

Adulterous Woman John 8: Guilt is washed away.
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3rd verse. "Thro' many dangers toils and snares, I have already come."

Introduction:

Have you ever been caught Red-handed? Maybe it was when you were a teenager, and your parents caught you sneaking in late at night after curfew. In those moments, everything makes noise. Every creak in the floor, every squeaky step, every noisy door hinge, sounds 10 times louder than usual. Then the lights flip on, and your folks are standing there.

Maybe your boss catches you arriving late to work, or your supervisor notices you've been fudging on your reports.

How about this one: You're late for an appointment, and you're driving fast, speeding. And then you look in the rearview mirror and see the blue lights. You're caught!

In those moments people usually do one of two things. Either we fess up and admit the wrong we've done, or we deny it. We either come clean and admit the truth, and humble ourselves with apologies. Or, often times people will lie and distort the facts to get out of the punishment. We go on the defensive and try to rationalize what happened in order to sidestep our guilt.

If this is interesting to you, you're not alone. Americans seem to be fascinated with catching people in the act. The news media exploded on the story of New York Governor Elliott Spitzer when he was caught red handed several weeks ago. And Americans tuned in to learn all the details about his adulterous involvement with prostitution.

But that's just the tip of the iceberg. There are reality shows devoted to exposing people caught in the act. These are programs that rank right up there with Jerry Springer on the Family Programming charts. Shows like Cheaters, where hidden cameras catch unfaithful spouses in the act, and gives their mate a chance to confront them with their sin. There's a popular show on Fox now called the Moment of Truth, which uses a lie-detector polygraph machine to expose the truth about some very devious people. In order to win money on the show, they have to answer questions that might reveal hurtful realities about themselves, their families, and their careers.

The sad truth is that underneath our lust for gossip, and our desire to revel in the vulgar actions of other people, there is a spiritual reality. And here it is: All of us are sinners, and when we are confronted with that—when someone strikes us right between the eyes with our sin—we feel shame and guilt. And secondly, most of us have a sense of justice, and we want to see bad people held accountable and good people vindicated. The problem is, most of us make poor judges, and all of us will eventually stand trial before a holy God.

That brings us to today's story. It's a woman's story. We don't know her name. We just know that she's guilty of adultery. And as we listen to her story, as if it were being told today, ask yourself how you would respond. How would you satisfy your desires for justice and mercy—how would you treat this person if they were your spouse?

John chapter 8

At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. 3The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group 4and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. 5In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such

women. Now what do you say?" 6 They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. 7 When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." 8 Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

9 At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. 10 Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

11 "No one, sir," she said.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

There she was, caught red-handed. Mark Moore writes:

"In those predawn moments she was ripped from the arms of her illicit lover. She frantically dressed while being dragged from her bed and paraded through the streets of Jerusalem. By the time she arrived at the temple, the sun was up and class was in session. Jesus had already assembled a group of eager students. She was thrown down in their midst. There she lay on the cold stone pavement trying to cover her bare thigh. Her hair disheveled, her eyes wide and wild with fear and shame. Oh the shame! Even the silent stones of the stately temple seemed to mock her as a shameless whore (prostitute)." [Encounters with Christ, p107, College Press.]

In order to understand this scene, we need to understand the Old Testament Law. The sin of Adultery was punishable by death. Lev 20:10, NIV - 10 "If a man commits adultery with another man's wife—with the wife of his neighbor—both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death."

Deuteronomy 17 – 2 If a man or woman living among you in one of the towns the LORD gives you is found doing evil in the eyes of the LORD your God in violation of his covenant...and this has been brought to your attention, then you must investigate it thoroughly. If it is true and it has been proved that this detestable thing has been done in Israel, 5 take the man or woman who has done this evil deed to your city gate and stone that person to death. (17:2, 4-5)

We need to come to grips with the seriousness of sin. Folks, until we come to terms with the requirements of God's Law, and how bad a thing sin is, we cannot appreciate Grace. We need to be more personally outraged when "Christian" people who claim Christ don't do what he commands. And we especially need to acknowledge when we ourselves have violated God's law.

In many cases, if our thoughts or actions were laid bare, we would find ourselves on the floor like this woman. Guilty, and eligible to be punished with death. For us, it may be a secret sin we try to hide from those we love and care about. And for others of us it may be something from our past, and the guilt has a grip on us all the time, but we don't let it show. Luke 8:17 says, "For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open."

The woman in our story was guilty. But she wasn't the only one. The Pharisees are, too. Now, according to the law, a person needn't be completely sinless to bring accusation or judgment. The law just required that the accusers not have any guilt in that scenario. The problem is, these Pharisees are just as guilty if not more so than this woman.

Deuteronomy 17 - 6 On the testimony of two or three witnesses a man shall be put to death, but no one shall be put to death on the testimony of only one witness. 7 The hands of the witnesses must be the first in putting him to death, and then the hands of all the people. You must purge the evil from among you.

Deut 19 - If a malicious witness takes the stand to accuse a man of a crime, 17 the two men involved in the dispute must stand in the presence of the LORD before the priests and the judges who are in office at the time. 18 The judges must make a thorough investigation, and if the witness proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against his brother, 19 then do to him as he intended to do to his brother. You must purge the evil from among you. 20 The rest of the people will hear of this and be afraid, and never again will such an evil thing be done among you.

In other words, when they press Jesus, “Teacher, what does the law say we should do?!” Jesus keeps the law in tact. He essentially says, “The law commands you to stone her...so go ahead. Stone her. BUT, before you do, be sure that you have no guilt in this.”

The truth is, these Pharisees have been caught red-handed by Jesus. If they caught her in the act of adultery, then surely it was a set-up. How does anyone become an eyewitness to adultery? And where is the man she was with? Shouldn't he be stoned, too? And if they knew this was going to happen, then they could have prevented it rather than let the adultery happen. What's more, they aren't even interested in her. They have ulterior motives to trick Jesus. The whole scene is dripping with guilt—the accusers' guilt, not the woman's.

So they all drop their stones. And they walk away. And pretty soon, this woman and Jesus are by themselves, and Jesus asks her “Woman, who accuses you now?” “No one.” she replies. “Then neither do I. But go and sin no more.”

She did not protest her guilt or declare her innocence. She knew she was guilty. Jesus knew she was guilty. But Jesus took her guilt and our guilt on himself. And He says to her and to us, “go and sin NO MORE.” Jesus forgives, but he doesn't condone. He demands Life Change!

This whole story is about the balance between the Law and Grace. The woman was guilty under the law, but she would encounter grace. The Pharisees could ONLY see the LAW, and they had no understanding of God's grace and mercy. The woman would go away justified- the Pharisees went away condemned. And if we're going to understand grace, we need to understand the context. Here is how salvation works under the Law.

The Law:

Keep the commandments; escape the penalty.
Break the commandments; suffer the penalty.

Fair, reasonable. Inside all of us is a God-given desire to see justice done. We want bad people to be punished, and we want righteous people to be vindicated. And our God is a God of justice. He is perfectly just and fair. So when we look at this scenario, it makes sense. It's how many people view religion, too. They think, “As long as the good things I do outnumber the bad things I do, then I'll get to go to heaven. Every good person goes to heaven.”

Here's the problem:

It's theoretically possible to keep the commandments and escape the penalty. But Jesus is the only man in the history of the world who could do it. You see, you have to keep the law perfectly. If we break even one commandment, we are guilty of whole law. James 2:10 “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.”

That's the law. It's fair, but it's hard. And no one has ever been saved by keeping the law. Read with me from Galatians:

Galatians 2:15 "We...know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified."

So what's the alternative to salvation by the law? The alternative is Grace:

Grace:

Keep the commandments; suffer the penalty.

Break the commandments; escape the penalty.

Jesus was the only man ever to perfectly obey the whole law, but you know that he was killed on a cross. He suffered the penalty anyway. And there's something inside us that cries out FOUL! That's unfair. He was innocent. And you're right, it was unfair. But grace is not fair. Grace is more than fair. Because we have all broken the law, and we get to escape the penalty if we are in Christ. Jesus dies in our place, pays our penalty. We do not continue sinning. Instead, out of gratitude and reverent obedience we need to "go and sin no more".

Let's read on in Galatians 2:

17"If, while we seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! 18If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a lawbreaker. 19For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. 20I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. 21I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

When Jesus forgave the adulterous woman, he was not saying adultery was okay. Instead, he took her penalty upon himself and let her go free out of his love for her. And he does the same for you and me. It's not okay to sin. Jesus forgives us, but that doesn't make it okay. And our challenge becomes to go and be changed by living more like Christ. And by letting the Holy Spirit change our hearts and minds.

Galatians 5

13You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature[a]; rather, serve one another in love. 14The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." [b] 15If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

16So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. 17For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. 18But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

And as a church, we need to be convicted of the seriousness of sin AND the transforming power of Grace. And we need to avoid the dangers of coming down to easy on sin, or too hard on sin.

Listen to how the early church was commanded to deal with sin in the church:

1 Peter 4:3-5, NIV - 3For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. 4They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. 5But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

When you become a Christian, non-Christians will think you are strange for not participating in the same things they do. I can't tell you how many times people have given me strange looks and

comments when I say no to alcohol. Someone offers me a drink, and because of the convictions of my heart, I almost always say no, and when I do, non-Christians think I am strange.

Listen to what the Bible says:

Galatians 6:1, NIV - Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.

If you are a Christian, and you take sin seriously, then it will lead you to take a stand on things sometimes. Whether it's homosexuality, or sex outside of marriage, or gambling, or drinking, or gossip, there will be times when you need to stand for what is right and tell people you believe those things are sinful and wrong.

But at the same time, when we do that, we have to emphasize the Grace of God and point people toward Jesus. After all, every Christian is just a forgiven sinner.

1 Corinthians 12 - 12The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. 13For we were all baptized by^[c] one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

...v 25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. 27Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

We cannot ignore open sin in the church. We are all one body. Someone has said, "There is no such thing as a private sin in the church any more than on a ship, there is as a private leak." We all bear the consequences until the guilty person is restored. That's why it is so important for us to hold each other accountable by encouraging each other, and if necessary, speaking to each other in love. And our elders, as the shepherds of this church are to lead the way by example.

Luke 17:3-4 -

"If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. 4If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him."

Hebrews 10:

26If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, 27but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. 28Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? 30For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay,"and again, "The Lord will judge his people." 31It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Hebrews 3

12See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. 13But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

Conclusion:

What will it be for you: Law or Grace? Will you try to keep score of all your good deeds and hope the mistakes you've made along the way will be overlooked? Remember, if you have broken even one command in the Bible, you are guilty of breaking them all. And I dare say that means we are all guilty.

But grace forgives. Grace picks us up when we fall, dusts us off, and says, “Go, and sin no more.” And when we come to Jesus that way, and we let the power of his Holy Spirit change us, we can be confident we are justified by Christ. We are freed from sin. He takes away all my guilt, all my shame.

Now consider this woman’s story one last time. Look at her, and you will see the grace of Jesus Christ. Mark Moore says this:

Perhaps the reason the church clings so tenaciously to this text is that it engulfs so many of us. Some encounter Christ with sexual sins, others with equally flagrant transgressions. All of us, however, come broken and shamed. For many the stoning would be a merciful release. But beyond belief, Jesus dismantles the accusers and dismisses the charges. The legal penalty he took upon himself. For our part, we get up, brush ourselves off, and walk away free—not free to live our lives, but free to transform them. Free, indeed, to die to the sin that entrapped us and live to the one who rescues us.

The story of this woman is the same as all of us. We lay at the feet of Jesus...guilty. Will we accept Him and his love and forgiveness, or not? Will we choose Law or Grace?

Romans 8:31-39 (The Message)

31-39 So, what do you think? With God on our side like this, how can we lose? If God didn't hesitate to put everything on the line for us, embracing our condition and exposing himself to the worst by sending his own Son, is there anything else he wouldn't gladly and freely do for us? And who would dare tangle with God by messing with one of God's chosen? Who would dare even to point a finger? The One who died for us—who was raised to life for us!—is in the presence of God at this very moment sticking up for us. Do you think anyone is going to be able to drive a wedge between us and Christ's love for us? There is no way! Not trouble, not hard times, not hatred, not hunger, not homelessness, not bullying threats, not backstabbing, not even the worst sins listed in Scripture

None of this fazes us because Jesus loves us. I'm absolutely convinced that nothing—nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable—absolutely nothing can get between us and God's love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us.

Will today be the day you embrace the love Christ has for you? Will today be the day your life is changed forever? Or will you walk out these doors unchanged. The choice is yours.

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