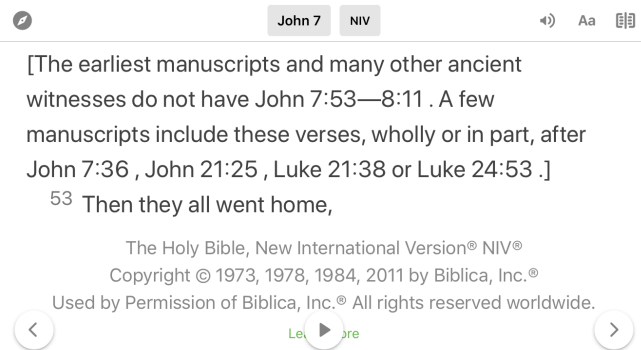


***Answering Jesus: Do You hear Jesus saying to you,
“I do not condemn you. . . sin no more”?
John 7:53-8:11***

Today’s passage is John 7:53-8:11. This passage is unlike any passage I’ve ever preached. Why do I say that? Here is a screen shot of John 7:53 from the YouVersion Bible app (New International Version). The note in brackets reads: “The earliest



manuscripts and many other ancient witnesses do not have John 7:53-8:11. A few manuscripts include these verses, wholly or in part after John 7:36, John 21:25, etc.”

In other words, the strong consensus among scholars is that this passage was not originally in John’s Gospel, but was added later. The fact that different manuscripts included it in different places confirms that it was added. At the same time, the scholars that I

respect the most (D.A. Carson, Bruce Metzger, etc.) also believe that the event recorded in John 8:1-11 actually happened, that the account is trustworthy even though it isn’t canonical. What is depicted in this account is fully consistent with everything we know about Jesus and His teachings.

Since this passage doesn’t have the authority of Scripture, we don’t want to build any doctrine solely on this passage; but it can serve to illustrate truths that are taught elsewhere. The fact that our English translations include this passage in brackets (instead of omitting it without comment) reflects that the Church has found this account to be valuable spiritually. I think that evaluation will be confirmed as we study this passage today.

The account of the woman “caught in adultery”: After the events of chapter 7 surrounding the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem, we read:

53 Everyone went to his home. 1 But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

Luke tells us that Jesus would spend the night on the Mount of Olives and during the day He would go to the temple to teach (Luke 21:37).

2 Early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people were coming to Him; and He sat down and began to teach them.

The outer court of the temple was a place where rabbis could come and teach their students. When Jesus took His place there to teach His disciples, a large crowd gathered. He sat down and began to teach them. His teaching was interrupted by these events:

3 The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the center of the court, 4 they said to Him, “Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act. 5 “Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?”

Pharisees were the most strict sect within Judaism; they meticulously tried to follow the Law. The scribes were basically scholars who studied and taught the Hebrew Scriptures; since their community was based on keeping the Law, the scribes passed judgment when people were accused of breaking a commandment. The scribes and Pharisees represented the social and religious authority in Israel. They had authority, but they had no compassion for this woman. Have you ever been “caught in the very act” of sinning? Yes. . . by other people and by God.

These verses raise all sort of questions, don’t they? By definition, adultery involves a married person having sexual relations with someone other than his/her spouse. If this woman was “caught in adultery,” where is the man? Passages such as Deuteronomy 22:22 say that if a man and woman commit adultery, both persons (the man and the woman) are to be “put to death.” By bringing only the woman, the scribes and Pharisees have already compromised the letter and the spirit of the Law. And how did they catch her “in the very act”? We can’t be sure, but it almost seems like a set-up.

In verse 6 we are told the motive of the scribes and Pharisees.

6 They were saying this, testing Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him. But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground.

Here we learn that it wasn’t really the woman who was on trial; ***Jesus was on trial.*** They asked Jesus to render a verdict on this woman in order to use His words against Him. They were probably wanting to accuse Jesus of being “soft on sin”; somebody who was a friend of tax collectors and sinners probably would not advocate stoning a woman caught in adultery.

“But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground.” The question we often ask at this point is, “***What*** did Jesus write when He ‘wrote on the ground’?” There is plenty of speculation about what He wrote.

- * Some think He was writing out the other 9 commandments (besides “Thou shalt not commit adultery.”)
- * Some think that Jesus is enacting Jeremiah 17:13 which says that the names of “those who turn away from [God] shall be written in the earth.” In this view Jesus was writing the names of the scribes and Pharisees, indicating that they were the ones who had turned away from the Lord.
- * Others think Jesus was basically doodling, sort of ignoring them until He was ready to give them an answer.
- * For me the most intriguing view (Keener, p. 737 and Klink, pp. 394-395) picks up on the detail that Jesus wrote on the ground “with His finger.” Just as the Ten Commandments were written on tablets of stone “by the finger of God” (Exodus

31:18, Deut. 9:10), perhaps Jesus was replacing the Law of Moses with the “law of love” (1 Cor. 9:21, Gal. 6:2).

The bottom line is that we don’t know what Jesus wrote on the ground because we aren’t told. And because we aren’t told, we can safely conclude that **what** Jesus wrote **isn’t essential** for understanding this passage. The significance is probably simply **that** Jesus wrote on the ground. Instead of answering the question posed by the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus took His time (and theirs) by ignoring the question. Instead, he stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger. They were clearly annoyed; notice how they kept asking Him for a verdict while He was writing on the ground.

7 But when they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up, and said to them, “He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.”

Jesus is making reference to the “law of witnesses” in Deuteronomy 17:6-7. There we read that if someone had done “a detestable thing in Israel” (the immediate context involved idolatry, not adultery), the accused person would be stoned to death on the witness of two or three people; a person couldn’t be convicted on the word of only one person. If the person was convicted, the **witnesses** cast the first stones and then the rest of people joined in.

Jesus didn’t say, “If you were eye witnesses of this woman’s adultery, cast the first stone.” He said, “If you are **without sin**, cast the first stone.” New winds were blowing; the Kingdom of God was at hand. The Law would soon be obsolete, replaced by the new covenant in Christ’s blood. Jesus hadn’t come to execute sinners; He had come to save sinners.

When Jesus stood up, the woman was no longer on trial; and Jesus was no longer on trial. **The scribes and Pharisees are on trial!** And every time you or I condemn another person, **we’re** on trial. Jesus says that unless you are without sin, you have no right to be judge, jury, and executioner - even in your heart.

8 Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. 9 When they heard it, they began to go out one by one, beginning with the older ones, and He was left alone, and the woman, where she was, in the center of the court.

The details here are fascinating. As Jesus’ words sank down into their hearts, “they began to go out one by one”: individually they were convicted that they were not “without sin” and therefore ineligible to “cast the first stone.”

As well we are told that they went out one by one “beginning with the older ones”: the implication is that those who were older were convicted first about their sinfulness. If we are teachable, as we grow older we can become more humble and sensitive to the conviction of the Spirit (we all have a little Pharisee hiding in our hearts). It’s also possible to resist the Spirit and become bitter and angry and crusty in our old age. To their credit, the Scribes and Pharisees showed up filled with pride and walked away humbled.

The result was that “Jesus was left alone” with the woman. He was the only one who was “without sin.” Being without sin, Jesus could have condemned her; He could have cast the first stone. But as we’ll see, He didn’t.

Only after the scribes and Pharisees walked away one by one did Jesus answer their question. We see it here in verses 10 and 11:

10 Straightening up, Jesus said to her, “Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?” 11 She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more.”

Jesus first said, “I do not condemn you, either.” This didn’t mean that adultery was no big deal or that Jesus was “soft on sin.” Jesus Himself would be tried, convicted, and crucified for her sin. Jesus would take her condemnation and her sin upon Himself on the cross. “I don’t condemn you” was an expression of His compassion, His mercy, His grace. Jesus didn’t come to condemn the world; He came that we might experience eternal life.

Based on **this foundation of grace**, Jesus next spoke **truth** this woman, “Go. From now on sin no more.” You may remember that in John 5 Jesus said something very similar to the man He had healed.

14 Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you.”

As we mentioned when we discussed that passage, in the gospels the way to “stop sinning” is to become a disciple of Jesus. As we follow Him, we “learn to obey all that He has commanded us” (Matthew 28:18-20).

10 Straightening up, Jesus said to her, “Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?” 11 She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more.”

When Jesus tells the woman in John 8, “From now on sin no more,” He is telling her to become His disciple and learn a different way of living. In John 8:31–36 we read Jesus’ perspective on sin. It turns out that He tells people to become His disciples and stop sinning because that’s the path to freedom:

31 So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

Look at verses 34 and 36:

34 Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. . . 36 “So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.”

If this woman would become Jesus' disciple, let His word dwell within her, and learn to obey everything Jesus commanded, she would experience true freedom, freedom from the bondage of sin. This is one aspect of the "good news" of the gospel; there is freedom in following Jesus.

The question today's passage poses to us is: ***Do You hear Jesus saying to you, "I do not condemn you. . . sin no more"?***

Each of us is "the woman caught in adultery." No sin goes unnoticed by God. ". . . all things are open and laid bare before the eyes [of God]" (Hebrews 4:13; see also Psalm 90:8). Each of us needs to hear Jesus say, "I do not condemn you," **AND** "sin no more." At different times and in different situations, we might need to hear one of those statements more than the other; but like the woman in John 8, we need to hear both.

Two observations that might help us hear this question more clearly:

Our obedience must be built on the foundation of grace. Jesus pronounced that the woman was not condemned before He told her "sin no more." If you haven't experienced the grace of not being condemned for your sin, there is no way you can be free from the bondage of sin. It is the kindness of God that leads us to repentance. It is the love of Christ that controls us. Romans 8:1-2 says it best:

1 Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

If you trust in Jesus alone to take away your sin and to give you eternal life, you are in Christ. And if you are "in Christ," there is now no condemnation."

There's a world of difference between thinking, "Because I am forgiven by Jesus Christ, I am pursuing a life of obedience," and "I'm pretty sure God is mad at me, so I'm going to try to get on His good side through obedience."

Think of an area of your life in which you need to learn obedience. Among other things, I've been convicted lately that I sometimes speak "careless words" - words that don't meet the need of the moment and give grace to people. I can easily feel condemned when I say things that hurt or confuse other people. But feelings of condemnation are a very poor foundation for obedience. Maybe you can think of something analogous in your life - some sinful habit or attitude, a lack of compassion for others in the church, in your workplace, on the streets, in the news. Obedience in these areas has to be built on the foundation of grace.

I can't give you three easy steps for becoming convinced that there is no condemnation in Christ. My main counsel would be to fix your eyes on Jesus; ponder the reality that He endured the cross so you wouldn't be condemned. Preach the gospel to yourself, telling yourself that there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus, until you are smitten by

the love of God in Christ. We respond to His love by loving Him in return. Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Obedience is a response of love.

Our obedience equips us to help others become obedient. The common consensus used to be that John 3:16 was the most well-known verse in the Bible (“For God so loved the world. . .”). But now the consensus is that the best-known verse is Matthew 7:1, “Do not judge so that you will not be judged.”

I’ve heard Christians say, “Until I’m perfect, I’ll never talk to other people about their sin. I’m no going to judge others so that I won’t be judged.” It is true that, like Jesus, we don’t go around judging people for sport; and we certainly don’t **condemn** other people for their sin. But the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) involves making disciples, baptizing them, and **teaching them to obey** Jesus’ commands. People who have experienced freedom from the bondage of sin have to help others experience freedom from the bondage of sin.

In Matthew 7:1-5 reads:

1 “Do not judge so that you will not be judged. 2 “For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. 3 “Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 4 “Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and behold, the log is in your own eye? 5 “You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.

Taking the log out of our own eyes means leaning to “sin no more” in some area of obedience. When we go through the painful and often tedious process of learning obedience, we become both humble and helpful. We are now able to “see clearly” so that we can help others get past their sin (take the speck out of their eyes). In Galatians 6:1 Paul writes:

1 Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

The goal is restoration (not condemnation). A harsh, unspiritual person will make things worse if s/he tries to address others’ sin. But if you have learned to obey, you will experience freedom, and you will be the kind of person God can use to help others experience freedom. We need many, many obedient, free people who can help others experience the same. That’s how we make disciples. That’s how the fulfill the mission of the church.

Note: We don't have the original manuscripts of the gospel of John (or of any book in the Bible). Rather, we have ***copies*** of the gospel of John (full or partial copies) written in the original language which was Greek. These documents will have differences due to copying errors or due to additions or subtractions (for various reasons). The discipline that evaluates these documents to discern what is authentic is called textual criticism. Scholars have ways of determining which wording of a passage is most likely to be the original wording of John or Mark or Paul. We can have great confidence that our English translations accurately reflect the original New Testament documents. The Greek NT has been preserved in more manuscripts than any other ancient document (over 5,800 manuscripts, either complete or fragments). The words that are in dispute don't affect any doctrine in a significant way.