

The Character of Jesus 42
The Woman Caught in Adultery
John 8:1 – 12
Convicting Legalism

- Characteristic: Convicting legalism
 - This event occurred during the Feast of Tabernacles (7:2, 14). Many faithful Jews would be in town for the 8-day feast. A portion of one's tithe was converted to cash, brought to Jerusalem, and converted back into food for the week-long festivities (Deuteronomy 14:24).
 - (3 – 6) Likely, a trial was ongoing concerning this woman. The leaders saw this case as an opportunity to make Jesus look bad in front of the crowd. The penalty for both parties was death (Leviticus 20:10). This assumes both were married or that, if the crime had been committed in the city, she did not cry for help (Deuteronomy 22:22 – 30). The elders of the town were to try the case (Deuteronomy 19:12), so the assumption is that the alleged crime took place in Jerusalem.
 - (6) What Jesus wrote is irrelevant. Perhaps He was just letting the tension rise.
 - (7) When Jesus did not reply immediately, the Jewish leaders repeatedly asked for a response. According to the Law, the accusers must cast the first stone, then the rest of the community joined in (Deuteronomy 17:7). Likely, the accusers from the trial had not come along, as they are not mentioned. At the least, actually executing this woman would have required permission from Pilate (John 18:31), as all capital cases had to be judged by the Roman governor. Jesus' reference to "without sin" was not about being sinless, or the entire judicial system of the Law would fall apart. Rather, He was exposing the hypocrisy of the situation: probable lack of witnesses, no permission from the Roman governor, and not Jesus' job (Luke 12:14, "Who made Me a judge or arbitrator over you?").
 - (8 – 9) Jesus let them drift away without the further ignominy of being stared down. The original crowd seems to still be watching.
 - (10 – 11) Jesus did not release her from the Law, but made an obvious comment that the required accusers were not present, so she could not be convicted. Then He added, "And sin no more," acknowledging that she had been guilty and got away with it, that she should think about this near-death experience and resolve not to be so foolish again.
 - (12) The application to the crowd was that what they had witnessed was darkness, whereas He was light. The darkness was in the woman's and the leaders' behaviors. Jesus had merely cast some light on them.
- Application: Convicting legalism
 - Again, this is not about needing to be sinless to give testimony or execute justice. Setting aside justice is inconsistent (not perfect). Sin is still sin and is incompatible with godliness. We need to seek to fix root causes rather than being content with being forgiven failures.
 - Legalism generally isolates a practice from all else, ignoring that other problems have been created by the conclusions. Modern examples:
 - The doctrine known as The Authority of the Scriptures must arbitrarily separate commands, examples, and necessary inferences into the expedient and the essential.
 - Disfellowshipping rarely cares about fixing the root cause, just evicting the guilty.
 - The Scriptures are about how to develop faith, not about benchmarks for acceptability.
 - Legalism is heartless. Not that convictions are unchristian, rather these leaders ignored the dignity of judicial proceedings just to create an embarrassing situation. Modern examples:

- Confessing sins to the group.
 - Requiring that people fix their behaviors before being given access to the power to do it.
 - Focusing on where we fall short instead of on where the Spirit has caused us to overcome.
- Shedding light on legalism destroys it. But it takes some thought. Bad doctrines were created by smart people, so they sometimes are difficult to unravel.