

In John 7 the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders escalates

The Chief Priests and Pharisees want to arrest Jesus and ultimately they wanted him killed
But they needed a plot that would get him in such trouble that there would be no question
They thought they had it—with this issue, Jesus would be condemned no matter what he said
In fact, Jesus would condemn himself!
It was the perfect trap!

A woman is caught in the act of adultery and sets up the perfect situation...

The Old Testament law demands that both the man and woman be stoned to death
But if Jesus responds out of love as expected and doesn't condemn her to death—
Then he breaks the law
To go against the law of Moses would be to teach heresy and condone adultery
If Jesus says she should be stoned to death—he is not compassionate or loving—and...
He faces Roman law, which said the Jews could not sentence anyone to death
It was the perfect trap! Jesus would lose no matter what he said

Early that day, Jesus was teaching in the temple and there was a crowd gathered to listen to him

The scribes and the Pharisees had the perfect opportunity to confront him in front of everyone
They brought the woman and made her stand in front of everyone—full of shame!
They said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" John 8:4-5 NRSV

We aren't told anything about this woman... but we can all feel her public shame
Was she a woman with children and no option but to sell her body?
Was she divorced or a widow who couldn't own property or earn money?
Was she forced to commit adultery by powerful men?
Did she choose adultery? I think this is the least likely option
No man stands with her—taking his share of the blame—law said man + woman
She clearly has been condemned by the scribes and Pharisees
Jesus would do the same—as she stood facing the accusers, crowd, Jesus

But Jesus bent down and wrote in the dust with his finger... saying nothing at first...

We don't know what he wrote
People have speculated—maybe it was a message, maybe it was just a doodle
But they kept badgering him—pushing for an answer—anxious for the trap to snap and catch him

Finally, Jesus straightened up and spoke to them...

"Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." John 8:7
Then he bent down again and wrote in the dust...
He threw it back at them, refusing to take the trap set before him

Caught in their own trap—they slowly walked away, leaving Jesus alone with the woman
Standing alone she must have felt both relief and fear of the one remaining
He was still bent over, writing in the dust

Slowly Jesus stood and asked, *"Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"*
Her answer was simple, *"No one, sir."*
Jesus said, *"Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."*

“Neither do I condemn you.”

She faced certain death, yet now she is free—but more than that, she has been given grace
Whatever the circumstances were that led to the adulterous act—Jesus didn’t condemn her

He extended grace and mercy to one trapped in sin

Jesus, the Son of God, did not follow the law of Moses—rather he set her free

“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” John 3:17 NRSV

Grace and forgiveness sets a person free...

Free from a life of bondage to sin

Free from the need to sell her soul

Free from the horrible guilt of being caught

Free from death—that she knows is coming to her

Free from the circular trap that keeps a person stuck in sin

He sends her on her way, asking that she not sin again

The gift of grace and forgiveness is that it gives us the power to move in new directions

Sin is a trap and it persists in holding us caught in the trap as one sin leads to another

But grace and forgiveness breaks us out of the trap and lets us start again

Grace and forgiveness frees us to create new habits and patters in our lives

Condemnation, on the other hand, holds us in a stuck place

So, as the church, let’s drop the condemning role and extend grace and forgiveness

It seems to me that it is more effective and allowing people to change and stop sinning

Dallas Willard reminds us that it is not the job of the church to “manage sin”

Rather we are to love people and let God deal with the sin

We don’t know about the woman caught in adultery and what happened to her

We hope that she found a new beginning and followed Jesus

But I do know that same new beginning is available to all of us—at any time

That we have sinned is true—yet Jesus extends grace and forgiveness rather than condemnation

Grace is a radical thing

We are forgiven—it’s a done deal

Go in freedom and live with Jesus, free from the traps of sin