

SINNING DAILY

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In examining the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, commentators have noted that no hint is given that the rich man had acquired his wealth by fraud, deceit, or through illegal deals. It was rightly his, and he could use it as he wished. They also point out that Abraham, Job, and others, were wealthy, yet were praised as godly people.

In this article, I grant all the above, yet argue that the rich man sinned daily and that this parable places a moral obligation on all Christians, especially in our society. To be clothed in purple and fine linen, to fare sumptuously, and to live at a high level, while ignoring the beggar that lies on our porch, full of sores, who longs to be fed with crumbs that fall from our table marks us as insensitive, the opposite of a godly person. The Apostle James, in his Epistle (2:15) asks whether we have a duty towards our fellow human beings, if they are naked, or destitute of daily food. Can we simply enjoy our wealth as though they did not exist?

The parable of the Good Samaritan carries the same obligation. Those that “passed by, on the other side” (Luke 10:31-32) had no compassion on the man that had fallen among thieves (Luke 10:33). One can think of possible reasons for their indifference – ritual cleanliness or religious responsibilities, for example. The rich man might also have had reasons. Did he know that the beggar had squandered his wealth, gambled it away, etc.? Did he hope that, at some later time, he might be of help? The parable does not say; it merely registers the neglect, and that is the center of the matter. The Apostle James, in his Epistle (4:13-17) says that “to him that knows to do good and does it not, to him it is sin.”

There are sins of commission (wrong acts) and sins of omission (failure to do what is right). Either way, sin is present. When a brother or sister needs help, postponement is a sin. The rich man knew Lazarus' plight; they had obviously met at the rich man's gate (Luke 16:20-21).

A Time of Reckoning

In the parable, both men die. Neither man's past is erased. Death is not oblivion; it is not the blowing out of a candle that once burned with a strong or a weak flame. It is like a magnifying glass that shows the true merits and demerits of the past – to each his due. Of course, a parable affords license, as though each man still had a body (tongue, fingers, etc.). In essence, the rich man had found himself in the torments of hell, while Lazarus had found comfort in the bosom of Abraham.

The rich man requests a favor – a drop of water for his parched tongue. In the same way that Lazarus once had desired the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table, the rich man desires a drop of water from the reservoir of Lazarus. Will Abraham, whom he calls *father*, show kindness and agree to alleviate his agony? Will Abraham act as a Good Samaritan and help?

The account leaves us amazed. In hell, there are no favors. There is no relief. Good Samaritans, crumbs, and drops of water are for this life alone. Death seals the kind of life one has lived and passes the record to eternity.

The Great Gulf

Abraham stresses to the rich man that his new state is not like the old one. The beggar is no longer at anyone's gate. Moreover, a gulf separates those that are blessed (in Abraham's bosom) and those who are not. Even the most forgiving saint cannot possibly cross over to do a good turn to a soul in agony.

In this life, the boundaries that separate human beings can be crossed. It takes but a decision to sit with a relative – a father, mother, brother, sister, son, or daughter – and go over the intricacies of life. We can

also help alleviate pain and suffering. There is no such hope, after death.

The rich man remembered that he had relatives among the living. The request “I pray thee, therefore, father” was definitely a plea, but it belonged to this world. The rich man's reason was: that otherwise his relatives would end up in the place of torment. He knew that his relatives were leading the same, carefree life and were in need of a warning.

Parents that have no respect for God, for church, or for values also set a standard for their children. As a result, their children grow up thinking of the self and set similar goals for their own offspring. It was the torments and the discomfort that prompted the rich man to request help for his loved ones. During his earthly life, he had no discomfort; therefore, he failed to act.

Relatives are the responsibility of the living. Every Christian parent can sit down with his children and say, “Let us go over the basics of life. Why are we here? What is expected of us? Should we be in church? What questions remain unanswered in our minds?”

The sin of omission is as serious as that of commission. One may choose it, perhaps so as not to be labelled a fanatic, perhaps because many hold the view that matters of religion are personal and private. Torments generate urgency. Urgency gives rise to concern, and we load the responsibility on others – in the present case, on Abraham to send someone from the dead.

Excusing Inactivity

Abraham's answer was: God has provided Moses and the prophets. If the living study them, they can avoid hell. A man from our world might easily protest by saying: “But, father Abraham, no one knows anything about Moses and the prophets. Schools do not teach religious education, and how many parents are qualified to act as guides in matters they do not understand?”

The names: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi are only names we associate with the Bible. We do not know what they contain.

Indeed, all have the option of attending a study so as to become informed; but the pace of modern life compels the modern man to omit duties. One must work in order to live. One needs time to relax. Health experts remind us to relax, if we want to avoid psychological problems. No one has the time, our culture considers religion to be private – each individual following his or her own path, doing his or her best to make sense of the world. Does the ordinary man really need to know anything, in order to be a Christian?

With such reasoning, then, we go about our daily lives, excusing the sin of omission. No human being is independent of others. Christ has left us a spiritual heritage, which plainly says that one cannot possibly be a Christian without showing concern for his fellow human beings – now, in this life, as the only chance we have for spiritual growth and godliness.

The sin of omission is so prevalent that it stands on our porch. If we are not careful, we will be sinning daily.