

HOW FAR?

By Monsignor Frank Chiodo

I remember teaching a high school religion class - the topic was Christian moral living. The question which was inevitably asked by every class was this, "How far can I go before it is a serious sin?"

"How far can I go?" The question smacks of a moral immaturity and yet aren't we all guilty of this kind of moral mentality? We live the Christian life as if it were an endurance test to see how much wrong we can do before we break down and sin. "How much booze can I drink before I am guilty of the sin of drunkenness?" "How far can I go?" "How much cash can I pilfer from the office petty cash box before it is a sin?" "How far can I go?" "How much violence can I tolerate in my domestic quarreling without sinning?" "How far can I go?" "How far can I go sexually before it is a sin?" Is this what the Christian life is really all about?

What kind of a marriage would you have if prior to the wedding you sat with your fiancé and discussed how far you could go in extra marital affairs before it was dangerous to your marriage? Or what kind of friendship would you have if you asked what the limit was on physical violence with one another before the friendship was off? Crazy? But isn't that how we approach our God?

Our conception of what the Christian life is about is based on our perception and many a Christian have a rotten understanding of what Christian living is all about because they look at it all wrong. Christian life is not a matter of how far we can go before we seriously sin. Christian life is understanding how far God has gone in order to be our heart's treasure.

We know that God became man and died for our sins - This is a fact of faith. But that will not have an impact on us unless we let this truth change our lives. The truth about us is that we see facts not as they are but as we are. The same facts will produce totally different reactions in different people. A shoe company sent two salesmen to explore the market potential for their product in Africa. After several weeks of investigation, one salesman wired back: Nobody wears shoes - consumer demand is zero - situation hopeless. The other salesman wired back an entirely different message: Nobody wears shoes - demand limitless - no competition - the situation is fantastic. Same facts - different interpretations.

The same happens in our Christian living. The fact that Christ died for us, his taking the punishment that we deserved for our sins causes some to see Christ as a treasure - others as a trifle. What is your perception of Christ? Is he a treasure or a trifle?

You can well discover an honest answer to that question by asking yourself, "Do I try to live my Christian life by trying to see how far I can go without sinning seriously?" If the answer is yes, then Christ is no treasure to you - he's a trifle.