vein, through the wisdom of the Proverbs, God admonishes us:

Do not be envious of evil men, Nor desire to be with them; (Proverbs 24:1)

Indeed, we find that Jesus Christ Himself warns us against several behaviors, including eating and drinking with drunkards:

But if that evil slave says in his heart, 'My master is not coming for a long time, 'and shall begin to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards; the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, and shall cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; weeping shall be there and the gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 24:48-51)

How then, do we properly understand and explain the interactions of Christ with sinners – events which are well documented in the Bible?

## **Regard for Repentance**

As we will see as we go on, the gospel of Luke provides some particularly insightful glimpses into these occasions. Let's return to Luke, chapter 5:

And after that He went out, and noticed a tax-gatherer named Levi [more commonly known as Matthew], sitting in the tax office, and He said to him, "Follow Me." And he left everything behind, and rose and began to follow Him. And Levi gave a big reception for Him in his house; and there was a great crowd of tax-gatherers and other people who were reclining at the table with them. And the Pharisees and their scribes began grumbling at His disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with the tax-gatherers and sinners?" (Luke 5:27-30)

Was Christ simply partying with a decadent crowd, or was there something entirely different going on here?

The gospel of Matthew lends significant perspective:

...Jesus said to them [the chief priests and elders of the people], "Truly I say to you that the tax-gatherers and harlots will get into the kingdom of God before you. "For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax-gatherers and harlots did believe him; and you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him. (Matthew 21:31-32)

Luke corroborates:

And when all the people and the tax-gatherers heard this, they acknowledged God's justice, having been baptized with the baptism of John. (Luke 7: 29)

What then, were the circumstances under which the newly-called disciple [later apostle] Matthew invited his fellow tax gatherers and other “sinners” to his big reception for Christ?

Matthew, a tax collector, has been called to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. Matthew has willingly left everything – his livelihood and the wealth it brought – to follow Christ.

Then Matthew gives a reception in honor of Christ, which must have also been, in one sense, a huge farewell dinner to his professional colleagues. Further, given what we have seen from the Scriptural insights, perhaps the majority of Matthew's guests were already repentant, having received the baptism of John. Certainly, other sinners would have come to the reception to learn more of Christ and of His message.

Of course, as we have also seen, the chief priests and elders of the people did not acknowledge John the Baptist as a prophet, nor did they respect the baptism of John; thus, they would not have differentiated between a sinner who had repented, and one who had not. We will see this point further substantiated as we go on.

Let's proceed now to some other occasions recorded in the gospel of Luke. Many of us remember the story of the diminutive Zaccheus, who had to climb a tree in order to see Christ:

And He entered and was passing through Jericho. And behold, there was a man called by the name of Zaccheus; and he was a chief tax-gatherer, and he was rich. And he was trying to see who Jesus was, and he was unable because of the crowd, for he was small in stature. And he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree in order to see Him, for He was about to pass through that way. And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and said to him, "Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house." And he hurried and came down, and received Him gladly. And when they saw it, they all began to grumble, saying, "He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." And Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:1-10)

This is an amazing account! Let's be sure that we truly recognize what is shared here.

Zaccheus is a tax-gatherer. In fact, he is a chief tax-gatherer. He is rich.

Cleverly, the Romans had employed Jews to collect the Roman taxes, in order to deflect the natural hatred against the Roman conquest of the Jewish nation. The reaction of the observant Jews was to despise the tax-gatherers generally, considering them guilty of dishonesty and extortion, which probably accurately reflected the behavior of most within the despised profession.

Consequently, it is not surprising to read that Zaccheus is considered by all in his city to be a sinner. Christ's comment seems to affirm Zaccheus' guilt: "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Yet what remarkable change had begun to take place in the heart of Zaccheus?

And he hurried and came down, and received Him gladly ... And Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much."

Zaccheus was repentant! Christ was honoring the repentance of Zaccheus with His presence as a houseguest in Zaccheus' home.

However, the unrepentant citizens of Jericho were unwilling to recognize the evidence of Zaccheus' repentant change. They regarded him as a "sinner," focusing only upon the apparent sins of his past.

God, on the other hand, judges righteous judgment. Without regard to disagreement from carnal human beings, God does recognize repentance:

"The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.

"But if the wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed and observes all My statutes and practices justice and righteousness, he shall surely live; he shall not die. All his transgressions which he has committed will not be remembered against him; because of his righteousness which he has practiced, he will live.

"Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked," declares the Lord GOD, "rather than that he should turn from his ways and live? But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity, and

does according to all the abominations that a wicked man does, will he live? All his righteous deeds which he has done will not be remembered for his treachery which he has committed and his sin which he has committed; for them he will die.

"Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not right.' Hear now, O house of Israel! Is My way not right? Is it not your ways that are not right?

"When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity, and dies because of it, for his iniquity which he has committed he will die.

"Again, when a wicked man turns away from his wickedness which he has committed and practices justice and righteousness, he will save his life. Because he considered and turned away from all his transgressions which he had committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die.

"But the house of Israel says, 'The way of the Lord is not right.' Are My ways not right, O house of Israel? Is it not your ways that are not right? Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct," declares the Lord GOD. "Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you. Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies," declares the Lord GOD. "Therefore, repent and live." (Ezekiel 18:20-32)

Carnal men argue that God is not right to disregard the righteous past of a man who turns, becoming wicked. Some carnal men argue that God is not right to regard the righteousness of a man's repentance, if he has previously been wicked.

Yet to our Eternal Father and His Son Jesus Christ, whose ways define righteousness, repentance determines life or death. "Therefore, [God adjures us] repent and live."

Throughout the chapter of Luke 15, Christ expands upon this theme. Our Savior paints a touching and instructive picture:

Now all the tax-gatherers and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. And both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

And He told them this parable, saying,

"What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture, 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. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

"Or what woman, if she has ten silver coins and loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost!'

"In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

And He said, "A certain man had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' And he divided his wealth between them. And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be in need. And he went and attached himself to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he was longing to fill his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him.

"But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! 'I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.'" And he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him, and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him, and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.' And they began to be merry.

"Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things might be. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf,

because he has received him back safe and sound.' But he became angry, and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began entreating him. But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you, and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a kid, that I might be merry with my friends; but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with harlots, you killed the fattened calf for him.' And he said to him, 'My child, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to be merry and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.'" (Luke 15:1-32)

What is the common thread of these parables? Again, it is Jesus Christ emphasizing God's great, merciful, and loving regard for the repentance of those who sin.

## **Jesus' Astounding Example**

Appreciating that impact of repentance, let's go on to examine some occasions where it is recorded that Christ did eat with unrepentant men – although it is evident that they were men who imagined themselves to be righteous!

Again, we find ourselves looking through the eyes of Luke, in this instance with Christ as He dined at the home of a Pharisee. How did Jesus handle this situation? Did He take the socially acceptable approach of keeping His counsel to Himself, minimizing any conflict?

As we read this account, let's ask ourselves: how would Jesus be perceived as a dinner guest in our society today, if He conducted Himself in this fashion?

Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with him. And He entered the Pharisee's house, and reclined at the table. And behold, there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet, and anointing them with the perfume.

Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner." (Luke 7:36-39)

We should note here that the host did not even vocalize these criticisms of Christ, or of the woman. Yet as we will see, ***Christ sees fit to rebuke His host, even for the error of his unvoiced thoughts:***

And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he replied, "Say it, Teacher." "A certain moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. Which of them therefore will love him more?"

Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have judged correctly."

And turning toward the woman, He said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair. You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little." (Luke 7:40-47)

What compelling abrasiveness toward the host, whose home Jesus had entered as an invited guest! Christ would not condone even the wrong thoughts of His host. ***Our Lord and Savior refused to be governed by the dictates of social politeness!***

After word of those events spread, it seems a bit surprising that Christ continued to receive invitations from the Pharisees. Obviously, there were some who had yet to feel the sting of Christ's forthrightness. Thus, again we read that Christ was asked to lunch in the home of a Pharisee. Will we find Christ here in a more courteous state of mind? Far from it! Let's look at this truly astounding luncheon conversation:

Now when He had spoken, a Pharisee asked Him to have lunch with him; and He went in, and reclined at the table. And when the Pharisee saw it, he was surprised that He had not first ceremonially washed before the meal.

But the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the platter; but inside of you, you are full of robbery and wickedness. "You foolish ones, did not He who made the outside make the inside also? But give that which is within as charity, and then all things are clean for you. But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithe of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, and yet disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting

the others. Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the front seats in the synagogues, and the respectful greetings in the market places. Woe to you! For you are like concealed tombs, and the people who walk over them are unaware of it."

And one of the lawyers said to Him in reply, "Teacher, when You say this, You insult us too." (Luke 11:37-45)

"Surely Jesus will realize how rudely He is behaving," this arbiter of Jewish religious law may have reasoned, "especially when I make clear to Him that His ill-mannered insults are touching even us – we who should be accorded the utmost respect."

Did Christ take the hint? Did Jesus collect Himself and begin to act as one would expect of a gracious guest? Not at all. Further provoking the lawyers, Christ kept right on, pointing directly at them:

... "Woe to you lawyers as well! For you weigh men down with burdens hard to bear, while you yourselves will not even touch the burdens with one of your fingers. Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and it was your fathers who killed them. Consequently, you are witnesses and approve the deeds of your fathers; because it was they who killed them, and you build their tombs. For this reason also the wisdom of God said, 'I will send to them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and some they will persecute, in order that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation.' Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered." (Luke 11:46-52)

And when He [Christ] left there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to be very hostile and to question Him closely on many subjects, plotting against Him, to catch Him in something He might say. (Luke 11:53-54)

Is it any wonder that the Jewish leaders began to be very hostile against Jesus?

***The scribes and Pharisees were unwilling to repent, and Christ was unwilling to relent in His condemnation of their unrighteous attitude!***

However, let's not forget to look a little closer to home. How would you, or how would I, react if Christ were asserting Himself so bluntly as our dinner guest? What if the exchange went something like this?

And it came about when He went into the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees on the Sabbath to eat bread, that they were watching Him closely. And there, in front of Him was a certain man suffering from dropsy. And Jesus answered and spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" But they kept silent. And He took hold of him, and healed him, and sent him away.

And He said to them, "Which one of you shall have a son or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?" And they could make no reply to this.

And He began speaking a parable to the invited guests when He noticed how they had been picking out the places of honor at the table; saying to them, "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him, and he who invited you both shall come and say to you, 'Give place to this man,' and then in disgrace you proceed to occupy the last place. But when you are invited, go and recline at the last place, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will have honor in the sight of all who are at the table with you. For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted." (Luke 14:1-11)

Here is one dinner guest, Jesus, taking upon Himself the correction of the other invited guests! "Who," it could have been asked, "does this man think He is?" Yet Christ does not end with admonishing the guests. Next in the line of Christ's verbal fire, is the host!

And He also went on to say to the one who had invited Him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return, and repayment come to you. But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

And when one of those who were reclining at the table with Him heard this, he said to Him, "Blessed is everyone who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!" (Luke 14:12-15)

Ah, at last, a positive statement offensive to no one – a comment typical of the proverbial peacemaker. Are we referring to Christ? No, it was His fellow Sabbath guest who, it seems, was desperately seeking to redirect this painfully awkward and uncomfortable conversation to a more pleasant and agreeable topic.

Did Christ grant that desired respite? Hardly:

But He said to him, "A certain man was giving a big dinner, and he invited many; and at the dinner hour he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for everything is ready now.' But they all alike began to make excuses. The first one said to him, 'I have bought a piece of land and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me excused.' And another one said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please consider me excused.' And another one said, 'I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come.' And the slave came back and reported this to his master. Then the head of the household became angry and said to his slave, 'Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and crippled and blind and lame.' And the slave said, 'Master, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' And the master said to the slave, 'Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.

'For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner.'" (Luke 14:16-24)

**What?** Given the context, Jesus' fellow guests certainly would have known that the "big dinner" of which Jesus spoke was in reference to the "eating of bread in the Kingdom of God," to which the other guest had alluded.

***Christ as much as told His fellow dinner guests that because of their ongoing misconduct, they would be excluded from God's Kingdom!***

Even toward a Jewish leader who respectfully sought out Jesus to learn from Him, Christ did not mince words. Unsparingly, Christ rejoined to Nicodemus' sincere question:

Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak that which we know, and bear witness of that which we have seen; and you do not receive our witness. If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how shall you believe if I tell you heavenly things? (John 3:9-12)

Moreover, Christ continued right on, unraveling the influential Nicodemus' strategy of visiting Him only at night:

He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their

deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God. (John 3:18-21)

Although subsequent events would establish Nicodemus' sincerity (See John 7:50 and 19:39), Christ clearly did not guard His words in order to preserve any social advantage of His connection with this ruler of the Jews. Christ did not moderate His approach to enhance this potentially valuable social connection.

Further, as we have already seen clearly demonstrated in Scripture, Jesus was certainly no comrade of those who were unrepentant. While He interacted with them as a teacher and as a force of warning, nowhere do we find Christ schmoozing with the impenitent. Clearly, Christ did not seek out friendships, social connections or ingratiation with impious human leaders – with the “gatekeepers” of society.

***At the peril of His own life, Christ rebuked and upbraided, without partiality, men great and small who were unwilling to submit to sovereignty of Almighty God.***

## **Our Lives in Today's World**

The Bible commands us to walk as Christ walked. (See 1 John 2:6.) Therefore, what do these things mean for us, as we seek to follow in Christ's footsteps?

***It is important that we not overlook the fact that there were times when Christ enjoyed social occasions, comporting Himself as would epitomize and surpass expectations for a gracious guest.*** The wedding in Cana provides an excellent example:

And on the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; and Jesus also was invited, and His disciples, to the wedding. And when the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine." ... Now there were six stone waterpots set there for the Jewish custom of purification, containing twenty or thirty gallons each. Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." And they filled them up to the brim. And He said to them, "Draw some out now, and take it to the headwaiter." And they took it to him. And when the headwaiter tasted the water which had become wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom, and said to him, "Every man serves the good wine first, and when men have drunk freely, then that which is poorer; you have kept the good wine until now." (John 2:1-3, 6-10.)

We see no mention of Christ chiding or abrading, either the host or the guests at this happy occasion. Instead, Christ contributed to the joy of the celebration by providing additional wine to compensate for an unanticipated shortage.

On the other hand, we need to recognize that this Biblical example cannot be used to recommend or to defend fraternization with the impious. Mary, a devout servant of God, seems to have been a special guest of the group, and Christ and His disciples were invited – factors which certainly suggest the bridegroom’s respect for God and for His way of life. Scripture does not directly comment upon the piety, or the impiety, of those with whom Christ shared in that celebration.

The apostle Paul also offers us some very helpful instruction:

I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters; for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler-- not even to eat with such a one. (1 Corinthians 5:9-11)

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us. (2 Thessalonians 3:6)

And if anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that man and do not associate with him, so that he may be put to shame. And yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. (2 Thessalonians 3:14-15)

Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned. (Titus 3:10-11)

***We are not to socialize at all with people who, having become part of God’s Church, are practicing sin!***

On the other hand, Paul, writing to Christians who were surrounded by an unholy society, acknowledges that some shared meals and social interactions with unbelievers will need to occur, in order for Christians surrounded by such a society, at times to witness to the world and also to conduct the affairs of daily living.

For us as Christians today, the same will generally be true also. Christ clarifies that although we are sent into the world – although we must function *in* the world – ***we must not be of the world:***

I have given them Thy word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth. As Thou didst send Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. (John 17:14-18)

Paul adds an additional important admonition, to help us gain a more complete comprehension of ***our responsibility and our reward*** – in relation to this vital spiritual concept:

Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said,

"I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM;  
AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.  
Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE," says the Lord.

"AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN;  
And I will welcome you.  
And I will be a father to you,  
And you shall be sons and daughters to Me,"  
Says the Lord Almighty. (2 Corinthians 6:14-18; 2 Corinthians 7:1 below)

"Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

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