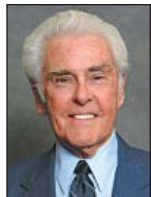


Freed by God's forgiveness

Many evangelical commentaries and most modern translations do not regard John 7:53-8:11 as originally part of John's Gospel even if they affirm the



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general authenticity of the account. For example, the New International Version and the New Revised Standard Version each bracket these verses as important teaching about how Jesus

dealt with a woman accused of being involved in an adulterous affair. We will gain such insight by treating the experience as authentic.

While in Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus entered the temple complex and was teaching the people. The scribes and Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman they had caught in adultery to see how Jesus would judge her. They were trying to trap Jesus. They believed that if Jesus chose mercy he would be in opposition to the law of Moses, and if he chose judgment he would be encouraging the illegal enactment of capital punishment.

God's law calls for the punishment of sin (John 8:2-6). Adultery is sexual intercourse of a man with another man's wife and this was found to be true for this woman. However, the law of Moses called for more punishment than the Jewish leaders were willing to acknowledge. They made the woman stand before the group that Jesus had been teaching and said to Jesus, "Teacher, the woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the law, Moses commanded us to stone such a woman" since stoning was a common penalty for many sexual sins in the Old Testament.

However the law of Moses said, "If a man commits adultery with another man's wife...both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death" (Leviticus 20:10). This commandment was repeated in the

renewal of the law in Deuteronomy: "If a man is found sleeping with another man's wife, both the man who slept with her and the woman must die" (22:22). But the scribes and Pharisees condemned only the woman and did not bring the man before the group as well. They then asked Jesus, "Now what do you say?" Jesus gave no answer but "bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger." Perhaps He was making a notation of what the law of Moses really said! No one knows.

None of us is without sin (John 8:7-9). When Jesus did not respond to the questioners, the Jewish leaders must have become very exasperated since their plot to trap Jesus was not working out. Finally Jesus stood up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to cast a stone at her."

What a shock this statement of Jesus must have been to the scribes and Pharisees but also to the common folk whom Jesus had been teaching. No one had accused them of being sinners at a level different from the sinful behavior of the woman who stood before them but their consciences were challenged by Jesus' affirmation: "if you are a sinless follower of the law, throw the first stone at her. "At this, those who heard began to go away, one at a time."

These words of Jesus recorded in John's Gospel remind us of Paul's judgment on the Jewish leadership. "Now you, if you call yourself a Jew, if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God...if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law an embodiment of knowledge and truth — you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourselves?" (Romans 2:17, 19-21). After all, "there is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of

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Scripture: John 8:2-11

the glory of God" (3:22-23).

God forgives us out of his grace (John 8:10-11). Jesus straightened up from his place where he had been writing on the ground and asked the woman, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" When she replied that no one had done so, Jesus said, "Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin."

Philip Yancey summarizes the effect of Jesus' actions upon the crowd and the woman. "This tense scene reveals a clear principle in Jesus' life: he brings to the surface repressed sin, yet freely forgives any freely acknowledged sin. The adulterer went away forgiven, with a new lease on life; the Pharisees slunk away, stabbed to the heart" (The Jesus I Never Knew, p. 152).

A hymn of the last century could easily have been the forgiven woman's song of life. Famous hymn writer Philip Bliss captured the song of forgiveness in the title and the text of his composition: Free from the Law, O Happy Condition.

*Free from the Law, O happy condition,
Jesus hath bled, and there is remission;
Cursed by the law and bruised by the fall,
Grace hath redeemed us [me] once for all.
Now we are free, there's no condemnation,
Jesus provides a perfect salvation;
Come unto Me, O hear His sweet call;
Come and he saves us once for all."*

John 1:17 summarizes this message: "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." This is the first time that John uses the name Jesus connected with the title Christ. This combination identifies "the Word became flesh."

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