



"Our prayers run along one road and God's answers by another, and by and by they meet."
—Adoniram Judson

25-Oct-13

How Jesus Reacts to Sin

The episode in John 8 of the women caught in [adultery](#) offers a stark contrast between the scribes and Pharisees and [Jesus Christ](#) in terms of their reactions to [sin](#). The gospels contain several examples of Jesus having to deal with a sinner—a harlot, a tax collector, even whole crowds who only wanted to get something for themselves from Him. Jesus, however, almost always treats such sinners the same way, unlike the scribes and Pharisees. We know the story:

Now early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now [Moses](#), in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?" ([John 8:2-5](#))

We can imagine that, despite the early hour, quite a crowd had already gathered there in the Temple precincts, and this is precisely what the Pharisees wanted, an audience to witness what was about to take place. The Pharisees had probably been watching the woman for quite some time, planning to use her to discredit Jesus before the multitudes. When she stole away to her tryst with the unmentioned man, they were ready. Barging into the room, the Pharisee's drag her out—leaving the man—and haul her to the

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Temple to display before Jesus.

Then they ask a leading question, testing Him, as verse 6 plainly states, to frame Him when He spoke against God's law. It was a "gotcha" situation. They knew that He "consorted" with sinners, and having questioned Him or criticized Him about it at other times ([Mark 2:16](#); [Luke 7:34](#), 37-39; 15:1-2; etc.), they expected to use His compassion for them against Him.

Jesus, though, does not react as they planned: "But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear" ([John 8:6](#)). He ignores them and their question, treating the latter with the disdain it deserves. What He wrote on the ground matters little. His action says that their silly attempt to entrap Him is hardly worth His notice, that He is not going to jump at their bidding, that He would not be baited into error. They were, in effect, playing "the accuser of our brethren," one of Satan's roles ([Revelation 12:10](#)), and we can imagine that this is often Christ's reaction to him when he accuses one of the saints.

The Pharisees, not liking or accustomed to being ignored and disdained, nag him for an answer. After letting them stew for a while, He answers in a way that totally disarms them of their "righteous" indignation: "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first" ([John 8:7](#)). Their consciences' pricked, the Pharisees from oldest to youngest, slip away, melting into the crowd, overcome once again by the Teacher from Galilee.

Yet, Jesus' reaction to the situation is not finished. What He does next is even more astounding:

When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

Consider that she is an obviously sinful woman; she had a reputation as a loose woman. The Pharisees had caught her in the act of adultery, and that was probably only one of many sins. We would likely not be wrong in calling her a wicked woman.

In every way opposite to her is Jesus Christ, sinless and perfect. The Pharisees, themselves sinful, attempted to force Him, a Man of unimpeachable character, to condemn a sinner—to them, a foregone conclusion. However, Jesus' approach to the

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situation is poles apart; His reaction and attitude throughout this vignette is completely contrary to that of the Pharisees.

To them, reading the Old Testament law concerning the punishment for adultery ([Leviticus 20:10-11](#); [Deuteronomy 22:22](#)), this was an open-and-shut case: The woman had been caught in the act, they had two or three witnesses, the law was clear, so there should be a stoning! This appears to be unequivocal. The law does indeed proscribe the death sentence by stoning. What more proof does Jesus need?

Despite everything weighing against the woman, Jesus approaches the matter differently. He clearly understands that the woman had sinned. He realizes there were witnesses to that effect. He knows the law and the penalty, but He does not leap to a verdict of condemnation.

Recall that, for some time, He does nothing but write on the ground. He lets the matter simmer. While the carnal Pharisees agitate for answers and demand action, Jesus patiently waits. [God](#) works with us in the same way. We can become infuriated when God fails to answer us immediately after we say, "Amen," but giving us time for things to work out is a consistent pattern with Him. We can be certain that He does this when we are accused before Him, even when we are guilty as charged, as the remainder of the passage in John 8 shows.

Because we are so familiar with the character of Jesus, we do appreciate how shocking His statement in [John 8:11](#) is: "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more." One would expect a righteous God to say, "This is the law. This is your infraction, so this is your punishment." But we understand that God is love and that He is gracious and [merciful](#), so when He does not say, "I condemn you to be stoned," we tend to pass over it without thinking.

However, first-century Jews would have been astounded to hear such a thing! They may have been the most judgmental people who have ever lived on the face of the earth. One little infraction of the law was enough to condemn a person. Excommunication was so common a practice that people stood in great fear of the Pharisees (see [John 9:22](#)). What Jesus says was a radical concept, one that contradicted everything they had been taught.

Moreover, Jesus had every right—as God in the flesh, to whom the Father had committed all judgment ([John 5:22](#))—to condemn her to death, but He shows mercy. He does not react in anger to reinforce how bad her sin was. He does not even preach at her. He simply commands her not to sin like this anymore, and He lets her go to work it

out for herself.

However, He does not pass up an opportunity to teach the crowd: "Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of [the world](#). He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" ([John 8:12](#)). He teaches that He, being that Light, has given us an example to follow in situations like this. A sinner condemned to die produces nothing. Only with further life and light will he or she have the chance to [repent](#) and grow in character.

That is how God works with us, and are we not happy that He reacts to our sins with [patience](#) and mercy? So we should forbear with our brethren ([Colossians 3:12-13](#)).

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Seeking God's Will \(Part Three\): Patience](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Richard Ritenbaugh, beginning with an apocryphal Jewish tale about Abraham's impatience with a guest, focuses on American's cultural impatience." The whole world now seems über-impatient. If God had the same character traits that we do, we would all be cooked in the Lake of Fire, with absolutely no hope for forgiveness. If God would give us godly power right now, would there be a world left standing? We are obligated to embrace the godly character traits of longsuffering, forbearance, endurance, and perseverance. God inhabits eternity; He possesses all time, He lives in all time, He can see all time, and can manipulate all time, but He is not subject to time. God has been waiting for over 3,000 years to bring to pass the promises that He made to Abraham and his descendents. We have no idea as to how long God has formulated His plan for humanity, but He is waiting patiently for maximum results. We should adopt God's perspective on time, developing longsuffering, learning to develop tranquility under adversity, waiting patiently until He receives what He is expecting. God put up with ancient Israel's mistakes, as well as our continuous mistakes, because He loves us. Like a patient farmer, God is waiting for His crop to mature. We need to make sure we are patient with one another, realizing we mature at different rates. We must learn not to be impatient with one another.

From the Archives: Featured Article

Amazing Grace

by John W. Ritenbaugh

The old song speaks of "Amazing Grace" but do we really understand just how amazing it is? John Ritenbaugh fills in some details on this vital topic.

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