Judge rightly: Jesus and the woman caught in adultery (John 7:53–8:11)

By the beginning of the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7ff) the Jewish leadership had grown in opposition to Jesus and were seeking grounds to kill Him. On the final and greatest day of the feast, Jesus invited people to come to Him and be quenched, and promised that the Spirit would be given to those who believed in Him.

Responses to Jesus among the people were mixed. But the leadership had sent Temple guards to arrest Him. The response of the leaders to the report of the guards reveals again their blind opposition to Jesus and gives an example of opposition arising from arrogant intellectualism.

I. ***An example of arrogant intellectualism (7:45-52)***

1. *It is revealed in the rejection of the testimony of the "common" people.* Because the guards did not agreed with their opinion of Jesus, the leadership considered them and the people as deceived. They set themselves and their opinions as the standard for what to believe.
2. *It is revealed in the rejection of clear reason from one of their own.* Nicodemus, one of their own, gave a Scripturally based caution to their quick judgment. They derided him, accusing him of favoritism but showing their own prejudice. They also claimed Scriptural support but either ignored the fact that Jonah was from Galilee (2 Kings 14:25) or assumed that the prophet Moses promised was the Messiah, a point on which they otherwise would not have agreed (though ultimately proven true).

Following this account is the report of Jesus being confronted with a woman caught in adultery (7:53 to 8:11). Some Bible versions may not have these verses and others might note that their inclusion is questionable. Can we trust our Bibles? Why is a passage like this in here?

II. ***The underlying text of our Bibles***

We have our Bibles today because God by His Spirit moved certain men to record His Word. Others have translated the text into our modern languages. But the texts which are translated are not the original letters, nor photocopies of them. This might raise a number of questions.

1. *From what do people translate?* Good translations are based on texts in the original languages. Scholars have compared hand-written copies that have been passed down through the centuries and tried to determine what was the original text and what might have been copyists errors that slipped in.
2. *How old are these copies of the New Testament and how many are there?* The content of the copies vary from just a few verses to the entire New Testament, but all combined they would total over 4800 Greek manuscripts plus 8000 Latin translations and another 1000 other-language translations. The oldest fragments date back to within a century of the original writings.
3. *How do the copies which we have compare with those of other literature?* Copies of the New Testament are much more in number, much closer in time to the writing of the originals, and found in many translations.
4. *Why don't we have the original or at least earlier copies?* For the first two centuries people wrote primarily on papyrus which easily disintegrates. By the third or fourth century more durable parchment became prominent.
5. *Why does a passage like John 8:1-11 get into the text and then later get removed?* Manuscripts have been found since earlier translations were made.
6. *Are there many passages in question like this and how should we treat them?* There are a few longer passages like this one and Mark 16:9-20 as well as a few consisting of one or two verses (e.g., John 5:3-4). There are numerous small variants, but in no case is any major doctrine of Scripture challenged. It would also not be wise to build any doctrine upon these verses alone.

There is evidence that John 7:52–8:11 was not part of John's original Gospel, but it is not absolutely conclusive. Many consider it to be the report of a true event, but not inspired. We can take it as an illustration of what Jesus said and taught elsewhere, but should refrain from building any teaching solely upon this passage.

III. ***An illustration of judging, both right and wrong***

1. *The Jews judged superficially.* The Jews came to Jesus with the woman only to trap Him. They were still seeking grounds to accuse Him, but had already decided that He should die. They grossly misjudged His character, person and abilities. The Jews were correct in the wrongness of adultery but were wrongly motivated. They did not seek justice nor to follow the law, otherwise the offending man would have been brought. In the words of the Sermon on the Mount they had failed to get the log out of their own eye.
2. *Jesus judged in a manner to help.* By His challenge for the first, who would cast a stone, to be without sin, He moved the Jews to introspection and to judge themselves. They left one by one realizing that they could not be the first. The woman did not run, but stayed and called Jesus "Lord". To her He showed compassion without ignoring her sin. Although He had all authority to judge (John 5:22), He did not come to condemn but to save (John 3:17).

Jesus is ready to forgive anyone who comes to Him in humble repentance. He does not overlook sin, but has paid the penalty of death which we have earned by sin. That payment can be for anyone personally, if they would just receive it by faith.

Jesus is a model for how we should deal with those who sin. We should not be like the accusers with impure motives, nor like the unforgiving servant. Extend the same forgiveness to others which we have received. Seek to restore and to win a brother, rather than condemn.

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