

How Are Christians to Associate with "Sinners"

In the world today, Christians are often faced with the question of how to interact with people who don't share the same faith or lifestyle. Jesus, in His life and ministry, modeled perfect love, grace, and truth in His interactions with sinners. As His followers, we are called to reflect His example while living in a world that often rejects God's ways.

Scriptural Foundations:

1. Jesus' Compassion for Sinners:

- **Luke 19:10** – *"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."*
 - Jesus came to offer salvation, not condemnation. His mission was to restore the broken, heal the hurting, and bring the lost back to God. Christians are called to embody this same mission.

- **Matthew 9:10-13** – *"While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?' On hearing this, Jesus said, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.'"*
 - Jesus intentionally dined with sinners to show that His mission was to bring healing, not to affirm their sinful ways, but to lead them to repentance and a transformed life.

- **Mark 2:15-17** – *"As Jesus reclined at the table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When 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?' 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.'"*
 - Jesus used this moment to show that His love and grace were available to all, regardless of their past mistakes or current lifestyle.

2. Jesus' Call to Love:

- **Matthew 5:43-44** – *"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."*
 - Loving sinners doesn't mean we approve of their actions, but it means

- showing them kindness, compassion, and the love of Christ. Our attitudes and actions toward them should reflect God's love, which is unconditional.
- **Luke 6:32-36** – *"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them... But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."*
 - Jesus emphasized that the true test of Christian love is in loving those who are not easy to love — the "sinners" of the world.

3. Jesus' Example in Personal Relationships:

- **John 4:1-26** – *The Woman at the Well.*
 - Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman is a powerful example of engaging with sinners in a loving, respectful, and transformative way. He didn't condone her sinful lifestyle, but He offered her the living water of salvation.
 - Jesus knew how to meet people where they were — He approached them with grace and truth, inviting them into a deeper relationship with God without compromise.

4. Jesus' Forgiveness and Mercy:

- **John 8:3-11** – *The Woman Caught in Adultery.*
 - The story of the woman caught in adultery shows that while Jesus does not condone sin, He does not condemn the sinner. He extends forgiveness, but He also tells her to "go and sin no more."
 - This balance of grace and truth is essential in how Christians should interact with sinners. We are called to share the message of forgiveness and to urge others to leave their lives of sin behind.

How We Should Reflect Jesus' Interactions with Sinners:

1. Be a Friend to Sinners Without Participating in Sin:

- **Luke 15:1-2** – Jesus was known as a friend of sinners, but He never participated in their sin. Christians should be present with people who need Jesus, showing them love and care while maintaining a clear distinction from sinful behaviors.

2. Speak the Truth in Love:

- **Ephesians 4:15** – *“Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.”*
 - We can't shy away from the truth about sin, but we must deliver it with love and gentleness. Jesus spoke hard truths, but He did so in a way that invited people to change, not to feel condemned.

3. Offer Grace, Not Condemnation:

- **Romans 8:1** – *“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”*
 - Christians should embody the grace that has been extended to them. Instead of condemning others, we are to offer the same grace that we received from Jesus.

4. See People as Christ Sees Them:

- **2 Corinthians 5:16-20** – *“So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer... We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.”*
 - We are called to see people as lost souls in need of salvation, not merely as sinners who need to be judged. Jesus saw the potential in people, and we should see others through His eyes.

5. Seek to Restore, Not to Judge:

- **Galatians 6:1** – *“Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.”*

- The goal of interacting with sinners should be restoration, not judgment. Jesus' purpose was to heal, and as His followers, our aim should be to help others find their way back to God.

Application for Today's Christians

1. Build Relationships with Non-Christians:

- Just as Jesus ate and conversed with sinners, Christians should seek opportunities to build relationships with those who do not know Christ. These relationships should be rooted in love and respect, and should not avoid difficult conversations about faith, but be guided by grace.

2. Practice Intentional Listening:

- Listening well allows us to understand the person's struggles and needs, and gives us the opportunity to speak life and truth into their situation when the time is right.

3. Don't Separate Yourself from the World, But Be Set Apart:

- We are in the world but not of the world (John 17:14-16). We shouldn't isolate ourselves from sinners, but rather engage with them in ways that point them toward Christ without compromising our own values.

4. Share Your Story of Grace – testimony:

- Be open about your own journey of forgiveness and transformation. Just as Jesus shared with the woman at the well and others, we can share the story of how Christ has changed our lives.

5. Pray for Wisdom:

- Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your interactions, giving you wisdom on when to speak, what to say, and when to remain silent. Our aim is to reflect Christ's heart toward sinners in all that we do.

Conclusion:

As followers of Christ, we are called to reflect His love and grace toward sinners. Jesus didn't come to condemn the world but to save it, and in the same way, we are to approach sinners with the same heart of mercy and compassion, offering the truth of the gospel while embodying the love of Christ. Our mission is not to isolate ourselves from the world, but to engage with it in a way that invites people to experience the transforming power of Jesus.

Let us pray for strength and guidance to reflect Jesus in all our relationships, loving those who are lost and showing them the way to redemption.