

Incidental Encounters with Withdrawn From Christians By Paul R. Blake

Last week, a devout sister in Christ from Northeast Ohio asked the question below. In the recent past, I was asked a similar question by two Christians here at Tomlinson Run. It seems clear to me that this issue is disconcerting more than a few conscientious children of God. I will attempt to answer it to the best of my understanding of the word of God in a manner designed to encourage obedience while at the same time without being unduly harsh.

Question: "I recently had experiences with brothers and sisters in Christ inviting withdrawn from Christians to birthday parties, graduation parties and the social dinner after a funeral. I stand virtually alone in not attending or leaving once I realize the circumstances. Would you consider a meal after a funeral in this same category? I believe that I do, but would attend a funeral if a disciplined Christian were there, just not the meal to follow."

Answer: Let me begin with the qualification that anytime a disciple's conscience demands that he must forgo an activity, he must follow his conscience. Sometimes a conscience requires more than the word of God demands, and therefore one must heed the conscience or risk sin. Having said that, consider...

Without doubt, the Christian sins when he invites an unrepentant withdrawn from disciple to a meal where others will be, for this reason: he violates a command of God no less binding than the command to be baptized. In addition, he sins by putting other Christians at risk by creating a situation where they may be led to sin. He needs to grow some courage and inform the disciplined person that they are withdrawn from, and until they repent, faithful Christians cannot enjoy a social meal with them. It is tragic that so many professed Christians value their relationship with the erring disciple more than their relationship with God, and therefore seldom hesitate to include withdrawn from persons in social meals. I find it shameful that Christians would intentionally put others in an uncomfortable and awkward position this way. And the excuse, "I am eating with him to encourage him to come back," is actually based on the foolish and false sophistry, "Let us do evil that good may come."

However, what of the Christian who comes to a social meal only to discover that an unrepentant, withdrawn from person is present? It must be understood that the very nature of violating the command not to eat with the disciplined requires intent. One has to purpose to validate the withdrawn from person by intentionally eating with him. Or, he can resolve to avoid conflict and discomfort with the disciplined person by purposing not to keep the command. In both cases there is intent to disregard a command of God. One who attends a funeral luncheon, goes to a restaurant, or goes to a social function and accidentally encounters a disciplined person did not intend or purpose to meet with him to eat with him. It was not his intent to validate this person. It is an incidental encounter. There is a difference between this and one who meets a disciplined person for the purpose of eating with him. When he does so purposefully, he sends the message that he is validating him against the will of God. On the other hand, one who accidentally encounters a disciplined person is not purposing to validate him, and is not viewed by observers as having done so. But, should an observer point out that there is

a disciplined person present, one should consider at this point that the potential exists that he could be sending an unintentional validation message.

1Corinthians 10:23-29 states: "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being. Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake; for the earth is the LORD'S, and all its fullness. If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake. But if anyone says to you, This was offered to idols, do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake; for the earth is the LORD'S, and all its fullness. Conscience, I say, not your own, but that of the other. For why is my liberty judged by another man's conscience?"

The point is, you may understand that an accidental encounter with a withdrawn person in a social setting may not be sin, but others with a more tender conscience may not know that. So, if you are informed that this is the case, you must act in such a way that protects their conscience.

When I go to a funeral luncheon, I am there to support and encourage the grieving family. I do not concern myself about an incidental and unintentional encounter with a disciplined person. I eat with the sorrowing family. However, if someone points out that there is a disciplined person present and they seem genuinely concerned, I do not eat for his sake, as per the text cited above. I hope this answers your question.

Not Thinking About Myself

"Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being" (1Cor 10:24). Dr. Karl Menninger of the Menninger Clinic was asked, "If someone felt a nervous breakdown coming on, what would you suggest that he do?" He replied, "If you feel a nervous breakdown coming on, I would urge you to find somebody else with a problem - a serious one -- and get involved with that individual, helping him solve his problem. In helping him to solve his problem, in reality, your own problem is going to disappear. You're no longer thinking internally. You're no longer letting things gnaw at your stomach. You're no longer getting disturbed about yourself because you're not thinking about yourself. You're thinking about others." Let us seek the well being of others and thereby help ourselves.

A Moments Wisdom

When one door closes another door opens; but we so often look so long and so regretfully upon the closed door, that we do not see the ones which open for us. Even if you are on the right track, you will get run over if you just sit there. The best way to have what you want, is to want what you have. If you do what you've always done, you'll get what you've always got. There are two kinds of people, those who do the work and those who take the credit. Try to be in the first group; there is less competition there. Happiness is an attitude of mind, born of the simple determination to be happy under all outward circumstances.

If the Creator had a purpose in equipping us with a neck, He surely meant for us to stick it out.

Honest hearts produce honest actions.

Live out of your imagination, not your history.

The people and circumstances around me do not MAKE me what I am, they REVEAL who I am.