

Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



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Jesus and Sin

How Jesus addressed the subject of sin provides some important lessons on how we should deal with the subject in our lives today.

“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.’ . . . Then [Jesus] said to her, ‘Your sins are forgiven’” (Lk. 7:39, 48).

The woman in this story had washed Jesus’ feet, wiped them with her hair, and anointed them with precious oil. It was an act of honor that scandalized the Pharisees in the room, because she had a reputation as an immoral woman. No self-respecting Jew would allow such a woman to touch him. Yet Jesus not only allowed her to touch Him, He also forgave her sins.

Stories like this in the Gospels have led some to conclude that Jesus was not all that concerned about sin, preferring instead to promote a more positive message of love and tolerance. This is a misreading of the evidence.

Jesus was not indifferent to sin. He had strong convictions about right and wrong, and taught them. His famous Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7), for

example, is based on the premise that God’s law is binding and must be honored (5:17-20). In that same Sermon, He urged His listeners to make whatever sacrifices necessary (plucking out eyes, cutting off hands) to avoid getting caught up in sin (5:29-30; see 18:8-9). Elsewhere, He described sin as a cruel master that enslaves those who practice it (Jn. 8:31-36), and warned against leading others into it (Matt. 18:6). At least twice He admonished those who received His forgiveness to “sin no more” (Jn. 5:14; 8:11). These are not the words of someone who has a careless “whatever” attitude toward sin.

Yet we must acknowledge that Jesus’ approach to dealing with sin was radically different from that of the Pharisees, who frequently blasted Him for being soft on sin. There was something about Jesus’ treatment of human imperfection that they saw as loose, even dangerous. It is in His responses to these critics that we gain a deeper insight into how Jesus viewed sin.

The sins of the masses that so incensed the Pharisees were indeed

character flaws that needed to be addressed, and Jesus addressed them. But Jesus saw another, more insidious sin at work among His critics. It was the sin of *pride*, a condescending self-importance that despised others as inferior and contemptible. In the very act of condemning the weaknesses of others, these critics were guilty of an altogether different sin that was just as deadly, just as despicable, as anything their inferiors were committing. Jesus’ strongest rebukes were reserved for that sin.

What some in His day (and many today) interpreted as careless indifference to sin was not indifference at all. Rather, Jesus was restoring a sense of balance to the subject. Even when we think we are good people, we are likely guilty of the same error that doomed the Pharisees, and are no better than those whose sins we scorn.

Jesus hated sin and gave His life to overcome its disastrous impact on the human race. Whether sinful woman or proud Pharisee, our first response to His sacrifice should be to acknowledge the fact of sin in our lives.

– David King