

JESUS CONTRASTS THE ATTITUDES OF THE REPENTANT AND SELF-RIGHTEOUS LUKE 07:36–50

Introduction

The present passage contrasts the attitudes of the sinful (repentant) and the self-righteous. It needs to be studied carefully, for self-righteousness is a serious sin. It is both common and damning.

- I. Simon, a Pharisee, invited Jesus to dinner and Jesus accepted (v. 36).
- II. The attitude of the repentant: a woman prostitute (v. 37-38).
- III. The attitude of the self-righteous (v. 39).
- IV. The two attitudes illustrated: the parable of two debtors (v. 40-43).
- V. The need of the self-righteous: to really see Jesus, who the repentant say He is (v. 44-50).

I. *Luke 07:36 Jesus at Simon's House*

Simon, a Pharisee, invited Jesus to dinner. Note several things.

1. Simon invited Jesus to his house, but he did not extend to Jesus the common courtesies (v. 44-46). He was rude to the Lord. He was not even sure Jesus was a prophet, much less the Messiah (v. 39). Why then did he invite Jesus to his house? We do not know; nothing is said as to why. The best speculation is that Simon enjoyed the company of celebrities, and he had heard so much about Jesus that he wanted to meet and talk with Him on an informal and friendly basis.
2. Jesus ate with both sinners and religionists (Pharisees) (Lk. 5:29-30). No one was excluded from His attention or love, even when they lacked the common everyday courtesies and respect (v. 44-46). He sought every man.
3. The house of Simon was a house of the rich. The rich always had an open courtyard, usually in the centre of the house. Sometimes the host would allow the public to stand around in the courtyard and listen to the discussions, in particular when a rabbi or some celebrity was the chief guest.

II. *Luke 07:37–38 The Repentant Woman*

The attitude of the repentant. The woman was a sinner, a prostitute. She demonstrated what a sinner has to do in coming to Jesus.

1. She sensed a desperate need. She was either convicted of her sin while hearing Jesus or else she had heard Him before and came under heavy conviction. His plea for men and women to repent and prepare for the Kingdom of God pierced her heart. She knew
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she was a sinner: unclean, lost, condemned. The guilt and weight of her sin was more than she could bear. She ached for forgiveness and cleansing, for freedom and liberty.

2. She approached the Lord despite all. She knew that the public scorned and gossiped about her, and the so-called decent people wanted nothing to do with her. What would Jesus do — He who said, “Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest...” (Mt. 11:28-30)? She knew that if she were recognized, the Pharisee might throw her out of the house.

He knew about her (v. 39). She thought about the situation, and her thinking turned into hope, and her hope into belief. Surely He who offered such an invitation would receive her. Before anyone could stop her, she rushed to Jesus and stood behind Him at His feet. (Remember, in the East people reclined to eat. They rested on their left arm facing each other around the table with their body and feet extending out away from the table.)

3. She surrendered to the Lord in utter humility. Standing there, she was overcome with conviction and emotion. She fell at Jesus’ feet weeping — so broken that tears just flowed from her eyes. She unwound her hair and wiped and kissed Jesus’ feet. Seldom has such love and devotion been shown Jesus.

Now note: there was only one thing that could make a prostitute enter a Pharisee’s home — desperation. She was gripped with a sense of lostness, of helplessness, of urgency. The loosening of her hair to wipe Jesus’ feet was forbidden of women in public. She must have been so desperate she was totally oblivious to the onlookers. The point is this: she was surrendering her heart and life to the Lord, begging Him to forgive her. She was so broken she was unable to speak, but Jesus knew her heart. Words were not necessary (vv. 47-48).

4. She loved much, giving her most precious possession. Perfume was highly valued by women of that day (See *Mary’s Commitment and Sacrifice*, Mt. 26:8-9). Apparently, by describing the perfume as he does, Luke is stressing the expense of the perfume and the great sacrifice she was making. It was probably the most costly possession she had, so she was giving it to her Lord. However, there is something more important here. Note what she did with the perfume. She anointed her Lord; anointed His feet in a supreme act of humility and love and surrender.

Thought 1. The person who comes to Christ must come with a broken and contrite heart.

Mat 11:28 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

Heb 4:15-16 *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

Psa 34:18 *The Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.*

Isa 57:15 For this is what the high and lofty One says — he who lives forever, whose name is holy: “I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.”

Isa 66:2 “Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?” declares the Lord. “This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.”

MATHEW 26:08–09 MARY’S COMMITMENT — SACRIFICE

When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. “Why this waste?” they asked. “This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor.” Mathew 26:08-09

The anointing was a sacrificial gift, a commitment beyond common sense.

1. The anointing was sacrificial. It was worth 300 denarii. A denarius was a small silver coin worth a labourer’s daily wage (Mt. 20:2); so the perfume was costly, valued at approximately a year’s wage (based on a six-day working week).

There is another fact to note about the sacrificial gift. Perfume was a precious item to Eastern women. Mary was taking a most precious possession and giving it to her Lord.

2. The anointing was a commitment beyond common sense. Imagine the scene: a bottle of perfume worth a whole year’s wage being broken and poured upon the feet of Christ. Common sense would say to the genuine Christian, “Sell it. Use the money for the poor, the hungry, and the homeless.” This is just what the disciples did: in fact, they were indignant and vexed about it. They questioned the act; they considered it a waste. After all, if she wished to anoint Christ, she could have used a less expensive perfume. But the disciples failed to see two points.
 - a. Mary was driven to express her faith in her Lord and her love for Him *personally*. The most meaningful way she could do this was to anoint Him as her Lord with the most expensive perfume she possessed.
 - b. The most significant person in Mary’s life was the Lord. He was the Messiah, the Saviour and Lord of her life and family. She wished to show Him that He was deserving of all she was and had.

The point is this: the disciples questioned what Mary did, just as most people would. In the eyes of the world, they would be right. A cheaper perfume could have been used, and not just a few, but a multitude of poor could have been helped with so much money. But what they and the world fail to see is that true love has to be expressed in a personal way. Love is never known unless it is experienced and shared by the believer.

Mat 7:3 “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?”

Rom 14:4 Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

Rom 14:13 Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way.

1 Cor 4:5 Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

James 4:2 You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God.

Thought 1. True love sacrifices self, gives of itself — all that one is and has. Love is not really shown when we give only what we can afford. It is when we sacrifice, dig deep into our lives and money, giving of ourselves all we are and have, that we really show love. The more we sacrifice, the more we demonstrate our love.

Thought 2. There is a strong message in Mary’s act — a strong message on giving much and giving sacrificially. But note: the gift and sacrifice were made out of a heart of genuine love and faith in Christ. This is the most important thing to keep in mind about Mary’s gift: her heart and life were wholly focused upon Christ.

Thought 3. Sacrifice is sometimes more important than common sense. Sometimes sacrifice should take precedence over common sense. Sometimes common sense must be stretched into sacrifice. Sacrifice is what brings about enlarged horizons, growth, development, advancement, more and more of whatever we are doing. In fact, the more we sacrifice under God’s care, the more growth, development, and advancement we see. Name the field, name the area, name the work — the principle holds truth. The more we (or society) sacrifice under God’s care, the more advancement we witness. There is a place for common sense, but there is a greater place for sacrifice.

However, there is one area that we often shrink from and ignore and do not allow the principle to take effect: the area of giving money or of tithing. We do not want our easy living and wealth to be touched. Because of evil hearts, men have allowed money and the power to purchase to become the object and judge of life. Too often a man’s image, esteem, power, influence and rights are determined by how much he has. □

III. *Luke 07:39 Attitude of the Self-righteousness*

The attitude of the self-righteous. The behaviour of the self-righteous man revealed several things.

1. The man was considerate, but self-righteous. Note, he only thought these things; he would not say them publicly lest he embarrass his guests. (How like the self-righteous!)
2. The man considered himself better. He felt he was better than the sinful woman, so he would never allow her to touch him. He would keep his distance, ignore, and have nothing to do with her. But note something else. He considered his judgment and knowledge, opinions and behaviour to be better than others. He expected others (Jesus) to judge and act as he did. He thought that if Jesus only knew who the lady was, then He would reject her.

Thought 1. Many do live self-righteously. They feel that they live and act better than others. They feel and act superior because they have...

- a better house
- a better position
- a better profession
- more ability
- a better education
- more success
- a better religion
- more recognition
- a better child
- a better job
- a better heritage
- better skills
- a better income
- a better life
- a better discipline

3. The man sensed no need for forgiveness and repentance. He thought of himself as *good enough* in two areas.
 - a. He was *good enough in religion*. Note he was a Pharisee, a man who had given his life to practice religion. If anyone were ever *good enough*, he should have been.
 - b. He was *good enough in behaviour*. He was well behaved, decent and moral, just and equitable, respected and highly esteemed. He was not immoral; in fact, he would have nothing to do with immorality. He had not and never would commit a sin that would be publicly condemned. Therefore, he felt as though he had done nothing for which he needed forgiveness.

Mat 7:21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”

Mark 7:6 He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: ‘These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.’”

2 Cor 10:12 We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise.

Titus 1:16 *They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.*

1 John 3:18 *Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.*

Prov 20:6 *Many a man claims to have unfailing love, but a faithful man who can find?*

Prov 30:12 *Those who are pure in their own eyes and yet are not cleansed of their filth.*

ACTS 23:08 PHARISEES

The word means *the separated ones*. The Pharisees were strict religionists. Their religious sect arose about BC 175. A Syrian king, Antiochus Epiphanes, tried to stamp out the Jewish religion and replace it with Greek customs and practices. A number of Jewish men opposed this threat and determined among themselves to save the Jewish religion. They refused to practice Greek customs and dedicated themselves to practicing the Jewish law in the strictest sense. They felt that by carrying out every little detail of the Jewish law and by teaching others to do the same, they could save the Jewish religion and nation and keep it from dying out.

Several things should be noted.

1. They were the orthodox of their day — a sect or school of religious thought. They were organized solely for preserving the law and the Jewish religion. Thereby, they were to save the Jewish nation.
2. They were strict literalists. The Jewish law was expanded into thousands and thousands of little rules and regulations by the Scribes. These rules and regulations were known as the Scribal or Oral Law. More than fifty volumes or books were eventually needed to hold the regulations.
3. The Pharisees were a body of the most zealous religionists.
4. There were never many Pharisees — never more than 6,000. The strictness and demands of the sect were too hard for the common people.
5. They were in dead earnest — dedicated and zealous, self-denying, and moral. No man could give his life to so desperate and restrictive a task unless he was totally genuine.
6. They were self-righteous, heartless, and hypocritical (Lk. 18:9). They lacked any sense of need or sin (Lk. 7:39).
7. They were bitterly opposed to the Sadducees, hating and despising them, feeling that the Sadducees were traitors to the nation.

However, the Pharisees were forced to quietly cooperate with the Sadducees because the Sadducees were the primary ruling party of the nation.

8. They were the main opponents of Jesus Christ and were unsparing in their denunciation of Him. Their savage attacks were primarily for two reasons. First, He was not a graduate of any of their rabbinical schools, nor a member of any of their religious sects. Second, He attacked their rules and regulations which had been added to God's law. □

IV. *Luke 07:40–43 Parable of Two Debtors*

The two attitudes illustrated. Jesus told a parable about two debtors. Note several things that say much to the self-righteous.

1. Jesus *announced* that He had something to say, something critically important. Undivided attention was needed. Every self-righteous person needs to listen and listen closely.
2. Jesus was a prophet and more — He was the Son of God; therefore, He not only knew the people who were sitting around Him, He knew their every thought. Note that from this point on, Jesus was answering the *thoughts* of Simon. Simon had never said a word about Jesus' not knowing who the woman was nor about his own question about Jesus' being a prophet. Simon had only been thinking these thoughts "to himself" (v. 39).

Thought 1. Jesus is the Son of God; therefore, what a man thinks pales into insignificance when facing the One who knows all thoughts, including what one really thinks and feels *within*. Jesus knows the truth of every thought and feeling within a man. If a person is self-righteous, Jesus knows it. If a person is repentant, truly repentant, Jesus knows it. No one hides anything, no feeling, no thought from Him.

3. The meaning of the parable is strikingly clear. A glance at the verses and points in the outline show this. Note how clearly the parable illustrates the grace of God in freely forgiving sin (salvation) (see Eph. 1:7; 2:8-9; 1 Jn. 1:9; 2:1-2).

V. *Luke 07:44–50 The Need of the Self-Righteous*

The need of the self-righteous: to really see Jesus, who the repentant say He is. Note what Jesus asked Simon, "Do you see this woman, this repentant?" The repentant had much to teach the self-righteous about Jesus. The repentant *really sees* Jesus, who He really is.

1. Jesus was the One who deserved more than common courtesies. The host usually showed respect by providing water for the guests to wash their dusty, sandaled feet. The kiss was the accepted greeting among friends, and oil was usually given for honoured guests to refresh themselves after travelling under the hot sun. It was expensive, so it was usually reserved for honoured guests.
 - a. Jesus deserved *more than common respect* (water); He deserved a worshipful respect: He was seen as Lord and was respected as Lord by the repentant. He was the One

who alone could meet the needs of the human heart; therefore, He was the One who was to be worshipped. The self-righteous needed to learn this.

- b. Jesus deserved *more than a common greeting*; He deserved a humble, broken-hearted greeting. He was approached with a sense of unworthiness and humility. The repentant saw the worthiness of Jesus and grasped something of His awesome person as the Son of God and as the sovereign Lord of the universe; therefore, He was the One to whom all men owed their allegiance, the One who alone had the power to forgive and accept men. The repentant saw Jesus as the One who alone could help her, the One who alone had the power to help, so the repentant approached Jesus and greeted Him with a deep sense of humility and unworthiness. The self-righteous needed to learn this.
 - c. Jesus deserved *more than a common gift*; He deserved a sacrificial gift. He was seen as the hope and Saviour of one's life, so the repentant gave Jesus her life, all she was and had. The repentant surrendered her life and gave the most precious gift she had to anoint her Lord. The self-righteous needed to learn this.
2. Jesus was the One who had the power to forgive sins. Three simple facts are important here.
- a. The woman's sins were many. Jesus did not overlook her sins, nor the seriousness of them. After all it was her sins and the sins of others that brought about *His humiliation*, His having to come to this sinful world and to die for the sins of men. However, He forgave her sins despite their awfulness. Every sinner should note this carefully.
 - b. Self-righteousness sensed the need for *little* forgiveness; therefore, the self-righteous loved little. The self-righteous had only a formal, distant relationship with God. His relationship was cold, having only a small sense of sin and sensing only a little need for forgiveness. It was enough to have Jesus present at his table (the table was about the only place many acknowledged His presence).

Thought 1. The self-righteous approach to God...

- has only a little sense of sin; therefore senses only a little need for forgiveness.
- is blinded to man's *state of sin*, to man's true being, that of being short of God's glory (Rom. 3: 23).
- has little sense of the need for special mercy and grace, is blinded to God's Sovereign Majesty and Person.
- has only a formal, distant relationship with God, has little personal relationship with God.
- gives little honour to God, makes little sacrifice for God.

- c. Jesus forgave sin. He had the power to forgive the sins of this repentant.

Thought 1. The fact of forgiveness, the very knowledge that millions have been truly forgiven, is proof that Christ is the Son of God, the One to whom men are to go for forgiveness.

3. Jesus was the One whom people needed to ask about.

Thought 1. The very fact that Jesus claimed the right and power to forgive sins should cause every man to sit up, take notice and ask, “Who is this?”

Acts 5:31 God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Saviour that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.

Acts 13:38 “Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.

Eph 1:7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace.

Psa 103:3 Who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases.

Psa 130:4 But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared.

Isa 43:25 “I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.”

Isa 44:22 “I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you.”

Isa 55:7 Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

Jer 33:8 I will cleanse them from all the sin they have committed against me and will forgive all their sins of rebellion against me.

4. Jesus was the One who did save the repentant. The woman believed Christ to be the Saviour, the One who could forgive her sins. Therefore, Christ saved her.

John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

John 14:6 Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Rom 10:9-10 That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

1 Tim 1:15 Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners — of whom I am the worst. ■