

# THE FRIEND OF SINNERS

Elder Ralph Harris

One of the things that irritated the Pharisees most about Christ was His familiarity with sinners and His sympathy toward the penitent among them. His conduct did not agree with their perverted notions of what their Messiah should be and do. These poor, deluded Pharisees fancied themselves to be very pure and good, and so great was their pride, arrogance and conceit that they verily thought they were too holy to have any association with sinners. There was no doubt in their minds that when the promised Messiah came He would company altogether with such as them.

With such high esteem for their own persons we may well imagine what their attitude was toward those who sought companionship with Christ and who felt their need of His grace and mercy. How disgusting it must have been to them to see those whom they considered to be vile, loathsome sinners falling down at Jesus' feet in tears of contrition and finding such a warm welcome there! What ignorant fools must they have thought those poor penitents to be! And how much greater fool must they have thought Christ to be for allowing them access to His manifest favor! The intimacy between Christ and penitent sinners was, is, and ever shall be, a fathomless mystery to the proud and lofty Pharisee.

But that which makes Christ most loathsome to the self-righteous is the very thing that makes Him most precious to His meek and lowly followers. Where would they be were it not that He "*receiveth sinners*" (Luke 15:2) and sups with them?

Christ would not do any good to anyone if He only spent His time with those who feel no need of Him and who feel to be as good or better than He. His answer to those who questioned His disciples as to why He ate with Publicans and sinners was; "*They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.*" The Pharisees did not feel any of the "sickness" that Christ spoke of here. They knew nothing of remorse for sin, and they were total strangers to soul-troubles. How could they know anything about a conflict between the flesh and the spirit when they thought themselves to be so pure?

The Spirit of the Lord still dwells in the hearts of the same class as those to whom Christ showed Himself merciful and mighty while He walked here upon the earth, for the most part passing by the "*wise men after the flesh*" (I Cor. 2:26), the mighty and the noble. He is still choosing the "*weak and base things of the world and things which are despised.*" This has always confused, confounded and enraged "the mighty" of earth, and it always will. —Elder Ralph Harris

