

SIN, SALVATION AND GRACE IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

Redefining Sin in Terms of Shame and Addiction

Shame: debased sense of ourselves (low anthropology) causes us to create personas that obscure who God created us to be (*imago Dei*). The false self causes us to act in ways that is either more or less than human. Shame (neurotic shame) is the root and fuel of all compulsive/addictive behaviors, which can be defined as “a pathological relationship to any mood-altering experience that has life-damaging consequences”. Toxic shame sometimes wears the face of grandiosity. Grandiosity is a disorder of the will. It can appear as narcissistic self-enlargement or wormlike helplessness. The problem of toxic shame is a “spiritual bankruptcy”. Toxic shame looks to the outside for happiness and validation.

Addiction: The drivenness in any addiction is about the ruptured self, the belief that one is a flawed person. May says that sin is what turns us away from love – away from love for ourselves, love for one another, and love for God. He sees two forces that are responsible: repression and addiction. While repression stifles desire (Freud), addiction *attaches* desire, bonds and enslaves the energy of desire to specific behaviors, things, or people. These objects of attachment then become preoccupations and obsessions; they come to rule our lives. Addiction makes idolaters of us all. Only grace will deliver us from addiction. Psychologically, addiction *uses up* desire. It is like a psychic malignancy, sucking our life energy into specific obsessions and compulsions, leaving less and less energy for other people and pursuits. Addiction exists wherever persons are internally compelled to give energy to things that are not their true desires. Addiction is a *state* of compulsion, obsession, or preoccupation that enslaves a person’s will and desire. We succumb because the energy of our desire becomes attached to specific behaviors, objects or people. *Attachment* is the process that enslaves desire and creates the state of addiction.

Sin and Shame in the Gospel of Luke

In Luke Jesus has a reputation for associate primarily with “sinners and tax collectors”, i.e. people who have no honor in Judaism and in society. The Pharisees and religious leaders complain that he is “a friend of sinners and tax collectors”, that is, people who they regard as beyond the pale, *persona non grata*, shameful (5:29-32; 7:31-50; 15:1-2; 19:7).

In thinking about sin and shame it is important to ask questions about power and control, as well as the question: who speaks for God? In antiquity a wide variety of unintentional infractions against divinely sanctioned norms were considered sins. In STJ these norms were based on an interpretation of covenant and Torah, so the question is who does the interpreting and who decides who is a “sinner”? “Sinner” is a label attributed by someone or some group that determines a person’s status vis-à-vis God and the covenant community. “Sin” and “Sinner” are always a matter of interpretation and cultural conditioning, and labeling one a “sinner” is a matter of power and control.

In three consecutive parables in Luke 15:1-32 the “lost” or the wicked are those who have violated the norms of Jewish law. However, the poor and the unclean have a marginal status and probably were included among the “sinners” that Jesus associated with (cf. 7:22; 14:13, 21; 16:20-21). Poverty implied not only a lack of resources but also social standing. Peasants below subsistence level might also be unable to comply with purity laws, and thus were put in a position of shame and dishonor. So to be labeled a “sinner” was primarily to be put in a position of shame and dishonor. It was social and not just a matter of personal morality.

In Luke, Jesus is cast in the role of liberator (4:16-19). In his answers to criticism from the Pharisees, Jesus takes as his starting point the need for a full human life. He sees healing as a way of restoring life by freeing the sick from the bonds of the devil (13:16). It is the love of God that breaks the boundaries of the laws of purity (7:47; 15:7, 10, 24). Many of these texts deal with unequal distribution of resources – health, purity, honor – and the sinners and the ill were excluded from receiving their share. Jesus' answers function as a protest against his control of the distribution of resources. Jesus showed with the power of his healings that he had authority from God to create a new order. Jesus bestows dignity, restores people to community and reorders life according to God's character and values. In addition to 4:16-19 a key text that describes the character of God as gracious, and as the basis for interpersonal relationships is 6:27-36. This passage is pivotal for understanding the nature and practice of God's grace – it is a programmatic text for comprehending why Jesus "eats with sinners and tax collectors". He is reordering society in accordance with God's character and purposes.

Sin & salvation: the meaning of "sin" largely determines the meaning of "salvation" and its counterpart "grace", and vice versa. The offence of Jesus' appears to have been that the wicked would be included in the kingdom even though they did not repent. He mediated God's grace by eating with those who were socially ostracized by their status as unclean, poor, sinners. The meals themselves were an experience of salvation and grace.

Pharisees and addiction in the Gospel of Luke

We are created in God's image for love, love of God and love for one another, but the energy of our desire becomes attached to specific behaviors, objects or people (co-dependency). In the Biblical tradition this is called idolatry, but in our culture we know this as addiction. Addiction attaches desire and we become obsessed with the objects of attachment. These addictions erode our freedom and use up desire. We give our time and energy to these rather than love.

In Luke the Pharisees are characterized as being *attached* to honor and money. Before we look at this depiction we need to clarify that the Pharisees in Luke are not so much historical figures as stereotypes. As stereotypes there is a Pharisee in each of us. The primary issue with the Pharisees, the cause of their concern with self-promotion and the desire to achieve high status is *hypocrisy* (12:1), or self-deception. Inasmuch as we do not know who we really are, people created in the image of God who desire to love and be loved, we are self-deceived. We act out that self-deception by attaching this deformed desire to other things and people. Therein lays the connection between shame (failure to appreciate the honor and dignity God has bestowed on us) and addiction (acting out that distorted view of ourselves and others).

Pharisees and scribes are reprimanded for practices of non-sharing, practices that give way to greed and wickedness (11:39-41; 20:46-47). Luke puts the accusation that the Pharisees were "lovers of money" (11:37-44; 14:7-14; 16) in a cosmological perspective of a world of two rulers and two principles. To love money was not just another sin, it was the ultimate sin of idolatry. To Luke the real impurity was that which consisted in plunder and greed – an uncleanness that was a result of negative social relations to others. Luke sees a direct relation between their concern for purity laws and their exploitation of people.

Confrontations between Jesus and Pharisees frequently focus on the question of power (4:31-37; 5:17-26). Luke's parables in particular point to a breakdown in loyalty to this system of power and control: tenants do not accept their duty to pay their landlord (20:9-16); a lord is accused of severity (19:21); patronage extended through hospitality may meet with rejection (14:16-24).

Through their attempts to control the physical body of people through purity laws, the Pharisees contributed to the preservation of the status quo of society. These stories focused on people who because of illness and sins suffered from uneven distribution of rights and resources, and who found themselves without access to the power of salvation. The question of purity was also a question of social control and the exercise of power.

In Luke (and Homeric social relations) generosity is expressed through *hospitality* and *giving to the poor*. In the Greco-Roman society of Luke's day there was no ethics of charity and almsgiving. At the basis of Hellenistic ethics was not concern for the poor, but love towards one's friends. Jesus' criticism in Luke 11:37-44 shows that they practiced negative reciprocity. It was a violation of the community fellowship. Luke pictures the Pharisees as antitypes to good community behavior when we compare this passage to the story of Zacchaeus (19:1-10). The transformation of "purity" from a ritual concept to a concept of societal solidarity through almsgiving, meant a break with this structure and its boundaries. In Luke "almsgiving" or "giving to the poor" becomes a symbol of solidarity in the behavior of the community.

The Practice of Grace through hospitality and almsgiving. Luke presents a vision of life through following Jesus in which relationships are redefined and society reordered. Grace is not just a personal experience of God, but rather interpersonal. In Luke two important practices of grace are hospitality and almsgiving.