
John 7:53-8:11 The Woman in Adultery!

Into Thy Word Ministries Bible Study www.intothyword.org

General Idea: When the meeting of the Jewish leadership ended, people started to go home. At some point, Jesus returned to His favorite prayer spot. He came back from the Mount of Olives and went to the Temple very early in the morning. The crowds came and He sat down to teach. As He was teaching, the religious leaders sought to trap Him in a no-win *scenario*, so they brought in a woman caught in adultery and showcased her sin. Then they said, *teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of fornication; the Law of Moses states that she must be stoned and put to death. What do you have to say?* They were hoping Jesus would be off-balanced or tripped up and say something they could use against Him, but Jesus “turned the tables” on them. He stooped down to write on the ground. The dust was His pad and His finger was the pen. Meanwhile, they kept demanding He answer, so He sought to turn their cunning into conviction. Then, Jesus said, *OK, go ahead and stone her. But, let those who have not sinned be the first ones to throw the stones.* He then returned to the canvas of the ground and continued to write in the dust. The woman’s would-be accusers and His entrappers started to leave—one by one. The oldest went first and soon the only one left was the woman. Then, Jesus said to her, *where are the people who bring these chargers against you? Isn’t there anyone to condemn you?* She replied, *no*; then, Jesus said, *neither do I. Go and do not sin again!*

Contexts and Background:

There is a debate about whether the context of this passage fits, as this passage is not found in the earliest Greek manuscripts. There is the possibility that this event did occur in the sequence of events during the feast in-between time of Jesus’ speaking engagements, but it is more probable that this occurred at another time. Of the earliest manuscripts that do have this passage, it is found in different sections of John and it is even in some manuscripts of Luke by verse 21:38. In addition, none of the early Church Fathers commented on this passage; over 90% of the NT was commented on. In the “textual criticism” of this passage, the Greek syntax is very different than the rest of John or Luke. Although, many stories in ancient religious cultures, including Judaism, had rich oral traditions and people memorized passages that were not written down until much later. So, is this a problem? Yes and no. Yes, because we have to play detective and see if this is an actual historical and accurate account of Jesus. After careful investigation, it is, so “no,” it is not a problem for our learning and edification of God’s Word. Even though this is a later addition that did not come to be in John until the fourth century, there is no indication that the narrative is wrong. This story follows the character of Jesus, the customs and historicity of the times (as in, this is a factual account that was known, along with many other stories about Jesus then, which have been lost to history.) This one, being of such importance, finds its way back. It can also be a testimony of the Bible’s reliability and impact, that if we wonder if anything was left out that we might need for our spiritual growth or understanding of God, the answer is “no.” We have what God wants us to have and it is up to us to get busy in the study and application of His most precious Word (John 21:25)!

Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings:

- *Own home.* Because the context is not known, we do not know when or where Jesus was, but He was probably hanging out and teaching outside of the city walls of Jerusalem, where it was tranquil and usually unimpacted by disruption. However, here is a disruption that brings a teachable moment.
- *Mount of Olives.* It is a small mountain ridge in the eastern part of Jerusalem surrounded by a garden valley of olive groves from which olive oil was made. This pristine prayer spot is where Jesus spent a considerable amount of time and where He would later be betrayed (2 Sam. 15:30; Ezek. 11:23; Matt. 26:30; John 18:1-2; Acts 1:11).
- *Temple courts.* This was the common area where the Rabbis and Scribes would gather their students and teach and where the religious leaders would give their edicts. The pious Jewish sages and Rabbis, who taught where Jesus was teaching here, would often gather their students in these courts to

instruct and to challenge them. The good ones warned that wrong teaching, leading others astray, and deliberately teaching error were heinous sins, as was promoting one's own desires for personal glory and position—exactly what the Pharisees and these accusers were doing (John 7:14).

- *Teach.* A teacher has the call and responsibility to instruct and edify the truth with clarity and accuracy. We are to allow the Word to touch our thinking, our conduct, and us so we can then touch others by our word and example. We are held accountable for our teachings. We are to teach God's wisdom, not ours; His glory, not ours. Also, the Church is called to teach and guide the flock. We are never to be rude or tactless or lazy or forsake this great, needed, and important ministry of discipleship (Matt. 5:19; 18:6; Rom. 14:10-12; Gal. 6:1; Col. 1:9, 28; 2:3; 3:15-17; 4:5; Heb. 5:11-14; James 3:13-18)!
- *Adultery.* An act of fornication with someone who is not your spouse. Here, a woman sinned, and these leaders or henchmen of the leaders, used her as a pawn to snare Jesus. This was a major sin; it was a betrayal of the marriage vow contract and an insult to God who brought the couple together.
- *Caught in the act of adultery.* The law required sufficient evidence; circumstantial conditions were not allowed as the witnesses must have first-handedly seen the act. So this begs the question; either they were a part of it, or one of them was the male adulterer who used this to get himself off; perhaps they assumed she was guilty and dug out a known prostitute. In any way, this sin cannot be done alone (Prov. 6:32-35).
- *The Law.* Refers to the "Mosaic Law;" here, a particular one—adultery. This is the Jewish Torah, first five Books of the Old Testament, which contained the guidelines to *right* versus *wrong*. It taught that it was the right of the civil leadership to implement a death penalty for fornication and sexual betrayal of one's spouse. However, only the Romans were allowed to carry out such an act; they did not do it for religious reasons, but for acts of extreme temple violations and vandalism, and (mostly) for crimes against Rome or the local magistrate. Jesus fulfilled **the Law** on our behalf!
- *Stone such women.* The desire was not to honor the law or do justice; it was to humiliate this woman and Jesus. The law required the punishment and/or execution of both sinners; so, where was the man (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22)?
- *A trap.* This was a classic entrapment, bating a person to do something they would not normally do to win a bet or show off someone or something.
- *Accusing.* This would characterize Jesus as a rebel and insurrectionist to get Himself in trouble with the Romans or with an unpatriotic and liberal Jew, unfit to be a Rabbi. Thus, by seeking to tip Jesus' hand, they pressured Him to fall into a **no-win scenario. Either He would violate** the Law and condone adultery, thus getting Himself in trouble with the Pharisees and losing all credibility and Temple privileges, or else they would have the leverage to charge Jesus with a crime, thus, He would be in trouble with the Romans. This would also get Jesus in trouble with His followers because of His reputation of compassion and teachings on forgiveness (John 18:31).
- *Write on the ground.* One of the big mysteries of the Bible is this passage and phrase; what was Jesus writing? Well, think it through. What could He write that would deeply convict and drive the people away without His having to say a word? What could He state that would disqualify their accusation against Him and against the woman? Then, to shoo them away without a retort or rebuttal—the only thing I can think of is that Jesus was naming names and sins, showing that they were the ones guilty of sin! The other possibility, as indicated by the word *finger*, is that Jesus may have been writing down the Ten Commandments and the Holy Spirit convicted those who were there to repent and they chose instead to run, to flee and hide. This act accused them of the very sins they were bringing up against this woman and Jesus. He turned their fight into fright and then flight. It is interesting that this is the only occasion in Scripture where Jesus writes anything. Most pious religious leaders, both Jew and Greek, wrote a lot; conversely, Jesus spoke and the Disciples wrote it down for us. Now, He speaks

through His Word and we are to write it in our hearts and minds so it shows up in our will, motivation, and actions.

- *Finger*. This is a startling parallel to God's writing of the Ten Commandments before Moses. This is a very powerful image and should not be taken lightly. It is the Holy God pointing out sin and conviction, a call to pay heed, listen up, and sin no more (Ex 31:18; Deut. 9:10).
- *Without sin*. Meaning *if you are without any sin*, it is a general term and does not refer only to adultery. This also refers to Deuteronomy 13:9; 17:7, where the witnesses must be correct and accurate and accountable for their accusations. In this case, they were not. Also, only those not guilty of the crime could participate as witnesses, judges, and executioners.
- *Throw a stone*. It was the duty of the witness to be the one or first one to throw a stone. This was to ensure a proper accusation, because the tight-net culture would have ravaged the person with extreme guilt to have given a false witness, unless he or she was a psychopath. That is why more than one witness was required in such cases. The law protected the innocent and convicted the guilty. An additional deterrent to being a false witness was that the false accusation would land the person the same penalty (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 13:9; 17:7; 19:19; 22:22-24).
- *Older ones first*. Possibly, as a person becomes older, he is able to be wiser, less presumptuous, and more willing to see his/her own faults first while the younger people have more to prove and they let pride get in the way.
- *Condemn*. This is a legal term meaning *under the sentence of a court of law*, just as today a person tried and convicted of a crime is condemned. However, here there is no court or judge or proper attorneys—nor were legal procedures followed. Thus, since procedures were not followed, the person, woman, is acquitted. Today, we would call it a mistrial.
- *Leave your life of sin/sin no more*. This means *stop it; stop sinning*. It does not mean she was not guilty of her charge or that Jesus condoned her actions; rather, there was no legal basis for punishment because there was no witness or even a court. So, Jesus admonished her to be careful and not get herself in this predicament again—to stay on the right path and not sin! Pious Jews believed, as the Torah depicted, that it is the goal of the God-loving person to purge sin from one's life and pursue righteousness. Yet, all knew that sin was a part of life and couldn't be completely removed; this is why the sacrificial system was used. So, they followed the law and sought networks of accountability and discipleship and pleaded to God for forgiveness, because God is the only One who can forgive sins. Here is an incredible act of grace and mercy (Matt. 9:1-8; John 3:17; 12:47).

Devotional Thoughts and Applications:

Adultery destroys relationships and affects generations. It is evil because it takes and steals what does not belong to the person. God wants us to be righteous with our current and future relationships, so when we are married, we will have a more solid marriage that will last, grow, and be much happier and joyful for us. Remember, God is the author of sexuality. In addition, He desires the expression of exclusive intimacy to be between a husband and wife. Adultery and premarital sex will ruin both our current and future relationships. Adultery does not stay private, or remain in secret or behind closed doors; it will be found out. It is sin; it migrates with you in the long term with all of your relationships, as well as into your marriage or future marriage. Many others will be affected too, such as the spouse or future spouse, the spouse of the person you were with who is robbed of what belongs to him or her, each one's family and friends, and so on. The tranquility of the entire local Jewish culture would have been affected—family, friends, and the entire community sharing in the shame (Prov. 16:32; 25:28; Rom. 13:12-14; 1 Cor. 6:12; 9:25-27; Galatians 5:18-21; 1 Thess. 5: 22; Titus 2:12; Heb. 12:2; 2 Pet. 1:5-7).

God's Word tells us that we choose the ways of adultery, fornication, and impure thoughts that make us eager for destructive behaviors, and pronounce them to be pleasure. These are what the Bible calls *uncleanness*. These are what create relationships filled with hostility, quarreling, jealousy, anger,

selfish ambitions, and divisions between people and God. The focus is on envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and all kinds of sin. This attitude conveys the idea that everyone else is wrong, and those who will agree with you become desired allies! The Bible gives us a harsh warning that if we pursue these things, workable relationships cannot be built with God or others. Nor can a relationship even be formed with God, as you will impede His presence with you, and His work to others through you. You will not inherit the kingdom of God (Psalm 55:16; Prov. 6:32-35; 16:32; Eccl. 4:8-10; Matt. 11:28-30; John 21:15-19; Heb. 13:4; 1 Pet. 5:1-2).

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. What do you think Jesus was writing? What could He have stated that would disqualify their accusation against Him and against the women?
2. How do you feel when someone or something disrupts you when you are doing something important? How have you used disruptions as teachable moments? How can you do this more?
3. Do you think this passage is a problem because it is not found in the earliest manuscripts or Early Church Fathers?
4. Why does God care and want us righteous with our current and future relationships?
5. How would you be much happier and joyful following His precepts and not your fantasies and lust?
6. How would you feel if someone showcased your sin? Why do you think Jesus' entrappers started to leave?
7. Why is it important for a teacher to have the responsibility to instruct and edify with truth, clarity, and accuracy? What happens when we do not?
8. How is this passage a testimony of the Bible's reliability and impact?
9. Have you ever wondered if there were something not included that we may need for our spiritual growth or understanding of God? How does "the answer is no" motivate you?
10. Since we already have what God wants us to have and know in the Bible, what do you need to do to get busy in the study and application of His most precious Word?
11. How can you better face the sins you commit by seeing how Jesus treated this woman?
12. What do you need to do to allow the Word to touch your thinking, conduct, and character so you can then touch others by His Word and example?