

## Being a Sinner is Surely Fine, Now? Wasn't Jesus Drawn to Sinners ... OK About Them ...?

### For Sinners, Not The Righteous

Open to much misunderstanding is Jesus's firm commitment to *sinners*. It is generally understood, firstly, that these were sinners in the eyes of the religious establishment of his day - the Pharisees and scribes - and that Jesus's clear preference for the sinners' company (as opposed to that of the apparently self-righteous) suggests that he might have had (or can be thought, or represented, to have had) a desire to overturn and reverse the clear pronouncements of the (Jewish) Law regarding what was permissible or not permissible, what was right and what was wrong. Sadly, in our times, an inversion of the requirements of the Law is appealing to some (notwithstanding Jesus's affirmation that he had not come to remove it, and that not a word of it should cease to be).

Jesus seems to have had a clear preference for the company of sinners (not just the lower classes of society, but morally dubious people), but he and the evangelists still refer to them as "sinners"; neither they, nor the "righteous", are referred to using some contemporary phrase which we might render "so-called -". The righteous may have been hypocritical and odious, but we are not entitled to assume that Jesus used the phrase sarcastically; awful though self-righteous people may have been to him, Jesus surely knew of their actual fidelity to the Law, a law that he endorsed. The idea that the healthy do not need a physician, as he suggests, implies that he did indeed consider them ultimately "healthy". Likewise, the sinners. We have no reason to suppose that (better company though they might have been) Jesus considered them *not* to be sinners. The fact that they did need more attention (he had come to call *them*, after all) indeed suggests that they did require some spiritual straightening out (and the command to repent, to turn around, was at the heart of his call).

I once heard a sermon concerned with the "Woman taken in Adultery", by a self-proclaimed "liberal" clergyman. It made much of Jesus's positive attitude to the woman (and his opposite attitude towards her accusers); but the sermon omitted mention of Jesus's final words to her. From such an approach to the story (sadly, I have heard of it more than once) it might well be possible to think that Jesus was "affirming" the woman, her doings, and her "lifestyle" choice, and, further, that he was condemning those who maintain that adultery is sinful. Moral inversion – the upturning of thousands of years of Judeo-Christian ethics and morals – is, sadly, often found in the revisionist project. It usually claims that the way people inherently are (or have come to believe they inherently are) is inevitable, and somehow good and appropriate, indeed, the creative work of God – as opposed to something which might be risen above, overcome, and changed by the studied application of, and obedience to, God's clearly-revealed moral law.

Jesus came to call sinners, and however appealing they might have been, he was there to change them; sin was, and is, sin. Thus, "Now go away, and D'ONT do it AGAIN!", was his parting shot to the adulterous woman.