



Just a Stone's Throw Away

³The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the center of the court, ⁴they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act. ⁵Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?" ⁶They 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.

⁷But 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." ⁸Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground.

⁹When 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. ¹⁰Straightening up, Jesus said to her, "Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?"

¹¹She said, "No one, Lord."

And Jesus said, "I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more." (John 8:3–11)

The core issue here seems to be that those who were most responsible for personally putting God's Word and ways into practice, because they were the ones who claimed to be the primary teachers and interpreters of God's Word, were found to fall short of the standard of God's Word in their own life. They were hyper-accurate in their ability to identify where others fell short of God's mark where the standard of His Word was concerned, but allowed it to go unchallenged when it came to their personal failures to apply that same standard to their own behavior. In fact, I would offer that this is often the case when someone wants to avoid being the object of such focus themselves, and instead of dealing with their personal issues of sin, draw loud and public notice to others whom they perceive to be committing "worse" or "greater" sin. Why is it that in this event the immediate parallels which first leap out to me are associated with most of the debates witnessed within the Church when it comes to the issue of homosexuality?

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For those of us who have been Christians most of our lives and may have even been raised in a multi-generational family of believers, we are, to be sure, distressed by changes which have taken place within the Church overall during our lifetime. This overall trend covers a multitude of issues, but can best be summarized as no longer going out with God's Word to change the world, but allowing the world entrance and influence to come in to change the Church by altering or outright ignoring Scripture. But the strange thing is that there did not seem to be loud or visible protests until this worldly tolerance for sin crossed a particular line. There did not appear to be a public chorus of response as long as the Church was experiencing a dilution and outright compromise in the areas of its *heterosexual* sin and the related area of divorce for other than biblical reasons, but as *homosexual* indiscretions attempted to obtain equal status, this particular sin was "too much" and many believed a stand had to finally be made.

The point is that Scripture is articulate and straightforward when it comes sin in general and to the **many** different areas of sexual sin in particular, not just the one. What about sexual promiscuity overall? (A very broad subject which it addresses repeatedly.) Or the issues of marital faithfulness/unfaithfulness? Or that sticky wicket called "divorce"? Why isn't the same standard applied to the much greater problem, statistically speaking, of tolerance for heterosexual sin? Do you really think the issue of homosexuality can be remedied without also removing the much more prolific leaven of heterosexual sin? The truth is that tolerance for the former is what allowed entrance and root of the latter.

I often feel that the event cited above is being played out today by Christians turning a blind eye to heterosexual sin who are attempting to bring to Christ's attention someone "caught" in this "greater" sin when they choose to willfully ignore not just their own personal shortcomings, but the even greater issue of sexual immorality that's now become culturally normative within the Church. When heterosexual sin has already been allowed permanent residence, how surprised should we be that such a foothold leads deeper into the forest, so to speak? Compromise on heterosexual issues served as the gateway to all that has inevitably followed.

Perhaps the greatest irony of what took place in this account of the Pharisees and the adulterous woman is that we have the so-called experts of the Law contending with the Author of the Law Himself. Here is the hand which wrote the Word pausing to write yet again during an attempt to turn the letter of the Law against itself. The lesson here is not

about enforcing God's Word exclusively where others are concerned, but first and foremost applying it to one's own life and personal behavior.

If these men had actually been fully and properly dedicated to God's Word in the first place, they would have been changed from the heart and sought to apply the proper biblical standard of God's love to the woman's situation, seeking to turn such a sinner back to God. Most do not fully realize that when David wrote his Psalms about what he had learned from God's Word and how His love and mercy changed David's life, that basically all David had to work from was the Torah—the first five books of our Bible which are the center of the Old Testament Law. He was a man after God's own heart because he put those words into practice so as to be changed in his own heart and behavior rather than merely executing a legal interpretation.

*²¹Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility **receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.** ²²But **prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers** who delude themselves. ²³For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. ²⁵But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does. (James 1:21–25)*

What **every** Christian needs to do is consistently and steadfastly return to God's Word. If we accept the authority of Scripture as setting the standard for our behavior, it will not be long before the Holy Spirit will use it to convict us of whatever sin or shortcomings are present within us. If we follow through with the kind of commitment James is here speaking of in terms of being "an effectual doer" instead of "a forgetful hearer", it will not matter where one's sin falls in a rating system of "smaller to greater" sin; we will each have to deal with what individually ails us.

The greater problem when any kind of sin or deception is allowed not just entrance, but to take root in a believer's life, is that it is so often accompanied by either an outright abandonment of God's Word or a standoffish reinterpretation of the key passages correlating to one's areas of weakness. Who wants to continually experience Holy Spirit conviction that a spiritual remedy needs to be applied to the very thing to which we want to give ourselves? So we no longer read or study the Word, replacing it with a false authority which justifies our particular sin, or allow a reinterpretation to take place so as

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to create a kind of spiritual myopia of self-deception to believe that the Word no longer condemns us in this area. Other Christians who come along find no success in quoting Scripture to such folks because those who have made sin normative are no longer trying to put God's Word into practice, but at best are misapplying it to actually justify themselves. It is not unusual to discover they are actually no longer reading God's Word at all as part of their regular pursuit of Christianity.

We are living at a time when practically every sexual sin has become normative within Church thinking and practice, but also see that as a result it is accompanied by great spiritual deception of many kinds. (Unfaithfulness in an earthly matter is always eventually accompanied by unfaithfulness in spiritual matters.) But in spite of this, I have continually seen Christians come out of these situations, all of which have some common characteristics. First, they have not become so desensitized that they have lost all sense of biblical right and wrong—they at least know that “something” is not right. And second, they have a constant itch to return to the Word, both personally and in seeking a fellowship of believers where it is still faithfully taught and applied. These actions seem to be the common denominator in the path leading them out from under that yoke of sin and/or the chains of that false teaching. Like every example of a revival in Scripture, it takes a return to the cross (repentance of sin) accompanied by a return to the Word. This is how such things are permanently addressed, not by unloving confrontation, even if it contains elements of the truth.

When we encounter someone who maintains they are a Christian while pursuing what to us is obviously contra-biblical behavior, the issue is whether we are acting more in the character of these Pharisees or more like Christ. Notice that having addressed the issue of the right application of God's Word, Jesus follows this up with the right approach to abandoning sin from that point forward where the woman in question is concerned. *“From now on, sin no more”*. When someone submits themselves to the authority of God's Word, change will inevitably follow regardless of how “big” or “little” their particular sin may be. We need to encourage them to personally seek and apply God's Word for their individual situation, and not rush to issue condemnation and judgment just because this isn't an area of problem for us. We need to maintain some attention for ourselves, sympathetic that we simply have different areas of difficulty or weakness which in reality is just another area of sin.

To be sure, we have an obligation to stand up for the truth and not defer our beliefs, and there may be times when this is certainly called for, but in the course of addressing issues of behavior among fellow Christians there *is* a path to recovery which can be engendered and encouraged. Non-Christians embracing any form of sin need to hear the Gospel so as to become saved in Christ in order to experience His love; Christians behaving in the same character need to be restored to Christ by those who in the context of God's Word are practicing God's love:

*²⁴The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, ²⁵with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them **repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth**, ²⁶and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will. (2 Timothy 2:24–26)*

In God's economy, it is not just the truth of His Word alone which will make a difference, but the way in which His followers apply it first personally and then with biblical kindness and gentleness so as to not win an argument, but to lead by example to repentance.

In Him,

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