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John 8: 1-11

"CAUGHT IN THE ACT"
(THE WOMAN TAKEN IN ADULTERY)

Don't you hate it when someone asks you a loaded question? Anyway you answer it, you are in trouble.

That's what they did to Jesus. Jesus and His disciples had just come to the Temple. As was customary for visiting teachers, He stood in front of one of the tall columns, which held up the roof, and prepared to teach the crowd that had begun to gather.

Suddenly there was a commotion. A group of the religious leaders were dragging a young woman over to where Jesus was teaching. She was struggling to keep her balance and was trying to hide her face in shame.

But the men, who had hold of her, didn't seem to care how disgraceful and terrifying it was to her. They were using her like bait on a hook, in order to catch Jesus. This was a trap, which they had set at the for woman's expense, in order to make Jesus look bad to those who had begun to follow Him.

Listen to them: "Teacher, this woman was taken in adultery: **caught in the** very **act** of sexual immorality. In our laws, which God gave to Moses, command that such people should be stoned to death. What do you say that we should do?"

Pretty tricky! Do you see what they are trying to do? They really had to work hard on this one.

It looks like they have Jesus coming or going, in a no-win situation. Any way He answers, Jesus is in hot water.

-If He says: "No, don't stone her," He would have been accused of going against the laws of God.

-But, worse yet, if Jesus condemned her, He would never again have been the hope of lost people nor "friend of sinners." His ministry, of setting the loss, would have been irreparably damaged.

He is between a rock and a hard place. And just look at His enemies, smirking behind their beards. At last, they think, they've got him!

Tell me, what would you have done? Put yourself in Jesus' place. If asked what to do with the woman, who was caught in the act, what would you answer them?

I. Some might say: "**FORGET IT.** What she did is not all that bad. Everybody's doing it nowadays."

Or, at least, that is the way it seems. According to the media, even our national leaders should not be held accountable for sexual misconduct. After all, it is a part of their personal lives and does not necessarily affect the ability to do their jobs. "Besides, how many other men do the same thing and lied to their wives about it?"

Why, if you stoned every immoral person in Fort Myers, you'd cut the population in half. You'd take away half of the doctors, and lawyers, and business people, and policemen, and even some clergymen. It might even take a lot of people out of our churches.

So don't make a big issue out of it. Forget it!

Now this would be a very modern answer. This is even what many church people might say: especially if you talked to them when they're preacher, or social studies teacher, or "old-fashioned" Mom and Dad weren't listening. Many people do lip service to morality, but then they turn around and practice immorality, as if there were nothing wrong with it.

Once people at least hit it. Today many are flaunting it.

I was reading a newspaper about one of our Florida Universities, where the student government was objecting to the school's rule that boys and girls could not live in the same dormitory. Later, an interview was held with a girl from Orlando, who boldly volunteered her name to the press. She stated: "If they don't let us live together in the dormitories, then the motels around college will certainly be filled to capacity."

Today, nobody has to drag adulteresses into the open. They "tell all" to the press. They publish autobiographies, with sordid details, and make the "bestseller" list.

In fact, today, the people who are caught in adultery practically throw rocks at the rest of us; if we act shocked, because we are so "narrow-minded and prudish." They blame us for "putting a guilt-trip" (and its attendant psychological maladies) on other people.

Yes, many people do seem to be doing it. In many are saying: "forget it. There's nothing that wrong with it."

Yes, Jesus could not answer like that. He would have betrayed His heavenly Father and going against God's laws.

And neither can I go against God's laws. Popular or not, I can never say, "it's OK to be immoral." Nor can this church except people as members, if they insist on living together and not getting married.

How far can you let down God's standards? Some today say that, as long as you have prayed for Jesus to save you, it doesn't matter what you do, after that. But that's not what Paul says in Romans 6. "Shall we continue to send so that Grace may abound? God forbid! How shall we, that are dead to sin, walk any longer therein" (I Cor. 6: 15-20)? "Being not deceived; God is not mocked:" what you sow (in sexual promiscuity), you must reap (and unwanted pregnancy, guilt, mistrust which can wreck a marriage, and possibly AIDS).

Sin is an unbeatable game. And you don't help anyone by misrepresenting the odds!

John adds (I John 3: 6-10): "Whoever is born of God does not practice (habitually commit) sin." A truly born-again Christian will not long be comfortable, in a sinful lifestyle.

Peter caps it off by urging us to "no longer live the rest of your time in the lusts of men, but to the will of God. For the time past may suffice us to have done the will of the heathen, when we walked in impurity and lusts, excess of wine, evelings and carousings" (I Peter 4: 2-3).

Jesus and His servants can never ignore nor water-down the commands of God. When God said, "Thou shalt not commit fornication or adultery," He was trying to help His children find the best in life.

Please, let's get over this idea that God just gave us a bunch of rules, in order to test us and to find out if we would jump, when He whistled. No! That's the farthest thing from the truth. Any Time God said, "Thou shalt not," it was in order to spare us from damaging our lives, by breaking the unchangeable laws of the universe.

I used to tell my children: "Don't touch the stove." Why? Because I didn't want him burning their hands and perhaps damaging themselves, for the rest of their lives.

In God does not want us to be burning ourselves on the fires of lust and hurting our futures. That's why He says, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." That's why He tried to warn people against playing around with the fires of their passions.

God wants us to know that there is no such a thing as "free love." It is very costly. It costs us our self-respect. It costs us a clear conscience, and we paid dearly with a nagging guilt and a sense that we are not "worthy" of success and happiness.

And it will cost us the respect and trust, which are necessary for a happy and continuing marriage. Clinical surveys show that a promiscuous sex life leads to heartache, bitterness, disease, the emotional breakdown, and the general feeling that life is somewhere cheated us.

It is no coincidence that our divorce rate has gone up, in direct proportion to the way that our moral standards have come down. The free and easy morality of our day is destroying the home, the very basis of our society.

In fact, look at the girl in the story. She was already suffering.

Haven't you ever wondered, where was the man? He (as such paramours generally do) fled away and left her to face the shame and possible pregnancy, alone.

Listen, it happens thousands of times. That "double standard" still exists. The girl usually gets the worst part of the bargain.

That's why Jesus could not say: "Forget it. What she did is not all that bad."

Again, if you were asked what to do with this girl, who was caught in the act, what would you have said? Would you have answered?

II. **"PAST ME A ROCK. I'll hit her first."**

"She has done **an awful sin**. She deserved to die!"

Isn't it interesting how we catalogue sins? Big ones and little ones. Real bad and not so bad. Some which God should punish and some, on which He should go easy. Sins that stun, sins to stone, and sins at which to snicker. Mortal sins and venial sins.

Usually the sins, on which we are the hardest, are the sins, which don't happen to tempt us. We are hardest on the sins, which other people commit.

That's what these men did. They branded some sins as worse than others. Maybe it took their attention off of their own shortcomings, when they could throw stones and other people.

We usually can get all upset about sins of the flesh and go real easy on the sins of the spirit. The outward things bother us, yet I'm told in the Bible that "man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart." Jesus put it this way: "if you look at a woman and wish you could, you already have, as far as God is concerned" (Matthew 5:28).

This dual standard, about sins, is what the world usually calls "hypocrisy." It looks phony, when we seem more than ready to stand in our glass houses and to throw stones.

It interests me, when God points out the seven sins that He hates the worst, in Proverbs 6: 16-19. Adultery and some of the others, which people like to attack, did not even make the list. But most of the things, which God "hates," our things which we tend to excuse in ourselves.

"These six things does the Lord hate; yea, seven are an abomination to Him: a proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood. A heart that devises wicked imaginations, feet that are swift to run to mischief. A false witness that speaks lies, and he that sows discord among the Brethren."

Six of the seven go on at every church in town, and no one says a word about them. Yet God hates them. Why do we pick and choose to throw rocks at certain sins?

Well, Jesus wasn't even going to play their game. He knelt and wrote in the dirt. He did not even look at the woman, in order to add to her humiliation.

What do you think that He wrote in the dirt? What was it that backed-off the self-righteous bloodthirsty religious leaders?

Nobody knows for sure. Billy Graham thinks that He wrote all 10 of the Commandments.

Maybe He wrote the name of a woman in Rome, where one old pious Pharisee had once carried on an affair, when he was young. That Pharisee would have left hurriedly.

Maybe He wrote the word "Ephesus," that great sin-city of the East, where one of those scribes had left a girl, pregnant and deserted. That scribe had only to see that name, written in the sand, and he made a quick departure.

I do believe that He wrote something, which caused them each to realize that they were far from perfect, themselves. And, **until we are perfect, we are not able to be a fair judge of anyone else.**

Anyway, they must have gotten the point. When Jesus said, "He that is without sin, himself, should cast the first stone," everybody disappeared.

I wouldn't have thrown a rock, either. Would you?

There's a third thing, which we may have answered, if we had been in Jesus' Place:

III. "I won't throw a stone at her myself, but **I THINK SOMEBODY OUGHT TO** give her what's coming to her." "The law says she's got a coming: so somebody let her have it!"

If Jesus had said this, do you know what would have happened? Every poor, unhappy sinner, who heard it, would have hung his head and said: "No use coming to Him for help. He'll just cut me down."

Most sinners, though they may act arrogant, are not happy nor satisfied. They know that they are wrong. And, in their way, they are groping for an answer.

Jesus always had that wonderful combination, where He never let down God's standard of excellence, and yet He always came across as the sinner's hope.

Today, the Church of Jesus Christ must uphold high standards. And we must warn men that these sins, which we sow, will become the disasters, which we must reap.

But we can never allow ourselves to say: "You have it coming, and I'm glad to see you get it." This legalistic, censorious attitude, which cares more about the letter of the law than a cares about people, has closed the door and kept many people from coming to the Church, in their hour of greatest need.

One day a preacher got to hammering away at the sin of homosexuality (and it is an abominable sin, according to God's Word). But the preacher kept talking about "those dirty, stinking queers!"

A young man, who is desperately trying to break out of that unhappy lifestyle, was listening. After that, he was afraid to come to that pastor for help.

Remember that the Church is not here to fight sin. We are here to save sinners!

A dentist was teaching me to floss. He said: "We dentists fight plaque like you preacher's fight sin."

Now he made a good point about plaque. But he did not understand what I'm trying to do, as a preacher. I'm not here to uncover and uproot and to get rid of the places, where sin goes on.

You'll never find Jesus overturning a den of iniquity. The only upset the religious racketeering, down at the Temple.

You'll never root out all sin, anyway.

Listen, I'm not here to see that sinners "get theirs." No! I'm here to teach the "good news" to sinners. Christ has already paid the penalty for their sins, and they

can be forgiven and set free from their past sins. They can be born-again to a new life, as a child of God.

It's like Jesus told Peter: "We don't want anyone to Parish, but we want everyone to come to repentance" (II Peter 3: 9).

"But, wait a minute, preacher. Didn't God's law demand that she be punished to death? Can you just said that aside?" Certainly not!

But listen, God's laws are often not as hard as the twists, which men have put on them. If you will read the actual law of Moses, to which those religious leaders were referring (Deuteronomy 22:20 2-29; Leviticus 20:10), you'll find that this woman was not legally do to get stoned to death.

The law said that the man must be present also, and both must be stoned together. It also stated that, if she were overpowered "in the field" (or raped), that she could not be stoned. For all we know, she had been overpowered.

She was not worthy of stoning, but these religious leaders didn't care about that. All they care about was "using" God's laws, in order to trap Jesus, who threatened their religious political power grip over the people.

May God help us, as a Church, to stay away from cold and heartless legalism and to care more about people and their needs and we care about our own pet ideas and positions and pride. God gave us a nonjudgmental love and compassion, which opens our hearts to anyone with a need.

Certainly, we cannot say: "I hope she gets what is coming to her!"

Really, there is only one answer to such a question, the one which Jesus finally gave. (And notice that it was not given to the crowd, to satisfy its curiosity, but only to the woman, to satisfy her need):

IV. "I don't condemn you, either: **GO AND SIN NO MORE.**"

This is always Jesus' attitude. He does not want to condemn us, but to save us from our sins. John 3: 17: "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."

"But," you may ask, "how could Jesus overlook her sin?" He didn't overlook it. He dealt with it. He personally paid for it, Himself!

Jesus knew that, in a few days, He would be going to the cross and dying, Himself, in order to pay the penalty for her sins. He had the right to excuse her from dying, because He was going to be dying in her place!

And that's the way He forgives you and me. The Bible says that, "the penalty for all sin is death" (Romans 6: 23). So Jesus died for us all. He took the punishment for our sins and "nailed them to His own cross, and blotted out all the record keeping (handwriting) that was against us."

Good news! There's a crimson cure for the Scarlet sin! "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin.

That's why Jesus could say to her, "**Go:**" Go free! Walk away from here like a new person. Go without the guilt of the past, hanging over you. Move forward, in a new relationship to your God.

In fact, He could say: "Go **and sin no more.**" Not only can you be forgiven of your sins, but you no longer need to be the slave of sins control. You can live a new kind of life as a child of God, with the power of God to give you victory over sin's power.

Well, she must have taken Jesus up on His offer. Notice how she called Him "Lord." It is only when we will trust Him to be our Savior from sin and our "Lord," our leader for the future, that we can truly hope to live a new life in the future.

Have you made Him both Savior and Lord? Loan to come to Him today and bow the knee and start to walk with Him, from this day on?

I wish we knew the rest of her story. Billy Graham thinks that we do. He believes that this girl was actually Mary Magdalene, who later followed Jesus and washed His feet with her tears of appreciation. In her appreciation she never deserted Him. Even when all others fled, she unashamedly stood at the foot of His cross. She was also the first to see Him, after He arose from the dead.

I can buy that.

I know that is what happened, when Jesus saved me. I began a new life. I was given a new desire, to please God, and a new direction, which has helped me to move ahead in victory.

II Corinthians 5: 17 assures us that "If anyone is (trusting) in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

Today, won't you come to Jesus? No matter what you may have done, He wants to say to you, "Go and sin no more!"