

"I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more."

One of the things that I've learned is that my capacity to forgive has increased tremendously as I have come to understand just how much I've been forgiven. As I reflected on this recently, I remembered the story of Jesus being asked by the religious leaders of His day to respond to the woman caught in adultery.

John 8:1-11 NASB

1 But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 2 Early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people were coming to Him; and He sat down and *began* to teach them. 3 The scribes and the Pharisees *brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the center *of the court*, 4 they *said to Him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act. 5 "Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?" 6 They were saying this, testing Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him. But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground. 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.*" 8 Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. 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*. 10 Straightening up, Jesus said to her, "Woman, where are they? *Did no one condemn you?*" 11 She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "*I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more.*"

There is a lot to consider in this passage. First, why did they only bring the woman? If she was caught in the very act, the man must have been present too. So why didn't they bring the man? If they were really intent on keeping the law, it required that they bring the man to be stoned as well as the woman. Let's look at what it says.¹

Leviticus 20:10 NASB

10 'If *there is* a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.

Deuteronomy 22:22-30 NASB

22 "If a man is found lying with a married woman, then both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman; thus you shall purge the evil from Israel.

23 "If there is a girl who is a virgin engaged to a man, and *another* man finds her in the city and lies with her, 24 then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city and you shall stone them to death; the girl, because she did not cry out in the city, and the man, because he has violated his neighbor's wife. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you.

25 "But if in the field the man finds the girl who is engaged, and the man forces her and lies with her, then only the man who lies with her shall die. 26 "But you shall do nothing to the girl; there is no sin in the girl worthy of death, for just as a man rises against his neighbor and murders him, so is this case. 27 "When he found her in the field, the engaged girl cried out, but there was no one to save her.

28 "If a man finds a girl who is a virgin, who is not engaged, and seizes her and lies with her and they are discovered, 29 then the man who lay with her shall give to the

1 ((NASB) *Topical Reference Bible*)

"I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more."

girl's father fifty *shekels* of silver, and she shall become his wife because he has violated her; he cannot divorce her all his days.

30 "A man shall not take his father's wife so that he will not uncover his father's skirt.

I think that it was pretty obvious that they were not intent on truly keeping the law but on finding an occasion to make an accusation against Jesus. Jesus recognized this and that is why he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

While He is writing, they keep insisting that He give a response. I can just hear them, "Aren't you going to stone her so that you can keep the law!?" Jesus just ignored them until finally He straightened Himself up and said, **"He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."** Then He went back to writing on the ground.

Much conjecture has been given over the years as to what exactly Jesus wrote on the ground. Of course Jesus knew their sins and had no need for anyone to tell Him what to accuse them with. So I imagine He begins listing the sins of each man there, beginning with the oldest to the youngest. Slowly Jesus lays out His case against each of them that required stoning. I won't attempt to give a list here but suffice it to say, Jesus prevailed because each left as his sin worthy of stoning was revealed.

Finally, only the woman and Jesus are left. He then turns to her and asks where her accusers are and she replies that there aren't any. Jesus' response is an important one. **"I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more."** There is an important principle in His response that we can't miss.

First, Jesus forgives her. Second, Jesus tells her to go and sin no more.

Often times the first part is remembered over the latter. Why? People want to be forgiven. Any person who rightly understands who God is and what eternity will consist of wants to be forgiven. It's the second part that people have a hard time remembering. That go and sin no more part is hard to do.

One important thing to keep in mind is that our capacity to be forgiven is connected to how much we are willing to forgive. *Hear* what Jesus and others are saying in the following verses.²

Matthew 6:14-15 NASB

14 "For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 "But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

Matthew 7:1-5 NASB

1 "Do not judge so that you will not be judged. 2 "For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. 3 "Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 4 "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? 5 "You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

Matthew 18:21-22 NASB

2 (Torrey)

"I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more."

21 Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" 22 Jesus *said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven."

Mark 4:24 NASB

24 And He was saying to them, "Take care what you listen to. By your standard of measure it will be measured to you; and more will be given you besides."

Mark 11:25-26 NASB

25 "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions. 26 ["But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions."]

Obadiah 1:15 NASB

15 "For the day of the LORD draws near on all the nations. As you have done, it will be done to you. Your dealings will return on your own head."

Ephesians 4:32 NASB

32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Colossians 3:12-14 NASB

12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

James 2:13 NASB

13 For judgment *will be* merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

1 John 3:10 NASB

10 By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.

Thank God that the law was meant to be a tutor pointing us to faith.

Galatians 3:24-25 NASB

24 Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. 25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

This is where the second part of that verse comes in to play. *Go and sin no more*. Yes, we need to forgive freely and often. But we also need to encourage each other to sin no more. We can only do that by helping each other know how we are to live to honor God.

I'll be honest, sometimes it is hard to forgive people. It is also hard to ask for forgiveness. Both of these are hard because it requires that we give up a portion of ourselves and consider the other person, either the one asking for forgiveness or the one to whom we are asking for forgiveness. That is

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the principle that is often overlooked: we no longer live for ourselves when we place our faith in Jesus, we now live for Him and seek to do His will.

Forgiving others and asking for forgiveness are hard things to do but we need to learn how to do them and do them well.

Bibliography

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