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Sins—Forgiveness and Gratitude

(7:36-50)

Leon Barnes

“Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with him. And He entered the Pharisee’s house, and reclined at the table. And behold, there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining at the table in the Pharisee’s house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, . . .” (7:36-50).

“Say ‘Thank you’ to grandmother,” we tell our children. Everyone loves gratitude in other people. We especially think it is beautiful when we are the ones to whom others are showing the gratitude. Yet, it is hard to develop a real spirit of gratitude ourselves.

Gratitude and grace run along parallel tracks. We often do not express gratitude for what we earn because we believe that is deserved and nothing needs to be said to express gratefulness when we earn the pay. When we know that we do not deserve the goodness shown to us, when we know it is an act of grace, we are grateful. Even with regard to salvation, no one is more obnoxious than the one who thinks he deserves every blessing that God has given. In reality, there is no salvation apart from grace (Ephesians 2:8, 9; Titus 2:11-14). Since that is the case, does it not seem strange that anyone would feel puffed up over being saved?

HE ACCEPTED THE INVITATION

Jesus was invited to the home of a Pharisee for lunch. Looking back, it seems strange that

Jesus was invited into the home of the man, and it seems even stranger that He accepted the invitation. Most of us would have found some excuse not to go. After all, how could you possibly have a good time in the home of a Pharisee? He would constantly be looking for some flaw in your actions so he could point it out to others. But Jesus went.

Maybe He went because He knew this was the only way his heart could possibly be reached. If we stay away from everyone who thinks or behaves in ways that make us uncomfortable, we are closing the door of salvation to a huge number of people. Like everyone else, the Pharisees could be converted. They needed to be converted. They were both lost and miserable.

Jesus went to the home of the Pharisee, but He did not become a fellow Pharisee in His actions or attitude. It is one thing to associate with someone who has a judgmental kind of attitude. It is altogether different to become like that kind of person. Too often we become like those we are with for a while. If they are positive and enthusiastic about the work of the Lord, we are too. If they are critical of everything that is going on, we join in with that. When we react to others in that fashion, we are not following Jesus. Wherever we are and whomever we are with, let us live a consistent life for God.

HE WAS ALWAYS OPEN TO SINNERS

Imagine the sight. Jesus was sitting with the Pharisee eating the meal. Everything was done

just right. They were reclining at the table enjoying the relaxation of the moment when in walked a woman known for her sinful way of life. Coming to Jesus, she wept and began to wash His feet with her tears and wipe them with her hair. She anointed His feet with fragrant oil.

Notice that the action and attitude of Jesus did not make sinners avoid Him. Many found ways to listen to Him and touch Him. When our Christianity is such that sinful people want no part of us and avoid us, it is not the same brand of godliness as that practiced by Jesus. Followers of Christ have often walled themselves inside buildings which obstruct the approach of sinners, but we must open our lives for sinners to come in.

Understand that when you do that, every "Pharisee" in the church will misunderstand what you are doing. "Pharisees" love exclusiveness. They want the church of God to be a clubhouse for the initiated. If it were up to them, signs would be posted out front saying, "Sinners need not apply." When Jesus allowed the woman to wash His feet and anoint them with fragrant oil, the Pharisee responded by saying, "If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner" (7:39). Those today who are like the Pharisees lose sight of the redemptive nature of the church and of all who follow Christ. They elevate some of their rules and determine to exclude everyone from the body who does not play by their rules.

But Jesus and all who follow Him are constantly looking for ways to bring the lost ones in. It does not matter what the sin is. Jesus is the Savior. He is able to save those to the "uttermost who draw near to God through Him" (Hebrews 7:25). As a matter of fact, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15). He said, "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2:17).

FORGIVENESS AND GRATITUDE

Two debtors owe different amounts. One owes little and the other much. The master forgives both. Which one will love Him more? We answer, "The one whom He forgave more." The sinful woman knew how guilty she was. She saw her desperate needs and came to the only doctor who could heal her disease. The Pharisee was sinful, but he did not know it. His sins were small in his own eyes. He felt

no compelling drive to find salvation because he was already a good man in his own sight. His interest in Jesus was more academic and superficial. The woman's interest was personal and went to the heart. Even though Jesus came to his house to eat, Simon offered no special hospitality. He did not even provide for the washing of Jesus' feet. But the woman pulled close, and washed His feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.

Jesus' response to this was "For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little" (7:47).

How much have you been forgiven? If you see your sins as insignificant, then even when they are forgiven you would not think much of it. Your devotion to God would be lukewarm. If you see yourself as the chief of sinners, then when you are forgiven, it would be so deep that your service would overflow. You would know that you had been saved by grace because if you had gotten what you really deserved you would be lost forever. Therefore, your service to God would be overflowing and abundant. Commitment would come naturally, not by coercion.

Here lies the reason grace must be emphasized constantly. The individual who believes he has earned his way into fellowship with God will become difficult to work with and will quit when things do not go his way.

GO IN PEACE

Jesus said to the woman, "Your sins have been forgiven." Those at the table were amazed and asked, "Who is this man who even forgives sins?" (7:49). Jesus could have stopped and explained. "He could have said "I am the Savior of the world." He could even have said, "I am the Lord of lords and the King of kings"; but He did not. Instead, He spoke to the woman again and said, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (7:50).

Why do you suppose Jesus did not try to answer their questions and doubts? I do not know for sure, but one thing is certain. We need to go on with our work for the Lord that is good and right, instead of stopping work to answer every question that men may ask. If you stop and answer all the questions, it would not be long until most of the work for good has stopped. We need to make certain that what we are doing is in harmony with God's will, and then get on with the task.