

# Love or Legalism?

**E.T.S.:** In this passage, Jesus interacts with someone who loves Him and someone who portrays legalism.

**E.S.S.:** The passage shows us a contrast between someone who loves Jesus and someone who lives as a legalist.

**Christ Follower:** Identify the spirit of love or legalism in yourself. Learn from Jesus's response to this situation.

**Christ Seeker:** Jesus forgives all sin and receives the sinner who comes to Him for salvation.

## Introduction

Open to the seventh chapter of Luke today.

The question for the time we spend in God's Word today is, "Are we geared toward love or legalism?".

Legalism, as a concept or word, is thrown around in churches regularly. However, the word is not used in the Bible. Historically, legalism represents an ancient philosophical bent in China. A Chinese philosopher who lived in the 200s B.C. developed the philosophy that became the

prevailing system during the Qin Dynasty. During that time, every other system was outlawed. People who taught or followed other systems were executed. The system's teaching focused on man's inherent evilness and the necessity of a code of law with severe punishments to swerve his inclinations (<https://www.worldhistory.org/Legalism/>).

Interestingly, legalism within religion looks similar, with a more seemingly spiritual focus. The focus of legalism in religion is salvation or spirituality through law-righteousness or self-righteousness.

## **Illustration**

Charles Price (pastor of The Peoples Church in Toronto) tells the story of a friend of his who went to the Netherlands to share the gospel with Dutch people and became friends with many Dutch Christians. He was amazed to find out how distressed Dutch Christians were with the state of American Christians. You see, they were struggling with the style of dress and the application of makeup that women in America had taken up and was now a part of the Christian culture. They felt that this was a worldly sin that had crept into the church. They would never let the world impact them and apply makeup as the Americans did.

His friend was amazed to see how upsetting it made the Dutch Christians. So upsetting that he saw women and men cry tears of sadness. He watched as those tears ran down their faces and dripped off the edge of their noses... and dripped into their beer and otopof of their cigarettes as they lamented at the worldliness of American Christians.

# Introduction

Love and legalism cannot live in the same space. As we read Luke 7:36-50, the account demonstrates two people: one who loved and one who practiced legalism. The response of Jesus demonstrates His view of them. The difference between love and legalism is seen in the response to three realities in the text. As we identify them, let's seek to determine if we are geared more toward love or legalism.

## Bible

*(36) And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat. (37) And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, (38) And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. (39) Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner. (40) And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. (41) There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. (42) And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? (43) Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly*

*judged. (44) And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. (45) Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. (46) My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. (47) Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. (48) And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. (49) And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? (50) And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.*

*Luke 7:36-50 - KJV*

## **Introduction**

Let's look at the response to the three realities in the text.

# **1...The Response to Service**

## **Explanation**

Jesus, in response to the inner thought of Simon the Pharisee, contrasted what he had not done with what the woman had done.

Why Simon invited Jesus to his home for a meal cannot be determined from the information we have in the text. However, Jesus called Simon's attention to the contrast between himself and

the woman.

Simon offered Jesus no water for His feet. This was a traditional, hospitable practice in a culture where men wore sandals and the terrain was dusty. Yet, Simon did not make the offer to Jesus. On the other hand, the woman, that Simon was quick to judge and condemn, washed His feet with tears and dried them with her hair.

Simon did not kiss Jesus. A greeting kiss symbolized friendship, yet Simon did not offer Jesus this normal token of friendship among the Jews. In contrast, the woman continually kissed Jesus's feet. The activity likely appalled everyone, including Simon.

Simon did not anoint Jesus with oil. While less common than the other practices Simon did not do, anointing with oil symbolized an expression of deep honor. Simon did not honor the most honorable guest he had ever received into his house. However, the woman anointed His feet with ointment.

What made the difference between the two?

Love made the difference. One, prompted by a legalistic spirit, looked on the other, motivated by a loving heart, and judged unjustly.

## **Application**

What does service motivated by love look like?

It is humble, unselfish, and Savior-focused.

The woman bucked many customs, and even standards of propriety. To enter the banqueting area, reserved only for men, let down her hair, and kiss Jesus's feet could all be misconstrued and misunderstood, and they were. But, not by Jesus.

It is reckless.

She cared nothing for herself. She only desired to give what she could to One she loved so well.

It is unreserved, generous, and sacrificial.

The ointment, though not identified for its value or sentiment like that which Mary of Bethany poured out on Jesus, had value. Likely, she possessed and carried the best that she could. The perfume such as this was kept in a bottle with a long neck that women regularly wore around the neck, as much a part of their wardrobe as anything else. To take it, break the neck of the bottle, and pour it out on Jesus identified a sacrifice of worth and meaning. She not only gave what she had, she was literally giving herself.

## **Explanation**

How did the legalist in the room respond?

Simon, rather than being inspired or encouraged to serve, analyzed and criticized her service.

He saw her actions, misjudged her intentions, and blew off her service.

## **Application**

Are we involved in service or criticism?

Are we more likely to jump into serving or judging those who are serving?

The answer to the question may reveal whether you are guided by love or legalism.

## 2...The Response to Sinners

### Explanation

The contrast here is not only between Simon and the woman, but between Simon and Jesus.

Let's start with the contrast between Simon and the woman.

The main issue at play here is the response to sin.

Notice what Jesus, in the parable, implies:

- Everyone is a sinner.
- Everyone is a debtor to God's justice and judgment.
- Everyone is in need of the grace of Jesus for redemption.

The major difference between Simon and the woman is not the amount of their sin, but their awareness of sin.

How much sin must a person commit before he is a sinner?

The woman was known as a sinner indicating she was a notorious sinner, most believe a

prostitute.

How often might we react to a sinner like her the way Simon did?

The problem with Simon's response was his blindness. He was blind to the implications of Jesus's parable.

- He was a sinner.
- He was a debtor to God's justice and judgment.
- He was in need of the grace of Jesus for redemption.

His legalism caused him to be aware of the sin in the lives of others, but kept him blind to the sin in his own life.

## **Application**

What is your focus in relation to sin?

Is the amount of sin in someone else's life a greater concern than the awareness of sin in your own heart?

If you are more focused on the amount of sin in another person's life than the awareness of sin in your own heart, you may be suffering from legalism.

## **Explanation**

What do we learn about the contrast between Simon and Jesus?

The biggest difference?

Simon saw her for what she had been, really what she had done; Jesus saw her for what she was.

The difference was caused by what guided their approach to her. Simon was guided by legalism. Jesus was guided by love.

## **Application**

How do you view and approach yourself?

How do you view and approach others?

The answer may reveal if you are guided by love or legalism.

What about the sins in your own life?

We can be guilty of looking at ourselves the way that Simon looked at the woman. This is also problematic.

## **3...The Response to the Savior**

### **Explanation**

Simon and the woman responded to the Savior very differently.

For Simon's response, look at verse 39.

## Bible

*(39) Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.*

*Luke 7:39 - KJV*

## Explanation

Jesus's response to the woman left Simon thinking that Jesus was not even a prophet, let alone the Messiah and Son of God. His response to the Savior meant that he would not enjoy the blessing the Savior poured out on the woman.

What did the woman receive because of her response to the Savior?

## Bible

*(47) Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.*

*Luke 7:47 - KJV*

## Explanation

She was forgiven!

Jesus, Himself, identified the multitude of her sins; however, the multitude of her sins could not match the magnitude of His mercies!

## Application

Every sin can be forgiven, and will be if you come to Jesus!

## Explanation

She also received salvation.

## Bible

*(50) And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.*

*Luke 7:50 - KJV*

## Explanation

To be saved is to be delivered. Sin necessitates God's justice and judgment. Without a sacrifice to atone, the sinner stands deserving, and the deserved penalty is eternal separation from God.

The woman came to Jesus. In doing so, she received salvation.

Coming to Jesus happens through faith. That is, to believe that Jesus is the Savior and Son of God, that He died for sin in your place, that He was buried and rose again the third day.

## Application

Have you come to Jesus through faith?

## Explanation

She also experienced peace.

## **Bible**

*(50) And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.*

*Luke 7:50 - KJV*

## **Explanation**

When you have forgiveness and salvation from Jesus, that produces peace that cannot be attained any other way.

## **Application**

If Jesus has given you forgiveness and salvation, you have peace with God and access to the peace of God.

We call this the Gospel!

The Gospel is for the sinner who needs a Savior.

The Gospel is for the sinner who has the Savior.

## **Illustration**

"Too many believers think the good news is old news. We haven't heard the Gospel too much; we haven't heard it enough. Like many facets to a beautiful diamond, the Gospel has an infinite beauty that can never be exhausted. The more we look into the Gospel, the stronger and more

satisfied we will be in our faith.

We need regular reminders of all God has done for us in the Gospel, because the Gospel fuels and motivates our desire to obey God and to serve Him. When we see how much He has done—how much He has given us in His Son—we cannot help but be changed and motivated to give Him our whole lives. And even while we are weak and feeble sinners struggling to follow a perfect Savior, the Gospel reminds us how loved we are and how much God is working in us to help us follow Him.

There is no greater need in your Christian life than regularly reminding your own heart of the truth of the Gospel" (Matt Brown).

## **Conclusion**

**Christ Follower:** Identify the spirit of love or legalism in yourself. Learn from Jesus's response to this situation.

**Christ Seeker:** Jesus forgives all sin and receives the sinner who comes to Him for salvation.