

From Shame to Grace

(John 8.1-11)

When I was at Bible College in Brazil, a group of us were talking about a Christian leader who had been caught in sin. We were all sharing our “opinions.” Thankfully, one among us was wise. He remained quiet the whole conversation. When asked, “What do you think about it?” he replied, “I wasn’t made the judge of his situation.”

1. Introduction (vv. 1–2) “Where there is prayer, there is wisdom.”

Jesus spent His time on the Mount of Olives. Although today’s text doesn’t give further information, we know through the other Gospels that He often retreated to pray. His secret place was the source of His wisdom. The Pharisees are about to challenge Him with a tough question — a potential “lose-or-lose scenario” — and through the power of prayer and seeking His Father, He will find the solution.

2. The flagrant (vv. 3–6a) “Where there is a Pharisee, there is legalism.”

The flagrant incident — or should I say, the political incident? Because clearly this woman is being manipulated as a pawn by the religious leaders.

They obviously don’t love her. They also don’t love the Lord. They may pretend to have zeal for the Law, but in reality, they are rejoicing in her sin because it can now be used for their own advantage. They are nothing but legalists.

There are five issues with their question:

A. It is hypocritical: “Master...” they called Jesus, while the day before they called Him demon-possessed and a deceiver.

B. It is incomplete: Where is the adulterous man? Surely this woman didn’t sin by herself.

C. It is not a genuine question; it is an elicitation: Getting someone to reveal or provide something through questions or prompts. They already had the narrative and the “answers” before asking. If they already know what the Law demands for this lady, why bother Jesus?

D. It is hypothetical: Under Roman governance, capital punishment was restricted to Roman authorities, not Jewish authorities. Hence why our Lord Jesus died a death on the cross.

E. It is a trap: This wasn’t a question; it was a temptation. If Jesus says, “Yes, stone her,” they will claim He is not forgiving. If Jesus says, “No, don’t do it,” they will claim He is a liberal theologian who doesn’t hold to Scripture.

This is serious, since the Bible says, “You shall not tempt the Lord your God” (Deut. 6:16). From the beginning, the devil twisted Scripture to tempt people: he did it to Adam in Paradise and to Jesus in the desert.

3. The dilemma (6b-8) “Where there is Jesus, there is solution.”

The religious leaders manufactured a scenario that didn’t exist: they brought the woman to Jesus, they had a flagrant, they accused her on the basis of the Law, and they asked Jesus for a verdict. Jesus was at the Temple, but they turned the Temple into a virtual courtroom. Jesus was

teaching, but they turned Him into a virtual judge. They tried to get into Jesus' head, but He didn't fall for it.

Jesus' response teaches us three things:

A. The power of silence. Silence is power. Remember when you were doing your driving test, and the instructor didn't say anything — he just marked his paper while you were driving. In your mind there was a storm: "What is he writing?" "Did I make a mistake?" "Am I going to pass..." Then at the end he says, "Good job! You got your license." Silence is powerful, especially when tough questions are asked.

B. The power of writing. It is scientifically proven that you learn more when you write. Before answering this tough question, Jesus takes His time writing — brainstorming, preparing the words He will say.

(Side note: this is the only instance where Jesus is recorded writing in the Gospels. There are a few interpretations of why He wrote on the ground. One says it echoes Moses with the Ten Commandments — since Jesus wrote twice, and Moses had to pick up the tablets twice as well. Another says the Greek etymology for "writing" resembles the term used for a court clerk, so some imagine Jesus writing sins on the ground: arrogant, proud, thief, idolater... I like the last one the most: just as God wrote the Ten Commandments twice with His finger, here we see Jesus writing twice with His finger as well.)

C. The power of reframing the question. The accusers had their minds made up: *She deserves death!* Notice Jesus doesn't argue with them on the matter they are already biased about. Instead, He raises a subject they

never asked for: the criteria for stoning. They said, “She must be stoned,” and Jesus said, “Who has the right to do that?”

Thankfully, what Jesus says here is known by heart in Brazil: “He who has no sin, let him throw the first stone.”

The accusers made one mistake: they manufactured a courtroom and made Jesus the judge. However, according to Scripture, in His first coming Jesus is not the Judge — He is the Lawyer and the Savior. And her Lawyer was standing right there for her.

Jesus elevated the courtroom scene, appealing to the courtroom of conscience. When they self-examined, they were found guilty and ashamed. In the Sermon on the Mount, the Master had already taught about adultery: he who lusts is already an adulterer. When they searched their conscience, they discovered they were adulterers too.

4. The restoration (9-11) “Where there is Jesus, there is restoration.”

The crowd departed — the older first, the younger later. Only Jesus has the power to turn the tables this way: the accusers are now guilty, and the guilty is now forgiven and restored.

Jesus began restoring her the moment they proposed the question and He bent down to write. By doing so, He took all the attention off her. She was ashamed, scared, humiliated — and quietly, Jesus drew all eyes to Himself, not to her.

Also, the phrase “bent down” appears twice in this short passage. That is good news: our God is humble. He bends down to our level to restore us. Idols don’t bend; the proud don’t bend. Only the true God — who is who He is,

who needs no affirmation, no public opinion, no proof — leaves the throne of glory and becomes flesh to restore us.

Jesus calls her “woman.” Notice the accusers called her “such a woman...” Jesus restores her dignity. As you know, “woman” in the Aramaic Jesus spoke is equivalent to our “Ma’am.” It is the same way He addressed His mother Mary.

Lastly, Jesus said: “I won’t condemn you either. Go, and sin no more.” That means she was forgiven by Jesus. Only God can forgive sins; no man, no apostle, no saint, no church has that power. Jesus, the only one who never sinned, could have thrown the first stone — yet He didn’t. That is forgiveness.

“Go and sin no more” means deliverance, transformation, newness of life. Jesus not only saves us from the consequences of sin; He also saves us from the power of sin. Therefore, she can go into a new life — and sin no more.

Conclusion

Jesus’ love trumps sin and shame. I have seen in my own life, and in the testimony of others, something very similar to this woman’s story. When Jesus rescues us from our sinful life, we often cry because we feel so dirty in sin — and yet so loved. Our sin is right there, and the Holy Spirit knows it. He doesn’t pretend it’s not there; that’s not the issue. The point is that although He sees our sin, His forgiveness, love, and restoration *trump all the guilt*.

There are even books about this experience titled *Unashamed*. Though we had every reason to feel miserable, ashamed, and like complete failures — we don’t.