

The Telltale Sign of Sinner and Saint, Part 1

Luke 7:44-50

What do you think is the defining mark of being a Christian? We're not talking here about something that only God can know looking at every human heart from his omniscience, from his divine vantage point. I'm talking about something that we all can see on the outside, externally. What is the telltale sign of a Christian? If you answered, love, you're correct.

Divine love. Biblically defined love is the telltale sign of being a Christian. Like, love for one's enemies, that's the telltale sign. Those who treat us with contempt or disdain, or disrespect, loving those kinds of people. Only Christians do that. Christians must do that. Love like that only comes from God. It comes from God and God alone. Love is the telltale sign because love, even though many attempt to fake it, even though many have attempted to redefine it, to diminish it, to practice some kind of a human-produced counterfeit.

That love that God gives to the Christian is something that cannot be faked. It cannot be reproduced by any human means. The Apostle John wrote in 1 John 4:7-8, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God." Love is the sign that you have been born of God. "Whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love."

So whenever true, biblical God-given love is present, it's proof positive that one has been born of God. And if one is born of God, then that person has been made a new creature. This is a new creature who believes, who obeys, who grows in holiness, who leaves behind all earthly ambitions and distractions and pursues heavenly things. So love is the telltale sign of true Christianity. Love marks the difference between sinner and saint. Love is what causes the righteous to emerge from among the unrighteous.

And that is what we are seeing here in this very important section of Scripture in Luke 7:36-50, that love is the telltale sign between sinner and saint. We see both sinner and saint in the text. We see that Jesus deals with both of those individuals

in love. And in his love, he confronts the one, and then he comforts the other.

Just to bring up to speed, Jesus has been invited by a Pharisee to be his guest at his house at an afternoon dinner. Other guests are there. They share the Pharisee's heart and mind. They're friends of the Pharisee, but Jesus is "the Teacher," as you can see, he's called in the text. He's the respected, he's the featured guest at this dinner. Jesus has already gained some notoriety in Galilee and this Pharisee and his company, they are keen to hear what Jesus has to say in a more private setting.

Have a look at the text and let's read verses 36-43, "One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. And behold, a woman of the city, who is a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment.

"Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner.' And Jesus answering said to him, 'Simon, I have something to say to you.' And he answered, 'Say it, Teacher.' 'A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?' Simon answered, 'The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.' And he said to him, 'You have judged rightly.'"

All it takes is a simple display of humble worship by this former sinner to totally reverse the ambush that Simon and his, his own friends had set for Jesus. Jesus has discerned the thoughts of Simon's heart and now Simon has come under the scrutiny of the Lord Jesus Christ. You can see here that Jesus isn't at all hostile to Simon. He's not unkind, but he's loving, and he starts by taking an indirect approach with Simon in confronting him. He tells Simon a short story, a parable.

The parable of the two debtors is a story that reasons from cause to effect. The cause of being released from a burden of an unpayable debt, it effects an attitude of love from both of those who were forgiven their debt. So this story is made-up. It's to prove a point. Only God is wealthy enough to have debt owed to him and cancel them. This story, though, comes across to Simon as a bit of make believe, which may be why when Jesus asked Simon in verse 42, "Now which of them will love him more," Simon answers the way he does in verse 43. "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt."

Simon doesn't have any question about that. He does add that little verb, "I suppose." No sooner has he spoken and given the answer, than Jesus does close the trap when he affirms, when he commends Simon's judgment in verse 43. "You have judged rightly." No problem with Simon's critical faculties. No problem with his reasoning. He is able to come to right judgments, as Jesus has just proven. So why did Simon get it so wrong in verse 39? "If this man were a prophet," oh, but he's not, then, "he would have known who, and what sort of woman is touching him, namely that she is sinner." She's known that way. Why doesn't he know that?

Jesus did know. And he is at least a prophet. So why couldn't Simon see that for himself? And why did he misjudge this woman with a, the evidence of her radical transformation so clear for everyone in the room to see? How does Simon totally miss that? How does he misjudge Jesus and how does he misjudge this transformed sinner?

What I want you to see, this is vital for your own discernment, it's vital for your critical thinking, but it's also deeply settling for your own assurance, for your own devotion to God, to Christ. It's so vital for your sanctification. What you need to see is how, as we said at the beginning, love marks the dividing line between sinner and saint. That's what we see as Jesus interacts here with Simon and this woman.

First main point, Jesus loves the sinner by confronting him. Jesus loves the sinner by confronting him. Take a look at the section running from verse 44 to verse 47. In the parable of the two debtors, we said that Jesus reasoned from cause to

effect. Now in verses 44 to 47, he reverses the line of reasoning and he moves from effect to cause. Look at the text. "Then turning toward the woman Jesus said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.'"

Having read that, did Simon show love for Jesus? Even a little love for Jesus? No. Not even a little. Simon showed no love for Jesus. But Jesus returns that lack of love in Simon by loving him. And when he loves Simon, he loves him enough to confront him. He doesn't try to be nice here, to cover it over in grace, which is, by the way, total misnomer if you understand grace. Covering it over and not confronting somebody is not grace. Grace is to lean into this with kindness and love and confront it.

So Jesus loves Simon here by confronting him. He, he is kind, but he is direct. He's gentle, but he is straightforward. He does not mince words. We could really use more of this today, couldn't we? So why does Jesus confront? Is Jesus personally offended here? Not at all. Jesus sees the evidence here that Simon is in a desperate condition. Simon, contrary to his own thinking, contrary to his sense of false assurance and, believe me, folks, there are many today who are under the shroud, the darkness of a false assurance because they have embraced false sub-Christian gospels. There's so many people who call themselves Christians, and they think they're fine. But, beloved, they don't know him.

And Jesus sees the evidence in Simon that he remains dead in his trespasses and sins, that he's still under divine condemnation and wrath, that he's heading for hell, and it's eternal. This is why he shows love by confronting Simon. This has nothing to do with Jesus and his sense of personal offense. It has everything to do with his love and concern for Simon.

Let's look closely at how Jesus did this here. We'll call this subpoint A: Jesus confronted Simon's cold indifference, his



cold indifference. Notice how verse 44 begins. It says there that, "Then turning toward the woman Jesus said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman?'" Now the woman has been worshipping at Jesus' feet. She's been making a scene. She's crying and there are so many tears that it wets Jesus' feet. There's no towel, so she wipes up the mess with her own hair. She's kissing his feet repeatedly, anointing and rubbing in the ointment onto his feet. I mean this is going on in front of the whole dinner party.

By turning to the woman, whom Simon disregards, Jesus is leading Simon to force him to look at this woman as well. What's the big deal about that? This woman is a woman whom Simon regarded with cold indifference. He didn't care about her. She's nothing to him more than a notorious sinner, someone that he can look at, disdain, and feel better about himself. Jesus has directed Simon's attention to this woman, someone whom he regarded as worthless. And he's now influencing Simon, not only to pay attention to her, but get this, to learn a lesson from her. This is going to be very hard lesson for this coldly indifferent Pharisee to swallow here.

So why is Simon so cold and so indifferent toward this woman? What explains that? By asking the question that he asked, Jesus has also here confronted the cause of Simon's indifference. Subpoint B, Jesus here confronted Simon's spiritual blindness. He confronted Simon's spiritual blindness. It says, "Then turning toward the woman Jesus said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman?'" Or better if we translate the verb according to its verb tense, Jesus asks Simon here, Simon, are you seeing this woman?

But by putting this in the form of a question, Jesus exposes the fact that Simon had been ignoring this woman. Now, he forces Simon to look at her, and then, to look closer at her, and to observe her behavior, and to perceive what explains it. Simon needs to look beyond that woman's past, doesn't he? He needs to look beyond her public reputation. He needs to see her for who she has obviously become. He needs to examine the situation with spiritual eyes, with true understanding.

But he can't do that, can he? Jesus is painting the contrast here for Simon who's never seen, trying to show a contrast between this woman's signs of spiritual life and

Simon's lack of spiritual life. Simon is simply unable to see it because he's spiritually blind. So after confronting Simon's arrogance and his blindness and that's not even really finishing the sentence.

We get to subpoint C, here, Jesus confronted Simon's social unfriendliness. Frankly, social unfriendliness sounds a bit mild. There's been a lack of hospitality on Simon's part. And as we can see in verses 44-46, it just goes beyond just simple unfriendliness to actually reveal a pretty profound problem in Simon. Notice how Jesus says to Simon in verse 44, "I entered your house." It's not a throwaway line. You can't see it in English, but the pronoun, your, is up front in the original language. And in this case, it draws attention, not, not simply to Simon's ownership of the house. I mean that's been established. But rather to the inhospitable treatment by the one who is the owner and the host. Another way to translate the sentence would be instead of, "I entered your house," it would be more like, I was your invited guest.

Luke noted in verse 36 that it's the Pharisee, he's the one who asked Jesus to come and eat with him. Again, in verse 36 and

in verse 37, the fact that this is the Pharisee's house is repeated twice there. In verse 39, Luke tells us that when the Pharisee, oh by the way, the one who had invited him, when he saw this. So now Jesus says, I was your invited guest. With a reasonable expectation of social grace and propriety, there ought to have been honor, some honor showed to a guest of honor, right? At the very least, there ought to have been some marks of social grace and friendliness.

From verses 44-46, Jesus outlines his charges, his confrontation with a pattern of contrast. Look again, "You gave me no water for my feet," then notice how it turns on, But she, but she, but she. "You gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in, she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment." You can hear the cadence there, right, the rhythm there in Jesus' confrontation. There is a pattern there. Three statements of contrast. All of them are parallel to one another.

Notice how specific Jesus is in his confrontation. Notice how Jesus is concrete in his language when he confronts Simon. He doesn't indict Simon's lack of attentiveness to him in the abstract. That is he doesn't say, Simon, you were inhospitable, you were unfriendly, you were discourteous. Those are true. They're more abstract terms. He points to the evidence and he uses concrete language, something they could all see. Something they could all recognize. The way he structured the language in the sentences, he's painfully direct. He doesn't let Simon off the hook at all. Here's how it comes across in the original. "Water for me upon my feet, you did not give. A kiss for me, you did not give. With oil my head, you did not anoint." It's stark. It's concrete. It's direct.

At the very least, Simon has inadvertently signaled here a distance in the relationship, but more likely, he's revealing and signaling his unfriendly suspicion toward Jesus and perhaps even further to show an already decided contempt for Jesus. So wherever we land on the question of whether these marks of social etiquette were expected or not expected or just nice, it is clear that Jesus has noticed these oversights. That's

apparent. A lack of water, the lack of the kiss for greeting, the lack of oil anointing his head stood out to him.

So Jesus has confronted Simon's arrogance, his blindness, his unfriendliness. He's moved from effect to cause to bring Simon to the conclusion we find here in verse 47. This is subpoint D: Jesus' conclusion about Simon. Jesus confronted, letter D, subpoint D, Simon's total lovelessness. He confronts Simon's total lovelessness. Here in verse 47, Jesus and Simon here both looking at the woman. Jesus has listed the obvious evidences of her radical transformation.

What started back in verse 40 with, "Simon, I have something to say to you," ends here in verse 47 with the conclusion, therefore I tell you. I have something to say to you, now, therefore, my conclusion, "I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much." She who, "he who is forgiven little, loves little." Therein lies the confrontation. As Jesus has pointed out in these three verses, Simon didn't love much. Simon didn't love a little. Simon didn't love at all.

Much love, as Jesus says here. Much love is a clear indication that person realized how much God has forgiven him or her. And much love, notice, is not in feelings inside. It's not just contained in the brain. Much love is what's demonstrated on the outside. It's what others can see. Much love. When there's little love shown, that demonstrates that a person simply doesn't recognize how much God has forgiven. The person doesn't recognize and realize the depth of sin, the seriousness of sin, that even the most minor sin merits an eternal hell.

But listen, where there's no love shown, zero, blank, nada, no love means no forgiveness. Those who have been justified by God through faith in Jesus Christ, Romans 5:1, those who've been justified by God, have peace with God. That is to say, there's no more enmity, no more war. It's the cessation of hostility toward God. And more importantly, the cessation of his wrath toward us. By his grace, we enter into condition of full and final peace. As Paul says, Romans 5:5, "God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

Simon, his lack of love, spoke much louder than he knew. Jesus revealed to all who can look and see, it revealed his lack of regeneration, which means a lack of faith, a lack of saving grace, a lack of forgiveness. His lack of love means that he had not been forgiven. For all of his education, for all of his wealth, for all the respect that was afforded to him in society, for all those who sought invitations to his dinner table, Simon lacked the one thing that really mattered. He did not possess peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus confronted him because he loved him. This man who treated Jesus with such cold indifference, with discourtesy and disdain, this man who judged Jesus to be not a prophet, Jesus loved him. Jesus loved a man who treated him like an enemy.