

The Woman Caught in Adultery

Whether or not John recorded this account is up for debate since it is not found in many of the oldest New Testament manuscripts. Some manuscripts have it in other places in John, while some even have it in the gospel of Luke. Nevertheless, the church has long held it records an authentic episode from the life of Christ. ¹

John 8:3-4 *The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the center of the court, they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act."*

But if that was so, where was her partner? According to the law, if the woman was engaged to someone else, her adulterous partner was subject to stoning, too. Had he fled for his life? ²

The scribes and Pharisees did not bring this woman to Jesus because they were zealous on this particular morning to uphold the law against adultery. John is clear about their motive: they were testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him (v. 6a). ²

Their motive was clear – to trap Christ. If he recommended leniency, He would alienate the legalists. If He supported the death penalty, He would alienate the many who opposed it even in those days. ³

John 8:6b *But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground.*

John Calvin said in his commentary on Romans, "When God closes His holy mouth, we should cease from inquiry." ²

John 8:7 *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."*

It was required by Jewish law that the accusers cast the first stones. ⁴

Deuteronomy 17:7 *The hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.*

- Only Jesus met the qualifications that He Himself had given for carrying out the execution. ²

John 8:8 *Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground.*

Through the ages scholars have speculated about what was going on with this particular action by Jesus. ²

John 8:9 *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.*

Instead of passing judgment on the woman, Jesus passed judgment on the judges! ⁴

John 8:11 *She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more."*

Execution was the stiffest penalty for adultery, but it was not mandatory. Moreover, by the time the woman spoke to Jesus, all the accusers had left, and without a witness to the sin, there could be no trial or punishment. Still, it was gracious for Jesus to let her go, for He certainly knew her guilt. ¹

- Each one of us comes to God like this woman – guilty, ashamed, naked, and exposed. Be done with this kind of life. ²

Jesus' Self-Witness

During the Feast of Booths, except for the last day, great candelabras in the temple were lit, and there was much rejoicing under their light. ¹

John 8:12 *Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."*

By proclaiming Himself the light of the world, Jesus was announcing that He fulfills the Feast of Booths. He is the light under whom people can rejoice truly, the presence of God who guided the people of Israel in the wilderness, the journey that the festival commemorated (Lev. 23:33-43). ¹

Exodus 13:21 *The LORD was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night.*

Light also appears in the Old Testament as representing several different things. It is a metaphor for the salvation that the Lord provides to His people. It symbolizes the guidance that the law of God offers. Isaiah 42:5-9 uses light as a representation of Israel and, preeminently the Servant of Israel, who are given to the nations for the sake of blessing. ¹

Psalms 27:1 *The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the defense of my life; Whom shall I dread?*

Psalms 119:105 *Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.*

John 8:23-24 *And He was saying to them, "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins."*

- To die in sin is the worst thing that can ever happen to a person. ¹

There is a way not to die in sin, however, and that is to believe Jesus when He says, "I am He", which entails believing everything that our Lord says that He is, including, for example, that He is the light of the world. If we die in faith, believing that Jesus is God incarnate, then we will escape dying in our sin and therefore go where He is going (John 14:1-3). ¹

Abraham and Freedom

John 8:31-32 *So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."*

When we turn to Christ in saving faith, we receive and rest in Him as Savior. And the result is that we abide in His word. True disciples of Jesus follow Him not just at the beginning, but also to the end. ¹

True disciples are marked not by sinless perfectionism but by abiding in the words, the teaching of Christ. They do not just confess Jesus with their mouths, but they trust in Him with all their heart and prove it by seeking to do His will, repenting where they fall short, and returning again and again to Him to learn His way. ¹

John 8:34 *Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin."*

Jesus says we are not really free. We are like slaves on a galley. We still have minds, wills, and hearts, but the chains of our slavery limit our choices. ²

"Our hope is this, brethren, to be made free by the free One; and that, in setting us free, He may make us His servants. For we were the servants of lust; but being set free, we are made the servants of love." ¹ – Augustine

John 8:43 *"Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word."*

cannot hear. I.e., do not wish to, cannot bear to, accept His teaching. It is not a matter of intellectual capacity but of inner response. ³

This is the point that the great Augustine labored his entire life and his ministry. He argued that the fall left man morally impotent. Fallen man does not come to the Word of God because he has no taste for the things of God. That's why God has to change the disposition of a person's heart before he will ever respond to the Word of Christ. The Spirit has to set him free. ²

- Sin is not simply making bad choices or mistakes. Sin is having the desire in our hearts to do the will of the enemy of God (Eph. 2:1-3). ²

John 8:48-49 *The Jews answered and said to Him, "Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?" Jesus answered "I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me."*

Jews and Samaritans felt profound contempt for each other. Their thought would be like this: "Only a demon-possessed Samaritan would have the nerve to accuse Jews, the true children of God, of not being the children of God." ¹

John 8:51 *Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he will never see death."*

Jesus once again extended to his opponents the offer of salvation. Those who hear and keep – believe – His teaching will never taste death. Jesus was referring to the gift of eternal life, the truth that He breaks the power of death and will raise to life all who trust in Him. ¹

John 8:53 *"Surely You are not greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets died too; whom do You make Yourself out to be?"*

Whatever Abraham saw it was most likely from heaven after he died and not while he was living on earth. ³

John 8:56-58 *"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." So the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am."*

Here as perhaps nowhere else in Scripture Jesus claimed for Himself equality with the Father by clearly using the divine name that God revealed to Moses (Ex. 3:14). Jesus identified Himself as eternal deity, declaring He was alive as the second person of the Trinity before Abraham was born." ²

Exodus 3:14 *God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"*

<p>1473. <i>ἐγώ</i> <i>ēgō</i>, <i>eg-o'</i>; a prim. pron. of the first pers. <i>I</i> (only expressed when emphatic):—<i>I</i>, <i>me</i>. For the other cases and the plur. see 1691, 1698, 1700, 2242, 2249, 2254, 2257, etc.</p>	<p>1510. <i>ἐγώ</i> <i>ēgō</i>, <i>i-mee'</i>; first pers. sing. pres. indic.; a prol. form of a prim. and defective verb; <i>I exist</i> (used only when emphatic):—<i>am</i>, <i>have been</i>, <i>×</i> it is <i>I</i>, <i>was</i>. See also 1483, 1498, 1511, 1527, 2252, 2071, 2070, 2075, 2076, 2771, 2468, 5600.</p>
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- "Disciples of Christ abide in His Word. Those who abide in His Word know the truth and are free. By contrast, the unregenerate are in bondage to sin and desire to do Satan's wishes. Where do you stand?" ²

¹ *Tabletalk* magazine, Robert Rothwell, May 2018, pp. 35-48

² *John (St. Andrew's Expository Commentary)*, R. C. Sproul, 2009, pp. 147-168

³ *New American Standard Bible*, Charles Caldwell Ryrie *study Bible*, 1995

⁴ *Be Alive*, Warren W. Wiersbe, 1986, pp. 123-135