

## SOCIAL LEPROSY

In the book of John, Jesus prays for those who would follow his teachings after he ascended into heaven. What I find fascinating is that Jesus began by praying for what he didn't want to pray. Yeah, it sounds strange, doesn't it?

Why would anyone ever start praying by asking God for what they were not asking? Maybe the clue is in what it was that Jesus didn't pray. He says, "I pray not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the Evil One" (John 17:15).

Why did Jesus pray this?

I think it's because he knows human nature and he knew that, soon after his ascension, we would want to remove ourselves from the world around us. We're not comfortable hanging out with those sinners. More often than not, we treat the lost, those outside the Church, as if they have some sort of "Social Leprosy". We're afraid we'll catch what they've got, so we avoid contact with them. We create Christian versions of the world so that we never have to interact with these "Social Lepers". We have Christian Radio Stations, Christian Yellow Pages, Christian Coffee Shops, Christian Book Stores, and all sorts of private avenues where our contact with non-Christians is minimized.

I'm convicted when I realize that Jesus didn't even treat people who had actual leprosy this way, and yet I treat those who think differently than I do as if they had some infectious disease that I might catch if I'm exposed to them for any extended period of time. The ironic thing is that Jesus expected that his disciples would be salt and light in the world, not hidden under a basket waiting for the second coming.

Paul the Apostle echoed the prayer of Jesus when he instructed the Christians in Corinth about their interactions with non-believers. "I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people; not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world." (1 Corinthians 5:9-10)

Have we removed ourselves from the world? If so, we've allowed the Enemy to pacify us into complacency. It's time to awaken from our slumber and burst out of our Christian bubble.

#### SALVATION IS A PROCESS, NOT AN EVENT OR POINT IN TIME

One thing I find fascinating as I study the New Testament and the practice of the early church is that their concept of salvation was much different than mine. When I think of salvation, I usually think of that one day when, as a nine year old boy, I walked forward and prayed with my pastor to ask Jesus into my heart. However, Peter and Paul seemed to have a different opinion about the salvation process. In their minds, salvation was an ongoing experience, not a one-time deal.

"..And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." (Acts 2:42-47)

"For you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls." (1 Peter 1:9)

When we begin to think of Salvation as a process, and not an event, it changes the way we think of Evangelism.

The early church fathers also had a great saying that has come to inspire my own faith. The statement was "Conversatio Morem!" which can mean either "Death To The Status Quo!" or "Constant Conversion!", depending on the context.

This phrase was indicative of the mindset held by the early church fathers that salvation, or conversion, was something every disciple needed to experience constantly, not just a one-time event or point in time.

#### THE FINISH LINE OR THE STARTING LINE?

In your own experience, what happens when someone you've been praying for and witnessing to finally accepts Christ as Lord and Savior? Don't you cheer and weep and give high-fives to all your Christian friends? Sure you do. That's an appropriate response. Even the Scriptures tell us that the angels in heaven celebrate when someone is saved.

(Luke 15:7-10)

However, our response and attention usually diminishes soon after this event. I believe it's because, for us, our work is done. Our friend has "made it". They are "in". They've crossed the finish line and we can all move on with our lives now.

But, if Salvation is a process, and not an event or a point in time, then our work is not done. Our friend has not come to the end of the journey. Instead, they have only just begun.

In other words, Salvation is not the finish line, it is the starting line. If we begin to think of Salvation in this way, as an ongoing, daily commitment to following the marvelous person of Jesus, it will have a radical effect on our methods of evangelism and the way we treat those we hope to lead into this way of life.

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