

"I did not come with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:1-2).

The Woman Caught in Adultery (John 8:1-11)

Did It Really Happen?

This story is reported to be not included in the "earliest and most reliable ancient manuscripts" and that "other ancient witnesses do not have John 7:53-8:11." There has been great debate over the centuries as to whether or not the story of the woman caught in adultery and brought before the Lord really happened, and if so, whether or not it should be included in the original gospel of John (or in any other).

How should one determine, first of all, whether or not it is true? There are many who revere those things written in the Scriptures, not because of the truth expressed in them, but because they are in the Bible. Such an attitude is plainly biased; the sin is called "Bibliolatry."

Truth stands, no matter where, when, how, or by whom it is expressed.

Many nominal Christians commit the sin of Bibliolatry, revering "The Holy Bible" or "The Canon" as though anything else ever done or said by God or men of God does not measure up, simply because it is not recorded in the Bible. Many even go so far as to think that God does not speak to people personally any more, not even to His own born again children, except by the Bible, ever since it was completed almost two millennia ago. They, in essence, are saying that He Who includes within Himself all things has limited Himself to the mediation of a book, however outstanding it may be and is. Essentially, they make the Bible out to be God. The important thing is whether what is expressed is sanctified (exalted above, differentiated from, and set apart from other things by God), and not if it is or is not in the Bible.

God sanctified all that Jesus did in His public ministry. That some things are not included in the Bible does not necessarily make them any less true or authoritative, godly or valuable than those things that are included, especially if the Lord did and spoke them. Jesus said and did many things that were not included in the Bible. John said so (in the Bible):

"This is the disciple who testifies of these things and wrote these things. And we know that his testimony is true. And there are also many things, whatever Jesus did, which, if they should be written singly, I suppose the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen" (John 21:24-25).

Truth stands, no matter where, when, how, or by whom it is expressed, and it is **expressed**, everywhere. For example, Jesus not only referred to Scripture, but also to creation, as authoritative. "Consider the ravens, the grass, the lilies...those born of the Spirit are like the wind...." He gave parables and their interpretations to instruct His disciples and others. He spoke of principles such as building on sand or rock, counting the cost before beginning, and so forth. Every particle of God's creation declares the truth, and none of it any less than any other. That is because He, the Perfect One, is the Author of all things.

God gave me understanding of this story, whereas I misunderstood it before.

There is our understanding and there is God's. While ours may count when it comes to the things of men, it certainly does not count when it comes to the things of God. God, speaking through Isaiah, declares:

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways My ways, says Jehovah. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9).

God has given me understanding of this story, whereas I misunderstood it before. I would now like to share how I misunderstood it and how I now understand it. It is the difference between understanding with the carnal mind and understanding with the Spirit of God by revelation. It is the difference between truth and error, spirit and flesh, good and evil, life and death.

Here is that controversial story:

John 8:1-11 MKJV

- (1) But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.
- (2) And early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him. And He sat down and taught them.
- (3) And the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman taken in adultery. And standing her in the midst,
- (4) they said to Him, Teacher, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act.
- (5) Now Moses in the Law commanded us that such should be stoned. You, then, what do you say?
- (6) They said this, tempting Him so that they might have reason to accuse Him. But bending down, Jesus wrote on the ground with His finger, not appearing to hear.
- (7) But as they continued to ask Him, He lifted Himself up and said to them, **He who is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone at her.**
- (8) And again bending down, He wrote on the ground.
- (9) And hearing, and being convicted by conscience, they went out one by one, beginning at the oldest, until the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.

(10) And bending back up, and seeing no one but the woman, Jesus said to her, Woman, where are the ones who accused you? Did not one give judgment against you?

(11) And she said, No one, Lord. And Jesus said to her, Neither do I give judgment. Go, and sin no more.

Why would some be inclined to believe that the story is not true? This story is a well-known one, with the bolded words that are often quoted, especially by those who like their sins too much to give them up. To ward off those confronting them, they alter the words somewhat to their purpose: "He that is without sin, let him cast the first stone." Here are some arguments questioning the validity of this story:

1. The Law, which was cited by the accusers to Jesus, says that both the man and the woman taken in adultery are to be put to death (Deuteronomy 22:22). Seeing there was only a woman, some discount the story's veracity. Where was the man in this case? It can be assumed that it takes two to commit adultery, but that is not necessarily so. One unmarried party may not know that the other is married, for example. Was the man a true adulterer? If so, perhaps he escaped and was not identified. Perhaps they had already stoned him and reserved her to trap Jesus.
2. Some argue the story does not ring true because there was no repentance required in order to receive forgiveness. Does not the Bible speak voluminously and explicitly about repentance to receive forgiveness? Yes, it does. John the Baptist, "filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb" (Luke 1:15), called on the people to repent, and baptized them when they demonstrated fruits of repentance. Jesus and His disciples continued the same message.

However, repentant or not, the woman would not have received clemency because the Law did not allow for it. For the act, one was condemned, without so much as a reprieve. Jesus did say to the woman, "Go, and sin no more." If she repented, she would not perish. It could also be said that in this case, the issue was not the woman's sin, but that of self-righteous sinners, who were good at condemning others, yet who were guilty themselves.

3. I had this argument against the story: It says that the accusers left one by one, starting with the eldest. Why the eldest? Is sin a respecter of age? Those in sin, like rotting fruit declining, grow harder as they age. Their consciences do not improve. Is it not possible that they might be the last to leave? At least, would there not be variation? However, we must acknowledge that the younger are more zealous, impetuous and merciless (as was the young man, Saul of Tarsus, for example).
4. I argued the following against the story: Jesus is quoted to have said, "He that is without sin, let him first cast a stone at her." My carnal interpretation disagreeably suspected the story to be suggesting that nobody ought to be punished; nobody ought to face judgment before any man or body of men because there is not one person without sin to be qualified to judge or to execute justice. Today, when someone speaks against sin, calling on people to repent, the retort of wilful sinners is (you know it): "**Let him that is without sin cast the first stone!** Take the beam out of your own eye first! You are judging! Only God can judge! Jesus paid for all our sins!

5. Who are you to tell us what to do? Nobody's perfect! What I do is between God and me. You don't know my heart! Only God knows my heart! You have no right to **cast stones!**"

Certainly, it is true that hypocrites have no right to speak against sin. Nor do those not appointed by God have the right to address someone on sin. However, if the way of God was that nobody could ever say anything because we have all been in sin, then there would be no prophets or bona fide evangelists and preachers, and nobody would have the right to call anyone to repentance, because, as the Bible truly says, none are without sin. Parents would have no right to correct their children, or teachers their students for misbehaving, or the police and courts, the general public.

Jesus addressed this matter by telling His disciples to first take the beam out of their own eye, and then **they could** remove the speck from their brother's. The Scriptures are clear that people cannot repent unless they believe, and they cannot believe unless they hear the truth, and they cannot hear the truth unless preachers are sent (Romans 10:13-15).

When Peter rose up to speak on the day of Pentecost, after he and the other disciples had received the Spirit, he publicly declared to the Jews that they had sinned. He confronted them with their sin:

"Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, **ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:** Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that He should be holden of it" (Acts 2:22-24).

He was not finished:

"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, **Whom ye have crucified**, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, **Repent**, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, **Save yourselves from this untoward generation**" (Acts 2:36-40).

What right did Peter have to say these things to the people? Was he not the one who, after swearing he would die with Jesus (remember that an oath to God was a serious matter in the Bible - Numbers 30:2), denied the Lord, not once, not twice, but three times? What right did he have to call people to repentance? His right was twofold: One, he was repentant of what he had done. It says that he wept bitterly. Two, he was inspired by the Holy Spirit to speak against the sins of the people. Having repented, and been appointed by God to speak, he called for their repentance,

having the right and duty to do so. About 3,000 people, pricked in their hearts, repented.

He knew that her accusers needed judgment as much as she did.

In this story there is no indication that Jesus was unreasonable, saying one ought not to speak against sin or that one ought not confront another on his or her sins. He was teaching that none of us has the right to condemn another, and that the Law was not intended for condemnation.

Was He exonerating the woman? Not apparently. He was teaching that all are guilty. He knew that her accusers needed judgment (correction) as much as she did. He also said what He did to spring the trap they had set for Him, without falling into another.

6. I was also suspicious of the storyteller's characterization of the woman. She was allegedly caught in the very act of adultery, which would have been a very recent act, no doubt. If true, she had not given any indication of repentance, yet respectfully called Jesus "Lord." (Many call Jesus "Lord," and live ungodly lives, but in this case, the storyteller appears to have been depicting the woman as sincere.) "How could she be sincere, fresh out of a bed of adultery?" I asked.
7. Did Jesus spare that woman caught in adultery? According to the story, He certainly did, but ought anyone dare take His mercy for granted? Did He spare Israel forty years later, when General Titus of Rome destroyed it, as Jesus had prophesied? Did He spare Ananias and Sapphira when they lied about how much they had sold their land for? Here is the account:

Acts 5:1-11 MKJV

(1) And a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession.

(2) And he kept back part of the price, his wife also knowing, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet.

(3) But Peter said, Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart for you to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back part of the price of the land?

(4) While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own authority? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men, but to God.

(5) And hearing these words, Ananias fell down and expired. And great fear came on all those who heard these things.

(6) And the younger ones arose, wound him up, and carrying him out, they buried him.

(7) And it was about the space of three hours afterward, when his wife (not knowing what was done) came in.

(8) And Peter answered her, Tell me whether you sold the land for so much? And she said, Yes, for so much.

(9) Then Peter said to her, How is it that you have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door and they will carry you out.

(10) Then at once she fell down at his feet and expired. And the younger ones found her dead, and, carrying her out, buried her beside her husband.

(11) And great fear came on all the church and on as many as heard these things.

The Jesus interpreted into this story by the carnal mind is "another Jesus."

Jesus was not at all soft on sin. He did not lay down His life only to have people take advantage of His spilled blood, and continue to do their own thing, destroying themselves. Though there is no indication that the woman caught in adultery repented, there is also no indication that she did not repent, and the Lord did tell her to "go, and sin no more." He pardoned her.

But while this woman committed an offense punishable by stoning to death, as commanded by Jesus Christ (God of the Old Testament), on the other hand, Ananias and Sapphira did not kill, nor commit adultery, nor even steal. They simply kept back that which was theirs to keep anyway. Their wrong was pretending and professing to give to the apostles all that they received from the sale of their property. Yet they were not so much as given opportunity to repent of the deception that seemed to do nobody any harm. Jesus destroyed them on the spot (Acts 5).

If the story of the adulterous woman is true, it was the same Jesus in both cases. The Jesus often **interpreted into** this story by the carnal mind, however, is "another Jesus," a lawless concoction of a lawless concoctor who concocts to live lawlessly, depicting Jesus as a sentimental sop, who forgives anyone for anything, on the spot, when He is anything but such a character.

The True Jesus said:

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17).

He also said:

"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law" (Matthew 10:34-35).

Where do we see the Lord, as He ministered in the days of His flesh, speaking and enforcing the Law of Moses on the people? Nowhere. He did not come to enforce the

Law, but to fulfill it. He knew that it was impossible for men to fulfill the Law, and He taught them so, not that they would be lawless, but rather that they would learn to trust in Him and the righteousness of God instead of themselves and the Law. By doing so He did not diminish the Law, but raised it to be, in the sight of mankind, representative of the Nature of God, which it is. This story is not invalid because Jesus did not enforce the Law.

8. I suspected that this story was making Jesus out to be some kind of hero, which it is not. Jesus is not a hero, as many think, and as this story may **seem** to make Him out to be. Heroes are the stuff of the world seeking idols. Heroes excel in their own virtue and power, displacing the glory of God, if they do not credit God. Neither is Jesus a **defender** of the sinner. He is the **Savior** of the sinner. There is a difference. He calls on all to repent, not to "forget about it, as long as you don't do it anymore." Is Jesus merciless? No. Is He there to lay down the law? No. Neither is He there to ignore or to do away with it, as many wistfully desire. While He is a judge of fools, He is not a foolish judge.
9. Finally, I was persuaded that the story did not happen because several Bible scholars have testified that this story is not found in reliable manuscripts.

In my NIV (New International Version) translation, it says that this story is not included in the "earliest and most reliable ancient manuscripts" and that "other ancient witnesses do not have John 7:53-8:11."

My "Good News for Modern Man," published by the American Bible Society, says this of the passage: "These verses are not in the oldest and best manuscripts of the New Testament." In its introduction of the gospel of John, it says, "The story of the woman caught in adultery (8:1-11) is placed in brackets because many manuscripts and early translations omit it, while others include it in other places." My Revised Standard Version says, "The most ancient authorities omit 7:53-8:11."

Did it happen? Yes. Was it in John's original report? It does not matter.

My New English Bible has this note: "This passage, which in the most widely received editions of the New Testament is printed in the text of John, 7:53-8:11, has no fixed place in our witnesses. Some of them do not contain it at all. Some place it after Luke 21:38, others after John 7:36, or 7:52, or 21:24."

So while the "oldest and best" manuscripts allegedly do not have this passage at all, some of the later manuscripts allegedly have it in varied places. Does the varied location not suggest further that it was added?

My Amplified Bible Version says, "John 7:53-8:11 is not found in the older manuscripts, but it sounds so like Christ that we accept it as authentic, and feel

that to omit it would be most unfortunate." Precisely the point I made earlier! It sounds good, and seems to appeal to many, but did it happen, and if so, was it meant to be included in the gospels?

Is this story true to Jesus Christ's character? There can be little doubt that some scholars omit this story, not because they know Jesus Christ as He is, after the Spirit, and have judged the story accordingly, but because it is not in the more ancient, more original manuscripts; they trust in reason, as good as it may be.

The Lord has addressed my misunderstanding of this story. He has revealed a tiny bit of the expression of His marvelous wisdom in His dealing with the woman and the religious mob. It did happen, and our assurance of this does not lie in what the translators of, and commentators in, the NIV, the New World Translation, or the other translations have to say. Our confidence is not in men, but in the Lord Jesus Christ, Whom we know. Without the Spirit of God, we can understand nothing, though we know the true history of every manuscript to the last jot and tittle.

Did it happen? Yes. Was it in John's original gospel report? It does not matter. The story is as authoritative and holy as it would be if it were included in the original. The Bible does not sanctify its Maker. It is the Maker, Jesus Christ, Who sanctifies the Bible.

Here this, O Christendom full of Bibliolaters:

Jesus is not about the Bible; the Bible is about Jesus!

Victor Hafichuk

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