

The Woman Caught in Adultery

John 8:1-11

John 8:1-11 - *“And everyone went to his own house. But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ² Now early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them. ³ Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, ⁴ they said to Him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. ⁵ Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?” ⁶ This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear.*

⁷ So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.” ⁸ And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. ⁹ Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. ¹⁰ When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, “Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?”

¹¹ She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said to her, “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.”

Background Notes

This passage, John 7:53 through 8:1-11, is not found in some of the earliest manuscripts of the Gospel of John. Manuscripts are hand-written copies; copies of documents and books were made by hand before the invention of the printing press. There are several thousand manuscript copies of the Gospel of John in the Greek language alone, and most of these manuscripts **do** contain these verses. However, the very earliest manuscripts (those that date closest to the writing of the original document) do not contain these verses. And some manuscripts include this story, but they place it in other locations in the Gospel of John.

So the question is: Are these verses a part of the original Gospel of John, or are they a later addition, or are they an insertion? As you know, we don't have the *autograph* (the original document) of the Gospel of John. In fact, we don't have **any** of the original documents of the books of the Bible. We only have copies.

Just about every New Testament scholar agrees that this story is authentic, and that it's a true account of an event in the life of our Lord Jesus. But the question remains: “Is it a part of the *inspired record*?” “Is it Scripture - or is it not?” Just because the account is not in the earliest manuscripts, this doesn't mean that it wasn't part of the original document. The early manuscripts that **did** contain it may have been lost, or they may have fallen apart because they were worn out from being so well used. Or perhaps the scribes who copied the early manuscripts that did contain the account left it out for one reason or another.

I believe we can't be dogmatic about the answer to this question, either one way or the other. There's a lot more we could say about it on both sides of the question, but for the sake of brevity and for the purposes of this Talk, we're going to treat this portion of text as **Scripture**.

Verses 5 & 7 say that the Lord wrote on the ground. This is the only time in all the Gospel records that we read of the Lord **writing**. What did He write? We don't know! Many suggestions have been made, and there are many possibilities, but let's face it - we don't know!

Maybe Jesus wrote part of the Law, just as the finger of God wrote it on the stone tablets when He gave the Law to Moses. Maybe He wrote the name of the guilty man who had been allowed to escape. Maybe He wrote the names of the Pharisees who had brought the woman, because they too were guilty. It seems that they had plotted this whole event to try to entrap the Lord Jesus. Maybe the Lord wrote the same words He spoke: *"He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first"* (v7). Maybe He bent down and wrote on the ground to avoid eye contact with the disheveled woman, or maybe to indicate to those self-righteous scribes and Pharisees that He was not going to debate with them. These are just a few of the suggestions that have been made. We don't know what the Lord wrote here, or why, and any guess is pure speculation.

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. God knows how to bring conviction to self-righteous people.

The self-righteous scribes and Pharisees were guilty themselves – in fact, they may have planned this whole event. It's unlikely they would have caught this woman just by chance, in the very act of adultery, early in the morning! And where was the adulterous man? According to the Mosaic Law (Leviticus 20; Deuteronomy 22), there was to be no double standard. Both were to be sentenced to death. Likely the Jewish leaders knew who the man was, but they had allowed him to escape.

So these scribes and Pharisees were guilty too - and God knows how to bring conviction to self-righteous people! They thought that they had trapped the Lord Jesus in a dilemma. If the Lord said, "Stone her, according to the Law!" he would have lost His reputation for being compassionate. In addition, the Jews didn't have the authority to carry out the death penalty. They were controlled by the Roman Empire, which had sole jurisdiction over the death penalty. So surely if Jesus had said, "Stone her!" the Jewish leaders would have brought Jesus before the Roman authorities and said, "He's trying to take power into His own hands."

However, if the Lord had showed compassion and didn't uphold the Mosaic Law by calling for the death penalty for adultery, they would have accused Him of not upholding the Law!

The Lord didn't reply immediately, but *"when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first"* (v7). Then he stooped down again, and *"those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last."* Why the oldest first? Well, the oldest man there probably had the most sin to hide, so maybe that was the reason!

The point here is that God knows how to bring conviction to self-righteous people. The Lord may have said, "He who is without *this* sin, a sin of immorality - let *him* cast the first stone." In any case, God knows how to bring conviction to self-righteous people.

There are many self-righteous people today, and God knows how to bring them under conviction. God has ways to make these people realize that they are wearing masks.

Here's an illustration: A Christian physician I know was attending a medical convention. He was having dinner with a few colleagues at a classy hotel, and they were discussing ethics. My Christian friend was explaining that you really can't have ethics apart from the **moral absolutes** found in the Bible. A woman in the group said, "That argument is ridiculous! Mankind is basically good, and you can establish high moral standards just based on man's basic nature." Just at that moment a couple of hotel security people came into the dining room, came over to their table, and said to the woman, "Madam, we have reason to believe that you have removed some of the hotel valuables." Would you believe it? She had slipped some of the hotel silverware into her tote bag! The woman was mortified and ashamed. (My friend said that he could hardly resist saying, "I rest my case!")

God knows how to bring conviction to self-righteous people.

2. God does not condone sin, but He forgives sin.

After the scribes and Pharisees left, having been convicted of sin, the Lord said to the woman, "*Where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?*" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "*Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more*"(v10-11).

Notice what the Lord **didn't** say. He didn't say, "Go home and don't worry about it. It really wasn't a big deal." And He didn't say, "It really wasn't sin - the man took advantage of you in a weak moment!" No, Jesus didn't say anything like that. And He didn't say, "Go home, and from now on just sin as little as possible." No! The Lord **didn't lower God's standards of righteousness in any way** - but He **did forgive** the woman! I think this woman became a true believer in Jesus Christ.

God doesn't condone sin, but He forgives sin. Maybe you know that you're a sinner, but you're trying to justify yourself or forgive yourself by saying, "Well, it's not so bad." Or maybe you're thinking, "It wasn't really my fault." Or, "Everybody's doing that these days!" Or, "The Bible's rules are old-fashioned." Or, "I am not as bad as other people who have committed much worse sins."

Don't think that God will lower His standards and let you into Heaven because you think you know some people who are "bigger sinners" than you are! No. God will not lower His righteous standards - but He will forgive your sin! If you confess your sin to the Lord Jesus, and believe in Him as your Savior, God will forgive your sin. God doesn't condone sin, but He does forgive sin. Praise the Lord!

Practical Applications

1. Let's not hide behind "bigger sinners."

That's what the scribes and Pharisees liked to do. They liked to despise the "open sinners" or the obvious sins of the loose-living people, because it made them feel righteous. They hid behind the "bigger sinners."

We can be guilty of this tendency too. The easiest way to cover up and not feel convicted about the sin of materialism, for example, is to go to a wealthy church where everyone is materialistic! You blend in with the crowd. You can hide there and not feel convicted!

Do you ever feel uncomfortable when you're with a truly godly person? If so, that's a good thing! You're being forced to look at yourself as you really are, rather than comparing yourself with "worse sinners"! Let's not try to hide behind "bigger sinners."

2. Let's be characterized by a forgiving spirit!

Sometimes we find ourselves in a situation where it's our responsibility to judge wrongdoing – as a parent, as a teacher, as a church leader, as head of a ministry. What should we do?

Well, we **don't** sweep sin under the rug! We **don't** change the Bible's definition of sin! We **don't** lower God's standards! We **don't** throw justice to the winds! **No!** We have to deal with the wrongdoing, but we **do** remember the place of forgiveness. God forgave us, just as the Lord forgave the woman in John 8!

Let's be characterized, as Jesus was, by a forgiving spirit. Yes, sometimes we may be required to carry out discipline, but a forgiving spirit, and a clear desire for restoration should characterize our discipline.

Some of us may need to show more forgiveness and love in our attitudes to other believers. Some of us may have held grudges against other people for years, and we need to forgive. Let's be characterized by a **forgiving** spirit!

Do you recall the story of the runaway son in Luke 15? The only thing his father needed to see was a changed attitude - and he forgave the son for **everything** he had done! Let's be characterized by a forgiving spirit!