

John 8:2-11

2 Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. 3 The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst 4 they said to him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. 5 Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" 6 This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. 7 And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." 8 And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. 9 But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. 10 Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" 11 She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more."

Remember those times when you were a kid and you caught your brother or sister doing something wrong? Remember how excited you got sometimes to go tell mom or dad? You probably pointed to your sibling and shouted, "You're in big trouble!" You would then go smugly to your parents and announce the news. How often did this backfire? It's happened to me anyway, suddenly *I* was the one in trouble! Other times, I was disappointed that my parents didn't fly off the handle like I wanted them to.

You learn from an early age that no one likes a tattle-tale, and rightly so. I remember being stumped by my dad's logic when he asked me, "Well, did you tell you sister to stop?" As you get older, you realize that a child is not the best interpreter of a parent's rules and discipline. It can take years before a child finally understands what parents mean when they say that there's a good reason for their rules and that they discipline out of love.

I don't think we're going too far in calling the Pharisees and the scribes in this lesson tattle-tales. They seem all the more pathetic because they are adults, acting like children. Nonetheless, they had a case. They indeed had found a sinner, and as religious leaders, it was their duty point out sin and uphold the Law of the Lord. But no one can uphold the Law of God without understanding it. That was their big mistake. It was also a big mistake (for their cause, anyway) to bring the matter up with the one Person who knew the Law perfectly—God's Son, Jesus Christ. He took control of this situation and showed everyone that:

Jesus is the Master of Justice and Mercy

I. While the Law Declares NO ONE is Righteous

II. Jesus Justifies ALL sinners

Many times when a pastor preaches on this text, he'll paint the picture of a courtroom scene. It certainly works, as this is all about law. It has quite a twist, too. But it doesn't seem like this story is one that a courtroom drama would pick up. For one thing, on a show like *Law and Order*, you need someone to root for. You normally know that some one is innocent, and the

exciting part is seeing how they prove his innocence. In this account, however, no one is innocent. For another, the ending is too unbelievable for TV.

The Pharisees and scribes were the interpreters of the Law of God. Moses was their favorite. But we know from the gospels that they were an evil bunch who went beyond God's word and burdened the Jewish people with regulations and demands for good works even though Scripture goes out of its way to show that no one can make themselves righteous, no matter what one does. So, if you are familiar with the gospels at all, you know that these Pharisees and scribes coming to Jesus are up to no good.

But on the other side, you have a guilty party, too. This woman that they brought to Jesus was definitely guilty. John tells us that she was caught in the act itself. She hadn't broken some petty law that the Pharisees and scribes made up—she had blatantly violated the sixth commandment. There was no loophole. It seems that she figured herself condemned. Standing in the middle of a group of church leaders and Jesus, the master of the Law Himself, she didn't even bother to ask for mercy. She only stood there and awaited her sentence.

The leaders of the church are God's representatives on earth, and are to faithfully uphold the Word of God. This includes the discipline of members who sin. Sin must be taken very seriously because God takes it so seriously, He will not even stand to have a sinner in His presence. He created hell to shut sin up. At the same time, it is God's will that every person turn from sin and turn to Him for life. The Pharisees and scribes should have had the will of the Lord in mind when they caught this woman in adultery and sought to do that will in order to snuff out sin and save her soul.

But they were not interested in God's justice. They only wanted to test Jesus, in the hopes of hanging an accusation on Him. They used this opportunity to try and trap Him. They act like they're in the right by quoting the Law the God gave through Moses. **If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.** That's what the Lord says in Leviticus 20:10. You might be wondering why they hadn't brought the man to Jesus as well. That's a good question, and we don't know. Remember, though, that the Pharisees were not perfect at keeping the Law. With those words, they seemed to have an open and shut case. But it's a bit more complicated than that. This is a trap after all.

God did indeed command this punishment for Old Testament believers. But He also demands that we respect the government. Israel at the time of Jesus were under the authority of the Romans. They had taken the power of execution out of the hands of the Jews. That is why Jesus had to go before Pontius Pilate. If Jesus said, "Stone her" He would be accused of subverting the Roman law. If he had said, "Let her go free," He would be destroying the Law. How could He possibly go on saying he was the Messiah when He doesn't even follow the Word of God?

Realize that if any of us were in Jesus' place in this trap, there is no way that we could win. But that's the point of the Law. It completely hems us in. Jesus shows that by saying, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." It takes awhile to set in,

and the older men realize that they've lost more quickly than the younger ones. You see, as much as we want to administer God's justice in His stead, as much as we love to be tattle-tales — because it sure feels great when we're right and another is wrong—we are in no position to throw stones. You can accuse your fellow man all you want and make their fault look so much worse than your pious life, but you better take a look at God's Law first. There you will find out that you, too, need to be put to death. God demands complete obedience, and one slip up means eternal death. God also says that no one is righteous. You never had a foot in the door. At your conception, your chance to throw stones was forfeited because of the original sin you inherited from your parents.

So, it doesn't do any good to look at an adulterer like the woman standing before Jesus and say, “Well, that's a serious case. Something needs to be done about here.” Very good, you've never fornicated. But have you really never looked lustfully at a person, whether on screen or on the street? Have you done everything you could to lead a pure and decent life in word and deed? What about all the rest of God's Law? Do you love each command because it is the will of your God? Understand that if you even so much as question the wisdom behind a single commandment, you have fully rebelled against your Creator. The evidence is in, the Law shows without a doubt that no one is righteous.

Thanks be to God for sending His perfect, holy Son into the world! If no one kept God's Law, we're all dead. Because Jesus kept the Law, He was able to cut through the trap set by the Pharisees and scribes. But now, put yourself in the woman's shoes. What happens next? It's really a terrifying position to be in. Jesus had sent all the accusers away because they all had faults that disqualified them from administering God's justice. But Jesus had no faults. HE had the right to throw stones. We can't blame her as she expected the worst, but she was not Jesus' plan. Jesus said he came to save the world, not judge it.

If God wanted only to judge the world, His Son Jesus would have no reason to become man and live among us. He would just rain down His judgment from heaven and we would all be completely destroyed. God, however, in His great love, wished to save the world. That is why Jesus took on our infirmities and dwelt among us. Some one had to live perfectly under the Law. Some one had to spill his blood as a sacrifice to appease God's wrath. That some one is Jesus, only Jesus. When He rose from the dead, God declared all sins past, present and future forgiven.

That's why Jesus could not throw stones at that woman. It would be a miscarriage of justice. She believed in Him, therefore, when Jesus, and God Man looked at her, He saw no sin, but only His blood which had purified her. She no longer had a fault—nothing at which to throw a stone.

On a side note, people through the centuries have called this part of Scripture “The Account of the Adulterous Woman” and still refer to her as an adulteress. But Jesus forgave her—we shouldn't call her that anymore! She was a believing woman, a saved woman, your redeemed sister in the faith!

Jesus took the crushing blow of the full weight of the Law so that neither this woman nor you will be crushed by it. A great result of that is now you can understand the Law. God gave the Law to show us our sin and also to point out to our New Man what evils we are to flee. The Holy Spirit has taught us to use the Law for good, as we seek to do the will of our Father who loves us. So, we don't want to take from this account the lesson that some in this world will have you take. Many will say, "See, here we learn that we're not supposed to judge." We cannot NOT point out sin in others, but we do not do it as tattle-tales. We are not looking to condemn others, but to turn them from the danger of sin and show them their Savior who has died for their sins as well.

Sometimes it's hard to believe that no one condemns us. We've all been there. When you question whether you are worthy to go up to the Lord's table and receive His body and blood. You remember all the times you failed in keeping God's law. Satan is the world's greatest tattletale, he's been at it from the beginning. He's also very good at catching you in the act. But don't let him accuse you. He can't accuse you. You are redeemed from sin and you have no place in the devils dominion. Confess you sins, repent, and then go take and drink that blood of Christ which purifies you from all sin. You have God's promise that He will not see your sin, but only the perfection of His Son. Jesus comforts you daily saying, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more." All your accuser are gone. There is only you and Jesus, who will be with you from now to eternity. Amen.