

# NEITHER DO I CONDEMN YOU

John 7:53-8:11

Key Verse: 8:11

**“No one, sir,’ she said. ‘Then neither do I condemn you,’ Jesus declared. ‘Go now and leave your life of sin.’”**

Christian scholars tell us that this passage is absent from many early Christian biblical texts or has been found in other places, like the end of Luke’s or John’s gospel. Why was this passage omitted in some manuscripts? Barclay’s commentary<sup>1</sup> is helpful. He says that church father Augustine gives a hint saying that it was removed because ‘some were of slight faith’, and ‘to avoid scandal.’ Some worried that this passage might be wrongly taken to justify a permissive view of adultery. Barclay concludes, “We may be sure that this is a real story about Jesus, although one, so gracious, that for a long time people were afraid to, tell it.” Some spend much time surmising what Jesus wrote on the ground. Others use the passage to attack capital punishment. We will study the passage to learn of Jesus, how he came full of grace and truth. We will also see our dangerous tendency to point out the sins of others and condemn them. We will study this passage in 3 parts to learn about sin, about grace and about truth. May the Lord have mercy on us all to accept the marvelous grace of Jesus and his call to a new life.

**First, the deadly consequences of sin (7:53-8:8).** Look at the opening verses. They read, **“Then they all went home, but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.”** While others went home for some R&R (rest and relaxation), Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Why did Jesus go there? It could be that Jesus had no place to stay. But we also know from Scripture that the Mount of Olives was Jesus’ common place of prayer when he was near Jerusalem. Luke 21:37 tells us, **“Each day Jesus was teaching at the temple, and each evening he went out to spend the night on the hill called the Mount of Olives...”** The Mount of Olives was the site of the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus agonized in prayer just before his arrest, trial and crucifixion.

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<sup>1</sup> Barclay, William. “The Gospel of John, Vo1.2,” pp.337-9. Also accessible at <http://www.dannychesnut.com/Bible/Barclay/Gospel%20of%20John.%20Part%20II.htm>, second to last article.

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I don't know about you, but as for me, after a long hard day of emotionally-draining work, I'm ready to do something relaxing, like watch television or listen to music or sleep. But look at Jesus! Jesus spent time alone, listening and talking to his Father God, pouring out his soul in prayer. May God help us to pray. I don't just mean the discipline of prayer of getting to a prayer meeting. I mean to find for our souls delight, rest and strength through prayer. There are two memorable, spiritual long-distance car rides I have had. One was singing country gospel songs with my wife Maria. The other was the ride home from our recent ISBC, in which the four of us had continual prayer and Bible study for most of the 10 hours. Lord, teach us and help us to pray.

Now look at verse 2. **“At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them.”** Opposition was mounting against Jesus day by day. Many people would go into hiding if they were in Jesus' situation. But Jesus boldly went to the temple and taught the people. Why did Jesus do this? It was because he had a mission to accomplish. Jesus had to keep proclaiming the word of life, Jesus said in John 5:24, **“Very truly tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.”**

During his teaching at the temple, Jesus was interrupted. Look at verses 3-5. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, **“Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?”**

Whoa, this was quite a scandalous scene! This woman was dragged out of bed in shame and embarrassment and made to stand in public before Jesus as he was teaching at the temple. It was quite a disturbing scene with some messy detective work. To begin with, where was the man who was equally as guilty of this crime of adultery? And why did not the witnesses try to stop this capital crime? Jewish law required at least two witnesses. Were the witnesses hiding in a brothel or peeking through peoples' windows?

Consider the woman. How must she have felt? She was after all caught in the very act of adultery. She must have been terrified, for Moses' law stipulated that adulterers must be put to death. Leviticus 20:10 says, **“If a man commits adultery with another man's wife-with the wife of his neighbor-both the**

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**adulterer and the adulteress are to be put to death.”** Again, Deuteronomy 22:22-24a reads, **“If a man is found sleeping with another man’s wife, both the man who slept with her and the woman must die. You must purge the evil from Israel. If a man happens to meet in a town a virgin pledged to be married and he sleeps with her, you shall take both of them to the gate of that town and stone them to death.”** Adultery was one of three capital offenses in Israel punishable by death, along with idolatry and murder. This woman was trembling in fear.

She was also so ashamed. In every civilized culture on earth, marriage is an honorable institution. To violate another person’s spouse is despicable and deplorable. This was especially true in Jewish society. God gave the Ten Commandments to his people. One of these commandments stated, **“You shall not commit adultery”** (Ex 20:14). Prostitution and other forms of sexual deviance have been regarded as immoral behavior since before the book of Genesis was written.

Some of you might be thinking, “Well, I’ve never committed adultery, so I’m safe. I’m okay. Thank God!” Not so fast. Jesus said in Matthew 5:27-28, **“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”** The fact is, we have all sinned and the wages of sin is death. We all deserve to die and be judged by a holy God. Who can stand in judgment before the perfect and holy God?

Verse 6 tells us the real motive of the woman’s accusers: **“They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.”** Not only did they accuse this woman, they wanted to accuse and destroy Jesus. They were using this woman to trap Jesus. How were they trying to trap Jesus? If Jesus said, “Stone her,” he would be in trouble with the Romans, for the Jews had no right to execute anyone without a Roman trial (Jn 18:31). Also, Jesus would be violating his own teaching on love and forgiveness. But if Jesus said, “Don’t stone her,” he would be contradicting the law of Moses, who commanded that adulterers be put to death. They thought they had Jesus in a corner.

What did Jesus say? At first he said nothing. He bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. What did he write? The Bible doesn’t tell us. But the writer tells us that this is what Jesus did. Then why did he do this? Actually he did it again in verse 8. It could be that Jesus is showing us something.

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Sometimes, when we don't know how to best answer someone, it is best to be silent and pray. When we need wisdom, we can pray. James 1:5 says, **“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.”** I'm not saying that Jesus lacked wisdom. But we certainly do. And we certainly need to be silent much more than we are when we are attacked and to pray much more than we do.

One scholar suggests that Jesus might have written Exodus 23:1 on the ground. It says, **“Do not spread false reports. Do not help a guilty person by being a malicious witness.”** Indeed they were malicious witnesses, for they did not care if this woman died or lived. Another scholar suggests that Jesus wrote a list of their sins on the ground. Still there is another possibility. Another place in the Bible in which God writes with his finger is the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments are not negotiable. Before God's holy law, we all stand guilty.

There is yet more to be said about sin. Look at verses 7-8. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, **“Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”** Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

According to Jewish law, the witnesses were to be the first ones to throw stones. But a false witness, if discovered, would suffer the same punishment. Jesus did not bypass the law of Moses. If indeed the woman was guilty, then she deserved to die, according to God's law. Jesus simply bought her time, making it practically impossible to carry out her death sentence at that moment. Jesus appealed to the consciences of her accusers: **“Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”** Jesus did not abolish the Law of Moses. Jesus simply raised the bar on the qualifications of those who could enforce the execution. His condition was that only a sinless one could throw a stone at her.

In this way Jesus exposed the sins of her accusers. At least he made them examine their own hearts and lives. He also gave them time to consider it, by stooping down and writing on the ground again. Look at verse 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.”** Jesus' words convicted them of their own sins. The older ones more quickly identified themselves as sinners, perhaps because they had sinned more or perhaps because they were wiser to recognize themselves as sinners. It was good that they gave up the right to throw a stone at the adulteress. But it was not good that they left Jesus and went away in

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humiliation. Without repenting, they would come back to destroy Jesus in another way. What they needed to do was repent and accept Jesus' wisdom and mercy.

**Second, Jesus' amazing grace (10-11a).** So after all the others left, Jesus was still there. Actually, Jesus was without sin. So Jesus was qualified to throw a stone at her. In fact, only Jesus is qualified to judge and to execute judgment on the world. And he will judge the world one day. 2 Corinthians 5:10 says, "**For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.**" As the Apostles' Creed says, "He will come again to judge the living and the dead." With none of her accusers there, verse 10 says, **Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said.** The Greek Word for "Sir" can also be translated "master" Or "Lord." In any case, whether she meant "sir" or "Lord" she showed deep respect for Jesus. Jesus loved her like a father loves his daughter who got herself into a big mess. Jesus declared to her, "**Then neither do I condemn you.**"

How could Jesus say: "**Then neither do I condemn you?**" How could Jesus bypass the law of Moses like this? There are two reasons I can think of. **Firstly, Jesus came not to condemn sinners but to save sinners.** This was his mission from God. John 3:17 says, "**For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.**" **Secondly, Jesus would soon take upon himself her condemnation and sin as the Lamb of God.** Only Jesus is qualified to take away our sins. Apostle Peter understood this and declared in 1 Peter 2:24, "**He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.**" Apostle Paul also understood this and declared in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "**God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**"

One day we must each stand before the judgment seat of Christ. On that day, we cannot point at others who sinned more than we did. We must give an account of our own lives. All of us have said, thought and done things that we are ashamed of and we don't want anyone to know about. But Hebrews 4:13 says, "**Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.**" On Judgment Day, there is no hiding place. Apart from Jesus Christ, we have to face God's wrath and judgment for our sins. There is no excusing our sins. There is no comparing with

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others. The question will be: Did we believe and obey Jesus Christ, or did we reject him?

John 1:12 proclaims the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ: **“Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...”** And again, as we have heard many times, **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”** (Jn 3:16).

Do you feel condemned for your sins? If not, maybe you're too self-righteous, thinking you are better than others. But Proverbs 14:12 warns, **“There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.”** Or perhaps you live in self-condemnation, constantly condemning yourself and others. Then accept Romans 8:1 in your heart, **“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...”** Jesus knows we are sinners, but he does not want to condemn us. Jesus says to each of us, **“Neither do I condemn you,”** in order to save us and give us a new life. This is the amazing grace of Jesus.

**Third, the truth of a new life.** Jesus came full of grace and truth. His grace is to forgive us of our sins. But he doesn't leave us with no other alternative. He gives us the truth of a better life. He calls us to a new life in him. After declaring to the adulteress woman, **“Neither do I condemn you,”** Jesus did not bid her well and tell her to be more careful whom she meets up with. Jesus said, **“Go now and leave your life of sin.”** Jesus called her to a new life. Jesus had literally saved her life. Out of gratitude for the amazing grace of Jesus, we would hope that she lived a new life for Jesus who saved her. Jesus calls each of us also not only to be pardoned and forgiven of our sins but to live a new and better life in him. As followers of Jesus who live in his grace, we cannot continue in a life of sin. Now we live for him who died for us and who rose again. We now live to declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light (1Pe 2:9).

Perhaps you are like the woman in this passage and you know it. Or perhaps you are like the religious leaders who were quick to point out someone else's sins, not recognizing their own condemnable guilt before God. One thing is sure: you are a sinner and you cannot save yourself from God's righteous judgment. Listen to Paul's exhortation in Romans 2:1-4: **“You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based**

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**on truth. So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the some things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?"**

On what do you base your confidence before God? It cannot be based on your own effort, however noble it might be. Paul boldly declared, **"There is no one righteous, not even one...For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"** (Rom 3:10, 23), and he concluded, **"Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law..."** (Rom 3:20)

Only Jesus Christ can take away our sin and guilt and condemnation. He promises to do so when we trust in him rather than ourselves for salvation. Have you trusted Jesus Christ and him alone for your salvation? Have you begun a new life in him and for him? Jesus saves us from a life of accusing and figure-pointing-judging others, as if we are better. It has been said that whenever we point at others, three fingers are pointing back at ourselves. Our job is not to condemn others. We are not qualified to do that. Even Jesus, who was qualified to judge, did not judge and condemn sinners. Rather, it is our joyful job and meaningful mission to point sinners to the Savior and help them to know and trust in him. May God help us to do so - to help even one person to know Jesus' grace of forgiveness of sin and to live a new life in him. May God help us to live in the grace and truth of Jesus: **"Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin."**