

Confronting personal sin...to omit or admit?

1. Examine John 8:2-11. What has happened here? What do you see? Explain the trap set by the Pharisees.

Jesus is teaching to a large group of Jews in the temple, and this incident is timed by the Pharisees to publicly discredit Jesus' ministry with a seemingly perfect trap. Men (Pharisees and scribes) bring a woman accused of adultery. The question to Jesus is "does she get stoned?" (A side note: according to the Mosaic Law, death is the punishment for both male and female adulterers. Where is the male?)

The Mosaic Law states that if the truth of two or three witnesses is clear, then she is to be put to death (Lev 20:10).

-If Jesus says yes, then He commits a crime according to Roman law. Judea is under Roman occupation and subject to Roman laws, which has the right to determine capital punishment. A violation of this law would be viewed as sedition and punishable by death.

-If Jesus says no, then Jesus, in effect, is saying that Roman law is a higher authority than God's Law. This would immediately discredit Him as a religious authority in the view of this large Jewish audience.

2. How did Jesus get out of this mess? Why was the guilty woman absolved of punishment?

The attitude of confrontation was interesting. Unlike the Pharisees and scribes who approached self-righteously to Jesus about this adulterous woman, Jesus spoke once while standing and spent the majority of time stooped and looking, not at the woman's accusers, but at the ground. Jesus' answer, "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her," did not challenge the hypocrisy of the accusers.

-Did Jesus say "no?" The dilemma for the accusers is that Jesus can be interpreted as approving the Mosaic Law but with a viable condition; thus, He cannot be accused of setting Roman law above God's.

-Did Jesus say "yes?" The dilemma here is that Jesus does not give a clear answer on capital punishment; thus, He cannot be accused of sedition, only the one who throws the first stone (and without sin) will be guilty of sedition. So whoever throws the first stone will be guilty of sedition and will be subject to public scrutiny. Who is humanly perfect?

What about the adulteress and the punishment asked for by the accusers? Rather than agreeing with Jesus or approving of His insight, the accusers leave the dilemma unresolved by literally leaving. With no one to testify against the adulteress, the woman is dismissed, as according to the Mosaic Law, no case has been made against her.

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3. What is the significance of this passage to us? How does it apply?

There are several significant implications in this passage:

- a) To the audience, a new standard is set for Judgment.
- b) Jesus, the Sinless One, did render Judgment on the adulteress. He forgave her and let her go with an admonition, "neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more." Given the fact that this crime is punished by death, this whole incident reveals God's real attitude towards sinners.
- c) The essence of this passage is Judgment for sin, yet the adulteress was not the only one with sin. The accusers had to face their sins and their conviction caused them to leave. The adulteress had to face the truth of her publicly and in the presence of witnesses; she did not plead her innocence. The accusers did not face the truth about themselves enough to admit them or repent for them. The adulteress stayed within the presence of the Lord; the accusers left the presence of the Lord. The adulteress was forgiven; the accusers were not.

"[Beware] of substituting interpretation for application. It is easy for us to settle for knowledge rather than experience. According to the Bible, to know and not to do is not to know at all." Howard and William Hendricks

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