

*Mark 2:16-17*

*"When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that He was eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they said to His disciples, 'Why is He eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners?' And hearing this, Jesus said to them, 'It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.'"*

Religious study is the history of mankind's search for God. What makes Christianity unique is that it presents itself as God's search for mankind. But God's search and rescue is often in the arenas of life where we seldom tread. The homosexual and the prostitute are in needs of healing as much as the paralytic and the leper. Sadly, little has changed since the days of Jesus, where an audible gasp was probably heard by those who witnessed Jesus call Levi to follow Him.

The calling of Levi exposes the tendency for God's people to exclude and write off others engaged in sin we would never see ourselves committing. I suppose it is human nature to assume those who are chosen by God will be those who are most like us. Yet we forget Jesus went to those who were despised and unclean to redeem them for God's Kingdom. I have known many who have felt the stone wall of resistance to "those kinds of people" from the same people who sang about how God's grace "saved a wretch like me." Is it too amazing for us to see the same grace is extended to save those we are convinced deserve punishment?

How many Christians today would be no less agitated than the Pharisees if they found the people protesting the convictions of certain Christian businesses sitting in the seat next to them because someone had the courage to go to them and tell them God loves them as much as the righteous? We applaud handing out tracts in a fleeting bid to witness to those who gather at the tavern, but to invite the abortion doctor to dinner on Sunday night is another story all together. The thought of associating with those who live on the other side of our barriers scares us because it often blurs the line between the righteous and the unrighteous. However, if we listen to Jesus at the table with the tax collectors, we would see there are no righteous people to call, because all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

The assembly of believers is the gathering of those who saw the sign saying there is a party and all are welcome. It makes no difference what we were before we walked in the door. The Church is the gathering where the only thing that matters is what happens to us after we arrived. Jesus is willing to throw such a party to reach those who are lost and despised. It is all about whether we accept or reject Jesus and the effect of that decision on our lives today. If we go looking for Jesus to be fasting with the priests we will be sorely disappointed to find Him eating among the sinners.