

Sinners in the Church

by N.M.

What, really, is the true objective of the Church? To separate the good from the bad?
Or could it perhaps be to accept the bad, and help them "clean up"?

- The parable of the Prodigal Son
- Agony, over the lost brother

The above questions arise, when we bring to mind the inconsiderate and cruel manner in which certain religions behave towards their departing or expelled members. More specifically, the Watchtower organization forces its remaining members to not speak and not greet anyone who ends up outside its organization, for whichever reason. This behaviour of theirs is motivated on the one hand by their need to **isolate** those who decide to depart, so that **the others in their organization never find out the truth**

behind that departure, and on the other hand, so that it can claim that it is (supposedly) a "clean organization, which expels the unclean".

Let's take a look however at what the Holy Bible says about these things:

The parable of the Prodigal Son

Our Lord Jesus Christ tells us that Christians must follow in His footsteps, and emulate His example. He said: "...**he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also...**" (John 14:12).

The Apostle Paul similarly said: "**Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ**" (1 Cor.11:1)

So, if we observe how Jesus Christ behaved towards sinners, we have an exemplar that we too can emulate. By doing so, we will see what God's will is, and we will follow His example. "**Therefore, be imitators of God, as dear children**" (Ephes. 5:1)

What did Jesus Christ say about God's behaviour towards sinners? Did He perhaps say that we should send them away and never speak to them again, so that we can claim to have a "pure Church"? Or did He say that we should approach them, with the aim to heal them?

We have an extremely important example, in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Jesus Christ Himself narrated it, as found in Luke's Gospel (Luke 15:32).

In there, He spoke of a father who had two sons. The younger son one day went and asked his father to give him his share of the paternal inheritance, so that he can leave home. His kind-hearted father did in fact give him his share. The son moved out of his father's house, then squandered all his fortune by living in total debauchery, until, finally, he ended up being deprived even of food. In order to survive, he herded pigs and he even coveted the pods that the pigs ate. One day, he decided to return to his father's house - not as a son, but as a

servant - so that he might at least secure a meal. He did not return to his father out of love, but out of need. When his father spotted him from a distance, he did not wait for his son to come to him, but instead, he ran towards his son and embraced him and kissed him first. Neither did the father ask him to clean up and dress himself first; he welcomed him as he was, dressed in rags; he then bathed him and dressed him with clean clothes in the paternal home. He also gave him a ring, and slaughtered the finest calf for the celebration. However, the elder brother became resentful. He complained about his father's kindness towards his sinful brother, who had squandered all that money on whores and debauchery.

"*You never had such a celebration for my sake*", he told his father.

His father however, corrected his viewpoint:

"*My child, you have always been with me, and whatever I have is also yours. You should come and rejoice along with us now, because this brother of yours was dead and he is again alive; he was lost, and now has been found.*"

Of course there is no need for wisdom here, for one to understand that the father of the parable was God, and that the younger son is every sinner who has distanced himself from the Father's House, the Church.

So, what do we observe here?

To begin with, the father did not send away his scatterbrained son. His son left home, of his own free will. God likewise does not send any one away from His Church ! "**...and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out**" (John 6:37). The groups we referred to however, on the contrary (and solely per their own judgment) expel even those who have sinned, but still love God. Surely these "churches" can't be God's ?!

Anyway, when the younger son returns home, his father accepts him and even runs to welcome him; he doesn't say "*go away and come back in a few months, after I make sure you've corrected yourself*". The father in the parable accepts him the way he is - in his rags, his filth

and his sin! He does not send his son off to wash himself first, so as not to sully the house's "front". The father bathes him, cleans him and dresses him, **inside the paternal home.**

Contrary to this behaviour, many seemingly pious groups expel such people, "until they have cleaned themselves up". Understandably then, one might wonder if it is possible for such groups to have anything to do with our benevolent Father, God. One wonders what their actual role is, if they are not concerned with helping a sinner to become cleansed, but rather, that the sinner should depart from them in order to be cleansed!!! In fact, the Watchtower forbids its members to speak or even greet any people who may have not sinned, but have simply departed from that organization, for reasons of their own. Would the father of the parable have acted that way?

The father in the parable dresses his son with the "clean garment" of vindication, and gives him the "betrothal ring" of the Holy Spirit, **inside the paternal home!** (Ephesians 1)

Here lies the role of the Church! To help each sinner become clean, within Her bosom. The Church does not send away sinners; She calls to them to approach Her, so that She may help them to repent.

The father in the parable is also not swayed by the supposedly "ethical" indignation displayed by his elder son. On the contrary, he reproaches him and explains the importance of a sinner's salvation. The father does not stop to think that his "impure" son is shameful, or that he is sullyng the family's good name. Above and beyond the family's "front", he is concerned with his son's salvation.

What a difference, when comparing this attitude to the seemingly pious religious groups! They sacrifice the "lost sheep", for the sake of their group's front. They need to preserve their good name - AT ALL COSTS - even if that requires doing it over the dead bodies of their strayed brethren.

And how reminiscent of God is His Orthodox Church ! By following His example, we do not send away anyone! WE ARE NOT INTERESTED in claiming we are the "church of the pure". After all, we already know that the Church of the Lord also has "[tares](#)" inside Her. Instead of concerning ourselves with preserving a good name, we prefer to pick up our sinned brother, show him the method of therapy, and if he so desires, be purified and whiten his robe once again, so that the betrothal of the Holy Spirit may begin to act within him.

**This is why these Protestant groups accuse us:
Because we do not send our brother away
Because we do not have a "display front"
Because we follow the example of our heavenly Father, and of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

But this is not so unusual. "***No servant is greater than his master***" Jesus Christ had said; "***if they have guarded My words, they will guard yours also***" (John 15:20). Whatever these groups accuse us of, they had also accused Jesus Christ of the very same things. They accuse us that Orthodoxy has sinners and fornicators in her, just as they had accused Jesus Christ, as mentioned in Luke 15:1-2: "***Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, 'This Man receives sinners and eats with them'.***"

In response, Jesus mentioned three parables. They can be found in the 15th chapter of Luke; one of the parables is the one of the Prodigal Son that we just mentioned. By following once again the example of our Lord, we will point out the other two parables, for the attention of the contemporary Pharisee critics of the Church.

Agony, over the lost brother

The other parable is found in verses 3-7 of the same,

15th chapter of Luke's Gospel:

"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. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance."

Listen, dear readers - you, who accuse us of receiving sinners - if you do not listen to us, then at least listen to the Lord ! There is a vast difference between a sheep and a sinner! It is not possible for us to abandon him, even if there is only a slight chance of him becoming healed. There is nothing of value about a "front"! Jesus didn't concern Himself with any accusations; He simply continued to receive sinners, and saved many of them!

Likewise, in the following example of the woman that the Lord spoke of immediately after, as also recorded in chapter 15 of Luke's Gospel, in verses 8-10:

"Or, what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!' Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Let those who have ears listen to the words of the Lord. And let those who abandon a strayed brother for fear of being criticized be ashamed of themselves, because they are crushing the one "***for whom Christ died***". (Romans 5:6-8)

"Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, ¹³ and make straight

paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed." (Hebrews 12:12-13).

Support the sinners, and do not abandon them! Become emulators of Jesus Christ, and not like His Pharisee critics, who want to separate themselves from those of the "world".

Besides, the term "Pharisee" means "the separate one".

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