

Worse Sinners

Luke 12 records Jesus' sermon to an audience so vast that people were stepping on each other. On this occasion, some told Him about a group of Galileans whom Pilate butchered while they were in the process of offering sacrifices. Perhaps this was reported to divert attention from themselves Jesus had just sternly rebuked the multitude. At any rate, the implication was what terrible sinners these must have been!

Jesus answered, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered this fate?" (Lk. 13:2). In other words, can we tell by what befalls a man what kind of man he is?

Sin's Consequences

In one way the answer is yes. Sin has immediate consequences as well as eternal ones. Moses told ancient Israel, "Be sure your sin will find you out" (Num. 32:23). Solomon observed that "the way of transgressors is hard" (Pro. 13:15, KJV).

One who drinks alcohol is far more likely to have a debilitating or fatal traffic accident. A promiscuous man lives in fear of discovery and disease. Lying, cheating, swindling, and stealing invite others' wrath. Divorce is laden with heartache. In this sense it is absolutely true that the more one sins, the harder his life. This is one reason Paul said godliness holds promise for the present life as well as the life to come (1 Tim. 4:8).

Sin and Suffering

We go too far, however, when we always equate one's suffering with his sin. This was the mistake of Job's friends, who argued that only sinners suffer in life, while the righteous always do well. That has never been true.

One may face hardship as the result of another's sin, not his own. Or, hardship may not at all be directly related to anyone's conduct, as in the case of the blind man in John 9 (note v. 2). Conversely, since God "causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Mt. 5:45), He may allow the wicked to prosper materially. The point is, God's estimate of a man is not necessarily revealed by the man's lot in life.

Worse Sins and Sinners

Jesus' answer built on this truth. Were these greater sinners? "I tell you, no, but, unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Lk. 13:3). He then cited a similar circumstance and reiterated His conclusion (vv. 4-5). In so doing, the Lord returned the drifting focus of His hearers to where it was needed: on themselves. It is not another's sins but my sins that I need to assess.

It certainly is true that some people are greater sinners in that they sin more often. It is also true that in certain ways, some sins are worse than others. Some have greater temporal consequences on self or others (I would rather live next door to a glutton than a murderer!). But the sober truth is, any sin separates us from God, and any sinner who does not repent will be lost eternally.

- by Frank Himmel

Do You Pray During the Worship Services?

The worshipper who would pray in the assembly must do more than bow his head and close his eyes. He must pray. "Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uniformed say 'Amen' at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say?" (1 Corinthians 14:16). This verse suggests four requirements if one is to enter into a prayer.

1. He must listen to the prayer. One cannot legitimately say "Amen" at the conclusion of a prayer if he has not listened to the prayer. "Mind-wandering" is an ever-present problem. We sing, but we don't observe the words of the song. We bow our heads, but we don't listen to the prayer. We sit through the sermon, but our minds wander to things of an earthly nature. Consequently, we attend worship periods, but we don't worship as we ought. If one is to pray, with the congregation, he must listen to the prayer.

2. He must understand the prayer. When a man in the first century led a prayer in an unknown tongue, the worshiper could not say "Amen," for he could not understand the language in which the prayer was spoken. Neither could the worshiper say "Amen" today if the leader has not spoken loudly enough to be heard or if he has used words or phrases which the worshiper does not understand. Those who lead prayers in the assembly should be conscious of the needs of the whole congregation, speaking up where all can hear and using words which all can understand.

3. He must agree with the prayer. A number of years ago, while sitting beside an older preacher, I observed his saying "Yes" or "Yes, Lord" at the conclusion of each separate phrase of the prayer as it was being led. He spoke the words softly enough that I was probably the only one in the assembly who could hear them, but I was impressed. Obviously, this brother was listening to every phrase, determining whether or not he agreed with the phrase, and was then softly speaking his agreement. He was not just sitting through a prayer; he was praying. Occasionally, we hear sentiments expressed in prayer with which we do not agree. To these sentiments we cannot say "Amen."

4. He must say "Amen." The word "Amen" means "so let it be." We long to hear the strong, resounding "Amen" at the close of prayers which we used to hear. We fear that the move away from this practice is just another step toward cold, lifeless formality in our worship periods. We are not contending, however, that one must say the word "Amen" audibly; but we are suggesting that at least in his mind he should say "Amen," thus making the prayer his own prayer. He has listened to the prayer; he has understood the prayer; he has agreed with the prayer; now he speaks to God his "Amen" or approval of the prayer as his prayer. In this manner, he unites with other worshipers in common prayer unto God.

- by Bill Hall

A Servant's Heart

Our Lord taught that if we would be truly great in His kingdom, we MUST develop a servant's heart. "But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant" (Mt. 23:11). If we understand this truth, then we will be working more and more to acquire the attitudes and characteristics of a servant. What are some of these?

If I possess a servant's heart, then I will be ready and willing to do any job that needs to be done even when it is not the job that I really wanted to do. Some tasks are difficult and receive little recognition, but I'll do these anyway. After all, I shouldn't be doing my works to be "seen of men" (Matt. 6:1ff).

With a servant's heart I will worry less (ultimately none at all) about how others serve me, and I will be more interested in finding ways to serve others. "Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant" (Matt. 20:26,27).

As a faithful servant, I will not be rebellious against God, the things taught in His word, or to those who are in authority over me (elders, parents, employers, etc.). To do so would be completely contradictory to the whole notion of servanthood (1 Peter 5:5-7).

As I grow in these attributes of a servant, I will begin to see myself and my needs as less important in the "bigger scheme" of things. "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith (Romans 12:3).

And finally, as a servant who is seeking to please God, I will grow in the realization that my work is never done - that I have never done as much as I could have or should have done. "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (Lk. 17:10).

- by Greg Gwin