

Mark 2:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?

Analysis

The scribes and Pharisees' question ('How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?') reveals their theological framework: association with sinners implies approval of sin. They assumed that holiness requires separation from contamination. Jesus' behavior scandalized them because rabbis typically avoided such fellowship to maintain ritual purity and moral reputation. However, they failed to distinguish between compromising with sin and showing mercy to sinners. Jesus' holiness wasn't fragile ceremonialism requiring protective isolation but robust righteousness that transforms others through contact. Reformed theology recognizes two errors: the Pharisaic error of self-righteous separation, and the worldly error of compromising with sin.

Historical Context

Pharisees (meaning 'separated ones') emphasized strict Torah observance and ritual purity. They developed extensive oral traditions regulating all life areas. Their food laws extended beyond biblical kosher requirements to include ritual hand-washing and separation from the ceremonially unclean. Table fellowship was particularly significant—sharing meals with sinners could render one ceremonially impure. The Pharisees' question reflects genuine confusion: how could a prophet claiming divine authority violate purity standards?

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. Do you view sinners as people to avoid or as mission fields for gospel proclamation?
2. How can you maintain moral purity while still engaging meaningfully with non-believers?
3. What does Jesus' example teach about balancing biblical holiness with gospel accessibility?

Interlinear Text

καὶ οἱ γραμματεῖς καὶ οἱ Φαρισαῖοι, ἰδόντες αὐτοῦ
And ^{G3588} **when the scribes** **And** ^{G3588} **Pharisees** **saw** **unto his**
^{G2532} ^{G1122} ^{G2532} ^{G5330} ^{G1492} ^{G846}

ἐσθίει μετὰ τῶν τελωνῶν καὶ ἁμαρτωλῶν ἔλεγον τοῖς
he eateth **with** ^{G3588} **publicans** **And** **sinners** **they said** ^{G3588}
^{G2068} ^{G3326} ^{G5057} ^{G2532} ^{G268} ^{G3004}

μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ Τι ὅτι μετὰ τῶν τελωνῶν καὶ
disciples **unto his** **How** **is it that** **with** ^{G3588} **publicans** **And**
^{G3101} ^{G846} ^{G5101} ^{G3754} ^{G3326} ^{G5057} ^{G2532}

ἁμαρτωλῶν ἐσθίει καὶ πίνει
sinners **he eateth** **And** **drinketh**
^{G268} ^{G2068} ^{G2532} ^{G4095}

Additional Cross-References

Luke 19:10 (Parallel theme): For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

Luke 18:11 (Resurrection): The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

Isaiah 65:5 (Parallel theme): Which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou. These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day.

Acts 23:9 (Resurrection): And there arose a great cry: and the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God.

1 Corinthians 2:15 (Parallel theme): But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.

Luke 19:7 (Sin): And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.