

## Luke 7

### *Legalism, License, and the Gospel*

#### Study Summary and Learning Objectives

This study focuses on a key passage of Scripture that demonstrates the Gospel at work through Jesus. We get a clear character study of a man who is living a life saturated with legalism, a woman who is abusing her license, and Jesus who demonstrates the power and grace of the Gospel.

#### Objectives:

- Identify what legalism is and the pitfalls of it.
- Identify what it means to abuse the grace of God and live a life of license.
- See what it means to live in light of the Gospel.

#### Steps to Prepare for Leaders

- Think through a sin struggle in your life that you would be willing to share during accountability time. Apply this sin struggle to the application question about legalism, licentiousness, and the Gospel response.

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**Read Out Loud:** For the purpose of this study we will be focusing on the life of Jesus in the second half of Luke 7.

#### Section One: The Setting

**Read Out Loud:** Before we can dig into this story of legalism, license, and the Gospel in the life of Christ, we first need a definition of legalism and license.

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, license or gospel].

**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."

**Read Out Loud: Luke 7:33-35** <sup>33</sup>For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' <sup>34</sup>The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' <sup>35</sup>But 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?

*Possible Answer: I have been accused of being a Green Bay Packer fan because I watched the game at a friend's house who is clearly a Packer fan.*

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

*Possible Answers: One who doesn't follow the religious rules, a glutton, drunkard and friend to the outcasts*

? 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?

*Possible Answer: He could spend time with them rather than eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners. He could follow their social and religious rules.*

## Section One: The Scene

**Read Out Loud: Luke 7:36-39** <sup>36</sup>When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. <sup>37</sup>A 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. <sup>38</sup>As 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. <sup>39</sup>When 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."

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.

? 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?

*Possible Answers: Go to the door and greet them – hug them/shake their hand. Hang up their coat for them.*

*Allow them to use the restroom/wash their hands. Offer them a drink.*

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

*Possible Answer: Nothing. He reclined at his dinner table and waited for Jesus to take His place.*

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

*Possible Answers: All we can really know is that she is known in the community for her sin. However, we can know based on culture that it was difficult for single women to be able to support themselves financially and she had to rely on other means to provide for herself which could have included prostitution. She is living a life of license, and identified by her sin.*

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

*Possible Answers: He thinks the woman is virtually scum and that Jesus shouldn't associate with her. He thinks he, as a Pharisee, is better than that woman and more worthy of Jesus' association. Simon thinks that he is able to merit the mercy of God by how well he knows and obeys the Law. Simon thinks that his good works will cover his sin in the eyes of God.*

## **Section Two: Jesus' Gospel Response to Legalism and License**

**Read Out Loud:** In this final section, we will see how Jesus responds in light of the gospel to Simon the Legalist and the woman who lived a life of license.

**Read Out Loud: Luke 7:40-50** <sup>40</sup>Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you."

"Tell me, teacher," he said.

<sup>41</sup> "Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. <sup>42</sup> 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?"

<sup>43</sup> Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven."

"You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

<sup>44</sup> 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. <sup>45</sup> You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. <sup>46</sup> You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. <sup>47</sup> Therefore, I

tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.”

<sup>48</sup> Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”

<sup>49</sup> The other guests began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?”

<sup>50</sup> Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

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

*Possible Answers: Both Simon and the woman have sin debts they cannot pay and they both need Jesus to forgive them of their sin and debt.*

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

*Possible Answers: The woman is responding in worship to Jesus, as she understands how her life of license and sin needs forgiveness, and that Jesus offers that. Simon’s response is out of arrogance and a heart of legalism and superiority.*

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

*Possible Answer: They both need forgiving, but she is repentant and Simon is not.*

### **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?