

Judgment and Our Savior

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We live in a world filled with sin. Our friends, neighbors, co-workers, and other people flaunt their sins on social media or in public. Some do it because they have blinded themselves to the wrong they are committing. Some do it to provoke a reaction in others. Some do it out of a misguided desire to affect social change. Whatever the reason, we daily see the sin of others. How should we react to it?

In John the eighth chapter, an account is given of a thought-provoking encounter between Jesus, the scribes and Pharisees, and a woman caught in sin. Leading up to the story of the woman caught in adultery, it is revealed that it is nearing the time of the Feast of Tabernacles (**John 7:2**). Three times a year, all Jews were called to Jerusalem to worship the Lord, (**Exodus 23:14-19**); the Feast of Tabernacles (also called the Feast of Booths or Ingathering), was one such feast. Jesus' brothers urged him to teach and do his works in Judea. Jesus responds to them: *"Go ye up unto this feast: I go not up yet unto this feast; for my time is not yet fully come."* Yet Jesus does go up *"in secret"* (**John 7:10**) and begins teaching in the temple. His knowledge of the scriptures appeared to surprise those who heard him. The rest of chapter seven recounts Jesus teaching in Jerusalem during the feast, and his actions caused the people to debate his identity. *"But, lo, he speaketh boldly, and they say nothing unto him. Do the rulers know indeed that this is the very Christ?"* (**John 7:26**). On the day after the feast, early in the morning, Jesus came back into the Temple from the Mount of Olives (**John 7:53, John 8:1-2**) and began teaching the people. At this moment, the scribes and Pharisees try to trap Jesus.

They seek to trap Jesus by bringing before him a woman caught in the act of adultery (**John 8:3**). She was guilty. Jesus did not deny it, and we have no record of the woman proclaiming her innocence. It would have been hard for her to protest her innocence when she was caught in the act. Both she and the man with whom she was engaged in adultery were to be put to death according to the old law (see **Leviticus 20:10, Deuteronomy 22:22**). We are never told where her partner was. Jesus does not directly address this inequity either, so we will not dwell on that aspect of this account either. So, here is this woman caught in adultery brought before Jesus by the scribes and Pharisees so that they might trap him.

Why did the leaders assume this would be a good trap for Jesus? They must have assumed that he would seek to circumvent the punishment of this woman, and when he did, they could accuse him of being against the Law. They were correct! Jesus did desire mercy for this woman, and he was successful in averting the death penalty. What would lead them to believe he would seek mercy for this woman? While we can only speculate, it is possible that they heard his teaching, *"But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance"* (**Mark 9:13**). Or, *"They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance"* (**Mark 2:17**). From these two teachings, they might have concluded how he might react. Whatever led them to this assertion, they rightly predicted that Jesus would not want this woman to be stoned.

That Jesus would desire mercy is probably one factor that led to his actions in this case. Our Lord's desire for mercy is one of the many blessings for which we should all be thankful.

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (**2 Peter 3:9**).

Another factor could be the rather blatant lack of regard for justice demonstrated by the scribes and Pharisees. They did not seek to follow the Law they sought to use this woman's sin as a tool against the Lord. If they desired justice, they would have brought her partner. If they desired justice, they would not

have brought her before Jesus. Jesus, seeking mercy and to stop the manipulation of a sad circumstance, decided to intervene.

How should we react to the sin we see in others? While the scriptures bear out that our actions toward a brother or sister in sin may be different than what is appropriate for those in the world (**Galatians 6:1**, **Hebrews 3:12-13**, **1 Corinthians 5**), there are some common themes. Jesus' response to the scribes and Pharisees reveals at least one facet of this: *"He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her"* (**John 8:7**). Jesus asks the scribes and Pharisees to look inward first. He asks that they examine their own lives and asks that they apply the longsuffering and mercy they received to this woman also. He reminds them that their own position before the Lord does not give them the standing to condemn. There is broad applicability for us, too: *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (**Romans 3:23**). This does not mean that we change the standard the Lord has set, but rather we should first recognize our humanity and allow that attitude to temper our reaction.

This teaching from the Lord is not isolated to this passage. In **Luke 6:41-42** we are admonished by our Lord to look at ourselves before we seek to intervene in the lives of our brethren. Further, in **Luke 18:9-14** Jesus instructs that we should not take pride in our *"righteousness."* Or, we should not compare ourselves to those in sin, but rather we should be humble and remember all that we have done and all that the Lord has done for us. Paul echoes these thoughts when he writes:

Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves (**Philippians 2:3**).

When we see the sin of the world, it should move us to sorrow and compassion. *"For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil"* (**Ecclesiastes 12:14**).

Actions taken in reaction to the sin of others should be motivated by love and to foster repentance. Again, Jesus sets the example for us. To the surprise of Jewish leaders, he sought out those who could use his teaching most. Jesus, who has every right to condemn, seeks to save. Let us pray that all hearts be turned to the Master *"who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth"* (**1 Timothy 2:4**).