

"The Stones in Condemnation"—John 8:3-7

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, "The Stones in Condemnation", is John 8:3-7 → *The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do You say?" This they said to test Him, that they might have some charge to bring against Him. Jesus bent down and wrote with His finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask Him, He stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her."* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

"Don't be so quick to cast the first stone!" Such a statement is usually made in an effort to get a person to think about his self-righteous judgments. It does reveal the struggle of every human being when confronted by the behavior, attitudes and thoughts of others around them. "Don't be so quick to cast the first stone!" serves as a warning to take a look at your own behavior or thoughts before being so quick to condemn the behavior and attitudes of

others. Otherwise you may have to follow your condemnation with another cliché directed at yourself . . . something about . . . “eating your own words?”

The phrase “Don’t be so quick to cast the first stone!” actually comes from the situation in the text before us. In an effort to trap Jesus in His words so they would have grounds upon which to condemn Him worthy of death, the religious leaders of His day brought a woman before Him caught in the very act of adultery. *They said to Him, “Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do You say?”* (cf. Verses 4-5)

Indeed, Old Testament law did require both the man and woman caught in adultery to be stoned to death. (cf. Deuteronomy 22:22) Stones played a prominent part in the act of condemnation for the Jews. A brutal form of capital punishment, it served justice by displaying an accountability to one another in the community of the Church in the Old Testament. As a people belonging to the LORD they were not to tolerate any evil behavior within their midst, in an effort to avoid providing a foothold by the devil to breed more sin amongst them.

People could experience stoning in condemnation for such behaviors as disobeying specific instructions of the LORD (cf. Exodus 19:13), breaking various commandments (i.e. 1st—Leviticus 20:2; Deuteronomy 13:6-10 / 2nd—Leviticus 24:14-16 /

3rd—Numbers 15:35 / 4th —Deuteronomy 21:18-21 / 5th—Exodus 21:29; Leviticus 24:17-23 / 6th —Deuteronomy 22:21-24) and sorcery (cf. Leviticus 20:27). Deuteronomy 17:7 says: *The hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.* Notice this form of punishment accompanying condemnation involved the whole community, beginning with the witnesses. Everyone had better be thoroughly convinced of guilt worthy of death since they all had a responsibility in the administering of justice! All in the Church are accountable to and for each other!

It is too easy to notice the unholy behavior of others and even easier to point it out—if not verbally as least mentally. However, the question placed before Jesus by the religious leaders could have proved challenging for Him. If Jesus answered with mercy He could be accused of disobeying the Law of Yahweh—punishable by death. If Jesus answered in accord with the Old Testament Law it would be an infraction of Roman law which reserved the right to execute the death sentence. Overstepping the authority of the Roman government was also punishable by death. What was Jesus to answer?

Jesus used the Old Testament Law according to one of it's proper uses—to show sin and the need for a Savior from the condemnation of that sin. We usually refer to this use of the law as “the 2nd use of the law” where the law

acts as a mirror. You know how the mirror functions in your house. You wake up in the morning, walk into the bathroom, look at yourself in the mirror and say, “Oh! You are so beautiful!” Yeah! Right! It’s more like, “Yuck! What am I going to do with you!” Unfortunately, your mirror shows you your imperfections in all their glory!

Notice how Jesus used the law in verse 7 of our text: *He . . . said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.”* In the midst of condemnation, Jesus brings self-examination, which He desires to lead to salvation by repentance and faith in Him.

Jesus was not questioning the guilt of this woman. That was clear. He was not questioning their understanding of the God’s written Law. That was also clear. Jesus wasn’t even questioning the motive of their heart and actions. That was very clear to both these religious leaders and Jesus. He was simply forcing them to focus on their need for condemnation in their own sinfulness as they carried out the proper punishment with their stones of condemnation.

In the midst of condemnation, Jesus brings self-examination, which He desires to lead to salvation by repentance and faith in Him. Jesus wanted the same thing for both this woman and these religious leaders—forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation through faith in His Person & Work!

“Don’t be so quick to cast the first stone!” because you may be

condemning yourself in the process. Many a movie has depicted these men standing before Jesus, stones in hand and ready to throw. Jesus' use of the law as a mirror determined what the men were to do with their stones of condemnation. The very Law they used to condemn others also condemned them as rightly it should because we are all under the same condemnation in sin. You and I need some kind of deliverance from the condemnation upon our sin that we deserve.

John 8:9 says: *When they heard it, they went away one by one.* Their only option was to let the stones of condemnation lie on the ground or drop them if they were ready to throw. They apparently came to the conclusion expressed in James 2:10-11—*Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. For He Who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.* Guilty as charged!

Unfortunately, as with so many who experience the Law's condemnation upon their sin, these men *went away* from Jesus rather than **to Jesus**. His desire for these unbelieving Jews trying to trick Him and this adulterous woman was the same—that each would recognize their sin, repent and believe in the **only One** Who can take care of the condemnation of that sin—Jesus. He wanted a shift to take place in their faith from a focus on the stones

in condemnation to a focus on the Stone of condemnation, Jesus Himself. Jesus said it earlier as recorded in John 3:17 → *God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.* Jesus had to come to save by taking the condemnation of our sins upon Himself. Otherwise, we would all be left to walk away in guilt and be hell bound.

Praise God that Jesus did keep His purpose in clear focus and persevered for us! In the midst of condemnation Jesus revealed His purpose for being present among us in the first place—to saved sinners instead of condemning sinners by taking the condemnation and punishment which we deserve for our sin upon Himself on the cross! Praise God that His love for unlovable sinners such as you and I was so solid!

Notice also how Jesus dealt with the guilty woman in the text. This is pure grace! The woman, knowing full well that she was guilty and deserving of death, was probably stunned by Jesus' response. She had every reason to truly fear death that day, even in the presence of Jesus alone! However, Jesus pronounced absolution, even without any sign or word of contrition and repentance on her part! He didn't ask her if she believed in Him as her Lord and Savior or if she was sorry for her sin. He didn't tell her to accept Him as her Lord and Savior. In fact, before announcing absolution Jesus **required**

nothing from her! Thus His command to *go, and from now on sin no more* was based purely upon grace. The motivation for following the Law properly flows from basking in the Gospel! The repentance and obedience of this woman would flow from a faith in Jesus as the Savior from sin, a faith **of His own creating!**

Thus, the focus becomes grace, mercy and peace based completely upon the Person & Work of Jesus Christ, the Living Stone! Before being so quick to cast the first stone your desire will be to help others deal with their sin humbly in the cross of Jesus Christ through confession and absolution. Before being so quick to cast the first stone your desire will be for Christ's mercy to be reflected in your actions. Before being so quick to cast the first stone your focus will flow from the Holy Spirit's conviction that you are forgiven by pure grace in Christ! Amen.

There is therefore now no condemnation

for those who are in Christ Jesus.

(Romans 8:1)