

# INTERPRETER



A JOURNAL OF LATTER-DAY SAINT  
FAITH AND SCHOLARSHIP

Volume 32 · 2019 · Pages 53 - 76

## **Procedural Violations in the Trial of the Woman Taken in Adultery**

Steven T. Densley, Jr.

Offprint Series

© 2019 The Interpreter Foundation. A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 444 Castro Street, Suite 900, Mountain View, California, 94041, USA.

ISSN 2372-1227 (print)  
ISSN 2372-126X (online)

The goal of The Interpreter Foundation is to increase understanding of scripture through careful scholarly investigation and analysis of the insights provided by a wide range of ancillary disciplines, including language, history, archaeology, literature, culture, ethnohistory, art, geography, law, politics, philosophy, etc. Interpreter will also publish articles advocating the authenticity and historicity of LDS scripture and the Restoration, along with scholarly responses to critics of the LDS faith. We hope to illuminate, by study and faith, the eternal spiritual message of the scriptures—that Jesus is the Christ.

Although the Board fully supports the goals and teachings of the Church, The Interpreter Foundation is an independent entity and is neither owned, controlled by nor affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or with Brigham Young University. All research and opinions provided are the sole responsibility of their respective authors, and should not be interpreted as the opinions of the Board, nor as official statements of LDS doctrine, belief or practice.

This journal is a weekly publication of the Interpreter Foundation, a non-profit organization located at [InterpreterFoundation.org](http://InterpreterFoundation.org). You can find other articles published in our journal at [Journal.InterpreterFoundation.org](http://Journal.InterpreterFoundation.org). You may subscribe to this journal at [InterpreterFoundation.org/annual-print-subscription](http://InterpreterFoundation.org/annual-print-subscription).

# PROCEDURAL VIOLATIONS IN THE TRIAL OF THE WOMAN TAKEN IN ADULTERY

---

Steven T. Densley, Jr.

**Abstract:** *The story in John 8 of the woman taken in adultery is sometimes used to argue that Jesus was lenient toward sin and that we should be too. However, when placed in its broader context, we can see the story is not one in which Christ shows indifference or contempt for the law, but rather utmost respect for it.*

The story of the woman taken in adultery is sometimes referenced as an example of the love and forgiveness of Jesus. As Raymond Brown has observed, “Some have used this to paint their portrait of the liberal Christ and have turned it in to a maudlin justification for indifference toward sins of the flesh.”<sup>1</sup> Of course, as Christ exemplifies perfect love and is the embodiment of mercy, it is tempting to use this story as an illustration of Christ’s love and mercy. However, those who use the story as an example of how we should not judge others, that we should be forgiving of one another, or that Christ is against capital punishment,<sup>2</sup> fail to take into account the context in which the story takes place.

For example, it is important to remember that Jesus Christ gave Moses the law. He, as Jehovah, commanded that adulterers should be put to death.<sup>3</sup> Capital punishment for adultery was part of the Hebrew canon of laws at the time of Christ.<sup>4</sup> It would be curious indeed if He who gave the law was now advocating that the law not be enforced. Some may be inclined to resolve this incongruity on the basis that Christ was God, He who would pay for all sins on the cross and later stand in judgment of mankind (John 5:22; 1 John 2:2). Christ, the only person who has ever been totally without sin (Hebrews 4:15), paid the price for our sins. He therefore had the divine right to condemn a sinner or to forgive a repentant offender. However, He did not actually forgive the woman (John 8:11). Furthermore, the Pharisees did not believe that Jesus could forgive sins (Luke 5:21), and

yet somehow they were “convicted by their own conscience” (John 8:9). So what message did the Pharisees actually understand?

It has been suggested that Christ was teaching that while “the letter of the law seemed to compel Jesus to condemn the woman, ... his response shows that sometimes the righteousness of God is better served by redemptive and restorative grace.”<sup>5</sup> Was this Christ’s message? That the law should no longer be enforced since we have *all* sinned and fallen short of God’s glory (Romans 3:23)? There is nothing in the text to indicate that the reason the Pharisees left is that they suddenly became converted to the principle of redemptive and restorative grace. So what could have caused them to leave?

It should be noted at the outset that much of the scholarly writing addressing this incident has examined the question of whether the story was authentic and an original part of the Gospel or was fabricated and inserted at some later time.<sup>6</sup> Of course, even if the episode was not an original part of the Gospel of John, we need not necessarily conclude that the story was apocryphal.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, regardless of whether or not the story actually happened, the question of why it was written and how we should interpret it is an interesting and important one. What was the writer of the story trying to teach by showing Jesus Christ apparently defending the adulteress and allowing her to escape punishment — a punishment He Himself had pronounced? In light of all the evidence that follows, it seems most reasonable to conclude that this is not a story of tolerance for sin but one of respect for the law.

In his article “Law in the New Testament: The Story of the Woman Taken in Adultery,” J. Duncan M. Derrett attempts to answer some of the more difficult questions raised by the story.<sup>8</sup> For example, what did Jesus write in the dust? And what prompted the accusers to retreat so quickly? Derrett believes the accusers must have had impure motives in bringing the woman to Jesus. In collusion with the husband, Derrett believes, the men set the woman up to be caught in the act of adultery, which was contrary to the requirements of the law. He speculates that Jesus wrote words of the law on the floor of the temple, reminding the accusers that they must not serve as witnesses in a trial brought under questionable circumstances and that one should not even lend his support to such an affair. These legal injunctions pointed out by Jesus caused the accusers to drop their stones and leave. My analysis attempts to go beyond the work of Derrett by drawing the focus more acutely on the potential motives and intentions of the accusers and the procedural requirements by which they would have had to abide in order to justly put a guilty woman to death.

**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.** (John 8:2)

The writer of this pericope begins by making it clear that Jesus began teaching as the light of the sun began to fill the sky. At least one commentator<sup>9</sup> has noted how the symbolism evident in this passage is consistent with light imagery elsewhere in the Gospel of John (John 1:4–9; 3:2; 7:50; 8:12; 9:4; 11:10; 13:30; 21:3–4).<sup>10</sup> The gospel writer began his book by stating that Christ was “the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1:9). Now, as the light of dawn filled the temple, so did Christ’s great example illuminate the minds and hearts of those present. “I am the light of the world,” He declared that morning. “[H]e that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12).

The writer of the gospel then makes note of the fact that, consistent with Rabbinic practice for teachers, Christ was seated in the temple.<sup>11</sup> That this encounter took place in the temple is notable, since this was the proper place for performance of the ritual ordeal known as the Sotah, or the ordeal of the bitter waters (Numbers 5:11–31). The significance of this will be discussed below.

**And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act.** (John 8:3–4)

Adultery in the law referred specifically to sexual intercourse between a man and a married woman (Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22–24). The Greek word used here, from which “woman” was translated, usually refers to a married woman.<sup>12</sup> According to Derrett, “[t]here is no reason to doubt but that she was a married woman, though the word *μοιχεία* will admit of other possibilities.”<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, Derrett continues, Jewish law and Semitic customs make it clear that the witnesses would have to have seen the woman actually engaging in sexual intercourse.<sup>14</sup> It seems clear that the woman was guilty.<sup>15</sup> The penalty for false accusation was severe — those who falsely accused a person of a capital offense could themselves be put to death (Deuteronomy 19:15–19). It seems unlikely then that the accusers in the story would so openly declare the guilt of the accused unless there was a firm basis for the accusation.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, the words of Jesus himself acknowledged the guilt of the woman when he later told her to “sin no more” (John 8:11).

Yet, while it does not seem likely that the witnesses falsely accused the woman, it does seem likely the woman was entrapped or set up to be caught in the act. The reason this seems likely is that it would be difficult to catch someone in the act of adultery. Since adultery was a capital crime, illicit lovers would have every incentive to avoid detection, and the law required two eyewitnesses to the event (Deuteronomy 17:6). Because the husband could not serve as a witness against his wife,<sup>17</sup> two or three others would have to actually see the man and woman engaging in intercourse.<sup>18</sup> This suggests that the suspicious husband may have planned an elaborate situation whereby his wife might be caught in the act of adultery. He may then have hired witnesses<sup>19</sup> to lie in wait until the couple engaged in sexual intercourse, at which point it could be said that the crime of adultery had been committed. This would mean the witnesses were not paragons of integrity simply trying to enforce the law. Such witnesses may have had material incentive to condemn the woman, casting doubt on their characters. In fact, their actions would have brought them under suspicion of breaking the law themselves, an idea discussed below.

A further indication that the accusers were corrupt is the conspicuous absence of the male offender. The law required that both culprits be executed (Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22). It may be that the husband or the witnesses were willing to accept a bribe<sup>20</sup> from the male. But the female, unable to offer a bribe, since her money would become her husband's upon her death anyway, had little power to buy her freedom. Finally, the husband had incentives to execute his guilty wife, while the same incentives to kill the male lover did not exist. This point will be discussed further since the questionable motives of the husband and the witnesses raises a key issue in interpreting this story.<sup>21</sup>

**Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? (John 8:5)**

The law of Moses stated in Leviticus 20:10, "And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death." Deuteronomy 22:22 said, "If a man be found lying with a woman married to an husband, then they shall both of them die, both the man that lay with the woman, and the woman: so shalt thou put away evil from Israel" (see also Ezekiel 16:40). During the time of Jesus, as Derrett and Brown have written, stoning was the way in which a woman guilty of adultery was punished.<sup>22</sup>

Some commentators have noted that alternatives to execution existed in the case of punishing a woman caught in the act of adultery. The

alternatives included divorce (Jeremiah 3:8; Deuteronomy 24:1–4)<sup>23</sup> and the husband stripping the woman naked and driving her from the home (Hosea 2:2–5; Jeremiah 13:22–26; Ezekiel 16:37–39 & 23:29; Nahum 3:5).<sup>24</sup> While some of the alternatives to capital punishment appear in the scriptures to be metaphorical, Gordis points out that “were . . . [alternatives to stoning] out of the question, the use of [such] metaphor[s] by the prophets in their pleas for Israel’s return to God would have been totally self-defeating.”<sup>25</sup> However, while it is possible these alternatives existed, no one disputes that execution was also an alternative that still existed in Jewish law during the time of Jesus.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the accusers would have been acting in line with traditional Jewish law of the time by suggesting that it would be appropriate to put an adulteress to death by stoning.<sup>27</sup>

However, the fact the woman is said to have been caught “in the very act” seems suspicious. How did this happen? If the husband of the adulteress planned to capture the illicit lovers in the act, he must have suspected them of adultery in the first place. If he suspected adultery but decided to wait until he caught his wife in the act, it would further indict the husband and the witnesses, since the law made specific provisions for a husband who suspected his wife of adultery: the Sotah, or ordeal of the bitter waters.

This provision is found in Numbers 5:11–31. It allows a husband to accuse a woman of adultery without fear of punishment for false accusation. If the husband suspected adultery but had no witnesses, he could bring his wife and a jealousy offering of barley meal to the priest in order that she may undergo a sort of trial by ordeal. The priest began the ordeal by taking dust from the floor of the temple and mixing it in a vessel of holy water. Next, the priest uncovered the woman’s head and put the offering of meal in her hands. He then spoke an oath to the woman, saying:

If no man have lain with thee, and if thou hast not gone aside to uncleanness with another instead of thy husband, be thou free from this bitter water that causeth the curse: But if thou hast gone aside to another instead of thy husband, and if thou be defiled, and some man have lain with thee beside thine husband: The LORD make thee a curse and an oath among thy people, when the LORD doth make thy thigh to rot, and thy belly to swell; And this water that causeth the curse shall go into thy bowels, to make thy belly to swell, and thy thigh to rot.<sup>28</sup>

Afterward, the priest would write the words of the oath on parchment in water soluble ink. He would wash the parchment with the dirty water and let the water run back into the vessel for the woman to drink. The text says that if the woman is guilty, her belly will swell and her thigh

shall rot, and the woman shall be a curse among her people. If she is innocent, she will conceive a child.

The text concludes by saying that this is the law. When a husband suspects his wife of adultery, he must perform the requirements of this law in order to be guiltless from iniquity rather than set her up to be caught *in flagrante delicto*. Numbers 5:29–31 states:

This is the law of jealousies ... when the spirit of jealousy cometh upon him, and he ... shall set the woman before the LORD, and the priest shall execute upon her all this law. Then shall the man be guiltless from iniquity, and this woman shall bear her iniquity.

So if a man does not submit his wife to the ordeal of the bitter waters when “the spirit of jealousy cometh upon him,” he will not be “guiltless from iniquity.” It seems, then, that the husband in our story may have brought iniquity upon himself by disregarding the law. Instead of following the law of jealousies as soon as he suspected his wife of adultery, he may have decided it would be preferable to find a way for his wife to be put to death.

There are numerous reasons why a husband would have a motive to defy the law of jealousies and seek his wife’s death instead of submitting her to the ordeal of the bitter waters. Presumably, once the ordeal was completed, the couple would return home and continue their lives, waiting for the results of the oath.<sup>29</sup> One would assume the results would take weeks if not months for signs to appear of the woman’s guilt or innocence. Once he found his wife could have no children, he could divorce his wife. Of course, a husband could divorce his wife anyway, without even putting her through the ordeal.<sup>30</sup> But if he were to divorce her without a clear cause,<sup>31</sup> he would lose the benefit of succeeding to her property as her heir,<sup>32</sup> and he would be required to repay the bride-price to his wife’s family.<sup>33</sup> So it would be wise to wait for the results of the ordeal before executing a divorce. Of course, if one had doubts about the ability of the ordeal to definitively determine the guilt of a wife, one would be tempted to find (or create) more clear evidence. Or if a husband did have confidence in the efficacy of the ordeal, he might have been reluctant to engage the trial of the bitter waters because he was guilty of adultery himself. According to rabbinical commentary, if a man had committed the crime himself, the ritual would not be effective in exposing the adultery of his wife.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, a jealous husband with the taint of sin upon himself would have reason to believe the ordeal of the bitter waters could not establish the guilt of his wife. Finally, a husband might be so overcome with jealousy that he would rather see his wife



killed immediately than wait several months for his suspicions to be confirmed, only then to divorce her. Therefore, a plausible motive existed for a suspicious husband to construct a way in which witnesses could catch his wife in sin.

**This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. (John 8:6a)**

Under Roman law, adultery was not a capital offense until the third century AD.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, Derrett claims the Sanhedrin was not allowed to try cases involving capital crimes.<sup>36</sup> So, if we assume, as many have, that the Jews were not allowed by the Romans to employ stoning for adultery, this surely would be a way to tempt Jesus into making a statement they could use to accuse him. If Jesus were to say that the woman should be stoned, as Mosaic law provided, the accusers could go to the Roman authorities accusing Jesus of speaking out against Roman authority and Roman law. In the alternative, if Jesus said the woman should not be executed, they could have accused Jesus of preaching doctrine contrary to the law of Moses. In spite of the fact that there may have been no due process available to enforce the death penalty, the Jews of the time were not above using capital punishment, though perhaps without Roman sanction. The Bible recounts examples of Jesus and Paul narrowly escaping the deadly wrath of lynch mobs (Luke 4:29; John 8:59 & 10:31; Acts 5:28), while Stephen was executed by stoning (Acts 7:58–59). In this context, therefore, the question of whether she should be stoned seems disingenuous. Indeed, it seems clear that the question was asked in order to “tempt” Jesus.<sup>37</sup>

**But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. (John 8:6b)**

Although no one really knows what Jesus scribbled in the dust, many have speculated about what Jesus might have written there.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, a short discussion of some of the possibilities is instructive.

Some have suggested that Jesus wrote the names of the wicked accusers on the floor of the temple, acting out the prophecy of Jeremiah 17:13: “all that forsake thee shall be ashamed, and they that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living waters.”<sup>39</sup> Ambrose speculated that Jesus wrote “earth, earth, write that these men have been disowned,” a saying also said to be inspired by Jeremiah, who wrote “O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord” (Jeremiah 22:29), and “they that depart from

me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living waters” (Jeremiah 17:13).<sup>40</sup>

Derrett speculates that since Jesus was probably sitting on a low stool and writing with his finger in the dirt, it is unlikely that He could have written more than 16 Hebrew characters.<sup>41</sup> Derrett further speculates that the writing was a text of law having to do with accusation and execution of offenders.<sup>42</sup> And since Christ’s oral comments relate to the function of witnesses, Derrett narrows the possibilities to one: “put not thine hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness.”<sup>43</sup> Derrett points out that all the rabbis’ rules on disqualification of witnesses hinge upon this verse.<sup>44</sup> Jesus clearly recognized the impure motives of the accusers. Rather than fall into the trap of simply answering their question and giving them something with which to accuse him, Jesus removed himself from the situation by drawing in the dust. And by thus removing himself, the accusers became the accused. “[H]is refusal to be a party to what may be an unrighteous decision merges imperceptibly with a warning to the questioners that their own activities must be justifiable, and that it is not sufficient that they or some of them saw her in the act of adultery.”<sup>45</sup>

The act of Jesus’s writing in the dust brings a couple of images to mind. First, writing words of the law in the dust of the temple could serve to remind careful observers of the ritual of the bitter waters, in which the words of the law of jealousy were combined with dust of the temple floor in a mixture that could serve to set an accused adulteress free. However, this connection may have been lost on the minds of those present, since the process of taking dust from the temple floor was a particular one. The dust was taken from underneath a slab that lay to the right of the entrance to the sanctuary and not from any random location on the floor of the temple.<sup>46</sup>

Second, this act of Jesus’s reaching forth his finger, perhaps to write words of the law, brings to mind the finger of Jehovah writing the words of the ten commandments (Exodus 31:18; Deuteronomy 9:10).<sup>47</sup> This connection was also not likely made in the minds of the accusers, though it is a poignant reminder to the modern reader that it was Christ Himself who wrote the law.

**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. (John 8:7)**

It is unlikely that a lynch mob could be halted in their tracks by a simple plea to be non-judgmental. However, the words of Jesus may actually have been a legal reference that implied that the accusers may

be subject to the very penalty they wished to impose upon the woman. The suggestion that the men themselves may be guilty of a capital offense would be enough to inspire the effect we read about in the narrative. This fact demands a legal interpretation of Christ's words.

The Law of Moses required that in the case of capital punishment, at least two witnesses to the offense were required, and that the witnesses should be those to initiate the execution by casting the first stones (Deuteronomy 17:6–7). As Derrett pointed out, the fact that stoning was even an issue means there must have been at least two witnesses to the act.<sup>48</sup>

As already noted, based on the law in Exodus 23:1, a witness could be disqualified on the basis of unrighteousness. According to Baylis, Deuteronomy is another place where strict requirements are placed on witnesses:

If a false witness rise up against any man to testify against him that which is wrong; Then both the men, between whom the controversy is, shall stand before the Lord ... if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother; Then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother. ... [L]ife shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot. (Deuteronomy 19:16–19)

Where the verse reads, “If a malicious witness rises up against a man,” the word “malicious” is defined as “a witness that promotes violence and wrong.”<sup>49</sup> Another commentator has stated that the word “false” is used here to describe a perversion of justice; those who act falsely “are those who do violence to the Law, who use it for their own benefit.”<sup>50</sup> A statement found in the Talmud dating from the Second Temple period attributed to Shimon ben Shetah warned, “Examine the witnesses thoroughly, but be careful with your words, lest from them they learn to lie.”<sup>51</sup> The integrity of the witnesses was an essential element to the administration of justice. So just as the trial of a suspected adulteress (i.e., the ordeal of the bitter waters) demanded an untainted husband in order to be effective, so did the trial of an accused adulteress demand untainted witnesses in order to be legally effective.<sup>52</sup>

The Greek word *anamarthtoς*, used here in John 8:7 to describe being “without sin” (used nowhere else in the New Testament), occurs in 2 Maccabees 12:42 where, in context, it refers to being without the sin of idolatry.<sup>53</sup> This suggests that although the word could be used to communicate being without sin in general, it could also be used to mean being without sin in a specific sense as well. A variety of possibilities have been proposed for what the sins of the accusers might have been: failure to apply the ordeal of the bitter waters, conspiracy between the

woman's husband and the witnesses to plot for her execution, and failure to deliver both guilty parties for the trial. Furthermore, there may have been a transgression of the obligation to act to help prevent a brother's sin (See Leviticus 19:17; Deuteronomy 19:15; Matthew 18:15–16; Luke 17:3; Galatians 6:1; James 5:19).<sup>54</sup> (Or in this case the sin of a sister or a wife.) If the witnesses had lain in wait in order to catch the adulteress in the act, they would have hesitated to emerge from their hiding place until coitus had occurred. At this point, they would have been unable to help prevent the sin of the woman. So the accusers may have been guilty of a number of transgressions. But at the very least, it seems they would have been guilty of the sin of serving as “false” witnesses by promoting violence and wrong to the woman and doing violence to the law by using it for their own benefit.

**And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground.**

(John 8:8)

Some early manuscripts, after the phrase “wrote on the ground,” included the words “the sins of every one of them.”<sup>55</sup> Metzger and Ehrman speculate that this phrase was added by an unknown copyist seeking to satisfy a natural curiosity concerning what it was that Jesus wrote upon the ground.<sup>56</sup> It is interesting to hypothesize that the accusers themselves might have been guilty of the crime of which they have accused the woman. While there is no textual support for this idea, adultery seems to have been a common occurrence. Jesus implies that the Jews of the time were an “adulterous generation” (Matthew 12:39; see also James 4:4). Also, not long after this time, the trial of the bitter waters was discontinued. The explanation given by Rabban Jochanan Ben Zacchai, who lived at the time of Jesus, was that the Sotah was abandoned because adultery was so openly prevalent.<sup>57</sup>

Derrett says that if he is correct in his theory about what Jesus wrote the first time, “there can be no doubt what it was Jesus wrote to round off his [judicial] ‘opinion.’”<sup>58</sup> He then cites Exodus 23:7a: “From a false matter keep far.” This is the verse upon which the rabbinical rule rests that one must not associate with a sinner as co-judge or co-witness.<sup>59</sup> It is unclear to what degree a witness had to have been free from sin. Of course, to an extent, this requirement would exclude everyone from being a competent witness. If Jesus was saying that only witnesses wholly without sin were eligible to testify and to perform the execution, it is curious that those present in the temple would feel inspired to drop the stones they held for use against the adulteress and then pick them up again to use against Jesus only a few minutes later (John 8:59). While the temple-goers do not seem to have felt an obligation to be completely

sinless, it seems they were at least convinced they had to be free from taint as regarding that which they were to testify.

Finally, the image of Christ writing words of the law again reminds us of the respect Christ had for the law since it was He who, as Jehovah, gave the law. And just as Jehovah wrote the words of the law twice, Christ wrote on the floor of the temple twice (Exodus 34:1–4, 28).<sup>60</sup>

**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. (John 8:9)**

Perhaps the accusers were reminded of the then popular story in the History of Susanna as they dropped their stones and left.<sup>61</sup> In this story, found in the Apocrypha, Susanna is a recently married woman who finds herself pursued sexually by two respected elders. The elders threatened that if she did not accept their advances, they would accuse her of adultery. Susanna refused to submit and was thus brought before the people to be accused and put to death on the false testimony of the two elders. A young man, called Daniel,<sup>62</sup> came to her defense and proved the elders had borne false witness. The two elders then suffered the same death they would have carried out on Susanna. Since this story was well known at the time,<sup>63</sup> it is quite possible the accusers were reminded of the story either by what Jesus had said to them or by what he wrote. This would be especially true if, as Derrett has suggested, Jesus wrote words from Exodus 23:7 on the ground, since this is the very verse Daniel cites in obtaining Susanna's acquittal.<sup>64</sup> The story of Susanna might also come to mind if, as some have suggested, the accusers themselves were guilty of adultery.<sup>65</sup>

The fact that the accusers did not argue the point Jesus made confirms that Jesus was not making a statement regarding the appropriateness of capital punishment. Clearly, capital punishment was not the issue but rather the competence of the accusers to carry out the punishment. The fact that Jesus did not press for the death penalty in this case has more to do with a respect for due process than with the attitude of Jesus toward forgiveness or even capital punishment. If He meant to teach that stoning should no longer be practiced He could have said so and explained why. Instead, He focused on the procedure by which an adulteress would justifiably be put to death and reminded the accusers that the proper procedure was not being followed according to the law. They could not argue with this point and so dropped their stones and left, one by one, as the significance of what He said and wrote in the dust began to sink in.

The group of men who came to accuse an adulteress and to accuse Jesus left, finding themselves accused by their own consciences.

**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? (John 8:10)**

It is frustrating to all of us how our system of justice sometimes allows the guilty to go free. It appears the Jewish system of justice had the same problem. If the woman was guilty of adultery, why would Jesus let the woman go on a technicality? The example Jesus shows us is one not of ambivalence toward or defiance of the written law but one of utmost respect. The law required that those who served as witnesses and executioners should be competent in their duties. This point of law was so clear and so important that it was agreed upon by all those present — one who was guilty of a capital offense should be set free where no two people could competently stand against him or her.

**She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more. (John 8:11)**

It is significant to note that unlike other episodes with sinners (see e.g., Luke 7:36–50; Luke 23:34), Jesus did not offer the woman forgiveness. It would therefore be incorrect, as some have been, to cite this incident as an example of the divine forgiveness of God.<sup>66</sup> Although Christ will stand in final judgment, He chose not to pass judgment on the woman at this time. Instead, He admonished her to sin no more, mercifully allowing her time to prepare for that final judgment, which opportunity was not afforded her by the accusers. Of course, we may not know all the reasons He did not “condemn” the woman under the law. However, one reason seems clear at least: He did not condemn her because procedural requirements would not allow it. He was not a witness to the crime and so could not stand in condemnation, unlike a competent eyewitness.

**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. (John 8:12)**

Jesus stands as the light of the world in many ways. Often, His example is one of love and forgiveness. However, in the story of the woman taken in adultery, He shines in a different way. While we cannot be certain of exactly why the accusers left, the words and actions of Christ clearly provided the impetus to their departure. We do not know what He wrote on the ground, and we do not know what the men were thinking when

He said, “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.” However, we do know that, while He did not condemn the woman, He did not tell her that her sins were forgiven. As we try to make sense of these events, when viewed in the context of Jewish law, it is clearly not a story of repentance and forgiveness. It seems rather to be a story of commitment to order and procedure.

It is sometimes easy in the modern world to forget the importance of the procedural rules and safeguards of our own criminal justice system. As we in society pass judgment on the accused, we may find ourselves pointing an accusatory finger not only at those who are guilty, but also at those who defend the guilty. In this story, Christ can be seen as a light to those who have a commitment to due process of law, order, and those safeguards that make us more civilized. When viewed in this vein, this story serves not only as a statement that the wicked are unfit to serve in God’s system of justice, but also as a statement that the process of justice matters. To follow the example set in this story, we should be willing to follow the law both when it means the guilty will be punished and when it requires that the guilty are set free.<sup>67</sup>

*[The author wishes to thank John W. Welch and Matthew L. Bowen for their valuable feedback.]*

**Steve Densley, Jr.** is a Utah attorney (JD, Brigham Young University). He graduated with University Honors from BYU with a combined BA/MA in public policy and political science. He has published articles in the *Utah Bar Journal*, the *Journal of Law and Family Studies*, *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Faith and Scholarship*, and *Meridian Magazine*. He currently serves as executive vice president of *The Interpreter Foundation*. He was the executive vice president of *FairMormon* from 2013–15, a recipient of the *John Taylor Defender of the Faith Award*, and was a producer of *FairMormon’s* podcast when it twice won the *People’s Choice Award for Best Podcast in the Religion & Spirituality category*. He has served as an elders quorum president, high councilor, young men’s president, gospel doctrine teacher, and is currently the 1st counselor in his ward’s bishopric. He and his wife Heather have four children and one grandchild.

## Endnotes

- 1 Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (i–xii)* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 338.

- 2 This is suggested by Henry McKeating, "Sanctions Against Adultery in Ancient Israelite Society, With Some Reflections on Methodology in the Study of Old Testament Ethics," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 11 (March 1979): 58.
- 3 Compare Exodus 3:14 with John 8:58 where the term "I am" used in Greek is the same word the Septuagint uses in Exodus which is the way Jehovah identifies Himself. See *The Holy Bible* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1988) 1343n58b. See also, John 1:1.
- 4 J. Blinzler, "Die Strafe für Ehebruch in Bibel und Halacha zur Auslegung von Joh. viii 5," *New Testament Studies* 4 (1957–58), 32–47, quoted in Brown, *Gospel According to John*, 333.
- 5 Kevin G. Smith, "Adultery, Divorce, and Eldership," *Conspectus: The Journal of the South African Theological Seminary*, 16, no. 09 (September 2013): 65.
- 6 See e.g., Scott J. Kaczorowski, "The Pericope of the Woman Caught in Adultery: An Inspired Text Inserted into an Inspired Text?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 61/2 (2018): 321–337; Brown, *Gospel According to John*, 91–96. Metzger and Ehrman note: "The earliest Greek manuscript known to contain the passage is Codex Bezae, of the fifth century, which is joined by several Old Latin manuscripts (*aur, c, e, f, f2, j, r1*)." Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th Ed. (New York, Oxford University Press, 2005), 319–20. They also recognize the anomalies raised by the pericope. It was absent from a large number of diverse manuscripts, no Greek Church Father for 1,000 years after Christ referred to the passage as being part of the fourth Gospel, the style and vocabulary differ from the rest of the Gospel of John, etc. Metzger has observed that the story shows strong signs of historical veracity. See Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, (New York: United Bible Societies, 1975), 220. Yet, Metzger and Ehrman also find that "the case against its being of Johannine authorship appears to be conclusive." Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament*, 320. This suggests the possibility of an authentic story that was not authored by John.

In contrast, Heil argued that there is strong linguistic and literary evidence that supports the conclusion that the story was original



to Gospel of John. John Paul Heil, “The Story of Jesus and the Adulteress (John 7:53–8:11) Reconsidered,” *Biblica* 72 (1991): 182–91. Wallace responds to Heil by arguing that Heil’s literary arguments usually work against themselves\*\* and that the external evidence that the pericope was a latter interpolation into the Gospel of John is overwhelming. Daniel B. Wallace, “Reconsidering ‘The Story of Jesus and the Adulteress Reconsidered’” *New Testament Studies*, 39 (1993): 290–96.

- 7 Wayment writes, “The earliest manuscripts of the New Testament omit this verse and John 8:1–11. Some manuscripts place the story of the woman caught in adultery at John 7:36, after John 21:25, or after Luke 21:38. The story appears to have strong external support that it originated with Jesus, but it may not have originally been placed here in the Gospel of John or even to have been written by the author of the Fourth Gospel. It is placed in double brackets [in Wayment’s translation] to indicate that it has questionable textual support, but it is included in the text because it has a reasonable likelihood of describing a historical event from the life of Jesus.” Thomas A. Wayment, trans., *The New Testament: A Translation for Latter-day Saints: A Study Bible* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2019), 181.

Some evidence exists that may lead us to conclude that while the story may not have originally been in the Gospel of John, it may nevertheless be authentic. For example, Knust noted that “the *pericope adulterae*, or some version of it, was perceived to be ‘gospel’ — in the sense of ‘a good story about Jesus’ — by the late second century, whether or not it was known from a written Gospel. By the fourth century, the *pericope adulterae* appears as a regular proof-text among Latin-speaking Christians.” Jennifer Wright Knust, “Early Christian Re-Writing and the History of the *Pericope Adulterae*,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 14:4 (2006): 489. Knust added, “The story remained less known in Greek Christian traditions, though it appears in a commentary of Didymus the Blind, is depicted on a few fifth- and sixth-century Egyptian pyxides, and is discussed in the writings of one anonymous sixth-century Greek chronicler.” Knust, “Early Christian Re-Writing,” 490. While perhaps not original to the Gospel of John, there is some evidence that it may have been included in the Gospel of the Hebrews. “According to Eusebius, Papias, a second-century bishop of Hierapolis, knew a story involving a woman of sins before the

Lord, a story that Eusebius (and maybe Papias?) also found in the *Gospel according to the Hebrews*. Eusebius writes that “[Papias] has put forth also another story concerning a woman falsely accused of many sins before the Lord, which is contained in the Gospel according to the Hebrews.” Knust, “Early Christian Re-Writing,” 495. Of course, the *pericope adulterae* in John involves a single sin, and there is no indication in the text that she had been falsely accused. So this may be referring to a different story, or perhaps Eusebius or Papias remembered it incorrectly.

Interestingly, Didymus the Blind described a story “in certain gospels” of a woman “condemned by the Jews for a sin” who was taken before the Savior to be stoned. Christ is quoted as saying, “He who has not sinned, let that one take a stone and cast it.” Knust, “Early Christian Re-Writing,” 499–500. This sounds very much like the story in John. Scholars are unsure of what is meant by the phrase “in certain gospels” and debate whether Didymus meant various copies of John, or that he found it in various gospels perhaps including John and the *Gospel according to the Hebrews*. Knust, “Early Christian Re-Writing,” fn. 47. In any event, there is reason to believe that the story was circulating among the believers fairly early and certainly before it appeared in the Codex Bezae.

J. Duncan M. Derrett suggests that one reason the story may not have been included in some of the early texts was that it may have been offensive to some who would rather not give the impression that Christ was lenient toward sin. See J. Duncan M. Derrett, “Law in the New Testament: The Story of the Woman Taken in Adultery,” *New Testament Studies* 10 (1963), 1–2.

- 8 Derrett, “Law in the New Testament,” 1–26.
- 9 Charles P. Baylis, “The Woman Caught in Adultery: A Test of Jesus as the Greater Prophet,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 146 (1989): 176–77.
- 10 Perhaps this is evidence of the authenticity of the story and of its correct placement in the Gospel of John.
- 11 Some have challenged the authenticity of the story because nowhere else in John does the writer specifically point out that Jesus sat down to teach. However, instead of discrediting the story, the fact that sitting was the usual rabbinic custom makes the episode appear more authentic. For further discussion of this

- point, see Zane Hodges, "The Woman Taken in Adultery (John 7:53–8:11): Exposition," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137 (1980), 43.
- 12 James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson), 1181.
  - 13 Derrett, "Law in the New Testament," 4. Some, however, have speculated that she was not married but betrothed. The reason for this speculation is that Deuteronomy 22:23 specifies stoning as the punishment for a woman betrothed who has intercourse with a man inside the city boundaries. However, the unchaste actions of a betrothed woman are nowhere called "adultery." The Hebrew word for adultery, *na'aph*, referred to a woman who had broken wedlock (Strong, *Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, 75). And while stoning is specifically mentioned in Deuteronomy as the punishment for a betrothed woman, and the method of death for a married woman is not specified, this does not mean a married woman could not also have been put to death by stoning. Strangulation was at one point adopted as the punishment for adultery, but this took place after the time of Jesus (see Blinzler, "Strafe für Ehebruch in Bibel," 32–47, quoted in Brown, *Gospel According to John*, 333). It therefore seems clear that the woman here was married.
  - 14 *Ibid.*, 4–5.
  - 15 "Morris notes that the word 'caught' properly denoted 'caught in the act of stealing,' but came to be used of other offenses. It left no room for doubt [that the adulterous woman was caught in the act]." Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1971), 887, quoted in Baylis, "Woman Caught in Adultery," 177n20. See also Randolph O. Yeager, *The Renaissance New Testament*, (Bretna, LA: Pelican Publishing, 1981), 6:153.
  - 16 Of course, the story of Susanna and the Elders, discussed below, in which Jewish elders falsely accuse a young woman of sexual impropriety, provides a counter example.
  - 17 Z. Frankel, *Der gerichtliche Beweis nach mosaisch-talmudischem Rechte. Ein Beitrag zur Kenntniss des mosaischtalmudischen Criminal- und Civil-rechts* (Berlin, 1846), 121, 285, cited in Derrett, "Law in the New Testament," 4n5.
  - 18 *Ibid.*, 116, cited in Derrett, "Law in the New Testament," 4n7.

- 19 Hiring witnesses in this way is referred to in Ket. 46a.
- 20 Derrett, "Law in the New Testament," 7. Derrett points out that the possibility of an adulterer bribing a husband occurs in Proverbs 6:32–35: "He will not regard any ransom; neither will he rest content, though thou givest many gifts."
- 21 See the discussion of the "law of jealousies" below.
- 22 Derrett, "Law in the New Testament," 11; Blinzler, "Strafe für Ehebruch in Bibel," 32–47, quoted in Brown, *Gospel According to John*, 333. But see McKeating, "Sanctions Against Adultery," 58. Although McKeating does not dispute that stoning existed in the law as an option, he does not believe the Jews during the time of Jesus intended to carry out the death penalty against the woman taken in adultery. McKeating makes the point that "there is no recorded instance, in the whole of Jewish narrative literature of the biblical period, of anyone actually being put to death for adultery." However, that there is no such recorded instance may only point to the difficulty of complying with the strictness of the law: it is nearly impossible to find two competent witnesses.
- 23 See also, Raymond Westbrook, "Adultery in Ancient Near Eastern Law," *Revue Biblique* 97:4 (1990): 558; Arnold A. Anderson, "Law in Old Israel: Laws Concerning Adultery," in *Law and Religion*, ed. Barnabas Lindars (Cambridge, UK: James Clarke., 1988), 16.
- 24 The purpose of this seemed to be that it showed the husband was no longer responsible for the care of his wife. See Anthony Phillips, *Ancient Israel's Criminal Law: A New Approach to the Decalogue* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 111. This punishment for adultery, apparently used in conjunction with divorce, was common in ancient near eastern countries. R. Gordis, "Hosea's Marriage and Message: A New Approach," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 25 (1954): 20n30a, quoted in McKeating, "Sanctions Against Adultery," 61; Westbrook, "Adultery in Ancient Law," 559–62.
- 25 Robert Gordis, "On Adultery in Biblical and Babylonian Law — A Note," *Judaism* 33 (1984): 211.
- 26 Westbrook states: "The 'death penalty' imposed by the codes, biblical and cuneiform, is therefore nothing more than the limit imposed in principle on the husband's right to revenge by the courts. It could in particular circumstances be set lower."

Westbrook, "Adultery in Ancient Near Eastern Law," 565. That capital punishment existed in the legal codes is not disputed. Whether the Jews were able to carry out the punishment is disputed as noted below (see *infra* note 36).

- 27 Of course, if death were not the correct punishment for an adulteress, that the accusers were threatening to use such a method adds credence to the idea that the accusers were not acting according to correct procedure.
- 28 It is unclear exactly what is meant by this curse. However, the Hebrew words for thigh (*yarek*) and belly (*bitnek*) might more clearly be translated as "reproductive organs" and "womb." See Alice Bach, "Good to the Last Drop: Viewing the Sotah (Numbers 5:11–31) as the Glass Half Empty and Wondering How to View it Half Full," in *The New Literary criticism and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. J. Cheryl Exum and David J.A. Clines, 26–54. The translation of these words suggests that, while an innocent woman would conceive, one guilty of adultery would lose the ability to procreate; a fitting punishment for one who has allowed her place of procreation to be violated.

The medical condition being described in these verses has been identified as a prolapsed uterus. "In this condition, which may occur after multiple pregnancies, the pelvic floor (weakened by the pregnancies) collapses, and the uterus literally falls down. It may lodge in the vagina, or it may actually fall out of the body through the vagina. If it does so, it becomes edematous and swells up like a balloon. Conception becomes impossible, and the woman's procreative life has effectively ended." Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "The Strange Case of the Suspected Sotah (Numbers V 11–31)," *Vetus Testamentum* 34 (1984): 20–21.

- 29 See Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "The Trial Before God of an Accused Adulteress," *Bible Review* 2:3 (1986): 49.
- 30 Basically, a man could divorce his wife for any reason or no reason at all. However, a purely arbitrary divorce might have been condemned by public opinion. Ze'ev W. Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times*, 2nd ed. (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2001), 152.
- 31 Cause for divorce could be immodest conduct in which case the man may keep the dowry and need pay no compensation.

- Raymond Westbrook, "Biblical Law" in *An Introduction to the History and Sources of Jewish Law*, ed. N.S. Hecht et. al. (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1996) 14.
- 32 Derrett, "Law in the New Testament," 6.
- 33 Daniela Piattelli and Bernard S. Jackson, "Jewish Law During the Second Temple Period," in *An Introduction to the History and Sources of Jewish Law*, ed. N.S. Hecht, B.S. Jackson, S.M. Passamanek, D. Piatelli, A.M. Rabello (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1996), 48.
- 34 John Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1989) 3:329.
- 35 Derrett, "Law in the New Testament," 11n1.
- 36 Ibid., 10. However, there is dispute over this point. The Gospel of John (18:31) and the Jerusalem Talmud both say that during this time, the Jewish court was not able to use the death penalty. However, the Babylonian Talmud says capital cases were not taken away until AD 70. Piattelli and Jackson, "Jewish Law," 38. Also, Matthew 26:66 and Mark 14:64 both seem to presuppose the ability of the court to carry out a capital sentence. However, the fact that the Sanhedrin judged him to be "guilty of death" (Mark 14:64 and Matthew 26:66) may be understood as an exception within the context of the accusation that Christ said he would destroy the temple (Mark 14:58 and Matthew 26:61). Sherwin-White explains that "as the evidence stands, the only exception to the general rule that the municipal authorities of the Empire were refused capital jurisdiction is that the Sanhedrin possessed certain powers of this sort in connexion with the maintenance of public order the Temple area. Anything else should either belong to the jurisdiction of the procurator or require his sanction." A.N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament*, (Oxford, UK: University Press, 1963), 42.
- 37 But see Brad H. Young, "'Save the Adulteress!' Ancient Jewish *Responsa* in the Gospels?" *New Testament Studies* 41 (1995): 59–70 (arguing that the story describes an ancient Jewish *responsum* in which the Pharisees, who opposed the death penalty, came to Jesus looking for an interpretation of the law that would allow them to save the adulteress from capital punishment). Young's analysis assumes innocent intent on the part of the Pharisees (no mention

is made of the scribes) and fails to account for the evidence indicating the impure motives of the accusers. Also, that they may have opposed the death penalty is irrelevant if their true intention was to trap Jesus. Furthermore, Young's interpretation depends heavily upon verse 6a as an interpolation. While it is possible the statement was added to the pericope at a later date, this does not mean the statement is not a valid interpretation of what the intent of the accusers actually was. And as Hodges has pointed out, the phrase "this they said, tempting him" (touto δε elegov peirazouteξ αυtov) is a phrase found nowhere else in the New Testament. However, a nearly identical phrase is found in John 6:6, "this they said to prove him." (touto δε elegev peirazw αυtov). This fact is strong evidence for the authenticity of both the phrase and the narrative. Hodges, "The Woman Taken in Adultery," 44.

- 38 However, as Young points out, "If what Jesus wrote in the dirt was so integral to the resolution of the conflict, the exact words would have been recorded in the narrative." Young, "Save the Adulteress!" 69.
- 39 Jennifer Knust and Tommy Wasserman, "Earth Accuses Earth: Tracing What Jesus Wrote on the Ground," *Harvard Theological Review* 103:4 (2010): 416.
- 40 Ibid., 408.
- 41 Derrett, "Law in the New Testament," 18.
- 42 Ibid., 18–19.
- 43 Ibid., 19 quoting Exodus 23:1b.
- 44 Ibid., 19n6.
- 45 Ibid., 21. Of course, Christ may also have simply been doodling on the ground. See Knust and Wasserman, "Earth Accuses Earth," 411, citing Paul Foster, "Educating Jesus: The Search for a Plausible Context," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 4 (2006) 7–33, at 20–21; Brown, *Gospel According to John*, 334.
- 46 Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "The Trial Before God," 49.
- 47 This connection is made by Hodges "The Woman Taken in Adultery," 46 and Baylis, "Woman Caught in Adultery," 180.
- 48 Derrett, "Law in the New Testament," 4.

- 49 Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 1980, quoted in Baylis, "Woman Caught in Adultery," 181.
- 50 *The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* 4:478–87, quoted in Baylis, "Woman Caught in Adultery," 181n35.
- 51 *M. Avot* 1:9. [https://www.sefaria.org/Pirkei\\_Avot.1?lang=bi](https://www.sefaria.org/Pirkei_Avot.1?lang=bi).
- 52 This connection is suggested by Lightfoot, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 329.
- 53 Hodges, "The Woman Taken in Adultery," 47n15.
- 54 Derrett pointed out that, like Jesus, various sects of the time believed an effort should be made to reform the sinner before the offender was condemned on the evidence of two witnesses. See, Derrett, "Law in the New Testament," 7n1.
- 55 Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 222. These manuscripts included U, II, 73, 331, 364, 700, 782, 1592, and armms.
- 56 Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament*, 320.
- 57 Lightfoot, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 327.
- 58 Derrett, "Law in the New Testament," 23.
- 59 *Ibid.*, 23n3.
- 60 Hodges points out that "the 'finger' of God is only *explicitly* referred to in connection with the *first* writing (Exodus 31:18). And so also here, the Lord's finger is referred to only in the first instance (8:6)!" Hodges, "The Woman Taken in Adultery," 51n14.
- 61 The connection between these two stories dates to as early as the fifth century when the Catholic church began to use them for the Saturday Mass after the third Sunday in Lent. Knust and Wasserman, "Earth Accuses Earth," 412.
- 62 It is unclear whether this is the Daniel of the Old Testament, however, the History of Susanna was at one time included in the book of Daniel. Derrett, "Law in the New Testament," 24n5.
- 63 Derrett, "Law in the New Testament," 26.
- 64 This was pointed out by Brown, *Gospel According to John*, 334 citing Susanna 53.
- 65 Lightfoot, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 329.



- 66 See e.g., J. Denny Weaver, "Forgiveness and (non) violence: the atonement connections," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 83.2 (April 2009): 319–39.
- 67 For a discussion of this principle, which includes a reference to the story of the woman taken in adultery, see Thomas L. Shaffer, "Should a Christian Lawyer Serve the Guilty?" *Georgia Law Review* 23, no.2 (1989): 1021–34.

