

Subject: Righteous Judgment

Scripture: John 8:2-11

Of the verses you'll hear quoted in church, one of the most quoted occurs when someone is being rebuked for their sin. When a church member is being rebuked for their hard-heartedness, he or she is told that "the Bible says, don't judge. Judge not, and be ye not judged." This verse, taken from Matthew 7:1, is used to prevent or deter judgment whatsoever. It's as though, when this one verse is quoted, it puts an end to the discussion, no matter what it is.

I'm sure you've heard this verse quoted a time or two in church, and I'm sure it's been used in situations that are designed to "shut people up" with regard to sin. Since we all have sin in our lives, the thought says, "you stay away from casting judgment on anyone, for anything. You can't judge anyone because you aren't innocent and sinless yourself."

And yet, I'm pleased to inform you today that those who have made such statements have not read the whole of Scripture on the matter. For, in fact, Scripture tells us that we are to judge -- but, when we judge, we are not to be hypocritical in doing so. To demonstrate what I mean, let's think on the words of Matthew 7, that classic passage of Scripture often used to shut down any criticism of anyone in the church: in Matthew 7:1, the Lord does tell us that we aren't to judge so that we aren't judged. But if you consider the next verse, Matthew 7:2, you'll find that Jesus says that we all will be judged: "for with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you." In other words, if you hold the measuring stick of standards impossibly high for someone else, and deny them any mercy when they sin, then you too will be held to an impossibly high standard and denied mercy when you sin.

We all sin, have sinned in the past, are sinning as of late, and will sin in the future, and there will be a judgment for every sin --- not just for all in the end but in the here and now and future. And when such judgments are given, they'll be given back to you based on your judgment of others. Read Matthew 7:5, a few verses down, and you'll see that Jesus doesn't condemn judgment of a brother or sister, but instead, condemns hypocrisy: "Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." What verse 5 says, in effect, is that we must first correct ourselves before we can be in a position to correct others. If I'm out of order and I can see someone else is, then I should be able to get back in line myself before I throw stones at someone else. We can learn from the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant to not condemn others while asking forgiveness for ourselves. If we want those we have offended to extend forgiveness to us, then we should extend forgiveness to those who have offended us. When we pray the words "forgive us our debts, as we forgive those who trespass against us" in the Lord's Prayer, we're telling the Lord to not forgive us if we don't forgive others. What we demand of others, we must first demand of ourselves. All will be judged, by God and man, but the question is not whether man judges but whether or not he or she judges rightly, godly, justly, righteously.

In one chapter prior to that of our text today, John 7, we see Jesus telling the Pharisees the same thing about right or correct judgment. In John 5, Jesus heals the paralytic man at the Pool of Bethesda who'd been there for 38 years laying by the pool with no help. Jesus tells him to take up his bed and walk, and he was healed. But the Pharisees didn't like it, not because Jesus wasn't legit, or because it was a hoax or a scam, or because the man was masquerading as helpless when he wasn't. The reason they disliked what happened? Because it was done on the Sabbath. They didn't evaluate what Jesus did in the context of a human being healed. They didn't see the good in it as worthy of applause, celebration, rejoicing. And who would say that Jesus healing the paralytic was terrible? It was a good thing, a wonderful thing, a miracle worthy of praise and worship before

God, but the Pharisees were so committed to the Law of Moses that they forgot the Law was about people, humanity. Why did they think it was called the “Law of MOSES” if it wasn’t pertaining to people? Moses, a human, came down from Mount Sinai to give the Law to other humans, the nation of Israel, but the way the Pharisees acted, you’d think the Law descended down the Mountain and into their midst by itself!

Their surface reading of the Law, and their bad hermeneutics or bad biblical interpretation, explain why they prioritized a day of the week above people. And those who prioritize Matthew 7:1 without reading through Matthew 7:5 are modern-day Pharisees who do the same. When your interpretation of the Law puts rules above people, then you’ve gotten it all wrong. And when your interpretation puts sin above righteousness and righteous judgment, you’ve gotten it all wrong. Jesus Himself says in John 7:24, “do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” Hence, the sermon title: “righteous judgment.”

Well, Jesus has tackled in John 7 how the Pharisees would circumcise a man on the Sabbath to fulfill the Law of Moses but wouldn’t want Him to heal a man on the Sabbath. He’s told them how illogical and wrong their thinking is, but they are too consumed with trapping Jesus in a fault that they stumble over their own faults and fail to see the beauty of God’s amazing grace in healing a man who’d been bound in his infirmity for so long that he likely thought he’d die in it. Here in John 8, the issue, once again, concerns the interplay and relationship between law and grace; and, just as the Pharisees failed the million-dollar response in John 5 and John 7, they once again fail the test.

John 8:2 sets the scene for us by telling us that Jesus “came again into the temple.” Jesus returns to a familiar place where He has been teaching the people. The people follow Him, typical of the masses who believed that Jesus was sent from God and taught the Law in a way no teacher or Pharisees had ever taught it. They followed Jesus wherever He went. I said

last Sunday in my sermon on Mark 2 that we should strive to be wherever Jesus is, whether it be the church, listening to a sermon on TV, or present in a Bible study, or other places where the Spirit is moving, if it be at all possible to be there.

In verse 3, the scribes and Pharisees bring to Jesus a woman caught in adultery. This woman was apparently married, for only married people can commit adultery (single, unmarried persons commit fornication, while married persons commit adultery). Adultery is an act by which married people step out on their marriage covenant and engage in sexual relations with other married persons. So the woman brought before Jesus was a married woman who was cheating on her husband during the day. In case you thought this kind of stuff only happens in the movies, or on TV shows, or only in today's world, I give you John chapter 8, verse 3. Adultery also happened in the Old Testament; anyone remember Potiphar's wife, who comes on to Joseph and tries to seduce him in her husband's palace?

Verses 3-5 give us the plot: "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?" They tell Jesus the crime of which this married woman was guilty: adultery, and then they give her punishment. Since she has committed adultery, she is to be stoned. They were right: back in the Law of Moses, in Exodus 20:14 and Deuteronomy 5:18, God says in The Ten Commandments that "You shall not commit adultery." In Leviticus 20:10, the Lord says that "the man who commits adultery with another man's wife, he who commits adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and adulteress, shall surely be put to death."

Paul says that love is the summation of the whole Law in Romans 13:9-10 with the words, "**9** For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false

witness,” “You shall not covet,” and if *there is* any other commandment, are *all* summed up in this saying, namely, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” **10** Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love *is* the fulfillment of the law.”

Adultery is listed alongside of fornication, uncleanness, and lewdness in Galatians 5:19 -- a sign that it isn't godly to pursue it, that it is not of God and it is not acceptable to God.

Yes, adultery was to be stoned in the Old Testament, and Paul himself said that adultery was not loving one's neighbor, that one should love his or her neighbor enough to not have his or her spouse sexually. In this statement, the Pharisees were right: the married woman caught in the act of adultery should be stoned.

And yet, at this point, there are a few questions I want to point out that I asked of the text when preparing this message: The Pharisees and the scribes brought the woman to Jesus in the temple; how did they discover she was in the act of adultery? Did someone tell them? Did they witness the adultery themselves? Did they know the husband personally? Did the husband of the married woman tell them, or was it the wife of the married husband she was committing adultery with?

These are good questions to ask of the text. Notice that the scribes and Pharisees say that “this woman was caught in adultery,” the verb “was caught” referring to their indirect relationship to the act and their immediate action to bring her to Jesus. Apparently, they didn't witness it, it seems, but someone did --- someone who told them. The Pharisees and scribes were considered to be something of the moral police in the days of John 8, so perhaps they were “called to the scene of the sin” whenever something happened. Perhaps the Pharisees were invited to the location where the adulterous sexual act was taking place. We don't know exactly how it happened, but we know that the Pharisees appeared at the scene and then brought the woman into the temple where Jesus was teaching.

But the location where Jesus is here, the temple, is a perfect location for the Pharisees to trap Jesus. After all, Jesus is teaching, the people are gathered around, and if Jesus slips up and says something against sound doctrine, He would be discredited in front of all the gathering, and His reputation would be demolished with one statement. The Pharisees had been waiting to trap Jesus, to catch Him up in a situation, and this adultery act was the perfect occasion for such a showdown. Not only was Jesus a teacher that the masses looked to for instruction, but He was also the Savior of the world and God Himself. To contradict Moses here would make Jesus look contradictory, would deny Him the perfection that He had so maintained up until now.

Knowing the unbelieving crowd, particularly atheists, had Jesus said “No, she should not be stoned,” then He would’ve contradicted His servant Moses and the Mosaic Law given at Mount Sinai. Their mention of the Law shows that they believed this woman’s condemnation was strictly a legal issue, that the Law condemned her, and that Jesus would have no choice but to agree with them this time. They thought they had theologically wrestled Jesus into surrendering a debate for once. In verse 6, it says that “This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear.”

Unfortunately for the Pharisees, they hadn’t done anything of the sort; rather, they’d left the door wide open for Jesus to escape unscathed without a scratch. Jesus stoops down to the ground, writing with His finger as though He hadn’t heard them, acting as though He didn’t hear them. Now, keep in mind, this occurred in the temple where the people were gathered, so the Pharisees wanted to do it before as many Jews as possible to send a message to those contemplating adultery. The Pharisees always wanted to be seen of men. These are the same ones that

liked to pray long prayers standing in the synagogues to be seen of men, Jesus says in Matthew 6:5, and these are the same ones that do good works to be seen of men, Jesus says in Matthew 23:5. The Pharisees sure loved the spotlight, and anything to make them look zealous for the Mosaic Law in the eyes of the Jewish population was the perfect thing to do. So, when we see them bringing this adulterous married woman to Jesus, we're not impressed because we know where this is coming from; we know the Pharisees are attention-grabbers and celebrity wannabes.

And yet, the Pharisees, as much as they want to impress, do not. As much as they want to trap Jesus in a doctrinal trap, do not. The reason behind pertains to what wasn't present at the temple gathering --- or rather, the person that the Pharisees and scribes hadn't brought before Jesus. Do you notice that the Pharisees and scribes brought the adulteress to Jesus, but not the adulterer, the man with whom this woman was committing adultery? Obviously, the adulteress couldn't commit sexual sin alone, so where was the willing male participant who was also likely married and in a marriage commitment of his own with another woman?

Apparently, only condemning the woman, the female, was the agenda of the Pharisees and scribes; they don't sound as though they really cared about the man, only the woman. This alone tells us just how sexist men were in the days of Jesus. Remember the Samaritan woman in John 4, the woman that the disciples were puzzled by when they returned to Jesus and saw Him talking with her? They were shocked Jesus would even address a woman because, in those days, women weren't deemed worthy of conversation. It's a real tragedy that some men in today's world don't think women are worthy of conversation at all, let alone a conversation about Scripture or theological discussion.

The Pharisees and scribes, in their zeal for the Mosaic Law, forgot about what the Law actually said. Leviticus 20:10, as I read earlier, said that both the adulteress AND the adulterer were to be put to death. In other words,

the Mosaic Law demanded that both the woman and the man be stoned or killed for sin, not just the woman. Some say that Jesus words in verse 7, “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first,” refer to the fact that the Pharisees and scribes couldn’t condemn the adulteress because they had their own sin in their own lives. And that is true: they did have sin because no human is perfect. And yet, remember Matthew 7 about judging others?

Remember John 7, about “judging with righteous judgment”? Jesus never says that we aren’t to judge. He wasn’t telling the Pharisees not to judge at all, that they couldn’t throw stones at the adulteress because they were sinners like she was. What Jesus was saying here is that the Pharisees and scribes were not without sin in this situation, in the event of bringing this adulteress before Him because of adultery. The Pharisees were condemned before Jesus because they brought the woman but abandoned the man. The adulterer, the male participant, went free while they wanted to throw the adulteress under the bus.

Unfortunately, this same thing happens today. No matter how guilty men are in bringing forth children out of wedlock, the woman is always condemned. “If she hadn’t spread her legs,” they say, “she’d never be in this situation.” “If she learned how to stop dressing so provocatively, she wouldn’t have been the target of rapists,” as if her dress automatically makes her worthy of rape and sexual assault. And when a sexual assault complaint or lawsuit is filed against a man, including our current President of the United States, the man is given a pass and told that “this woman is only trying to bring down his career.” They said the same thing about porn star Stormy Daniels as of late, but she took a polygraph and passed it with flying colors --- proving that her claims of an affair with the President are true and genuine.

The adulteress, the married woman who was caught in bed with another man who wasn't her husband, wasn't any more guilty than the male adulterer that the Pharisees and scribes let off scot-free, the man who didn't have the courage to appear and confess his own wrongdoing and find grace in Jesus. The Pharisees and scribes only wanted the woman to be punished; they didn't care about the man. Perhaps they, too, though that the woman "wanted it" and "asked for it," but regardless, the Mosaic Law condemned both the man and woman.

For the Pharisees to bring only the woman was silly because, the Law required both and couldn't be upheld if only one stood condemned. The only righteous judgment was to let the woman go if the man was already freed from condemnation. Without the male appearance, the woman couldn't be condemned of having done anything. The witness or witnesses who saw her also saw the man but wouldn't come forward to tell who he was or point him out. Those same witnesses, not the Pharisees (we gather this from their statement earlier), refused to come forward to condemn the woman --- and the Mosaic Law said that a person could only be condemned on the testimony of two or more witnesses: Deuteronomy 19:15 says, "One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established."

The adulteress didn't have any witnesses to condemn her because, as John 8:9 says, "Then those who heard *it*, being convicted by *their* conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last." They were convicted by their conscience. This tells us that, despite the evil nature of the Pharisees and scribes, they did have a conscience (if they suppressed it a majority of the time). That conscience told them that they were in no position to condemn the woman because they weren't squeaky clean in the process. They'd let the man go free and brought the woman to Jesus, and that wasn't righteous judgment. How righteous is it,

really, to let one guilty party go free for unknown reasons while making another guilty party pay the penalty? On whose authority had they decided that the woman should suffer and the man should escape? Who cast lots to decide that the man should keep his life and his adulterous female partner should lose hers?

This is what Jesus meant when He told the Pharisees about righteous judgment: He used their circumcision of a person on the Sabbath to tell them that, though they don't believe in work on the Sabbath, they'd circumcise a man in order to fulfill a necessary part of the Law. They'd profane the Sabbath in order to uphold it, break the "No Work" Sabbath rule so as to uphold the Law. If they could do that, then what made Jesus wrong because He healed the man at the Pool of Bethesda? They had their priorities regarding Mosaic Law observance and agreed with their own perspective but didn't consider the perspective of Jesus or anyone else.

With the man at the Pool of Bethesda in John 5, they told him that he shouldn't take up his mat because it was the Sabbath --- even though the man had been healed. They'd rather someone be injured for the purposes of circumcision, but not healed, on the Sabbath. And now, they were here in John 8 condemning an adulteress when her partner was released. It wasn't righteous judgment, and Jesus told them that their judgments should be righteous. He wasn't condemning judgment, just refining their notion of it and showing them the error of their own judgments regarding the work of God and other humans.

They were the teachers of the Law, but they were wrong, and their consciences told them so. When all else fails, every man has a conscience. No matter how ruthless a criminal is, he or she spends time plotting how to escape the consequences of their crimes. No matter how rebellious teenagers are, they hope to get away with their rebellion and their devious plans. Every evildoer does his or her best to get away with their crimes and

not be made to answer for them in court or behind bars. The mere fact that many don't want to get caught doing something illegal, the mere fact that some Pastors and Deacons and church folks try to hide their affair with other church person's spouses, is a good indication that they feel guilty and they have a God-given conscience. The Pharisees and scribes feel guilt because of Jesus' words to them. They had sin in their lives, that was true, but they had also sinned in the situation. How could they, having sinned in the situation and shown partiality to the man, come forward with the adulteress and condemn her alone when she couldn't do the deed alone? It isn't righteous to condemn one when the Mosaic Law, the very same Law for which the Pharisees and scribes had all the zeal in the world, said to condemn both guilty parties. It was partiality, and the Lord shows no partiality. He is no respecter of persons.

In verse 10, Jesus is now ready to respond to the adulteress because she and He are now alone: "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?" Jesus' words about throwing the first stone stung the hearts and minds of the guilty parties. They realized that they couldn't throw stones at the adulteress because, they too, were just as guilty. The Lord didn't like partiality, and they should have been stoned for their perversion of justice. So, if the adulteress was stoned, then they would've been stoned. And yet, if one goes free, then all go free, and that's why Jesus freed the woman: because righteous judgment gives to one what it gives to all. Righteous judgment isn't perverted, isn't partial, doesn't seek to play favorites as the Pharisees did regarding guilt and innocence,

Jesus asks the adulteress, everyone having departed by way of his conscience, where her accusers were. In verse 11, she tells Him that there are no accusers, to which Jesus says "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more." Here is the peak of the passage. Jesus shows here that His release of the adulteress from stoning had little to do with Jesus

overturning the Law or bypassing the Law, but rather, was done in step with the Law. The Law demanded righteous judgment and justice, and it was only justice to let one guilty party go free if the other was already free. Since there were no accusers, and the so-called accusers deserved stoning as well, Jesus lets the woman go free. And yet, He tells her, "Go and sin no more." This statement in verse 11 is how we know Jesus stood for righteous judgment and not overturning the Law: His last words to the adulteress were words of spiritual instruction, words in line with the Law, words that would encourage her not to sin or commit more adultery in the future with the same man or some other man. Jesus didn't free her from the consequences of the Mosaic Law so that she could go on sinning; No, He freed her from it because it was righteous, but He encouraged her to go on toward righteousness and not be caught in the same sin again. She was not saved from death because Jesus overturned the Law, or instituted grace as something new; she was saved because the Law upheld righteousness, and that same righteousness of the Law didn't call for her stoning if the other guilty party wasn't stoned. The adulteress was saved from death because of the grace that was given to her adulterous partner. Grace saved her, and that grace came out of the righteous Law of Moses that called for both to be put to death in adultery. By freeing her from stoning, Jesus was upholding the Law of righteousness, the Law that called for the same sentence for both willing participants, not just one of them. Grace doesn't undermine the Law; rather, it calls for righteous judgment, as our Lord delivered to the adulteress and the Pharisees and scribes.

This is what the adulteress was freed to do: she was freed to walk in righteousness, to walk in truth, do that which was right, not go back to the same ways that would have condemned her had it not been for Jesus. And this same freedom to righteousness is the same that we've been granted by the Lord in salvation. And we've been granted that freedom because Jesus paid the penalty for our sin. He fulfilled the Law so that we can experience His grace; Jesus became sin for us so that we'd become the righteousness of God in Him. And for all the grace we've been given, let us

heed the words of Jesus here to the adulteress: let us go and sin no more, let us walk in the liberty of our Lord and look to righteousness and holiness, never looking back to who we were without Christ.