

Kick The Dust Off (part 2)

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In the previous article, scriptures were presented that made it clear there are times when we must *“kick the dust from our feet”* and move on to new evangelistic opportunities. When the risk to our own souls is too great, we may have to allow those who are sinning to continue in sin for the sake of self-preservation. Christians should not *“cast their pearls before swine”* by joining a lost soul in sinfully dangerous situations, or in falsehood, for then two souls will be embroiled in that unrighteousness.

But the important lesson that we must all apply to our work in the kingdom is the need to strike a balance – we cannot jump head first into sin to try and save someone from it, but we should also not be so afraid of risks that we neglect our duty to save anybody! Consider the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), for in it we see the ideal treatment of a person who refuses to return home. The father never refused to let his son leave. The father never kept back the inheritance. The father never tried to seek after his son, to save him from his mistakes, to bail him out. Like this man, we sometimes have to let people go – we cannot abandon our own responsibilities to spend our lives seeking our prodigal sons. What an irresponsible man this father would have been had he neglected his duties at the farm! In the same way, we cannot become so involved with the hunt for a lost soul that we begin to ignore the needs of our families. Paul wrote that a father’s first responsibility is to the well-being of his dependents (1 Timothy 5:8). But was this all that the father did? Did he “give up” on his son? Should this man be ashamed because he allowed his son to fall away and live a sinful life in a distant land? No, for this father never gave up hope. He stood on his property, waiting for the return of his younger son, eager to see his figure appear on the horizon. And when the young man did return, the father welcomed him back with open arms! While we may make the decision to let somebody fall away – for someone with a mind to sin will sin no matter what we may do – we still have an obligation to be there for them if they decide to return to God.

Even Paul allowed some people to become slaves to sin – not because he wanted to give up on their souls, but because there was nothing more he could do for them but be supportive if they decided to return. *“But if any has caused sorrow... Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority, so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, lest somehow such a one be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him”* (2 Corinthians 2:5-8). According to the inspired writer, it is necessary to “give up as lost” those who refuse to repent. In fact, we must withdraw ourselves from that person in order to save the rest of the congregation (1 Corinthians 5:6). But when the time comes for that person to return, let us always be there to reaffirm our love for them.

Practical Considerations

“Does giving up as lost mean we are responsible for that sinner’s soul?” – It depends on how we have handled the situation. It is clear from Ezekiel 3:17-19 that the watchman of God is obligated to warn the people around him. Yet, notice the exhortation in the text, *“Yet if you have warned the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered yourself.”* We have to teach the Gospel to everybody we can, but part of that

job is moving on to new people when one proves to be unrepentant. We should never feel guilty about “*giving up as lost*” if we have done our best.

“I am uncomfortable with this idea of ‘giving up’ on people. Jesus never gave up on anybody.” – That is only partially correct. While Jesus leaves the door of salvation open to everybody, we must realize that even He knew when His listeners were unwilling to change. In the story of the rich young man (Matthew 19:16-24), the man leaves Jesus after hearing an unfavorable message. Notice that Jesus never pursued the man. He may have never seen Him again, in fact.

“Is there a benefit to ‘giving up’ on people?” – When we have to move on, whether from a potential convert who refuses to listen to the Word of God or from a brother who refuses to repent (Matthew 18:15-17), the goal is to prick the heart, hopefully to the point of repentance. *“For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it... I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance... For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation”* (2 Corinthians 7:8-10). The goal of our evangelism is bringing salvation to all people. While some may reject us, and we are forced to move on, we must remember that for every soul who rejects the Gospel, there is surely another just waiting to hear it!