

Part 25: Scandalous Grace

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Many years ago I was in a pretty bad car accident. It was early in the morning and I was just coming around the curve out of Lolo when I hit black ice. I swerved into oncoming traffic, and the last thing I remember was seeing a truck coming towards me through the passenger-side window. When I regained consciousness I distinctly remember my knee was just throbbing and I was pretty sure that I'd broken my clavicle. It wasn't until later in the hospital that a cat-scan revealed I actually had some internal bleeding on my brain. The broken bone and the bruised knee had been self-evident to everyone – I had judged that they were my biggest problem. But without the cat-scan I never would have known the extent of my injuries.

And my point is that sometimes we need help to see beyond what's self-evident. We make lots of judgments throughout the day. We're constantly diagnosing the problems we run into and the people that are around us. But the gospel – like a cat scan – takes us behind our superficial observations and hasty conclusions and reveals what's really going on. It looks past our formal religion and exposes our hearts and what causes us to misjudge others, ourselves, and ultimately Jesus.

And as we look at this passage today in the book of Luke, what we'll see is that: **Your view of Jesus will either produce love for Jesus or critique of others.**

And we're going to look at this in **two points**:

1. Superficial Judgment
2. Gospel Judgement

So we'll start with Superficial Judgment.

Superficial Judgment

Let's start by reading **Luke 7:36**:

So first we're getting the context for this scene. A Pharisee asks Jesus to eat with him at his house. And later we'll see that this Pharisee is named Simon. Now don't get confused – we're not going to talk about the disciple Simon Peter at all today – so when we say "Simon" we're only talking about this Pharisee.

Now the last time we saw the Pharisees they were watching Jesus to try to find some fault in him so they could accuse him. So at first we have to kind of guess what Simon's motives are. At best he's curious about Jesus, but he might also be looking for evidence against Jesus. Either way he's trying to make sense of who Jesus is.

And this is actually the first of three meals that Jesus will share with the Pharisees. And at each meal Jesus is going to cause a controversy. Later he'll cause controversy because he doesn't conform to the Pharisee's traditions and their view of the Sabbath – but this first controversy starts over how he associates with sinners.

Let's read **verses 37-38**:

So a woman enters the scene and she is described as both a “woman of the city” and a “sinner.” Now undoubtedly this woman was a prostitute. Luke wants us to know that she is a woman with a shameful reputation – she’s characterized by scandalous sin – but Luke prefers to refer to her as a “sinner.” And that word “sinner” actually makes a connection back to what Jesus just said in the previous section.

Remember he said that he was accused of being a friend of tax collectors and “sinners” – and then immediately we’re seeing him interact with a woman who is regarded as one of those “sinners.”

And so she comes to this dinner party, and obviously she wasn’t invited. At a meal like this, it would have been socially acceptable for spectators to come and listen-in to the conversation. But no one expected a prostitute to show up – let alone a prostitute that starts cleaning the guest of honor’s feet.

So what is she here for – why is she doing these things? Luke doesn’t give us an account of any previous interaction between her and Jesus. She’s certainly heard about him as the reports have gone out – and possibly she was in the crowd who heard Jesus’s teaching in the last section. But all we’re told is that she heard where Jesus was having dinner and that she was determined to do this.

Now let’s read Simon’s response to what’s happening in **verse 39**:

So Luke wants us to see this scene from the Pharisee’s perspective. It says when the Pharisee “saw this”. So Simon sees the woman and what she’s doing and Jesus’ response to what’s happening and he’s trying to formulate a judgment. So Luke takes us right into the thoughts of this Pharisee and shows us his observations.

First, this woman is a sinner. You can sense the contempt that Simon has for her. But it’s not only who she is – it’s her proximity to Jesus.

Now the washing and kissing of feet are probably what strike us as awkward and inappropriate – but in that culture it wasn’t weird or something immoral.

I remember being given a heads-up before going to Kenya that culturally it’s normal for men to hold hands. In their culture it can just be a sign of respect or friendship. One day I was walking through a slum talking with a Christian brother and he grabbed my hand as we were talking. I felt really awkward, and yet I was really trying to be culturally sensitive so I just went for it and held on to his hand.

So similarly we have to think outside of our own culture for a moment in order to see what Luke wants us to see. It wasn’t the foot washing or even the kissing of feet that communicated anything inappropriate. Instead it was “who” the woman was that was alarming. A prostitute is presuming to come to Simon’s house uninvited, using ointment likely obtained through her sin, and she’s even serving Jesus with expressions of hospitality and affection that up to this point have been used in the service of her profession. What’s more, Simon would have assumed that this woman touching Jesus would have transferred ceremonial uncleanness to Jesus.

And that leads into the Pharisee’s other surprising observation. Jesus does nothing. He seems to find nothing wrong or concerning about his proximity to this scandalous woman. So it’s Jesus’ association with this sinner that” is most startling.

And so Simon’s observations lead him to a logical conclusion: Jesus is not a prophet.

Now why are Simon’s thoughts focused on whether or not Jesus is a “prophet?” Well remember that earlier in this chapter Jesus had the authority to raise a man from the dead, and so despite all the evidence that points to Jesus’ identity the people conclude that Jesus must be a prophet. So this is the popular opinion of him right now. And if the Pharisees are going to overcome public opinion, they’re

going to need to discredit Jesus. And so whether Simon had previously made up his mind about Jesus or not, now he's definitely decided. And in the process he's also acquired an argument for why Jesus is not a prophet.

If you think of prophets in the Old Testament you'll probably remember Nathan confronting David's adultery saying "you are the man". Or maybe Jonah warning Nineveh saying: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" Or even the most recent prophet, John the Baptist, saying "Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" Prophets weren't really known for being soft on sin.

A true prophet wouldn't let this slide – Jesus either doesn't know who the woman is (in which case he lacks the insight of a prophet) or he doesn't care who the woman is (in which case he's lax on moral issues). Either way he can't be a prophet.

And what I want you to notice is that Simon's judgment isn't actually that far-fetched. If we had been in the room we probably would have felt pretty uncomfortable as well.

What's also reasonable about his conclusions is that sexual immorality is wrong – the Bible makes that clear. He's right about the prostitute in the sense that she is a sinner. **1 Cor. 6** is one of a plethora of passages that talk about sexual sin – and it says:

So God is not lax when it comes to sexual sin. But where does the Pharisee go wrong?

Well finally Jesus speaks in our passage. Let's read **verse 40**:

So remember that Simon had been talking to himself when he determined that Jesus didn't "know" who the woman was. But Jesus "answers" him – he knows Simon's thoughts.

And Simon responds casually "Say it, Teacher." We already know that inside Simon is critical of Jesus, but he calls him "Teacher" – he uses a title of honor - he's being polite.

But now Jesus is going to prompt Simon to make another judgment about something that is obvious and in doing so he's going to expose where Simon has gone wrong. And he's going to do this through a parable. Let's read **verses 41-43**:

Now the answer to this parable is extremely self-evident. There's no way that you could get it wrong. The debtors have no way to pay their debts, and the lender decides to cancel their debts. He simply forgives them. The amounts of the debts are about two years' wages vs. a couple months' wages. So it could equate to the difference between something like \$70,000 and \$6,000. But regardless of the amounts, of course it's the one who owes more that's going to appreciate being forgiven more.

But Jesus doesn't actually say that he will be more appreciative - or that he would be more loyal – instead he says that he will "love him" more. Now that's an interesting choice of words.

And did you see how Jesus is more enthusiastic about the Pharisee's answer than even the Pharisee is? The Pharisee says "I suppose..." – he's kind of reluctant – there's a hesitancy in his answer – maybe he's starting to get the feeling that this isn't going to end well for him. Jesus on the other hand affirms his obvious answer. He says "you have judged rightly."

Anyone could have seen the sinful woman and heard the parable and assessed both of them accurately. But despite how self-evident these things are, Jesus shows us that the Pharisee can get all these obvious things right and yet still get everything wrong because he doesn't know who Jesus is. Jesus wants to take us beneath the superficial so that we can see him rightly, and only then can we see the sinful woman and the Pharisee rightly.

And this brings us to our 2nd point: Gospel Judgment

Gospel Judgment

Let's read **verses 44-46**:

So did you notice how Jesus walks us back through all the same observations that the Pharisee had? Remember it said that Simon "saw this" – and now Jesus replays the scene saying "do you 'see' this woman". Both saw the same events but they are coming to two radically different conclusions.

What's different about Jesus' observations is that he's contrasting the woman's acts of devotion with Simon's shortcomings as a host.

There's three contrasts:

1. First, Simon provided no water for Jesus' feet vs. the woman wetting Jesus' feet with her tears and wiping them with her hair.

You can imagine that when your guest wears sandals on the dusty streets of 1st century Palestine, providing water for your guest's feet is a basic formality. It was a big oversight for Simon as the host to not do this. By ignoring his duty, Simon was essentially insulting Jesus.

This is contrasted with the woman seeking out Jesus to do this for him even though this wasn't her house and she had no obligation as his host.

2. Secondly, Simon didn't kiss Jesus on the cheek vs. the woman kissing his feet repeatedly.

Again this isn't anything inappropriate. A kiss on the cheek would have been a polite custom – a way friends greeted each other. It would have been a form of hospitality. But Simon doesn't communicate that kind of friendship or welcome to Jesus.

The woman on the other hand repeatedly kisses his feet expressing humility and devotion to Jesus.

3. And lastly, Simon did not anoint Jesus' head with oil vs. the woman anointing his feet with ointment.

Now anointing your guest's head would have been an appropriate courtesy. But Simon felt that this was unnecessary and could be ignored.

But the woman was so intent on doing this that when she heard where Jesus was, she must have gone home to get her flask of ointment before making her way to the Pharisee's house. She went out of her way – she was on a mission to anoint his feet.

Now none of this was mentioned when we were seeing things from Simon's perspective. Simon's hosting decisions were not even brought up. So it's the same scene but now we have new information. Somehow, Simon's discernment of the situation didn't include discerning himself.

If you have kids then you've probably experienced those awkward situations where your kids just stare at someone. They see something that isn't normal in their experience and say things like "what's on her face?" or "why doesn't he have any hair?" They're actually straining all of their powers of observation, and yet they fail to see what's obvious to everyone else – that they're the ones making this awkward. But if we're honest, we also find it easier to see everyone else's issues – like Simon we often don't discern ourselves.

And Jesus is being kind of critical of Simon, isn't he? I mean he's basically shaming Simon in front of his guests. Doesn't that seem kind of harsh? But do you remember in Jesus' sermon a few chapters ago, he

said, “Judge not and you will not be judged?” And “with the measure you use it will be measured back to you”. Through his neglect as a host, Simon had basically publicly insulted Jesus in front of his guests. And yet it wasn’t until he judged the woman and Jesus in his heart that Jesus responds in measure to Simon’s own judgment.

Simon wasn’t wrong about the sinfulness of the woman. But Simon judged Jesus wrongly. Because he didn’t understand Jesus he couldn’t interpret the woman’s actions or why Jesus didn’t send her away. And so Jesus contrasts what Simon and the woman did so that he can expose the difference between what Simon and the woman believed about him.

And we’re going to look at this in two points:

1. A Shallow Understanding of Sin
2. A Deep Understanding of Forgiveness

First we’ll look at A Shallow Understanding of Sin.

A Shallow Understanding of Sin

What’s underneath Simon’s judgment of the woman and Jesus? Why does he respond to this situation by judging them?

Well first, where does Simon start with Jesus? He invites Jesus to dinner not because he wants to honor Jesus. He’s seeking a stimulating conversation with an interesting teacher. He’s not seeking Jesus. He’s seeking to find something wrong with Jesus. He’s looking for a controversy – he’s preparing for a debate.

I heard a story of a missionary that was at a conference and he went out to lunch with a group of pastors. And their waiter was a surfer with crazy hair, tattoos, and piercings. And at one point the waiter looks down and says “Dude, you’ve got a Bible!” And he told them how he’d just gotten saved and he loved Jesus and was seeking Jesus – but the missionary noticed that the pastors at the table were bothered by the young man’s lack of theological precision in what he shared. After the waiter left the table the missionary said, “Well, it’s better to have it and not know what to call it than to know what to call and not have it.”

Now his point was that those pastors’ theological precision somehow failed to give them the same degree of enthusiasm for Jesus that this recently converted surfer had.

Simon has what you might call a preoccupation with the peripheral. He thinks proximity to the things of God is the same as knowing God. He’s fascinated by the external things of religion while missing his need for Jesus.

And this is sobering because you can be excited about lots of Christian things without truly being a Christian – without really knowing and loving Jesus. There are good things like apologetics, or end-times prophecy, or systematic theology, or minimalist living, or homeschooling – and all of these things are good and have their place but are you known as someone who loves apologetics or as someone who loves Jesus? Do you try to evangelize people to Jesus or do you try to evangelize them to minimalist living or homeschooling?

And this is all especially dangerous because we can hide behind the fact that it’s all biblical, but Simon’s judgments were also “biblical” in a superficial sense – but he needed to see the savior that the whole Bible points to, and he needed to respond to him with repentance and love.

But instead Simon correctly but insufficiently recognized that the woman was a sinner. She is one of those really “bad” sinners. No true man of God would have anything to do with her. And so in his head Simon accuses and discredits Jesus for his proximity to “bad” people like her.

Who do you think qualifies as the “bad” people out there? Who’s that person that’s on the other side of the issues you care about? Who are you most likely to get in a debate with – even if it’s just in your head?

We’ll come back to that a little later but for now just remember that Simon wasn’t wrong about the woman’s sin. But he was still missing something.

Simon’s decisive judgment is held up in contrast with Simon’s glaring lack of self-awareness. He was very aware of everything this sinful woman unexpectedly did do, but he seems completely aloof to everything he was expected to do and didn’t do.

We already looked at Simon’s insults and oversights – the water, the kiss, and the oil. But did you notice that Jesus, though aware of all this, – he still stayed and ate. Simon didn’t recognize all that Jesus had chosen to overlook – the grace Simon experienced by Jesus even choosing to stay.

So we see how shallow Simon’s understanding of sin is. He only seems to have a category for the shocking sins of others while overlooking obvious offenses in himself.

You see, a shallow understanding of sin makes it really easy to overlook your own sin and be critical of others. The gap between the woman’s “big” sin and the Pharisee’s small oversights gives him a false sense of security. Remember how Jesus had taught about trying to address a speck in someone else’s eye while you’ve got a log in your own eye? Well Simon has a log in his eye. The woman’s fornication isn’t one more reminder by contrast of how holy Simon is. Her sin is actually a speck compared to his self-righteous hypocrisy and judgment of Jesus. A pastor once said that self-righteousness keeps more people out of heaven than all loose-living combined. Your morality might keep you from sins you think are gross, but it has no ability to help you get forgiveness for even your more respectable sins.

Remember that Jesus reserves his harshest rebukes not for the sinners out there but for the prideful religious people in here. He says to the religious people who don’t repent “it will go better for Sodom than for you.”

So are you more offended by the sin being committed out there – or do you first recognize the depths of your own need for forgiveness.

But actually, Jesus’ message to Simon isn’t that Simon is a bigger sinner. The contrast isn’t between the severity of the sins but between the responses to Jesus.

You see the root problem wasn’t that Simon didn’t see his sin rightly. The root problem was that he didn’t see Jesus rightly.

Do you remember what Jesus said to Simon at the beginning of this confrontation? He said “I entered your house.” Earlier in the chapter people had rejoiced saying “God has visited his people!” They didn’t know how right they were. Jesus’ hadn’t just entered a house – this was God’s eternal Son who had entered humanity to save us. And it’s this Jesus who had entered Simon’s house. Remember it was the Roman centurion just a little earlier in this chapter who had insisted that he was not worthy to have Jesus come into his home. But somehow this Pharisee missed the significance of Jesus being willing to enter his home.

Simon doesn't recognize Jesus as the savior - he falls short of even seeing him as a prophet. And if you don't recognize who Jesus is, then you will have a faulty view of your sin, your need for forgiveness, and the worthiness of the savior who forgives.

It's his shallow view of Jesus that results in a shallow view of sin.

But we know the sinful woman sees Jesus rightly because she responds with A Deep Understanding of Forgiveness.

A Deep Understanding of Forgiveness

Let's read Jesus' verdict in **verse 47**. This is Jesus' judgment that can only make sense in light of the gospel:

So this is Jesus' verdict: the sinful woman loves Jesus because she knows how much she has been forgiven by Jesus. The Pharisee doesn't love Jesus because he doesn't recognize that Jesus is the one he owes and the one who freely forgives.

Where the Pharisee responded to Jesus with being judgmental, the woman responds to Jesus with love. She loves him much because she believes he has forgiven her much.

Her need for forgiveness and Jesus' authority to forgive is what this whole chapter has been moving towards. It's not just the faith of the centurion or the grief of the widow but love as a response to Jesus' forgiveness that he wants us to see.

The first thing we notice from what Jesus says is that her sins "are many." The fact that she is a sinner is mentioned over and over. And ironically, if you were aware that your sins were "many" wouldn't that make you want to hide from Jesus?

But she doesn't hide because she gets who Jesus is. Her awareness of her debt to him only further demonstrates how much her savior has loved her. Like the song we sing says "Our sins they are many, his mercy is more."

And so she loved Jesus.

Jesus asked Simon "Do you see this woman?" Simon had seen her but he just had a flattened view of her - she was just a sinner. But now, Jesus wants us to see this woman, and this time he wants us to see her as a witness of who he is - and that's demonstrated in her love for him.

So let's replay the woman's actions again paying attention to what it looks like to love Jesus:

First notice that when she decided to go to the Pharisee's house, she was willing to risk being judged by others. Her awareness of her sin actually made going into that house even more daring. Her love for Jesus gave her courage and freed her up to be criticized for Jesus' sake.

Are there situations where it's difficult for you to be identified with Jesus? Maybe it's at family get-togethers with an unsaved parent or sibling. Or maybe it's your professor in class, or maybe it's even the person cutting your hair. Are you freed up to be looked down on for being associated with Jesus?

And she's also not worried about making Jesus look bad. She wasn't afraid he was going to send her away for making him unclean or embarrassing him. Instead she was confident that she was accepted by him. He wouldn't send her away. No one else in the room mattered - she just wanted to serve her savior.

There are all these action words: brought, wet, wiped, kissed, anointed. Her love took action. But also notice all the affectionate words: wept, using the hair of her head, kissed his feet.

Sometimes we think of love only in terms of spontaneous affection that just comes out of us naturally. Or we can overreact to that and think of love only in terms of duty and action – doing things for Jesus whether you feel like it or not. But it's both – when we take action to love even when it really doesn't come easy - then if it's being done in the awareness of how Jesus has loved us – our affections for Jesus can't help but grow.

Her love took action and yet as she took action her affections for Jesus just kept growing.

Taking her place behind him at his feet communicated humility. Her tears communicated sorrow over her sin. The ointment she brought communicated that she was offering all she had to him.

This is a picture of repentance. Remember we quoted from 1 Cor. 6 earlier about how the sexually immoral won't inherit the kingdom of God. But what does the next verse say?

Let's read **1 Cor. 6:11**:

She was a sinful woman but now in her repentance what defines her isn't her sin or even that she washed Jesus' feet with her tears but that he washed her with his blood.

Everything she did was a fruit of her repentance and gratitude to Jesus. She wasn't trying to be a good host – she just wanted to express her love for him.

How is this picture of her love challenging to you? We all love – it's not a matter of if we love but what we love. In the book of Luke we'll see that the Pharisees love too. They love attention, being praised, recognition, and money. Ironically, the whole reason they oppose Jesus is to protect these things – and yet this sinful woman in knowing Jesus does the opposite – she's freed up to sacrifice all these things. The surrender of her source of income, the cost of the ointment, the humble acts of service, the risk of being judged – what could be lacking in Jesus that would make him seem unworthy of this?

And notice that what she does glorifies Jesus. But washing someone's feet isn't that noteworthy, is it? It's actually the lowest act – it's beneath you – something only a servant would do.

Sometimes we think too big about what it means to glorify God. I mean that we think it's the big stuff like going on a mission trip or volunteering in a leadership role – that's where you can really glorify God. And often we can overlook our sin along the way to achieving those goals because the ends of glorifying God in the big things seem to justify the means of how we get there.

I remember realizing this as I worked on editing videos for the church while simultaneously being rude to my children for their constant interruptions. But what glorifies God more? The video that has the potential to reach thousands of people being completed at all costs? Or me loving Jesus, dying to myself because I trust him, and showing my children his love in the small, unremarkable moments of today?

Jesus might not be physically present for you to wash his feet, but remember that when we love those who belong to him in small, tangible ways, Jesus says: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me."

Anything that comes from love for Jesus is significant to Jesus.

Let's read **verses 48-50**:

Now why does Jesus say to her that her sins are forgiven? Wasn't the whole point that she already knew she was forgiven?

Well definitely he vindicated her by saying this in front of everyone. But he'd actually already done that in the previous verse. What's different now is that he says this "to her". Jesus sees her. She's not just a sermon illustration – Jesus sees her and speaks directly to her assuring her of what she already believed.

And Jesus says this to her knowing what it will cost him. When we looked at Jesus' parable the focus was on the response of the two debtors – but it's easy to overlook what it cost the moneylender. For the moneylender to forgive their debts, he had to absorb the cost himself. And Jesus is willing to say the words that this woman's sins are forgiven because he is willing to absorb the punishment that her sins deserved in her place. When Jesus hung on the cross in agony, he hung there to absorb the cost of each of this woman's "many sins". These were weighty words filled with a costly love.

And this isn't the first person who Jesus has forgiven in the book of Luke. We've seen this same situation before. Do you remember he said the same thing to the paralytic? But what's different this time? Where last time Jesus healed the paralytic to prove he had forgiven his sins, this time the woman's love for Jesus proves that he had already forgiven her sins. "Wisdom is justified by all her children."

Simon wanted Jesus to be justified as a prophet by knowing the woman's sins and condemning her. But Jesus is justified as the Savior by knowing the woman's sins and forgiving her. The woman's repentance and love bears witness that Jesus is the Savior who forgives sin. And her acts of devotion demonstrate that understanding who Jesus is produces love for Jesus.

But the Pharisees are still asking the same question from back in chapter 5: "Who is this who thinks he can forgive people's sins?"

The problem wasn't that Jesus didn't know "who" the woman was but that the Pharisees couldn't acknowledge "who" he was. So who is Jesus? He is the one you owe who has the authority to forgive your debt.

Just as the woman's sinfulness is mentioned over and over again so Jesus as the one who forgives is mentioned over and over again. Throughout this chapter we've seen Jesus' authority over sickness and even death, but here the display of his authority reaches its climax in his authority to forgive sins.

The Pharisees sit around not able to do more than analyze or comment on the enemies of sickness, death, and sin – they have no solution for them – but in this chapter Jesus actually overcomes all of them.

And it's the woman's faith in this Jesus that saves her. She doesn't earn or deserve salvation because of her service to Jesus. Her love and devotion were simply a response to Jesus' forgiveness. And this is in contrast to what the elders of the Jews had thought earlier in the chapter. Remember how they thought that the centurion deserved something from Jesus because of the centurion's love for the Jews. But that's an inversion of grace. Your love doesn't win you a hearing with Jesus – your love is a response to grace unmerited. The sinful woman merely kissed and anointed the feet that would be pierced for her. Now a life of loving Jesus is a life of living out your peace with him – the peace that he has purchased for you at the cross.

Now we are meant to want to imitate the woman's faith and love. But we're also meant to see ourselves in the Pharisee.

Brothers and sisters, is your life characterized by love for Jesus or critique of others? Do you get worked-up by the sins of others but aren't as concerned about the sins in your own life? Are you more defined by how much you condemn or by how much you've been forgiven?

And this is something that has been particularly challenging to me. I remember going to a wedding for some neighbors who weren't believers and they had a woman who was a justice of the peace do their ceremony. And I remember being frustrated by how the things that the woman was sharing were so contrary to the very meaning of marriage. I've also been at an adoption ceremony where one of the couples who was adopting some children was a lesbian couple. And I was frustrated by how their motivation for adoption and the worldview they wanted to give away to those kids was so contrary to the message of God's adoption of us.

But what characterizes me more? Frustration over other people's sin or a deep love for Jesus? Am I more concerned with other people's sin or with helping people know the Jesus who has forgiven my sin? I am no more worthy than anyone else is. Does seeing the sin of the lost help me to have compassion on them and want them to know the freedom that Jesus gives? Remember that Jesus' most scathing rebukes were for the prideful, religious people – for the people with just enough truth to help them hate others.

But it's not even just the sins out there that distract me. Probably just as often, I've been frustrated by other Christians. How often have I looked down on other Christians for their association with what I determine is sinful? If you don't share my convictions about entertainment, alcohol, finances, or parenting... I have often been frustrated by how far others fall short of my ideals – how they fail to measure up to me.

Now it isn't that my personal convictions about these things necessarily need to change. It's not that the principles in God's word - that inform my personal convictions - don't need to be obeyed. But I have often been more concerned with the lack of discipline in others than the lack of love in me. But it's only in seeing the Savior that then all of your obedience can flow from love.

My heart is bent towards legalism, but what's more beautiful than a bunch of cookie-cutter replicas of my ideals is a deep understanding of the Savior who forgives.

Dear Christian of first importance is this: do you see Jesus? Do you see the Savior who has forgiven your very great debt? Do you love him?