

## **“Grace and Law”**

*May 3, 2026*

John 7:53-8:11

### **I. Introduction**

Through the centuries, there has been a fair amount of debate about what to do with these verses. Many of your Bibles probably have some kind of note regarding them—something like *“The earliest manuscripts and many other ancient witnesses do not have John 7:53 through 8:11.”* Some commentaries and other writers go through evidence that create doubt on the authenticity of these verses and then either ignore them completely or discuss them later in an appendix. Others treat them like the rest of the surrounding verses.

Let me summarize the variety of writings and comments concerning these verses: John 7:53-8:11 is not found in some ancient manuscripts; when it is found, it is not always in this location in John’s Gospel. These verses may not have been part of the original text of John’s Gospel, but as one commentator wrote: *“It is beyond doubt an authentic fragment of apostolic tradition that describes an actual historical event from Christ’s life.”* This story contains no teaching that contradicts the rest of Scripture. The picture it paints of the wise, loving, forgiving Savior is consistent with the Bible’s portrait of Jesus Christ. It definitely isn’t the kind of story that the early church would have made up about Him. As another commentator wrote, *“No ‘letter-of-the-law’ minded scribe would have invented a narrative which closes with what seems to be only a mild rebuke on Jesus’ part.”*

Because it is impossible to be absolutely certain that this story was added later and because the rest of chapter 8 seems to follow after this event, we will include it in our study of the Gospel of John. This story isn’t the story of a woman caught in adultery, or the hypocritical leaders who use her to attack Jesus. The central figure in this drama of immorality, hypocrisy, and forgiveness is the Lord Jesus Christ. But before the drama unfolds, the opening verses remind us of Jesus’ humility.

## II. Jesus' Humility

To begin, **turn to Colossians 1:15-17.** But when Jesus came to earth, Jesus, the Creator of all things, had no place of His own to stay, so, when “each went to his own home, Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.” Because of God’s love for the world, **Philippians 2:7-8** says that Jesus “made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!” In **Matthew 8:20** Jesus told a would-be disciple, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” Jesus gave up much for us. The Creator of all things had no place of His own.

The Feast of Tabernacles had ended, but Jesus took advantage of the opportunity to teach the pilgrims that were still in Jerusalem; “at dawn he appeared again in the temple courts.” Jesus didn’t use gimmicks to promote Himself; He just offered His teaching freely to all who would listen. In **John 8:20**, John wrote “He spoke these words while teaching in the temple area near the place where the offerings were put.” Jesus taught in the court of the women—at the place “where the offerings were put.” This way Jesus could talk to women as well as to men. It is here that we see the drama unfold.

## III. The Drama

**A. The Plot** As you may remember, Jesus had been cautious going to the Feast of Tabernacles, because as **John 7:1** says, “The Jews, i.e., the Jewish leadership, in Judea were waiting to take his life.” Three different times during the Feast people had “tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his time had not yet come” (**John 7:30, 32,44**). But the religious leadership never gave up. Fearing they were losing their influence with the people and fearing retaliation by the Romans if Jesus’ followers started a revolt, they hatched a plot to catch Jesus in a no-win situation.

Just like the “common people,” the Pharisees and the scribes (i.e., the teachers of the law) knew where they could find Jesus. So, bringing with them a woman caught in adultery, the teachers of the law and the Pharisees barged into the crowd of people listening to Jesus and “made her stand before the group.” Then, addressing Him with a false politeness, they said, “Teacher—i.e. Rabbi—this woman was caught in

the act of adultery.” They then demanded a ruling from Him. “In the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” Can’t you just hear the sneer in their voices? *Now what do you say? Should this adulteress woman be stoned?*

From the purely legal viewpoint, these men were correct. Exodus 20:14, the 7<sup>th</sup> commandment, forbids adultery. Leviticus 20:10 says, “If a man commits adultery with another man's wife-- with the wife of his neighbor-- both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death.” However, their plot, their challenge raises all kinds of questions: For example, the woman deserved to die, but where was the man? Those who had caught the woman in the very act must have seen him too. Why hadn’t they brought him along with the woman to stand before Jesus? For that matter, if justice was all they really sought, why bring the woman to Jesus at all? Why not take her to their own courts, where such cases would normally be heard?

The Jewish leaders were obviously trying to trap Jesus. If He said, “Yes, the woman must be stoned” then what would happen to His reputation of compassion toward sinners? In Matthew 11:28 He had said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” If Jesus said to stone the woman, the common people would leave Him and would never accept His message of forgiveness again. Also, since only the Romans could order an execution, Jesus would be acting in defiance of them as well. Without a doubt, the Jewish leaders would have been quick to report Jesus to Pilate and the Roman authorities for sedition.

On the other hand, if Jesus said, “No, the woman should not be stoned!” then He would be openly breaking the Mosaic Law and therefore could not be the Messiah He claimed to be. Once again, the people would leave Him. Since they couldn’t see how justice and mercy—law and grace—could exist at the same time, the scribes and the Pharisees felt that they couldn’t lose and Jesus couldn’t win. That is until Jesus responded to them.

**B. Jesus’ Response to the Religious Leaders.** The dramatic scene in the temple courtyard had reached its peak. The woman, her sin publicly exposed, was humiliated, terrified, and about to be stoned. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees were jubilant, thinking they had finally caught Jesus in an impossible

challenge. The crowd was hushed, watching intently to see how Jesus would react. Jesus' response to the religious leaders was totally unexpected by everyone watching—He “bent down and started to write on the ground with His finger.” He wrote on the ground in the Temple.

No one knows what Jesus wrote on that dirt floor in the temple but that hasn't stopped people from speculating. Some suggest that He wrote the words from [Jeremiah 17:13](#), “Those who turn away from you will be written in the dust because they have forsaken the LORD, the spring of living water.” Others suggest [Exodus 23:1](#), “Do not spread false reports. Do not help a wicked man by being a malicious witness.” Others suggest that Jesus wrote the leaders' particular sins. But whatever Jesus wrote wasn't important enough to be recorded.

Whatever it was, the scribes and Pharisees keep pestering Him. So, at last, “He straightened up and said to them, ‘If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.’” Then he stooped down and wrote again on the ground.

It was required by Jewish Law, in [Deuteronomy 17:7](#), for example, that “the hands of the witnesses must be the first in putting him to death.” Jesus was not asking that sinless men judge the woman, for He alone is sinless. So, perhaps He was referring to the particular sin of the woman. It may be that the woman's accusers were themselves guilty of adultery—if not physically, then perhaps with lust in their hearts. Jesus said in [Matthew 5:28](#), “I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Once again, we don't know what Jesus wrote in the dirt—it's left up to everyone's imagination, but convicted by their own consciences, the accusers quietly left the scene, “one at a time.” As one commentator wrote: “*Those who came to put Jesus to shame left ashamed; those who came to condemn the woman left condemned.*” The sad thing is that their sense of guilt didn't lead them to repentance and faith in Christ. Instead, they hardened their hearts as they turned away from Him.

C. Finally, there's **Jesus' Response to the Woman**. After the teachers of the law and the Pharisees had left, Jesus was left with the woman still standing there. We aren't told if the crowd had also left or if they stayed. It doesn't matter. The focus is on the Lord and the woman.

For the first time, someone talked to the woman. Straightening up, Jesus “asked her, ‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’” The term “woman” that Jesus used is the same polite, respectful word that Jesus used addressing His mother in [John 2:4; 19:26](#), the Samaritan woman at the well in [John 4:21](#), and Mary Magdalene in [John 20:13, 15](#). With her accusers gone, there was no one left to condemn her. So, exercising His divine right, His Sovereign right to forgive sin, like He did for the paralytic in [Matthew 9:1-7](#), Jesus said, “Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin.” “Go and sin no more.”

The woman was guilty of sin and according to the Law of Moses was to be put to death. For Jesus to forgive this woman meant that He had to one day die for her sins. [Romans 6:23](#) says, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Forgiveness is free, but it is not cheap. Jesus, the wise, loving, forgiving Savior, didn’t condemn her or condone her sin, but He did command her to abandon her sinful lifestyle. “Go now and leave your life of sin.” “Go and sin no more.”

#### IV. Conclusion

The same Law that revealed the woman’s sin reveals our sin. The purpose of the Law is to reveal sin. In [Romans 7:7](#) Paul wrote, “Indeed I would not have also known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, ‘Do not covet.’” Turn to [Romans 3:20-24](#). Every person is condemned by the Law until he or she is redeemed by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ who paid the penalty for sin by dying on the cross.

Law and grace do not compete with each other; they complement each other. Nobody was ever saved by keeping the Law. But no one was ever saved by grace until he admitted that he was a sinner. There must be conviction of sin before there is conversion. And following conversion, each Christian hears the same words that Jesus told the woman, “Go and sin no more.” Or as [Romans 6:1-2](#) says, “What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?” So how about you, are you a sinner saved by grace—God’s grace? Then, “Go and sin no more.”

**Communion Devotion – May 2026**

*I Corinthians 11:23-31*

Hebrews 9:22 says that “the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” In 1 Timothy 1:15 Paul wrote that “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” The only way Jesus could save sinners including the adulteress woman and each one of us is to pay the penalty for our sins. Jesus had to die in your place.

If you believe that Jesus died, that He rose from the grave 3 days later, and then ascended into heaven, this is a good thing, but it is not enough. James 2:19 says, “You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that-- and shudder.” However, if, as Romans 10:9 says, you believe that Jesus died on the cross **for your sins** and you have made Him **your Lord and Savior**, then you have done more than the demons—you are a child of God. If you have made this decision, then whether or not you are a member of TBC, we invite you to join us in this celebration, this remembrance of Jesus’ love, mercy, and grace for you and of your new life in Him.

But there are expectations for a child of God, as Jesus told the woman in today’s Scripture, “Go and sin no more.” As we read earlier in Romans, we have the same command. But God knows us, He knows that temptations come daily and sometimes we fail and yield to temptation. The Lord’s Table is a time for each Christian to look at his or her heart searching for sins that may have crept in. Sins that keep you from being all you can be for Christ who gave His all for you. “A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread or drinks of the cup.”

As you consider the bread and the cup and are reminded of how much Jesus really did for you, shouldn’t you be willing to give your all to Him? That’s what it means to call Him “Lord.” As well as thanking God for His love and forgiveness, during the quiet time when the elements are being passed, use part of the quiet time to take inventory of your heart and mind; get rid of anything that comes between you and God—confess your sins and as 1 John 1:9 says, “He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”