

Luke 7

Legalism, License, and the Gospel

In his book, *The Gospel Centered Life*, Bob Thune, gives a simple definition of legalism and license. The Gospel response we will dive into during discussion and accountability:

"Every Scripture passage asserts a moral imperative, either explicitly or implicitly. For instance, a verse may tell you not to lie. You can respond to this imperative in three different ways.

Legalism: You try your very best not to lie. This is what it means to live under the law. You will inevitably discover that you cannot not lie, even when you lower your standards about what that means.

License: You can admit from the start that you cannot obey this command and simply dismiss it as a biblical ideal you are not actually expected to obey. This is what it means to abuse God's grace and give in to sin."

Scripture Passage: Luke 7:33-35 ³³For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' ³⁴The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' ³⁵But wisdom is proved right by all her children."

? Have you ever been accused of something even though it was not true simply because of the people you were seen with?

? What reputation is Jesus earning for himself among the Pharisees?

? If Jesus wanted to gain a better reputation with the religious leaders, the Pharisees, what could He do next that would ultimately help His reputation?

Section One: The Scene

Scripture Passage: Luke 7:36-39 ³⁶When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. ³⁷A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. ³⁸As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

³⁹When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner."

? If you invited a guest to your home for dinner this weekend, what would you do to make them feel welcomed and appreciated when they got to your house?

In Jesus' culture, when one had a guest to dinner, they would have greeted their guest with a kiss. Then the host would offer an option for the guest to wash his feet or have a servant wash his feet. The host would also seat the guest at the head of the table to show them honor.

? What did Simon, the Pharisee referenced in this passage, do when Jesus arrived for dinner?

? What do we know about the woman who approached Jesus, her reputation and her lifestyle?

? What do Simon's words tell us about his view of Jesus and the woman? How do his words display his deeply rooted legalism?

Section Two: Jesus' Gospel Response to Legalism and License

Scripture Passage Luke 7:40-50 ⁴⁰Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you."

"Tell me, teacher," he said.

⁴¹ "Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

⁴³ Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven."

"You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

⁴⁴ Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵ You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶ You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. ⁴⁷ Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little."

⁴⁸ Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

⁴⁹ The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

⁵⁰ Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

? What is Jesus attempting to teach Simon through His story?

? What is different about the heart of the woman's approach to Jesus versus Simon's approach?

? Why does Jesus respond differently to the woman than he responds to Simon?

For Discussion and Accountability

Bob Thune provides a road map of a Gospel response:

1. God says, "Do not lie."
2. I cannot obey this command because I am a sinner.
3. Jesus did obey this perfectly. Jesus did what I should do (but can't) as my substitute so that God can accept me (2 Cor. 5:17).
4. Because Jesus obeyed the law perfectly and now lives in me, and because I am accepted by God, I am now free to obey this command by his grace and power at work in me.

? Think of a sin struggle in your life. What would be the legalistic way to deal with that sin? The licentious way? What would be an appropriate Gospel response?