

# OpenTheo

## The Woman Taken in Adultery (Part 1)



### The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In this presentation, Steve Gregg explores the well-known biblical story of the woman taken in adultery. While some scholars argue that the passage probably wasn't written by John, but rather by one of the synoptic gospel writers, Gregg believes that it is an authentic story of Jesus. He points out that Jesus affirmed capital punishment for crimes worthy of death in a civil sense but also taught a radical new teaching that looked tantamount to adultery. Gregg also highlights the authenticity of the passage by noting Jesus' use of Old Testament scripture to reveal hypocrisy among the accusers.

### Transcript

Let's turn today to John chapter 8. This is a very well-known story, often quoted not only by Christians, but even non-Christians like to quote from this from time to time. Especially where Jesus said, he who is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone at her. Obviously, having mentioned that verse, you know this is the story about the woman taken in adultery.

But for all of its popularity and for all of its being well-known and all, it is a story whose authenticity has been challenged more than most. And that is because the verses that contain this story are not found in the vast majority of manuscripts of John. Whether it is Greek manuscripts or Syriac versions or whatever, the manuscript evidence for this story being a part of John's gospel is very weak.

And most scholars don't want to surrender this story and say it is not authentic. But most of them also don't want to say that it belongs to the gospel of John. Because, again, the manuscript evidence is so much against it.

There are some things about the style and vocabulary of the story that are said not to really be like that of John. And also it is said that it interrupts the flow of material in John. So you've got several things working against this story being an original part of John's gospel.

The style and vocabulary are not very Johannine, as they call it. Not very much like John's. It is said that it kind of interrupts the flow of thought, rather unnaturally, of the

gospel.

And worst of all, it is absent from almost all, from most of, the vast majority of manuscripts don't have this story here in John's gospel. But the story is of great antiquity and many believe, even those who don't believe it belongs to John's gospel, many of them believe it is a true story about Jesus and perhaps it was part of another gospel. For example, there are a group of manuscripts that have this story placed after Luke 21.

Now, if you'll notice what Luke 21 is about, it is one of those places where the scribes and Pharisees, or the religious opponents of Christ, are bringing trick questions to him. I mean, basically what we have is this whole section of Luke, as well as the corresponding section in Matthew, is about the religious authorities coming to try and trap Jesus in various ways. Actually, in Luke's gospel it happens a little earlier than 21.

It's 21 in Matthew, but in chapter 20 of Luke, we have the Pharisees trying to trap him with the question about paying taxes to Caesar. You've got the Sadducees trying to trap him with the question about the resurrection and so forth. And some believe that this story of the woman taking adultery actually belongs to this context, that it was possibly really Luke's story and somehow in the shifting around of manuscripts, this story got shifted over to John's gospel, but it was really written by Luke.

Now, let me tell you some of the reasons for suggesting this. One is that this story in John 8 mentions in verse 3 the scribes and the Pharisees. The term scribes and Pharisees is fairly common in the synoptic gospels.

The synoptic gospels frequently make reference to the scribes and Pharisees as two groups that are joined together in discussing them. However, in John's gospel, apart from here, there's never any reference to the scribes and Pharisees. Scholars say this is much more like a synoptic expression found frequently in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, whereas John has nowhere else referred to the scribes and Pharisees in that manner, though he does refer to the Pharisees elsewhere and scribes, but to join them together, the scribes and Pharisees, is more, they say, something the synoptic gospels would do rather than John.

In support of placing this in a different context, for example, at the end of Luke 21, where it's found in some manuscripts instead of in John, we could point out that in this place, the geographical movements of Jesus in verses 1 and 2 of chapter 8 of John are very much like those of that last week of his life before his crucifixion. The final week, the Passion Week, as it's usually called, Jesus lived in Bethany, which was on the Mount of Olives. That is, he slept there.

But in the mornings, he went to Jerusalem every day and taught in the temple. And we read that this is what he did virtually every day of that Passion Week at the end of his life. That's what he's doing here.

It says in verse 8, But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives, but early in the morning he came again to the temple. And all the people came to him and he sat down and he taught them. So here, Jesus is apparently spending the night at the Mount of Olives, and early in the morning coming to Jerusalem to the temple to teach the people, which is what he did, we know, from the Synoptic Gospels, he did that every day of the Passion Week.

And therefore, some say this story would fit better into that place. However, against that suggestion, we could point out that there's no reason why such geographical movements would have to be confined to the Passion Week. Jesus went to Jerusalem on many occasions.

We know that some of his best friends, Mary and Martha and Lazarus, lived in Bethany on the Mount of Olives. And who knows, every time he went to Jerusalem, he may have lodged at the Mount of Olives. There's no reason why this couldn't fit here, too, it seems to me.

Although it would fit very naturally into that other context in Luke, perhaps some would say better. In that passage in Luke, as well as the corresponding passages in Matthew and Mark, in fact, Jesus was approached by the scribes and Pharisees about different things. He was approached about paying tribute to Caesar, which was an attempt to test him.

In fact, that Passion Week was full of tests where his opponents came. And that's what is happening here. It says that when they brought the woman taken in adultery to Jesus, in verse 6, it says, and this they said, testing him, that they might have something of which to accuse him.

We know that their efforts to bring hard questions to him, to find some fault with him, to test him and find something to accuse him of, became intensified during the Passion Week. But once more, that doesn't prove that they never did it previous to the Passion Week, and therefore, there's no absolute proof here that this doesn't belong to this period. So, what I can say in favor of it being Johannine and belonging at this place, is that some manuscripts do have it, but most of them do not.

But some of the ones that do not have it here, have it somewhere else, like in Luke. On balance, almost all scholars, including very conservative scholars, would argue that this passage probably wasn't written by John, but may have been written by Luke, or one of the other synoptic writers, and that it may have by some accident been shifted in the manuscripts over to this position. But that's not necessarily the case, and it's hardly important for us to decide that.

That it is a true story from the life of Jesus, told by one of the biblical writers, whether John or another, is acknowledged virtually by all. Even those who do not believe that

John wrote this story, they do believe that it's an authentic story, honestly and truly told, about something that really happened with Jesus. Whether it happened at this point chronologically, or really belongs to a later time of the Passion Week, is what some would debate.

I bring these things up to you because virtually every commentator on John is going to make these points and raise questions as to whether John really wrote this passage. But what I would point out to you is what really matters is whether it's a true story, whether it's really something that happened, and Jesus really said these things, and so forth. That's, of course, what the value of the Gospels is anyway, is that they tell us true stories about Jesus.

Whether it was John originally or some other who wrote this story, that it is a true story is what's important, and that we are reading of something that really did occur in the life of Jesus, and his actual reaction is the thing most important. So we're going to take it at this point, that is, at the point it falls in the chronological arrangement of John, even acknowledging that it's possible that it belongs to a later period in his life, as some of the manuscripts would indicate. Really, the passage in question begins at chapter 7, verse 53.

Chapter 7 ended with Nicodemus, in sort of a half-courageous way, trying to take a stand for Jesus. He was not very courageous, however. You might recall that soldiers had been sent out to arrest Jesus.

In John, chapter 7, verse 32, it said, The Pharisees heard the crowd murmuring these things concerning him, and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take him. And then we read some more of the things Jesus said, and it says in verse 44 of chapter 7, Now some of them wanted to take him, but no one laid hands on him. Then the officers came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, Why have you not brought him? And the officers answered, No man ever spoke like this man.

Then the Pharisees answered them, Are you also deceived? Have any of the rulers of the Pharisees believed in him? And then, as a matter of fact, it turns out that one of the rulers of the Pharisees speaks up. But they continue, But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed. Now Nicodemus, he who came to Jesus by night, being one of them, said to them, Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing? They answered and said to him, Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee.

And that is where the passage ends in most of the manuscripts. So that verse 53 that says, Everyone went to his own house, but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives, is part of the disputed passage, and so all the way up through verse 11. So John 7.53 through 8.11 is the passage that is in question in some of the manuscripts.

Now, let's start at chapter 8, verse 1. After this whole thing happened, and they sought to take him, but they weren't able to and all, Jesus went that night, apparently, to the Mount of Olives. But early in the morning he came again to the temple, and all the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. 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? But this they said, testing him, that they might have something of which to accuse him.

Now, the bringing of this woman to Jesus has some interesting features. One is that they say that they caught her in the very act of adultery. Now, whenever there is an act of adultery taking place, there are two parties.

And the woman must have had a man that was in the act with her when she was caught. Now the law of Moses, to which they appeal, they say, well, Moses said we should stone this woman. The same law that says that the woman should be stoned also says the man should be stoned.

Wherever the law speaks about adultery, it imposes the exact same penalty on the man involved as on the woman involved. And yet, if they caught this woman in the act, where was the man? Why hadn't they brought him to be stoned also? The question is suggested but not answered in the text, and many guesses have been made. We do not wish to put any kind of canonical authority on any of these guesses.

Some have felt that this was a thing that they had actually put the woman up to, that the man who was committing adultery with her was actually one of themselves. After all, people who commit adultery aren't usually caught in the act. It's an unusual thing.

And it would appear that this happened in the daytime as well, which would be, I don't know how unusual it is, I guess adultery could happen as much in the daytime as at nighttime. People who commit adultery are usually fairly secretive. The nature of what they're doing requires it, especially when you're in a society that has a death penalty attached to the act.

And yet these people happen to find this woman in the act. They do not mention her to be one of their own wives, for example. She may have been the wife of one of them, but probably not.

There's no suggestion of this. So it's not that one of these guys came home and found her with another man. So how did these scribes and Pharisees happen to find a woman in the act of adultery? If it is true that she was in the act of adultery, and it seems to be the case, it must have been in a very private, probably a very guarded situation.

How did these clergymen happen to walk in on her? Well, one suggestion is that they actually framed her, or that they actually arranged the situation, that they put some guy up to it, maybe paid him, to go in there and seduce this woman, and they knew at what time and place this would be happening, so they could walk in and catch her. But why would she be targeted like this by them? Was she somebody that they already had something against? Somebody that they disliked, and therefore they wanted to get her in trouble? Or it's possible that they just knew that this would be a good test question to put to Jesus, which is really what their motive was. Now I can't say for sure that they are the ones who are guilty of bringing this woman into the situation.

I mean, there may be some scenario, undescribed to us, where they happen by accident to come upon a woman who is in the act of adultery, but this kind of thing, as I say, doesn't usually happen unless it's the man himself coming home and finding his wife, in that situation. But, again, the fact that they didn't bring the man. If they caught the woman in the act of adultery, they would have also caught the man, or at least seen him.

They'd know who he was. If he had escaped through the window or something, they could send someone out and get him. It would not be the case that the woman alone would be brought to justice about this.

And so the fact that they caught a woman in the act of adultery, seemingly an unlikely thing to happen if it were not staged. The fact that the man that she was allegedly involved with was not brought also suggests the possibility that the man was in cahoots with them in some way, and the whole thing was arranged so that they could catch this woman in this act, or at least make such an accusation against her. It's hard to know.

Maybe she wasn't even in the act of adultery for all we know. That they would lie, they were not above lying. We know that they put up false witnesses to accuse Jesus of things he never did, and Stephen of things he never did.

So, I mean, she may not have even really been guilty. It's hard to know. But we'll take, you know, just since we don't know all the others, we'll take it for granted she was guilty.

She, in fact, did commit adultery. Jesus even seems to take it for granted that she was. Because when he says, let him who is without sin cast the first stone at her, he suggests that she should be stoned.

But, make sure the person who stones her is better than she. Obviously, if he knew that she was in fact innocent, and these were false charges brought against her, he would have said, you hypocrites, I know, get out of here. She's not guilty of anything.

But instead, he basically affirmed that stoning her was a righteous thing to do in this case. But he challenged them as to whether they were qualified to do it. Because they were not themselves any better than she.

They were not without sin. But we get ahead of ourselves here. In what sense was this question a test to Jesus to give them something to accuse him of? Well, we know that the scribes and Pharisees had plenty that they could accuse him of, you know, to their own satisfaction.

They could accuse him of blasphemy. They had, on more than one occasion, thought him to be blaspheming. For example, when a man was lowered through the roof of a house in Galilee, in Capernaum, and Jesus said, Son, your sins are forgiven.

The scribes and Pharisees, remember, this man is blaspheming because he's forgiving sins. Only God can do that, so that's blasphemy. On another occasion, back in John chapter 5, when Jesus said, My father works hitherto and I work.

Once again, they accused him of blasphemy and took up stones to stone him. And so, if they wanted to accuse him of blasphemy, they didn't need to find more charges. They already had, they could bring him to trial about those things they already were concerned about.

But you see, the Jews did not have the right, under Roman law, to execute a man. The Sanhedrin, which was the Supreme Court of Israel, was made up of the chief priests and other Jewish elders. And the Romans, in order to keep the Jews happy, had allowed the Sanhedrin to have some jurisdiction over a lot of different areas of social life and even to enforce penalties on petty crimes and things like that.

But one area of authority that the Romans had not given to the Sanhedrin was the right to execute a man. The authority of the Sanhedrin was stopped short of that. The Jews were not permitted to kill their criminals.

Roman law did not permit it. Now, what these people point out is, however, Jewish law did require it. They were bringing to Jesus a situation where Jewish law was in conflict with Roman law.

Moses said this woman should be put to death. Now, what they don't point out is that Roman law, however, would forbid them from doing so. So they're bringing a situation where there's a bit of a dilemma here.

Are we going to obey the Roman law or the Jewish law? That is the point of the test question. Now, the Jews, of course, could condemn Jesus of blasphemy if they wanted, but they couldn't kill him. What they needed was for him to say something that they could take him before the Roman authorities about and accuse him of wrongdoing there.

That's why, on a later occasion, they asked him about the tribute money. Remember when they came to him and said, is it lawful to pay tribute to Caesar or not? This was, again, a case where they were bringing a dilemma to Jesus where if he answered one way, he'd be opposing Roman law. That is, if he said, no, don't pay tribute to Caesar,

that would be, they could accuse him of undermining Roman law because the Roman law required them to pay it.

If he said not to do it, that would make him someone they could accuse before the Romans as a troublemaker and maybe get the Romans angry enough to kill him. That's what they wanted to do. But if he says, yes, pay tribute to Caesar, they figured that would get him into trouble with the Jews because the Jews hated Caesar and didn't like paying tribute to Caesar and that would point him out to be a collaborator with the enemy and lose his popular support among the Jews.

And we know that on that occasion, Jesus got out of it quite magnificently by saying, well, give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. And he ended up basically affirming that they should pay their tribute to Caesar but he pointed out to them that all they need to give to Caesar is the coin that has his own face on it. If it has Caesar's face, it must be Caesar's.

So give him what's his and give God what's his. The irony about this is that later on when the Jews did bring Jesus before the Sanhedrin and they did accuse him there of blasphemy and decided that he was worthy of death, they then had to take Jesus to Pilate with some totally different charges because they knew Pilate would not care to put a man to death for blaspheming the Jewish God, which is what the Sanhedrin had condemned him for. So they brought totally trumped up charges and when they brought Jesus to Pilate, they said this man is perpetrating sedition against Caesar, saying that people shouldn't pay tribute to Caesar.

They actually brought these charges against Jesus, that he was saying that people shouldn't pay tribute to Caesar. That's the opposite of what he actually said. So when they couldn't hang him on his own words, they just fabricated words and pretended like he'd said them.

He said things that the Romans couldn't charge him with, but when he didn't say those things that they could use to accuse him, they just made up things and claimed that he said them, even in fact saying the opposite of what he said and attributing it to him. Well, this was a similar kind of situation because the law of Moses said, The law of the Romans did not permit the Jews to take matters into their own hands for capital crimes. And I don't believe the Romans executed adulterers.

Hardly. Their emperors were adulterers and homosexuals and so forth. I mean, sexual crimes were not capital crimes under the Roman law.

Therefore, this is a perfect way of getting Jesus to have to take a stand either for the Roman law against Moses, in which case, of course, if he said, yes, stone her, I mean, don't stone her, he'd be going along with what the Romans required, but he'd be accused of undermining Moses, which would be a bad deal in terms of his image among



the Jews. On the other hand, if he said, do stone her, and supported the law of Moses, then they could take him to Pilate and say, well, this guy's trying to rabble-rouse, trying to get people to execute adulterers, which the Romans don't permit us to do, and therefore they could accuse him before the Romans, just as if he had said, don't pay tribute to Caesar. So this is just the same kind of test that the tribute money test was.

Both of them were trying to get Jesus into a trap where he would either have to get himself in trouble with the Romans, which they'd like for him to do, because the Romans could kill him, the Jews couldn't, and they wanted to kill him. So one choice would be to get him in trouble with the Romans. The other choice would be to get him in trouble with the Jews.

And if he got in trouble with the Jews, if the popular Jewish rabble didn't love him anymore, he would cease to be a problem to the Sanhedrin. So in either way they win. It looked to them like a win-win situation, when they asked him about the tribute money, and here when they asked him about stoning this woman caught in the act of adultery.

Now, Jesus didn't answer immediately here. When it came to the tribute money, Jesus answered quite quickly. Here he didn't.

Instead, he acted as if he didn't even hear them, initially. He stooped down, it says in verse 6, and wrote on the ground, he was in the temple, so this would be the dust on the temple floor, as he wrote with his finger, as though he did not hear. Now this last line, as though he did not hear, is absent from many of the manuscripts.

But the point is, he wrote something on the floor of the temple. This, and the similar statement in verse 8, again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. These are the only two places in the Bible that ever refer to Jesus writing anything.

In fact, we might wonder whether he even knew how to write, if not for a passage like this. We know he knew how to write because he wrote something on the temple floor. Amazingly, he never wrote a book, although his disciples wrote books, he didn't write a book.

We don't know that he wrote anything, except these words on the temple floor, and therefore that would make them, we would think, sacred words, the only words ever written by Jesus. And yet, the only words he ever wrote, we don't even know what they were. The disciples did not bother to record them, which is amazing, really.

They record what Jesus said, but when Jesus wrote this down, whatever he wrote, there is absolutely no attempt made to record for us what he wrote. Now there are several theories about what he wrote on the temple floor. One theory is that he was just doodling.

That is, he didn't write anything at all in particular. He was just graphically ignoring

them. I mean, not giving them the time of the day.

After all, some of the manuscripts do read as ours does here. He wrote as if he didn't hear them. It's like he was ignoring them and just kind of doodling on the, you know, like kids will doodle on a misty window or something, you know, to draw pictures or hieroglyphics or something.

I mean, just kind of doodling in the dust. And the reason we're not told what he wrote is because he didn't write anything in particular. What he wrote wasn't really words at all.

He was just kind of biding his time and acting like he hadn't heard them. That's one theory. But there are other theories too.

And it does seem that his doodling on the, or his writing on the temple floor there, has something to do with the impact his words in verse 7 had on the people. And there are a number of theories. One theory is that Jesus, and I do not hold this theory, by the way, but many preachers have presented it as a possibility, that he wrote down the names of each of the scribes and Pharisees that were there coupled with a list of their sins.

Now, I don't think this is likely. It seems like if he did something as dramatic as that, something that would require a miraculous word of knowledge to be given, it would be a tremendous demonstration of his prophetic powers, that that would be the kind of thing John would have mentioned, or whoever wrote this. I mean, a lot of times we're told in the Gospels, whether John or the Synoptic Gospels, that Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, and it tells us that he made it clear that he knew what people were thinking, that he got a revelation about things that they hadn't communicated to him.

And if, in fact, he was writing down their names, which he would not have naturally probably known, and their individual sins, which obviously he would not naturally have known, but he'd have to have that by a word of knowledge, then it seems like that would be a striking miracle, striking enough that probably John or whoever wrote this would have mentioned it. Would have mentioned, yeah, he wrote down their names and their sins, and that would give explanation to the fact that when he then turned to them and said, now, whoever among you is without sin, cast the first stone, he'd just written out what their sins were, none of them could cast a stone. It makes a dramatic theory, that kind of makes the story have an interesting twist to it, but I don't think it likely.

As I said, it seems to me that if he did something that dramatic, something that supernatural, that it would have been mentioned as something more than just stooping down and writing with his finger on the ground without mentioning what it was. Another possibility is that he may have written down some scriptures on the floor, scriptures that would in fact condemn some of the behaviors of those that were standing there accusing the woman. I mean scriptures about maybe greed, or scriptures about hypocrisy, things from the Old Testament, where they didn't see themselves as sinners, they saw this

woman as a sinner.

But he could have written down some scriptures from Deuteronomy or from Exodus or from maybe the prophets, which would point to their own sins, not so much that he enumerated their individual sins by name, but that he could have written down some scriptural words, which as they read what he saw, it would show them that, oh yeah, they too were sinners. So that when he then stood up and said, he that is without sin among you cast the first stone at her, it would be, in essence, they were quoting Moses to him. Moses said we should stone her.

That his writing may have in fact been quoting back scripture to them as well that would condemn them as much. Once again, I don't know that too much weight could be put on this theory simply because Jesus could have as easily said it as written it. In fact, in most cases, that's exactly what he did.

When the Pharisees frequently were accusing Jesus or the disciples of things they were doing wrong, and when Jesus wished to show them that they were doing things even more or equally unscriptural, he would simply verbally quote the scriptures to them. Have not heard what David did? Go and learn what this means. I will have mercy and not sacrifice or whatever.

Does it not say in your law I said you are gods? Whenever he wants to appeal to the Old Testament to show them their hypocrisy and their own guilt, he generally would just quote it out loud. We don't have any other case in the Bible where he wrote it on the temple floor, nor does it necessarily mean, or seem more appropriate, for example, for him to write on the floor in this case instead of just saying it to them. So I don't know if that's what he did or not.

It's possible he was just doodling and didn't write anything in particular. And if he did write something more specific, it's simply not told what it is, which might make all guessing about it a fool's errand, really, because, I mean, obviously, even if we knew what he wrote, we might have to decide, like the writer did, it wasn't worth mentioning. I mean, whatever he wrote, it wasn't important enough to record for the writer to record it.

It may not have had anything to do with the story, if he wrote words at all. Or if it did, it wasn't somehow so essential to know, or else the writer would have told us what it was. As easily as telling us he stooped down and wrote on the floor with his finger, he could have said, and he wrote these words, or he wrote down this kind of information.

But we're not told that. That's one of the mysteries of the passage. But it's really one of the marks of the authenticity of the passage as well.

When you make up a story, and you're trying to make it up like it's a true story, yet the

very fiction of it comes out in the fact, generally speaking, that you don't include details that have no value to the story, that don't forward the story. A made-up story, to make a point, usually focuses on the things that carry forward the point. A true story, however, just tells what happened, even if some of the things that happened don't seem to be that relevant to the point.

And Jesus writing on the floor is not made out in the story to be a relevant point. And since we don't know what he wrote, or if he even wrote any actual words, or just doodled, we can probably assume that what he wrote is not an essential part of the point he was making. Or if it is, it's not manifestly so.

And so we can simply observe the fact that he wrote on the floor, without necessarily having to speculate what he wrote, if anything. Yes, Judy? No, only twice here. Twice here in this passage.

Yeah, once is in verse 6. Yeah, in verse 6, where it says he wrote on the ground, and then in verse 8, it mentions again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. Yeah. No, just in this place.

And apart from these two verses, we never read of Jesus ever writing anything. Now, there is a scripture in the Old Testament, probably not relevant, but one theory is that Jesus did write down the names of those people standing around there. And there is a scripture in the Old Testament about the Jews who would be judged, it says their names shall be written in the earth.

It's in Isaiah, I believe, but I don't remember the passage exactly. But with reference to the Jews who were under God's wrath, it said something about their names shall be written in the earth, which perhaps means as opposed to in heaven. Jesus said his disciples' names are written in heaven.

But I don't even remember the exact passage in the Old Testament that says that. But some people thinking of that passage think maybe Jesus wrote their names there on the ground, in the earth, as it were, as men who were to stand God's judgment. Once again, it's kind of an esoteric theory.

I mean, when you just think about it, whoever wrote the story deliberately didn't tell us what Jesus wrote on the ground. And that's either because he didn't write anything, and therefore there's nothing to report, or whatever he wrote was not important to know for the story, which seems a strange possibility, because I'd like to know what Jesus wrote. And it's funny that the only time Jesus ever wrote anything, he wrote it in a non-permanent place, you know, and the next time people walked through it and shuffled that dust, what he wrote was no longer there.

But I guess that's because Jesus does his permanent writing on our hearts. He didn't

come to give a written law, like Moses did, but to write his law on our hearts. And Paul himself even said that though he himself wrote letters, books of our Bible, really the most important epistle Paul wrote was on the hearts of the Corinthians.

He said, or Christians in general, of course, but he said it to the Corinthians. In 2 Corinthians chapter 3, where he says in 2 Corinthians 3, 3, You are manifestly an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tables of stone, but on the tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart. The Corinthians and the writing on their hearts, the change of their hearts, in other words, is the principal epistle of God and of Paul that is of value.

Paul wrote other epistles, but the most important writing is that which is on the heart. And so Jesus apparently didn't write anything that was ever preserved for us to know. Now after he initially wrote on the ground, verse 7 says, So when they continued asking him, so they didn't just ask him once, they just kept asking him and he acted like he didn't hear them initially.

It's like the Syrophenician woman who kept following him and begging him to do something for her daughter and he just ignored her for a long time until the disciples finally said, send her away. And then he finally answered. I guess Jesus was one of these guys who, I was talking to Bill yesterday, how he doesn't let the telephone interrupt what he's doing.

My wife is that way too. I'm too curious when people, the phone's ringing, I want to know who it is. And also I don't want to be rude, not that it's rude not to answer the phone, if you're busy doing something else, maybe it's rude for someone to be calling and interrupting you.

I mean, the telephone has brought new ethics into human society. And if someone's home and they don't answer when I'm calling, I think they're being rude. On the other hand, if I'm busy doing something important and someone with a petty thing calls me, they're rude for interrupting me.

So I don't know who's being rude, but I guess I'm sensitive about being rude, so if someone asks me a question or rings the phone or something, I always want to answer right away. Jesus wasn't that way. He probably would let the phone ring if he had something else he was doing more important.

These people would be standing there saying, well, well, well, well, he's just acting like he doesn't even hear them, just writing in the dust. And finally, when he gets around to it, he answers them. In verse 7, he raised himself up and said to them, he who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.

Now, of course, Jesus' statement was calculated to deliver her from being stoned, but we

shouldn't miss the point that he affirmed that the stoning of an adulteress is a just and right thing. He did not care to execute her himself, as he mentioned later in the story, and he didn't think that the people accusing her were worthy to do it either. But that doesn't mean she had not done something worthy of death.

Jesus did not here lighten the severity of the crime and the sin of adultery or of its just consequences. In a sense, Jesus affirmed capital punishment here, at least one side of it. You see, there's two sides of capital punishment.

One is, capital punishment is valid if A, someone has done something worthy of death, and B, there's some duly appointed authority that's authorized to execute the person who's done something worthy of death. What Jesus affirmed here is that she had in fact done something worthy of death. The problem was her accusers were so hypocritical, they were not authorized, they would have been quite unjust to be the ones to execute her, because they too were sinners.

Now, his statement as it stands would seem, of course, to kind of nullify the law of Moses, because the law of Moses, which required certain people to be put to death, certainly the people who would put them to death were also sinners. The magistrates and the communities that were to stone idolaters and adulterers and blasphemers and so forth in the law of Moses, certainly the executioners in those cases were not sinless individuals. And if Jesus is saying that a person who's going to execute someone else must be absolutely sinless, then in fact he was undermining the law of Moses.

Because Moses had authorized people who couldn't have been regarded as sinless, since no man is sinless, to execute people who did certain crimes. And not every sin is worthy of death of the same sort. That is of a judicial, civil penalty being brought upon them.

Of course, all sin is worthy of death in the sense of eternal death and spiritual death, and all sin alienates from God. But some crimes are worthy of death in the civil sense, of civil law being executed, criminal sense. Other sins are not.

For example, it is a sin to look at a woman with lust, and it's a sin to commit adultery with her. Jesus said essentially in God's sight they're equally bad sins, but society in Moses' day was allowed to execute a person for committing adultery, but certainly not for, they weren't told to execute people for looking with lust. And likewise, you know, for murder, a person was to be executed.

But Jesus said if you're angry at your brother without a cause, it's the same thing. But under the law they didn't execute people who were angry. There are some sins which are equally bad in the eyes of God, but not, I guess, equally destructive to human society, and therefore God didn't impose civil penalties against some of them.

Now, if Jesus simply said, he that is without sin, let him be the first cast stone at her,

thus, you know, meaning any sin, if you've committed any sin at all, you cannot stone her, then he has nullified the law of Moses, which did command that such people be stoned, and did not make the requirement that the people doing the stoning be absolutely sinless people. If that requirement was imposed, then no one could stone anybody, because there are no sinless people. Therefore, many scholars believe that his statement should be translated more like, whoever is without this sin, let him be the first to cast a stone at her.

There may be something about the Greek, I'm not a scholar enough to know, but many commentators have said what Jesus actually was saying is, whoever has not committed this sin. Now, that would change things a bit, you see, because everyone has committed some sins, everyone's been proud at some time or another, everyone's been, you know, unkind at one time or another, these are sins, everyone's gotten angry at one time or another, no one is without sin in that sense, but certainly not everyone is an adulterer. And if Jesus' statement was basically, whoever is without this sin, let him be the first to cast stone at her, and all of them bowed out, and none of them actually stoned her, it would suggest that he knew they were all guilty of this sin.

And rather than him saying that an executioner must be a sinless person, he would be saying rather, an executioner must not be guilty of the same crime, that the victim is, or that the criminal is, that is. You know, a criminal is a criminal, not a victim, but the point is, if a person is being sent to the electric chair for being a mass murderer, but the executioner happened to be a guy who secretly was out doing murders and bank robberies on the side, it would be obviously an unjust situation. Although the person being executed deserves to be executed, the person who is the executioner equally deserves to be executed.

And many people feel that that's what exactly Jesus was saying, whoever is without this sin, whoever is not guilty of this same sin, that is adultery, let him be the first to cast a stone at him. Now, I've heard that interpretation of this passage from my youth, and I must say that my first reactions to it were negative. For one thing, it seemed to me that Jesus would be taking a tremendous chance here.

Because if what he is really saying, and words that they would understand this way, is if you are not an adulterer yourself, go ahead and stone her. Well then, he's taking the chance that one of them there might actually end up stoning her, because who would think that all the scribes and pharisees would actually be adulterers? Now, some might say, well, you know, if to look at a woman with lust is adultery, then everyone is guilty. Well, that may be true, but the pharisees would not necessarily accept Jesus' teaching that looking at a woman with lust after is adultery.

Therefore, it wouldn't have quite the teeth on their conscience that this apparently did. His statement really got to their consciences, we're told. It says in verse 9, Then those

who heard it being convicted by their conscience went out one by one, beginning at the oldest, even to the last, and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.

These people were convicted by what he said. Now, if he said, whoever is without this sin, meaning adultery, let him cast the first stone, and they were all convicted in their conscience, it's not likely that they were convicted for looking at a woman with lust, because the Jews simply were not convicted about that. It was Jesus who taught that as a radical new teaching, that such looking is tantamount to adultery.

The Jews would not have that, you know, the ones who rejected his teaching would not be concerned about that. The only way they would be concerned is if they were all actual physical adulterers. Now, that's what I had trouble with this interpretation for a long time with, because I thought, well, how could it be that all the scribes and pharisees in that crowd had actually committed physical adultery in the past? Certainly, physical adultery wouldn't have been that common among religious people.

And yet, it's possible that it was. I've read some places that adultery was not uncommon, even among the religious. The Talmud, which we have now, which is the codification of the elders' traditions, actually, in the Talmud, you can read some really terrible stuff.

There's all kinds of loopholes for sexual sin. For example, most of it is not even worthy, I mean, it's despicable to repeat, but child sexual molestation, if the child is under three years old, was considered not a sin in the Talmud, in the Jewish traditions. Not the law of God, of course God would condemn it, but the traditions of the rabbis permitted it.

And there were a whole lot of loopholes and various categories where they allowed sexual sin among themselves without calling it sexual sin, because the person with whom they did it was in a special category, and therefore it didn't count. And for that reason, it may be that there was a great deal of sexual immorality going on, even among the Jews, even among the religious Jews. If you look over at Romans chapter 2, in verse 17, Paul said, Indeed, you are called a Jew, and rest in the law, and you make your boast in God, and you know his will, and you approve of the things that are excellent being instructed out of the law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who sit in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law.

You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, Do not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? Now, this is another passage I used to have trouble with, because Paul was speaking to Jews, religious Jews, who boasted in the law, and believed themselves to be an upright example of God's will, and a light to the Gentiles, and so forth.