

**Is She a Sinful Woman or a Forgiven Woman?
An Exegesis of Luke 7:36-50
Part II**

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Exegesis of Luke 7:44-50

Verses 44-46: The Woman's Acts of Love Defended

In verses 44-46, Jesus started defending the woman's action. By hearing the parable of the two debtors, Simon the Pharisee may have gotten Jesus' main point that the woman's great love was a product of the great forgiveness, but Jesus gave Simon more details by comparing their actions. Verse 44 starts with the phrase καὶ στραφεὶς πρὸς τὴν γυναῖκα. The word στραφεὶς has the function of bringing the woman back to the center of this narrative. The word "see" in Greek in this verse is βλέπεις. This word is used in the Gospel of Luke many times and is used as a metaphor for perceiving the word of God. In Luke, to see the truth is to perceive the word of God.¹ There are two kinds of people in view here, one who receives the word of God and the other who does not receive it. For example, in Luke 2:20, after the shepherds saw baby Jesus, they rejoiced and praised God for all they had heard and seen. They are an example of seeing God's truth. On the other hand, Herod wanted to see Jesus but he did not believe in him. The Gospel of Luke used this comparison a lot and one of them is seen here in 7:44. Jesus asked Simon, "Do you see?" This word is not merely to ask Simon to see what the woman did but to see God's truth that she was a woman who was forgiven by God and showed much greater love than Simon did.² As I mentioned in Part I, Simon failed to see it. Jesus started to retell what the woman did for Jesus in order to make a vivid contrast between Simon and the woman, and He mentioned three things: water, kiss, and oil (ὕδωρ, φίλημα, ἐλαίω). The first thing Jesus mentioned was water. The structure of the entire sentence εἰσῆλθὸν σου εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν, ὕδωρ μοι ἐπὶ πόδας οὐκ ἔδωκας, is important to note. The word ὕδωρ is a direct object of ἔδωκας. Elsewhere in the Gospel of Luke, there are 167 examples of a verb with two complements following it. However in only four other places in Luke do the two complements precede the

¹Reid, B. E. 1995. "Do You See This Woman? Luke 7:36-50 as a Paradigm for Feminist Hermeneutics." *Biblical Research* 40, 37-49. New Testament Abstracts, EBSCOhost (accessed August 7, 2013).

²Ibid.

verb. Three of them are seen here in verse 44, 45, and 46.³ Two complements ὕδωρ μοι precede the verb ἔδωκας. This structure shows the speaker's emphasis on the word that comes first. The three things that Jesus mentioned, ὕδωρ, φίλημά, ἐλαίω, to compare Simon and the woman's action are parallel and do not have a conjunction.

Providing water (ὕδωρ) for a guest, although not necessarily required, showed warm hospitality. At that time, people wore sandals so their feet were usually dirty. To provide water made the guest feel relaxed and comfortable. Simon did not give the water to Jesus, but the woman wet Jesus' feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. In verse 45, Jesus mentioned a kiss (φίλημά). A kiss was a friendly greeting but was not really necessary to give to a guest. However the woman could not stop kissing Jesus' feet. That they may have been dirty made no difference to her. In verse 46, Jesus mentioned olive oil (ἐλαίω). This olive oil was not expensive, but Simon the Pharisee did not anoint Jesus' feet with anything. Simon did not provide water, give a kiss, or anoint Jesus, but the woman did all these things. Green suggests that her actions should be seen as more than a substitute for Simon's lack of hospitality. Like Simon, she did not provide water, but she washed Jesus' feet with her tears that were more valuable than water in Jesus' eyes. She did not wipe Jesus' feet with a clean towel, but she wiped them with her hair. She did not kiss Jesus' cheek or hand that was a typical Jewish custom at that time, but kissed Jesus' feet as a sign of humility. She did more than Simon did because she loved Jesus much and was grateful for what Jesus had done in her life. We cannot judge that Simon was so rude to Jesus because he did not provide these three things, but we can say that he did not warmly welcome Jesus. In Jesus' eyes, her unnatural actions became natural. The role of host (Simon) and intruder are interchanged. Her actions were considered to be strange by Simon and other dinner guests. Even some of them thought that her attitude was like a prostitute, but in Jesus' eyes, her warm welcome was natural for a forgiven sinner and Simon's welcome as a host became unnatural.⁴

Verse 47: Much Forgiveness in Contrast to Little

Jesus said, οὗ χάριν, λέγω σοι, ἀφέωνται αἱ ἁμαρτίαι αὐτῆς αἱ πολλαί, ὅτι ἠγάπησεν πολὺ· ὃ δὲ ὀλίγον ἀφίεται, ὀλίγον ἀγαπᾷ. (Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little (NIV)). Jesus concluded his teaching saying "therefore" (οὗ χάριν). There is a debate among scholars about which phrase "I tell you" (λέγω σοι) or "her many sins have been forgiven" (ἀφέωνται αἱ ἁμαρτίαι αὐτῆς αἱ πολλαί) receives the word "therefore" (οὗ χάριν). It seems a minor and unimportant difference, but depending on which phrase receives

³Martin M. Culy, Mikeal Carl Parsons, and Joshua J. Stigall, *Luke: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 248.

⁴Resseguie, James L. 1992. "Luke 7:36-50." *Interpretation* 46, no. 3: 285-290. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed August 7, 2013).

“therefore” (οὗ χάριτι), or it will totally change the theology of forgiveness. If we take the position that supports “I tell you” (λέγω σοι) as a receiver of “therefore” (οὗ χάριτι), we can translate the entire sentence this way. “Therefore (because of this conduct), I tell you that her many sins have been forgiven, as is evidenced by the fact that she loved much.”⁵ On the other hand, if we take the other position, the translation of the whole sentence will be like this: “I tell you. Therefore her many sins have been forgiven because she loved much.” We see that these two translations have a significant difference. The first translation shows that her great love was based on forgiveness she received before entering the Pharisee’s house, but the other translation shows that because of her love and actions such as wiping, kissing, and anointing, her sins were forgiven. Besides, how to translate word ὅτι is as important as the previous issue. Many times, this word is translated as “for” or “because.” So we tend to translate ὅτι here in verse 47 the same. However it should not be understood as a causal sense but as a content conjunction.⁶ So, like Marshall, it is proper to translate ὅτι as “as is evidenced.”

Furthermore, we should also take a look at the word ἀφέωνται. Since this word is in the perfect tense, here we can see another piece of evidence that the woman’s forgiveness occurred before that time. The passive form is also important because it tells us that God was the one who has given the forgiveness.⁷

All in all, I support the view that the woman’s love was a result of God’s forgiveness; not because she showed love, she was forgiven. Some English translations do not show this truth. For example, NASB translates in this way, “For this reason I say to you, her sins which are many have been forgiven for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.” The NRSV translates, “Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.” I think this kind of translation will cause confusion among the readers especially those who are new Christians. I prefer how the GNB and the TNIV translate the passage. The GNB says, “the great love she has shown proves that her many sins have been forgiven” The NIV says, “her many sins have been forgiven- as her great love has shown” These two are excellent translations that do not make the readers misunderstand that the forgiveness is based on love.

For the second half of verse 47, the NIV translation is not correct, “But he who has been forgiven little loves little” (NIV). The word ἀφιέται is the present tense so we should not translate this in a perfect tense since Luke intentionally made a difference here. In Greek, if a statement is described in the present tense that means that it is a general statement. So here Jesus told a general truth that

⁵I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Kingstown, Broadway: Paternoster Press, 1978), 313.

⁶Max Zerwick, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament* (Piazza della Pilotta: Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1996), 203.

⁷Barbara E. Reid, *Choosing the Better Part?: Women in the Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville, Minn: Michael Glazier, 1996), 114.

the one who is forgiven little loves little. If we translate this passage in the perfect tense, we miss the point that Luke was not pointing out Simon personally. It cannot be a precise application to Simon since he did not believe in Jesus and the teaching of John the Baptist.⁸ He did not acknowledge Jesus as Savior or a prophet. Simon had not even reached a standard Jesus made here “the one who is forgiven little loves little.” He was not yet forgiven at this point.

The one who is forgiven little loves little. Everyone is equally a sinner before God but not everyone recognizes that they need forgiveness, great forgiveness. This makes a huge difference in how we live our Christian life. We can live as if we are not great sinners by judging others, but it is so shameful to do so.

Verse 48: Jesus’ Response: Forgiveness Extended
to the Woman

“Then Jesus said to her, Ἀφέωνταί σου αἱ ἁμαρτίαι. Even though the woman knew that she was forgiven, Jesus announced it in public. The word ἀφέωνται is already seen in verse 47. As I have already explained above, a perfect tense explains a thing that has already taken place. The woman was forgiven, so why did Jesus still need to make an announcement? According to Bock, Jesus intentionally said it in public to confuse the dinner guests. Bock claims that if Jesus did not make the public comment they could have thought that the woman’s actions were either honorable or offensive. However, the guests, Bock alleges, were offended by the fact that Jesus publicly claimed to have the authority to forgive the woman when that authority, they believed, only came from God.⁹ Marshall and some other commentators say that the reason that Jesus made an announcement was to give the woman a personal assurance, but I do not agree with this view.¹⁰

Luke had a special intention of writing Jesus’ proclamation of the forgiveness, because forgiveness is one of the major theological themes in his Gospel. For example, in 1:77, Zachariah says that John the Baptist came to give the people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of sins. Also in 6:37, Jesus himself says, “Forgive and you will be forgiven,” and in 17:3, “If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.” In 23:34, “Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do.” In his very last words before Jesus left the world, he said, “Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations” (24:47). As already noted, forgiveness is one of the central themes of the Gospel of Luke. Apparently, Luke wanted to emphasize the fact that salvation comes through the forgiveness of sins.¹¹

⁸John Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, Word Books Publisher (Dallas, TX, 1989), 358.

⁹Darrell Bock, *Luke: 1:1-9:50*, (Ada, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 705.

¹⁰Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 314.

¹¹Van Til, K. A. 2006. "Three Anointings and One Offering: The Sinful Woman in Luke 7.36-50." *Journal Of Pentecostal Theology* 15, no. 1: 73-82. New Testament Abstracts, EBSCOhost (accessed August 7, 2013), 76.

Verse 49: The Pharisees' Reaction: Who Is This?

“The other guests began to say among themselves, ‘Who is this who even forgives sins?’” (NIV) This verse deals with a matter of Jesus’ identity. “Who is Jesus?” This question frequently arises throughout the Gospel of Luke. This major concern is seen in Luke in chapters 7, 8, 9, and 22. As I have mentioned above we can also see that forgiveness is one of major terms in Luke’s work (Luke 5:21, 24:47, Acts 10:43, 17:30). Bock suggests that the reason that Luke wrote a lot about forgiveness was that he wanted to show his readers that to be saved, it is necessary to recognize Jesus’ authority to forgive sins. Everyone who is seeking the truth must go through this process.¹²

Jesus’ proclamation of the forgiveness for the woman was not for personal assurance for her but for the other dinner guests. His word caused great confusion among them. Simon’s reaction in this verse is not known. It does not say if Simon responded to Jesus’ parable and had a heart to repent and admit that Jesus was a prophet. However, at least the other dinner guests were greatly offended. Why? In their eyes, Jesus acted like God himself who only can forgive one’s sins.¹³ This was the normal reaction for those who strictly observed the Jewish law. The Pharisees believed that as long as they gave the offering at the temple, their sins would be forgiven so it was unbearable for them to see that Jesus had such authority besides God.

The phrase ἐν ἑαυτοῖς suggests that it is possible that the other dinner guests showed their confusion and complaints verbally. They said, Τίς οὗτός ἐστιν ὁς καὶ ἁμαρτίας ἀφίησιν. The word ἀφίησιν is in the present tense. It shows that the dinner guests felt that Jesus’ active declaring of forgiveness as the judge declares, “This person is not guilty” at the court. If Jesus said in verse 47, “God has forgiven your sins” instead of saying “Your sins have been forgiven,” the Pharisees would not have a problem with Jesus. However since Jesus said, Ἀφέωνταί σου αἱ ἁμαρτία, they had a problem with this phrase. The word “forgive” here is passive. Stein named this passive usage “divine passive” to show Jesus’ authority.¹⁴ In spite of the dinner guests’ arguments, Jesus did not give an answer. Luke wanted his readers to have their own decision and it is so clear who Jesus is in the context of this passage.¹⁵

Verse 50: Jesus’ Confirmation: The Woman’s Faith Has Saved Her

The dinner guests might have recognized that Jesus was a prophet but verse 50 clearly tells us that Jesus is more than a prophet. This is the main point of this verse. One of the roles of the prophets in the Old Testament was to proclaim

¹²Bock, *Luke*, 706–707.

¹³Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 314.

¹⁴Stein, *Luke*, 238.

¹⁵Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 314.

God's Word. As we read through the Old Testament, we see their typical sayings "the Lord says" or "the Lord will forgive." The prophets were not God himself but they were the mouthpieces of God. On the other hand, Jesus' proclamation of forgiveness in verse 48, (Ἀφέωνταί σου αἱ ἁμαρτίαι) over the woman did not have "the Lord says" since Jesus is the Lord himself and has authority to do it. Jesus said, "I tell you." This phrase is exactly opposite to the prophet's declaration, "the Lord says," in the Old Testament.

Once again, Jesus declared, ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε. The word σέσωκέν is in the perfect tense; she was not only forgiven but was saved. What made it possible was her πίστις. She had never heard a direct word of forgiveness until that time, but she was able to believe that she was forgiven and saved. The woman's πίστις was the faith that did not wait for the word of forgiveness or did not simply come to Jesus to ask for His help but to respond to what had already taken place (forgiveness), grabbed it for herself and showed gratitude for it. Noland describes her faith in this way, "Faith is seen when there is no break in the pattern of divine initiative and human response by means of which a restored relationship to God is established."¹⁶ Faith should include a human response and without it we cannot call it genuine "faith." In the Gospel of Luke, we can see this pattern in 8:43-48 and 12:12-19. Having faith means there should not be doubt. If she had a little doubt that she was really was forgiven, she might have gone to the Pharisee's house to receive a confirmation from Jesus. However she did not. She went there with gratitude that shows that there was no doubt in her heart. Rather she was full of joy, love and gratitude.

Right after Jesus said, "Your faith has saved you," he continued, πορεύου εἰς εἰρήνην. This phrase is a common farewell formula in Judaism. Hendricksen says this phrase shows "prosperity for both soul and body," can be meant here. This peace is the smile of God reflected in the heart of the redeemed sinner, a shelter in the storm, a hiding-place in the cleft of the rock, and under his wings."¹⁷

To sum up, we can see the principle in this episode. In verse 48, Jesus said, "Your sins have been forgiven" but now "Your faith has saved you." What is the connection between two phrases? Bovon explains well. "Love for Jesus and forgiveness are now expressed with different words, as "faith" and "salvation." Luke uses these concepts interchangeably."¹⁸ I would like to add the word "peace" (εἰρήνη). If there is salvation, there should be faith, love, forgiveness, and peace. If there is forgiveness, there should be salvation, love, faith, and peace. These four concepts go together and should not be separated. There was a message of Jesus who proclaimed that God's kingdom had come and He was sent by God to save the sinners. Somewhere, the woman heard this message of salvation and forgiveness. She received it with faith, was saved and had great

¹⁶Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 360.

¹⁷William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978), 410.

¹⁸Francois Bovon and Helmut Koester, *Luke 1:A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1-9:50*. Translated by Christine M. Thomas. New. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1979), 298.

gratitude and love. She was looked down on by most of the people in the city. People did not know how much she was grateful, how much she was changed. However it does not matter for her for she had peace in her heart. Jesus sent the woman in peace so she would live in peace whatever situations would surround her in the future.

Application

This section will discuss applications that can be made from what has been learned in the exegesis of Luke 7:36-50.

Christians Should Show Extraordinary Love Because They Have Been Forgiven Greatly

The woman showed extraordinary love because she was forgiven greatly. The more she was forgiven, the more she loved Jesus. Since every single person on the earth is a sinner, there is no difference among them. No one can say, "This guy's sins are less than that guy's sins." So what matters most is how one sees and understands the meaning of forgiveness. If their understanding of forgiveness is not enough, their love will never grow, just like the Pharisee. The woman understood the meaning of forgiveness well, so she responded well. Thus, one's knowledge and love of God and people are not enough. People's love does not always respond well to God's forgiveness. At that time, perhaps the woman did not know what Jesus was going to do in the future. Jesus would be crucified on the cross to forgive all the sins in the world. However, still, she understood the meaning of forgiveness better than many Christians who know the history of salvation more than she did.

Is It Important How People Look At Christians?

If someone asks a Christian, "Is it important how people look at you?" that person should definitely say, "No." What matters is how God looks at someone. However, even if a Christian responds in this manner, it does not mean that he or she live out this truth. People have different perspectives on individuals and, therefore, no one can control how they are viewed. If someone paid attention too much to words and rumors about themselves, they would never know who they really were. This could cause that person to not be themselves. The Pharisee and most of the people in the city saw the woman as an unclean sinner who did not deserve God's grace and forgiveness. She was dirty in people's eyes. Yes, she used to be a sinner but for them, she was always a sinner. They never looked at the change in her that was caused by the Gospel and the fact that they too needed God's forgiveness. However, did the woman care how people looked at her? Apparently not. Many Christians pay attention too much to how people look at them even though God has already forgiven them and cleansed all their sins. Instead, Christians should be prepared to go into the house of the Pharisee

simply to search for what they can do to show their gratitude for what God has done in their life instead of crying with despair because of how people look at them.

Don't Label, Don't Judge: Don't Be Like The Pharisee

Labeling and Judging are part of human nature and are sinful. It is surprising to see how people are quick to label and judge others. Sometimes people act like Simon the Pharisee who labeled the woman as a great sinner. But the Pharisee did not see that he too was a sinner. This kind of sinful and evil habit can cause people to be quick to judge and label others. However, one should always remember the phrase, "Both of them are not able to pay back their debt." Do not want to be like the Pharisee but rather be like Jesus who had eyes that were full of love and compassion. Amy Carmichael says in her book, *If: What Do I Know of Calvary Love?*, "If I belittle those whom I am called to serve, talk of their weak points in contrast perhaps with what I think of as my strong points; if I adopt a superior attitude, forgetting 'Who made thee to differ?' and 'What has thou that thou hast not received?' then I know nothing of Calvary love."¹⁹

Conclusion

In the story of the sinful woman who anointed Jesus (Luke 7:36-50), Jesus makes a point about love and forgiveness. As has been discussed in this paper, his statement on this matter has been the subject of debate among scholars and pastors. The heart of the issue deals with Jesus' perspective on the relationship between love and forgiveness. Was the woman forgiven because she loved much? Or did she love much because she was forgiven?

In this paper, I have presented a detailed exegesis of this passage, including a discussion of textual criticism, in order to clarify this issue. From this study, I have concluded that the sinful woman in this passage loved much because she had already been forgiven by Jesus. This conclusion is contrary to the misinterpretation of some who believe the converse; that Jesus forgave the woman because she loved much.

The following is a summary of the evidence that the woman was forgiven before she entered the Pharisee's house.

The first evidence (see verse 37) is seen in the Greek phrase *γυνή ἥτις ἦν ἐν τῇ πόλει ἁματωλός*. The translation should be "There was a woman who used to be a sinner in the city." The word "in the city" (*ἐν τῇ πόλει*) between "a certain woman was" (*γυνή ἥτις ἦν*) and "a sinner" (*ἁματωλός*) is important. It means she was considered to be a sinner by the people in the city despite the fact that was no longer a sinner. Also the word *ἦν* is the imperfect tense. Again, it shows that she was no longer a sinner.

¹⁹Amy Carmichael, *If: What Do I Know of Calvary Love?* (Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publications, 2011), 13.

The second evidence (see verse 38) is seen in her actions that she brought some expensive perfume to anoint Jesus' feet. Along with all her actions such as crying, wiping, kissing and anointing, this clearly showed that all these actions were products of great forgiveness that she received from God.

The third evidence (see verse 41) is seen in Jesus' interaction with Simon the Pharisee. After Jesus told Simon the parable of the two debtors, Jesus asked a question, "Now, which of them will love him (the moneylender) more?" In Greek, "he will love" is ἀγαπήσει. The debtor who was forgiven more refers to the woman and this debtor will love the moneylender after he received the announcement of being debt-free. The woman's great love being shown to Jesus happened after she received forgiveness from God.

The fourth evidence is seen in verse 47. Careful observation of the words οὗ χάριν, ὅτι, and ἀφέωνται is the key to understand the principle of forgiveness. The word οὗ χάριν is received by the phrase λέγω σοι. Moreover, ὅτι should be translated as a content conjunction, so the translation is not "because" or "for," but "as is evidenced by." Also, it is important to note that ἀφέωνται is the perfect tense.

To sum up, the translation of verse 47 will be like this; "Therefore, I tell you that her many sins have been forgiven, as is evidenced by the fact that she loved much." It is obvious that forgiveness happened before the woman came to the Pharisee's house.

The fifth evidence is seen in the last verse when Jesus told the woman, Ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε. The tense is the perfect tense. Her salvation and forgiveness occurred when she accepted the message of salvation before she came to the Pharisee's house. It did not happen when she met Jesus face to face in the house.

By looking at these five pieces of evidence and apply the theology of forgiveness we can say with confidence that we love God because He loves us first and forgives us. Not, he loves us and forgives us because we love him first. Many times preachers and ministers tend to misunderstand this basic principle as they preach on this passage. Preachers misunderstand that the woman's actions are not a product of love but that of repentance. All of these are wrong interpretations and the messages of the Gospel do not include these false teachings. Ministers should always pay attention to God's truth that God loves us first. Every minister knows this simple statement, but sometimes we misinterpret the Bible and create false teaching and proclaim it without noticing. This is our responsibility as leaders, preachers and students of the word of God.

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