

Series: John

Title: The Discipline of Forgiveness

Text: Jn 8: 1-12

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**John 7: 53: And every man went unto his own house. 1: Jesus went unto the mount of Olives. 2: And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them. 3: And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, 4: They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. 5: Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? 6: This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with *his* finger wrote on the ground, *as though he heard them not*. 7: So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. 8: And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. 9: And they which heard *it*, being convicted by *their own* conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, *even* unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. 10: When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? 11: She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more. 12: Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.**

This is a passage that has caused much controversy. Many in the past would not preach from this passage. Some translations even omit this passage. It posed a dilemma to many in the past and it poses the same dilemma for many today. The dilemma is the very thing the Pharisee's thought Christ could not overcome. This woman had sinned—she was caught in the act, she is guilty, no question—the law says, “Stone her to death.” So they thought there was no way Christ could honor the law and show her mercy. If Christ shows her mercy then he dishonors the law; he does not execute justice. If he executes justice then he cannot show her mercy; he denies his own word because he declared that he came to show sinners mercy.

Also, (the biggest dilemma for religious folks) they thought if he shows her mercy and exercises no discipline upon her then it will only make her think she has a license to sin more; many think this passage will make believers today think they have a license to sin because they think he exercised no discipline upon this woman due to her sin. This is the dilemma for religionists in congregations where they like to impose strict church discipline. It is why many refused to preach from this text in the past. But this text shows us what only Christ can work, and he works it in the heart.

**Proposition:** The discipline by which Christ effectually brings his elect to repentance is the discipline of forgiveness in light of Christ honoring the law on behalf of his people.

This is the Light of Christ by which he shines in the heart granting repentance when he first calls his child out of darkness to faith in him. It is the same Light by which he continues to chasten us as believers, bringing us to repentance. It is by the Lord's forgiveness that our sovereign Savior produces fear and reverence in the heart of his child.

Psalm 130: 3: If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? 4: But *there is* forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.

This is not a one-time work. The Lord never stops teaching and increasing the fear of the Lord in the heart of his child. It is what we have to be taught over and over. As God exercises our senses, causing us personally to experience his mercy, the less we trust ourselves and the more we look to Christ alone. As God makes us witness how God's grace makes his people deal with such a case, especially when we are the guilty one, the more it increases faith and love. By Christ applying free forgiveness to our own heart, he grows us in discernment and strengthens us to avoid the pitfalls that would lead us to stumble in sin.

**Subject:** The Discipline of Forgiveness

**THE SETTING**

In the setting we see how Christ works grace in the heart.

One, Christ is the Advocate of his people with the Father. Notice, *John 7: 53: And every man went unto his own house. 8: 1: Jesus went unto the mount of Olives.* Christ was often found in the mount of Olives praying to his Father. Now, our Redeemer is in the mount of God at God's right hand. He is the Advocate who intercedes for his people with the Father.

Romans 8: 34: Who *is* he that condemneth? *It is* Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

Hebrews 7: 24: But this *man*, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. 25: Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

1 John 2: 1: My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: 2: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for *the sins of* the whole world.

Two, Christ is the Prophet of his people. Christ works this in our heart through the preaching of the gospel—*John 8: 2: And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them.* This all happened while Christ was preaching the gospel. God's righteousness, how God is just to show mercy to a sinner, is revealed by the Spirit in the heart through the preaching of the gospel.

Romans 1: 16: For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. 17: For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

Three, as our Sovereign, all-knowing, all-powerful God. Seeing this scene unfold in the midst of Christ teaching the gospel we are taught that, not only does Christ work this through the preaching of the gospel, but also he works all things in our lives to make us experience it.

Four, Christ is our Light continually. Immediately after this, Christ returned to preaching and he declares exactly what the text teaches. This is what he does by this work of grace—*John 8: 12: Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*

By Christ advocacy for his child, by Christ revealing himself through the preaching of the gospel, by Christ bringing us to experience his mercy and forgiveness personally, Christ shines his Light into our hearts. Thus he first brings the sinner out of darkness into his marvelous light. Thus he continues this work, keeping the believer following him. Thus he makes us not walk in darkness but have the light of life—the Light of Christ.

## **JUST MERCY AND FORGIVENESS**

Multiple times in scripture, God declares that Israel was the adulteress. The majority in Israel rejected Christ for Moses and the law. They rejected Christ our Righteousness for their own so-called righteousness. We see it here—*John 8: 3: And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, 4: They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. 5: Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? 6: This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him.*

Think of the times when people brought a loved one to Christ to be healed. They brought the man sick of the palsy. Their faith was such that they even let down their friend through the roof to bring him to Christ. Imagine if they brought the man sick of palsy and said, "This man can't work. He is no use to society. We think we should stone him, what do you think?" No, they brought him to Christ to be healed because they loved him. And what did Christ do? He first forgave him his sins. Then healed his body.

This woman needed the same healing. She needed forgiveness and healing the same as the man sick of the palsy. Law looks upon sin ready to execute the sinner. Grace and love look upon the sinner as one needing to be healed, to be forgiven by God. So grace endeavors to bring the sinner to Christ because he alone is the great Physician who heals. He alone is the Righteousness of his people who is just to forgive in mercy.

Yet, the scribes and Pharisee's brought this guilty woman to Christ, not to be healed, not to be forgiven, but to be stoned—and they had stoned her in their hearts already. Many in religion today would have immediately sided with these men and condemned this woman. But if Christ sided with them against her he would justify these men in what they were doing. It would not manifest the righteousness of God—the gospel Christ.

These men are guilty of far worse sin than this woman—guilty of the worst adultery there is. They had no love for Christ and no love for the sinner, only love for self. These men had no love for the gospel and no love for the honor of the law, only for their own works. They were ruled by pride. The scribes and Pharisees thought themselves righteous by their works. They thought themselves in need of no repentance, in need of no mercy and no forgiveness. They wanted to be judged by the law because they thought themselves righteous by their works. Thus they deemed themselves just judges of the law able to judge this woman and condemn her.

When this is the heart then the sinner is guilty of what they were doing. They were tempting Christ to find an accusation to condemn him and justify themselves for rejecting him. These accusers were attempting to discredit his gospel, attempting to sow discord and destroy his church. They were doing this all in the name of justifying themselves. That is the greatest adultery Christ must save his child from.

Now think of this woman. She sinned. She knows she is guilty. She is brought before Christ, before this congregation, she is in the dust in shame and she hears that the law demands she be stoned. But Christ reveals himself to her. He reveals his righteousness to her by first dealing with her accusers. The law had to be honored by Christ—justice had to be upheld. The accuser of the brethren—the devil—had to be destroyed. The sinner Christ saves has to be made to behold Christ alone accomplished it!

We see the gospel of Christ in Christ stooping, rising, stooping then rising.

Christ the Lawgiver took flesh made under his own law—*John 8: But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not.* Christ is the Lawgiver. He wrote the law with his finger in tables of stone, tables of dust. But that first table was broken. We broke the whole law of God. The second time God gave the law he put it in the ark under the mercy seat. Christ stooped down to the dust—down to where this guilty woman was. She represents his bride, his elect church, each one in particular, she is one in particular. Christ came down and took dust—he took flesh—made under his own law with the law in his heart to fulfil it for his people.

Then Christ lifted himself up on the cross and satisfied the justice of the law by going down to the grave—dying our death and thus turning the law away from his elect—*John 8: 7: So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. 8: And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. 9: And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last.* By lifting himself up on the cross and going down to the grave, Christ bore the penalty of the law and satisfied justice for his people by his blood. Thus Christ turned the law from condemning his people as he turned these men away

Now, Christ is risen, exalted to his throne, where all judgment is committed to him alone—*John 8: 9: ...and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. 10 When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman...* Christ was the only one remaining before this woman. He is the only one without sin to whom judgment belongs. He put away the sin of his people. Therefore, he alone is the judge of his people. Christ rules every heart of man to make certain that his people are judged in righteousness as he did this woman—sending her unjust accusers away in shame.

## **CHRIST THE LIGHT**

When Christ shines his Light he makes us see that we are not without sin. We are not the judge. Being the sinners we are we cannot condemn anyone else. We need to be judged. He speaks into the heart of his

elect effectually what he only spoke in the Pharisee's natural ears—*John 8: 8...he said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. 9: And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one.* Theirs was only a guilty conscience. It was a mere legal guilt which never makes the sinner fall down and beg mercy. Had Christ spoke this into their hearts they would have been like Peter, who “fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” (Lu 5:8). He makes the sinner smite upon his breast like the publican saying, “Lord have mercy on me the sinner” (Lu 18: 13). Christ alone speaks into our hearts, convicting us in his power and grace, so that Christ gets the glory for putting down the Pharisee in our sin-nature. He makes us see we are not without sin. Even for the believer sin is mixed with all we do. If need be Christ reminds us of this to keep us from judging others.

Then having made us know our sin and guilt and curse which Christ bore on the cross in our place, he speaks peace into our hearts—*John 8: 10: He said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? 11: She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.* But aren't there consequences for sin! Where is the discipline? What will make her go and sin no more?

The discipline Christ exercises in the heart is the discipline of mercy and free forgiveness in light of him bearing our curse in our place. It is what he declared when he said, *John 8: 12: “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”*

When we behold a brother sin it is easy for us to be lifted up. Christ works in our hearts to bring us down in repentance. He makes us examine ourselves and confess to God that I am not without sin. Doing so our Lord makes us remember Christ is the Judge. He fulfilled the justice of the law for my brethren.

Therefore, the only just thing to do for my brethren when they sin is show them mercy. So Christ's Light brings a believer to endeavor to bring the sick loved one to Christ that Christ might heal him. We do so by bringing them to hear the gospel. Or we do so by speaking the truth of the gospel of Christ and him crucified to them in love. When we are sick and in need of correction this is how Christ brings us to repentance and keeps us walking in his light!

The gospel is the power of God unto salvation for therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith—this is how Christ makes, and keeps, those justified by him walking by faith. It is the discipline of forgiveness in the Light of Christ our Substitute, our Righteousness, our All!

**Amen!**