



Further Study

In most KJV Bibles, the following marginal note appears relating to the account in John 8 and the woman caught in the act of adultery: "John 7:53-8:11 is absent from most of the older manuscripts, and those that have it sometimes place it elsewhere. The story may well be authentic. Indeed, Christ's response of compassion and mercy is so much in keeping with His character that we accept it as authentic, and feel that to omit it would be unfortunate (Richard Trench, Synonyms of the New Testament). Many believe it was omitted for several hundred years because people were using the passage to justify their own sin of adultery believing that Christ Himself was justifying it due to the fact that He was unwilling to condemn the woman due to a lack of accusers.

Make no mistake about it. The Bible nowhere excuses or condones the sin of adultery. In fact, the Bible does just the opposite. It warns of the severe consequences of a person committing adultery. This sin in the New Testament is taken even further than it was in the Old Testament by declaring that individuals are guilty of adultery even if it is committed in the mind and heart (Matthew 5:28). See also Exodus 20:14, 17; Leviticus 20:10; Hebrews 13:4.

Although the expressions of our sinful nature vary from person to person, the Bible makes it clear that we are all equally wretched in need of God's amazing grace. (See Hebrews 12:1; Romans 3:10, 12).

THE EPISODE OF THE WOMAN CAUGHT IN ADULTERY (John 7:53-8:11)

The account given in John 8 occurred early one morning in the Temple courts after Jesus had returned from a night on the Mount of Olives where he often retreated for private and personal prayer with His heavenly Father. The hall on this morning was filled with people expecting to hear the teaching of Christ. As Jesus began to teach, He was suddenly interrupted by a group of Scribes and Pharisees dragging in a woman that was supposedly caught in the very act of adultery. From the outside looking in, the entire episode looked like a perfect setup. It was clearly intended as a trap for Jesus.

THE TRAP IS SET

Facing what seemed to be the perfect trap, Jesus is now faced with a real dilemma. He is now being challenged publicly to judge this matter before all the people. His response would be crucial as to whether or not the trap would work. The Scribes and Pharisees knew that Jesus could probably only respond in one or two ways:

1. By the Old Testament Law: Everyone knew that the Old Testament law demanded death for such a sin. If He failed to impose the law, He would surely be asked to stand before the Jewish Sanhedrin to explain His actions.
2. By Roman law: Everyone in the hall that day also knew that Roman law did not prescribe the death penalty for adultery. They also knew that the Roman government had removed the right from the Jews to impose any form of capital punishment on anyone.

On the surface, this did indeed look like the perfect trap. What would Jesus say about the punishment that should be handed out?

PROBLEMS THAT JESUS WAS FACING

1. In reality, the woman should have been taken directly to the Jewish Sanhedrin to be judged. Legally, they were responsible to settle the matter and everyone knew it.
2. The woman was probably guilty. Jesus never questioned the validity of the claim. According to the witnesses, she had been caught in the very act of adultery.
3. There were eyewitnesses to the sin. This leads us to believe that the man involved in the sin was probably hired by the Scribes and Pharisees and he must have informed them of the time and place where she could be caught.
4. She never denied the charge.

5. The Old Testament penalty for adultery was clear, but the penalty would have included the man that was involved also (see Leviticus 20:10).

6. The man involved in the adultery was not brought into the hall with the woman. Had he escaped? Why were the Scribes and Pharisees not concerned about him? He was probably hired to be a part of this entire episode to trap Jesus, so they would have just let him go once they had used him for their benefit.

HOW WOULD JESUS RESPOND TO THIS SEEMINGLY PERFECT TRAP?

The plan of the Scribes and Pharisees to trap Jesus seemed to be working perfectly. Surely, there is nothing He could now say that would get Him out of this predicament. They have covered all the bases. They have got Him right where they want Him. Remember! Their motives are clear according to John 8:6. They could care less about the woman or her sin. It was Christ they wanted. She was simply a pawn being used to get Jesus.

First Response:

The first response that Jesus gave had to be the one response that they had not considered. Jesus looked at them and said, "he that is without sin, let him cast the first stone" (John 8:7). This response must have shocked the crowd because they knew that Old Testament law demanded that the accuser cast the first stone. In addition, if an accuser were to bring a false accusation against anyone, then they would be stoned as a false witness. Jesus was telling them that He was going to apply the full measure of the Old Testament law.

Second Response:

The second response of Jesus was even more shocking than the first. As they began to continue to insist that Jesus respond to them, He now completely ignores them. He does not speak one single word. The silence must have been deafening at this point. Rather than speaking to them, Jesus stoops down and begins to write a message on the ground. What did He write? Interestingly, the Bible does not tell us what He wrote that day. We are left to use our own imagination in light of all the circumstances. Here are a few of my personal ideas:

1. He wrote all or part of the Old Testament law on the sin of adultery. He could have included Exodus 20:14 and 17, and Leviticus 20:10.
2. He may have listed the sins of the accusers one by one.
3. He may have written that they were all guilty of the sin of adultery in light of Matthew 5:28.

Whatever He wrote on the ground that day, it was so shocking that all of them began to file out of the Temple from the oldest to the youngest. The only persons remaining were Jesus and the woman. His message literally cleared the hall that day (Matthew 8:9).

CONCLUSION/APPLICATION

The closing two verses of this account are very significant. Each verse gives tremendous insight into the passage.

Verse 10: The most interesting thing to me about this verse is that Jesus referred to her as "WOMAN". This is the same word that Jesus used in John 2 when He was talking about His own mother. The term refers to "dignity", "respect", "honor", and "grace".

Verse 11: "Go and sin no more". This woman evidently had been in the habit of sinning. It was a lifestyle for her. Jesus tells her to go and forsake that former lifestyle. This statement proves that Jesus was not ignoring her sin.

Jesus did indeed impose the death penalty for this woman's sin, but rather than impose it upon her, He was more than willing to suffer death in her place. The wages of sin has been and will always be death. (See 2 Corinthians 5:21).

THE OVERRULING, OVERRIDING PROVIDENCE OF GOD

We must never forget that God is always working all things after the counsel of His own will, and that He will use the godly and ungodly to achieve His purposes. That truth is beautifully illustrated here in John 8. Amazingly, God used these Scribes and Pharisees in a unique way in this woman's life.

1. They Exposed Her Sin:

2. They brought her to Jesus:

I could not help but think of the story of Joseph in the Old Testament when He said, "you meant it for evil in my life, but God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:20). That is the story of John 8 in a nutshell.

God's grace is simply amazing. It is only given to those who are undeserving.