

We are not throwing stones; We are weeping

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John 8 records one of the most poignant scenes in the ministry of Jesus. A woman who had been caught in the sin of adultery is brought to Him. The religious leaders who brought her didn't care about her; she was a means to an end. They wanted to trap Him. Should she be stoned, or not? If Jesus said to stone her, He would be going against the law of Rome. If He said not to stone her, He would be going against the law of Moses. Instead, He said, *He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her* (John 8.7). The crowd dispersed, then Jesus asked the woman: *Where are they? Did no one condemn you?* She replied, 'No one.' Jesus said, *I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more* (John 8.10-11).



That scene is lovely because it exposes legalism without ignoring sin, and it demonstrates grace without sacrificing truth. The woman was guilty of sin, but the scribes and Pharisees, instead of seeking repentance and restoration, sought only condemnation. Jesus did not excuse the sin, but to one whose sin was exposed, extended the grace of forgiveness. We are all that woman, for we are all 'exposed' as sinners, and all in need of forgiveness. And when, faced with our sin, we are prepared for judgment, we are surprised by grace.

In our day, scenes like this often play out in a different way. Instead of sin resulting in shame and an expectation of condemnation, it is celebrated. Many even approve of sin with the logic, 'How can it be bad if it makes me so happy?' But as with the adultery in Jesus' day, God's Word is not unclear on sin. Church leaders who follow the example of Christ do not condemn; they desire to offer God's forgiveness, and restitution. After all, no church leader is without sin; none can 'throw stones.' But often, when they agree with God, and refuse to accept or celebrate sin, they are criticized for 'hurting' others, and 'not showing love.'

What a difference from John 8. There, a woman who sinned received grace and went away with new hope: *Go. From now on sin no more.* Too often today, a person who has sinned rejects grace, and goes away not only denying they have sinned, but declaring that their actions reflect the way God made them. And after all, they are happy, so how can this be wrong?

Sin is not sin because we decide it is. Sin is sin because God says it is. One day, every Christian *will give an account of themselves to God* (Rom. 14.12). On that day, the Lord *will bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts* (1 Cor. 4.5). There are no exceptions: *We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body...whether good or bad* (2 Cor. 5.10).



God Hates Sin
Because
He Loves Sinners

It is not loving to see a person rushing toward destruction, and say nothing. A loving parent will not passively watch as their child plays in the street. So too, if we see a brother or sister rushing toward spiritual judgment, our loving reaction is to turn them from their way. Scripture is clear:

For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. . . It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Hebrews 10.26-27, 31)

My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins. (James 5.19-20)

Godly believers desire to turn sinners from the error of their way. When that attempt is rebuffed, they do not ‘throw stones,’ they weep. Their desire was to restore (Gal. 6.1); their attempt was met with rejection.

Every Christian will one day stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ. On that day, their fidelity to God’s Word will be judged: Did they faithfully proclaim it? Did they ignore or evade parts of it so as not to offend sinning Christians? Did they obey Christ, or seek the approval of men?

Scripture warns us: *Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap* (Galatians 6.7). Christians who embrace sin will face judgment for that sin. But elders will be judged for their leadership of God’s people. God’s warning to Ezekiel is one every elder should take to heart:

When I say to the wicked, “You will surely die,” and you do not warn him or speak out to warn the wicked from his wicked way that he may live, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand,” (Ezekiel 3.18)

Pray for church leaders. They are on the ‘front lines’ in the spiritual warfare which rages all around us, seeking to rescue Christians who are wandering into sin. When those attempts are rejected, they grieve. Pray that God will give elders wisdom and strength they need to continue to lead the church with ‘grace and truth.’