

Who Can Condemn Sinners?

John 8:1-11

Pastor Paul Anthes

John 8:1-11 But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ² Early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people were coming to Him; and He sat down and *began* to teach them. ³ The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the center *of the court*, ⁴ they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act. ⁵ "Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?" ⁶ They were saying this, testing Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him. But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground. ⁷ But when they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up, and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him *be the* first to throw a stone at her." ⁸ Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. ⁹ When they heard it, they *began* to go out one by one, beginning with the older ones, and He was left alone, and the woman, where she was, in the center *of the court*. ¹⁰ Straightening up, Jesus said to her, "Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?" ¹¹ She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more."

When Calvin arrived here he said, "It is plain enough that this passage was unknown anciently to the Greek Churches; and some conjecture that it has been brought from some other place and inserted here. But as it has always been received by the Latin Churches, and is found in many old Greek manuscripts, and contains nothing unworthy of an Apostolic Spirit, there is no reason why we should refuse to apply it to our advantage.

Introduction: A lot has been written about this passage down through the centuries, and there are some lingering doubts about its exact place in the Scripture. Some ancient manuscripts have placed it in Luke. In spite of this it appears in Latin Bibles from the beginning and appears authentic although possibly misplaced in the canon.

It is a simple story with three players. The woman, her accusers and The Lord Jesus. Let's look at each one before we examine the event itself.

The Woman: She is an adulteress. In fact she has been apprehended in the very act and no one questions that the charge is not true. She is disgraced. She is being publicly humiliated right on the temple mount during the great feast and she is actually worthy of a death penalty according to the law of the Jews.

Leviticus 20:10 ¹⁰ 'If *there is* a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.

Do you see the problem here? Sure!! Where is the man? Why did they not bring him? Perhaps because he was part of an orchestrated event to deliver the woman to the Scribes so that they could entrap Jesus with her. Enter...the third group of players

The Scribes and the Pharisees: These guys have no interest in the Words of God. They use the Scripture to promote their own programs, projects and perversions. They have been sneaking around like a bunch of vultures for months now. They connive, plot, lie, incite, intimidate and misquote the Scripture. They are intent on putting Christ to death, but they lack the means to do it. Jesus reads these guys like an open book and they hate him for it. Here is just a sample of what He said to the common people as these religions scoundrels looked and listened.

Matthew 23:12-15 ¹² "Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted. ¹³ "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. ¹⁴ "*Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation.* ¹⁵ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.

Matthew 23:23-28 ²³ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe the mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. ²⁴ "You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! ²⁵ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. ²⁶ "You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also. ²⁷ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. ²⁸ "So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

The Lord Jesus Christ: He stands in total contrast to both of the other players. Unlike the woman He has committed no sin.

1 Peter 2:22-24 ²² *He* WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; ²³ and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously; ²⁴ and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.

He was born in the right place, to the right parents, at the right time to be The Messiah. He claimed to be the God of Creation and then backed that claim with works that only God could do. His life authenticated His words. When John the Baptist was facing death in prison he sent some disciples to make sure he was dying for the Christ.

Matthew 11:2-6 ² Now when John, while imprisoned, heard of the works of Christ, he sent *word* by his disciples ³ and said to Him, "Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?" ⁴ Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵ *the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM.* ⁶ "And blessed is he who does not take offense at Me."

In the last two chapters alone Jesus has claimed to be the Bread of Life and the Living Water. In a few verses He will claim to be the "light of the World." All claims to Messiahship. Those hearing and seeing have been astounded saying...

John 7:31 "When the Christ comes, He will not perform more signs than those which this man has, will He?"

And even those sent to arrest him but came back empty handed testified...

John 7:46 "Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks."

This event brings Jesus' teaching on judgmentalism into the real world. Everyone knows the verse from the sermon on the mount where Jesus said...

Matthew 7:1-2 "Do not judge so that you will not be judged. ² "For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.

I have observed two reactions to this verse. Both of them are totally wrong...The unbeliever uses it as a means to justify his sin and accuse the believer of being a legalist. The believer just does not want to accept it at face value. Most Christians want the right to judge. Many if not most believe that if we do not judge men sinners then we are somehow complicit in their sin and that God will condemn us for not condemning sinners. What Jesus does and says here reveals the meaning of His words on the mount. Let's look at them now.

John 8:2-4 ² Early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people were coming to Him; and He sat down and *began* to teach them. ³ The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the center *of the court*, ⁴ they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act.

Early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people were coming to Him; and He sat down and began to teach them: Jesus, as usual has a crowd around Him. It is in this forum that these guys want to humiliate and entrap him. Then he will be discredited before the people who so esteem Him. So they...

...brought a woman caught in adultery, and set her in the center of the court: They drag her in and put her right in the center of the crowd on the temple mount where everyone can see her. She is disheveled, possibly not fully dressed, she is humiliated, shamed and guilty of breaking her vows to her husband and her God. And she is publicly

on display. It really can't get much worse than this. If you cannot feel any of her pain then you might be aligned with her accusers.

QUESTION: What if the worst sin of your entire life...either in action or thought was suddenly exposed in front of everyone you knew and cared about and you had no defense and no denial is possible. Try to imagine it! Your reputation and life as you know it are over. Most of us would not do something like this to our worst enemy, but these are the Scribes and the Pharisees. No problem for them and besides....they believe they have Jesus backed into a corner when they say...

"Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act. "Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?" [4-5]: These guys are sick to death of Grace and forgiveness. They have watched as Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath who [according to them] was a sinner. That is why he was lame...because he had sin. Likewise the man born blind and the woman with the issue of blood and the lepers as well. They were sick and they were poor because of God's curse on them. They were well and rich and that showed God liked them.

They have watched Him eat with prostitutes and stinking IRS agents...called tax collectors. When they objected Jesus threw it in their faces saying...

Matthew 21:31-32 "Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you. ³² "For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him; and you, seeing *this*, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him.

They were saying this, testing Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him. [8:6a] : Here is the trap they have set. If He says not to kill her then He is teaching against the law and is a heretic worthy of death. If He agrees that they should kill her He is breaking Roman law because they did not allow the Jews to kill anyone. They reserved that right for themselves. That is why these same clowns had to take Jesus to Pilate when they wanted to kill him. Whichever way He answers they have Him and can accuse Him successfully. They are drooling over the thought of the public kill.

But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground. [8:6b]: Jesus just lets them stew in their saliva for awhile. The Scripture gives no clue what he was doing or what He was writing. Some think He was writing the ten commandments....that would be pretty awesome. Some think He was just letting them get madder....the true purpose and motives of men often spill out like an overflowing sewer when they cannot get the response they want from someone.

But when they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up, and said to them, [John 8:7a]: It really angered them that He was not answering. They are so certain they have Him in their trap they cannot wait for the answer. They persist...they stay on their task and keep asking and asking and asking even though Jesus is not answering. Finally...He stands up.....looks at them and says..."**He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.**" [8:7b]

Then without fanfare....**He stooped down and wrote on the ground.** [8:8] Jesus goes back to doing whatever it was He was doing before. He is not preaching now or teaching. He is not performing a sign or a miracle. He is doing, by all human criteria....absolutely nothing. He is just killing time while His words sink in. These words, by the way are spoken in the morning light on the temple mount by the same person who said..."let there be light." These are the Words of the living God and as such are powerful and life altering. The Word of the Living God can convict of sin and bring men to repentance. Jesus speaks and then He waits as the desired effect takes place. We should learn to let God's Word...not ours do its desired work....

Isaiah 55:10-11 ¹⁰ "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; ¹¹ So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding *in the matter* for which I sent it.

When they heard it, they began to go out one by one, beginning with the older ones: When I was young I was quick to condemn. I believed in my own goodness and righteousness. I was such a fool. I did not know my own heart, but God did. In fact only God knows your heart and thankfully He will reveal it to you, but you will have to want to know it and you will grow older while it happens.

Jeremiah 17:9-10 ⁹ "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; Who can understand it? ¹⁰ "I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds.

One by one the Word of the Living God stripped away their self-righteousness and religion and laid bare the sinners fallen heart for them to behold and....**He was left alone, and the woman, where she was, in the center of the court.**

This guilty, broken, humiliated sinner of a woman is now alone with Christ. My friend...have you ever been alone with Christ with all your sin exposed for Him to see? Have you ever just brought your poor miserable life and just laid it at His feet? BUT...we do not want Jesus to see us like that. Christians spend most of their time trying to do just the opposite in Christ's presence. When do we ever get it all out there for Christ to see so we can know He loves us in our sin? Paul said it so perfectly...

1 Timothy 1:15 ¹⁵ It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost *of all*.

Straightening up, Jesus said to her, "Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?": I told you at the beginning that this event puts into actual practice what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount. Until you can see yourself as Paul, Zaccheus, Peter and even this poor broken woman....Until you know the depth of your own fallen soul, you will condemn others when they sin. It is an unalterable truth. And when we condemn in others what is true in us we shine the light of judgment on ourselves. When a man calls out for condemnation for adultery he is shining the light of God into the crevices of His own soul and heart.

Matthew 7:3-5 ³ "Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴ "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? ⁵ "You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

Paul expands on this saying that our fallen and sinful nature is so extensively and pervasively corrupt that we can absolutely NOT excuse ourselves by pointing out and condemning the sin of others.

Romans 2:1 Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. ² And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. ³ But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same *yourself*, that you will escape the judgment of God?

But you may object saying....But I have not committed adultery or sinned as others do. BUT....Jesus insists that our sin is innate. We are born with sinful hearts that we do not even know. We imagine ourselves always better and purer and more moral than others. Let me illustrate: Have you ever been really, livid at someone? Listen to Jesus on this subject:

Matthew 5:20-22 ²⁰ "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses *that* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. ²¹ "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER ' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' ²² "**But I say** to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty *enough to go* into the fiery hell.

Have you ever had a lustful thought? Again....Jesus speaks to this fallen nature of ours.

Matthew 5:27-28 ⁷ "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY'; ²⁸ **but I say** to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Have you ever had a neighbor or co-worker you could not stand? Have they driven you to the wall with anger or even....perish the thought "desire for revenge." Jesus Again....

Matthew 5:43-47 ⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ "**But I say** to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous. ⁴⁶ "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ "If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing *than others*? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Now....suppose that all of

the sin our your heart were suddenly laid out for everyone you know and care about to see.....

.....What would anyone of us here today give **NOT** to be this woman. To **NOT** be caught and exposed in our sin before every eye and ear? This is what it means then when Jesus...in that same sermon said...

Matthew 7:12 ¹² "In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

Jesus drives home this point when he says...

John 5:22 ²² "For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son.....

This means that none of it has been committed to us. Why? Because we are described above! We are not fit to judge because we should all be condemned ourselves if it were not for the surpassing grace and mercy and love of God and Christ.

John 8:11 ¹¹ She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more."

There are those who believe that Jesus granted this woman license to sin. They believe that someone can sin high handedly and God is obligated to forgive. By "High handedly" I mean with premeditation and arrogance....not in weakness or ignorance.

Jesus addresses her respectfully and tenderly. It is the same way he spoke to His mother. She is broken by her sin and He is the only one in the entire universe who can help her. So...what is going on here? Is Jesus excusing adultery and with it all sin in general. Is God just going to overlook every sin of humanity and do nothing about the cesspool of human wickedness that has destroyed everything that is blessed and joyful on the planet? Hardly! Let's see if, in closing we can connect the dots here.

CONCLUSION: Jesus brings several glaring realities before us here.

- **All men are guilty of sin and deserve condemnation.** You too have broken every law of God either out rightly or inwardly. We all have lied, cheated stolen, lusted, and hated. We have gloated when our enemies have stumbled. We have enjoyed seeing them dragged into the spotlight, stripped bare and exposed for their horrible wicked sins. But Jesus shows us that it should be us where this woman is. It could be us.
- **None of us are fit to judge or condemn someone else.** We should cease doing that. Don't judge your unbelieving neighbor or family member. Listen to yourself...you are pointing your finger at your own heart. We are calling God's attention to sin that we also possess. Maybe in the past or perhaps still in the future but our hearts deceive us. Only God can protect us from our own hearts. This is what prompted David to pray....

Psalm 19:12-13 ¹² Who can discern *his* errors? Acquit me of hidden *faults*. ¹³ Also keep back Your servant from presumptuous *sins*; Let them not rule over me; Then I will be blameless, And I shall be acquitted of great transgression.

- **God knows every hidden sin our your heart and life.** Before Him today **YOU...ARE** that woman. Your mind and motives are stripped bare and everything is laid before Him to see. To you He has been however even more gracious. I have not seen your heart and you have not seen mine. My six decades of sin is not spread out here beneath my feet for the world to behold. How kind you have been to me Jesus! How blessedly patient and full of love for your lost sheep.

But they are all known to you. You knew me before you created the world and loved me then in my sin. Your love knows no bounds and has not limitations.

- **Finally....Christ does not overlook sin.** He has never done that. In fact, what we have seen shows that He calls for purity in the inner man....where none of us can be pure. We can play religious games and we can perform rituals and embrace morality, but we are NOT pure in heart. So...I repeat....Christ does not overlook sin. What He does is make a provision for your hopeless condition. Here is how.

His love compelled Him to leave heaven at the Father's side and become one of His own creatures. God became a man for the love of man...but even more for love of you. AND...it is lavish love. It is adoption love like when a hopeless and helpless child is picked up from the gutter and bought at great expense by some stranger.

Ephesians 1:3-8 ³ Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, ⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love ⁵ He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷ In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace ⁸ which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight

What a blessed Savior. Who is like you Lord Jesus? Let me pray with Paul now.....

Ephesians 1:18-21 ¹⁸*that* the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. *These are* in accordance with the working of the strength of His might ²⁰ which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.