

SEED & BREAD

Otis Q. Sellers, Founder

convention by speaking to the woman. He also completely swept aside the demand of the Pharisees that one who had been declared a sinner and cast out of the synagogue could never be forgiven or brought back in. He declared her sins forgiven, and who could deny, after what the Lord pointed out about her love, that she deserved it? The Lord didn't just act to defy the conventions and authority of the Pharisees. First He showed just how wrong they were.

The Lord's words and actions caused an amazed reaction from those around Him. **And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"** How interesting that they responded this way! They did not respond in anger and indignation to what they could have viewed as a blasphemous claim. Their reaction shows how impressed they had been by the Lord's masterful handling of the situation. His dealings with both Simon the Pharisee and the woman left such an impression on them that they could not, for the moment, doubt that He had the power to do just what He said. His insight and His authority awed them all, and though they were surprised, they realized that He was within His rights to do as He had done.

The Lord ended the encounter with His words to the woman, **"Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."** Thus, the outcast woman received what she did not dare ask for: acceptance and forgiveness from the God from Whom her society had tried to cut her off. Simon, the one who was supposed to be in charge, was entirely shown up for the kind of man he was, and the Lord revealed the kind of God He is.

What conventions do we encounter in our society that tell us not to see certain people? We might not have a culture that forces us to treat anyone as if he does not exist, but we certainly do have conventions that categorize people, with some deemed worth our while and others being beneath our notice. Are we deceived by these conventions? Do we have the Lord's eyes, seeing those whose hearts are valuable in His sight, or do we let their external circumstances determine that they are simply not the kind of people who should be seen by upstanding members of society? If the Lord asked if you could see all the people around you, would you be able to say yes?

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CAN YOU SEE

By Nathan C. Johnson

When Jesus healed the man born blind in John 9, the religious leaders were angry because He performed this miracle on the Sabbath day. They did not want to believe the man was really born blind until they questioned his parents. The parents gave a very non-committal answer, admitting he was their son and that he had been born blind, but disclaiming any knowledge of how he now could see. In John 9:22, we learn why they answered this way. **His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed that He was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue** (NKJV throughout).

Being put out of the synagogue was a drastic punishment, not at all like being kicked out of a church. Since the synagogue was the community center, expulsion from it meant exclusion from the community of Israelites. It was forbidden to interact with such an expelled person if at all possible. Imagine what this would be like. No one of your own people would talk to you, or even acknowledge you were there. When you walked down the street, everyone you passed would act like you did not exist. If you entered a shop as a customer, no one would wait on you. If in desperation you just stole something, the shop owners would suddenly notice you. Everyone would love the bragging rights of having been part of your arrest and punishment. But short of this, no one would see you.

To be this kind of person would be almost like a living death. Worse, there was supposed to be no way back into the community once one was expelled. This state was labeled by the religious leaders as being a "sinner." In Scripture, this term is often categorized with that of tax collector, since this was one of the only jobs such a person could get: working for the Roman government against one's own people. Rome would force them to work with you, like it or not. Not every "sinner" would or could do this job of tax collecting, but all were treated like traitors regardless.

In Luke 7, the Lord encountered a woman who was considered a “sinner” while He was eating in the home of a Pharisee named Simon. Luke 7:37, **And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, 38. and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil.**

Some have wondered how such a woman could even enter the house of a prominent Pharisee. Why would they not have kept her out? Yet to ask this question is to misunderstand the position of a “sinner.” Everyone was supposed to act out the fiction that the “sinner” did not exist. Telling her to leave would have required the acknowledgement of her presence, and no one was willing to do that.

The Pharisees were largely the ones in charge of selecting those who were removed from the Jewish community. Thus the Pharisee Simon in whose house this event took place would have been the one from whom everyone would have taken their cues. If he acknowledged the woman, they could too. Apparently he did not act, and so everyone went on pretending the woman didn’t exist. Of course, they all knew she did exist, and the Pharisee noted what she was doing and had his private thoughts about it. So far, Jesus had not acted either. He had not stopped the woman, yet He had not accepted her, either. He simply sat there and let her honor Him, yet still, to all appearances, ignored her as everyone was supposed to do. This was not enough for the Pharisee, however. **Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, “This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner.”** Simon was unwilling to acknowledge the woman himself, but he thought Jesus should have, by rejecting her.

Jesus knew Simon’s thoughts, and He answered them, **“Simon, I have something to say to you.”**

I remember as a child when my parents said to me, “Nathan, I have something to say to you.” I knew I must have done something wrong, and I was about to be scolded. Simon certainly needed to be taught a lesson, as did all the heartless religious leaders who had enacted this dreadful banishment on anyone who challenged their authority.

The Lord gave Simon a parable, Luke 7:41. **“There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them**

both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?” 43. Simon answered and said, “I suppose the one whom he forgave more.” And He said to him, “You have rightly judged.”

Simon recognized the truth that one who is forgiven more will naturally love more. Yet now Jesus brought His lesson home. First, He did what no one else in the room would do. In verse 44, we read, **Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman?”** Of course, Simon and everyone in the room had been seeing her from the moment she came in. It is likely they were thinking of little else. Yet until the Lord spoke of her, no one dared acknowledge she was there, for that would have been admitting her existence in front of the Pharisee. Not even his own servants wanted to risk his wrath by doing that, lest such a punishment might befall them. Yet the Lord openly defied this convention and pointed her out to Simon.

Pointing out to Simon what he refused to see was only the start of the Lord’s lesson. He went on to point out her love. **“I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. 45. You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. 46. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. 47. Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.”** It is clear that the Pharisee Simon had only invited the Lord because He was a popular figure whom he felt obligated to connect with. It appears he viewed the Lord as inferior guest, not worth what was simply common courtesy. Probably this omission had been done purposefully, in an attempt to put the Lord in His place. It showed Simon’s lack of love for the Lord.

What a contrast was this woman, whom everyone treated as if she didn’t exist! Sinners were viewed as irredeemably bad people, according to the religious leaders’ assessment of them. Yet this woman had shown great love for the Lord, and she had done it even while He had been acting like everyone else and not speaking to her or acknowledging her. Far from snubbing Him as a guest, she had shown her love and devotion, even when He remained silent. What a difference from the cold heart of the Pharisee!

Now, having set it up, the Lord broke the final convention. He did not just speak of the woman; He spoke directly to her in Luke 7:48. **Then He said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”** The Lord went far beyond just defying the