



## The Garment of Gentleness May 7th-13th, 2023

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### MAIN POINT

The grace of God in Christ allows us to find forgiveness and empowers us to live with Him free of shame in a life of gentleness.

### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**What is your earliest memory of asking someone else for forgiveness, or having someone ask you for forgiveness? How did it feel to be forgiven? How did it feel to forgive?**

**Has your perspective on forgiveness changed as you've gotten older? How so?**

True forgiveness is a precious gift. When we humbly ask for forgiveness and receive it, it brings a greater intimacy and freedom into the relationship than ever before. Today's study introduces us to a woman who was caught breaking God's law and was shamed by the public. When the religious leaders brought her before Jesus, He offered her grace, forgiving her sins, liberating her from the law and shame, and setting her free to live for the glory of God.

### UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Read John 8:1-6

**Who were the Pharisees and scribes? Why were they bringing this woman before Jesus?**

The scribes and Pharisees were among the recognized religious authorities of that day. Scribes were experts in biblical law. That included not only the Scriptures but also the rabbinical interpretations that comprised the oral traditions religious Jews sought to follow. The Pharisees were known for their dedication to observe all the biblical laws and oral traditions. These two

groups, therefore, represented the pillars of the religious community and the guardians of established morality.

**Have someone read Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22. What did the law say about the woman?**

**What punishment did the crowd want for the adulterous woman?**

**How might the woman have felt during this experience?**

Since Jesus taught about God's will and ways, the religious leaders asked His opinion on the case of the adulterous woman. The scribes and Pharisees evidently had in mind Deuteronomy 22:22-24, which condemns to death both the woman and the man guilty of adultery. The woman was shamed by the law and could be punished by stoning.

**Do you think the scribes and Pharisees were sincere about the need to punish the woman? Why or why not? Who else should they have presented for punishment?**

**What was the goal of the Pharisees by bringing the adulterous woman to Jesus?**

The scribes and Pharisees' aim was to discredit Jesus and bring Him into conflict with the Roman authorities. In bringing the guilty woman before Jesus, the religious leaders were not acting from a love for God, for purity, nor for justice. They certainly had no love for the woman. To them, she was simply a weapon to use against Jesus. So on the one hand, if Jesus advocated stoning the woman, the trap perhaps was to accuse Him of advocating a death sentence in violation of Roman law. In that scenario, the scribes and Pharisees hoped the authorities would arrest and even execute Jesus. This woman was being used as a pawn by the religious leaders, yet Jesus would turn the table on them by asking a simple question and offering this woman grace.

Read John 8:6-9

**How did Jesus answer the scribes and Pharisees?**

Instead of falling into the trap of answering them, Jesus stooped down and used his finger to write or draw on the ground. What did He write or draw? There have certainly been many theories. Was He doodling? Was He listing the erring ways of the accusers? Was He copying the pattern of the Roman justices in writing the sentence and then orally stating the same? Was He acting out the implications of Jeremiah 17:13 concerning writing in the dust "those who turn away" from the Lord? Or did Jesus write Exodus 23:1 and 7 concerning joining in evil witnesses and avoiding false charges? Unfortunately we cannot know for certain.

**How did Jesus' direction to the crowd reveal the accusers' problems?**

**Why do you think the older men left first?**

Jesus finally said, "The one without sin among you should be the first to throw a stone at her." When they heard this, they left one by one, starting with the older men. Jesus could have used the term "without sin" to mean any kind of sin, but in this context it seems more likely He meant the sin of adultery. This does not necessarily mean the accusers committed adultery in the flesh, for adultery is not only a sin of the flesh but also a sin of the heart (see Matt. 5:28). The main thing to recognize is that in stating "the one without sin among you should be the first to throw a stone at her," Jesus was effectively introducing grace to the woman, freeing her from shame and condemnation.

Read John 8:10-11

**What do you think the woman was feeling when it was just her and Jesus?**

**What did Jesus say to her? How did Jesus' words empower the woman?**

Jesus said two intensely significant things to her. These two things are closely connected and both are vitally important: 1) "Neither do I condemn you." God has pronounced a spiritual death penalty on all sins, and that penalty has not been revoked. Jesus was showing that God is more interested in converting sinners than in condemning them. 2) "Go, and from now on do not sin any more." This command destroys any misunderstanding about Jesus' attitude toward sin in general and the sin of adultery in particular. He neither excused the woman's behavior nor gave her license to continue her sinful ways. Rather, He gave her an opportunity to make a new start. He invited her to repentance and faith. He empowered her to live with God and others free of shame.

## **APPLICATION**

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**Do you often feel a sense of condemnation? Why do you think that many who know Jesus' forgiveness still somehow feel condemnation?**

**The discipline of confession is important, both personally and as a group. How can we do better to incorporate confession into our community of faith? How would it benefit us as individuals?**

**Considering our call as believers entrusted with the gospel message, how should knowing that we are completely forgiven change the way we live each day?**

## **PRAYER**

Lead your group in prayer thanking God for His forgiveness. Thank God for restoring us through the work of Jesus. Pray that when you feel shame, you will look to Scripture and to Jesus to receive power. Pray for those at our church who are dealing with shame and loneliness. Pray that they would find peace and restoration in Christ. Finally, be on the lookout to encourage and befriend the people in your church who are dealing with shame and loneliness.

## COMMENTARY– JOHN 8:1-11

8:1-6a. The earliest and most reliable manuscripts do not include John 7:53–8:11. The Pharisees posed a dilemma. If Jesus agreed to stone the woman, he would incur the distrust of the sinners he came to save as well as break Roman law. But a refusal to stone her would make him vulnerable to the accusation that he treated the Law of Moses lightly. It is a sad commentary on the culture of first-century Israel that they brought in the woman but no mention is made of the man. The sin of adultery and its handmaiden, divorce, represent almost the norm in modern America. But at least in our day we recognize mutuality of responsibility.

John left no doubt regarding the Pharisees' motivation: They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. So the chapter begins with public accusation, but it also goes on to talk about personal guilt. In one sense the Pharisees stood on solid ground with their appeal to the Law of Moses (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22–24), but the law was not as clear as their accusation seems to imply. For example, her marital status would be a defining factor.

8:6b-8. Interpreters seem fascinated by Jesus' writing in the sand, certainly a reaction unexpected by the Pharisees. Why did Jesus do this? What did he write? One answer suffices for both questions: We do not know. It is useless to speculate, as some have done, that he wrote the names of other adulterers who were standing there among the group of accusers. We are bound to the text which tells us nothing more than that Jesus refused an immediate or reactionary response to the Pharisees' accusation. The centerpiece of this scene is the Lord's answer: If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.

The writing in the sand was followed by the wisdom of the Son. This rubric is certainly valuable for judgmental Christians in our times. The perfect reply preserved both Jewish and Roman law while exposing the wickedness of the accusers. As Jesus began writing on the ground a second time, they had time to think about their own lives and God began to speak to those who were open to hear his voice. Again the accusers were brought face to face with the law they themselves had quoted. According to Deuteronomy 17:2-7, the witnesses of a crime who had reported it to the authorities would be the first to cast the stones.

8:9. What followed was the withdrawal of the sinners, one at a time, the older ones first. Did the older ones leave first because they had more time to accumulate sins of their own? Was it their maturity and sense of impending judgment that made them fleet of foot to escape this embarrassing predicament? Did they recognize that perhaps their sin was greater than the woman's and Jesus knew that full well? Again, the text does not tell us. But conscience must have played some role in this scene as the accusers left Jesus alone with the woman.

Imagine a stage play as you watch in silence—no dialogue, no music. The confident and critical Pharisees, moments ago pointing their fingers at the woman and at Jesus, now silently exit stage right or stage left without another word. Christians are not perfect—just forgiven. And because of the extent of God's forgiveness to us, we ought to be the least judgmental people in the world.

8:10-11. The first two scenes of the story described the charges and their response. Now we come to the verdict. With the accusers gone, there remained no condemnation. The Son of God refused to press the issue. Her sin was not just set aside; soon Jesus would pay the penalty for both the woman and her accusers.

James Boice tells the story of a man who sat in his office aware of his deep sin but unable to do anything about it. Boice ministered to him by using the illustration of a man walking along a street and splashed by a car in the dark. As he continued he came into the light of a street lamp and became aware of the stains on his clothing. Finally, the man decided he could not go on, turned around, and went home to put on clean clothes. At that point the young man in Boice's office responded by saying, "My problem is that I don't have any clean clothes."

Precisely. Chapter 8 tells about a woman who had no clean clothes—and about Pharisees who also had no clean clothes. She knew she did not; they thought they did. Jesus offered the clean clothes of forgiveness to all of them—and to us as well.

Jesus asked a rhetorical question and the woman answered it simply. Forgiveness rests upon the Lord's understanding. In this vignette we find recognition, repentance, regeneration, restitution, and reconciliation.

A second important lesson in these two verses is that forgiveness rests upon the Lord's grace. Remember the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15? The father showed unconditional forgiveness and restoration when the son returned. Salvation does not come from suffering; it comes from grace—from the suffering and death of Jesus on our behalf.

Finally, we see that the verdict rests upon the Lord's forgiveness. Forgiveness demands a clean break with sin. In Matthew 9:2 we read, "Some men brought to him a paralytic, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Take heart, son, your sins are forgiven.'" In searching for a way to translate this, a missionary linguist working among the Guajira tribe in Colombia rendered the Lord's words, "I forgive you. Let's be friends again."

The same Jesus offers forgiveness today to sinners whose sins equal that of the woman or those of the Pharisees. And not only forgiveness for initial salvation but also for daily sins of anger, disobedience, envy, greed, and the judgmental character shown by the Pharisees which gave birth to this episode.