



Fake To Real: The Woman Caught In Adultery

BY Carol Reid

This may be one of those PG-13 scenes in the Scripture—not one you teach in children’s church! But in our real life, everyday experiences of the Christian faith, we need to see how Jesus interacted with a sinner. We need to see it because we also rub shoulders with sinners, and we often see one in the mirror.

This truth from Scripture is not fake news. It is real, solid bedrock to show us Jesus and His great love for sinners.

The Scripture Text: Fake or Real?

Read John 8:1–11. Imagine you are observing this scene in the Scriptures. List the emotions you might feel.

The first question is whether this passage, John 8:1–11, is inspired. It is not included in the earliest Greek manuscripts of John; in other early copies, it shifts around in placement. So, is this story real? Did it happen this way?

God’s Word has been carefully, painstakingly preserved, and copied carefully by scribes. Not one word of His promises has failed. His truth endures forever and never fades. If these verses were not

inspired, they would have at least been included for our instruction. They fit with the nature of Jesus and the rest of Scripture. The God who protects His Word would not allow falsehood to infiltrate it. We can assume that New Testament scribes inserted the story after verifying it.

Why would it be inserted in later manuscripts but not the oldest ones? You can probably imagine dozens of scenarios that allow for that—and none of them assume falsehood. Was the story so oft-repeated and well-loved that the scribes later began to incorporate it? Any reason to include it points to the wisdom of Jesus in battling the sinful pride of those who opposed Him. Let’s assume that the story is accurate and that God provided it for us.

The Dilemma: Fake or Real?

In Leviticus 20:10, what does the Law describe as the punishment for committing adultery?

In Malachi 3:5, what does the Lord say to those who committed adultery? Judging by the other offenses on the list, how serious is it to break the marriage bond?

What does the New Testament state about the conse-

quences for those who commit adultery? (See Galatians 5:19–21; Hebrews 13:4; 1 Corinthians 6:9–10.)

Jesus was teaching at the synagogue, surrounded by a large crowd. They were moving deeply into His message when suddenly the sermon was interrupted by another lesson—one even more memorable. In came a group of religious professionals, the scribes and Pharisees, dragging a woman.

Without question, she was guilty. No one could have said otherwise. She was taken in the very act of committing adultery. She could have lost her life. Jesus could have upheld the letter of the Old Testament Law and thrown the first stone.

In the Law, the punishment for breaking the marriage vow was severe. This was no late-night-television punch line. This was no whisper-to-your-neighbor gossip. This was a public offense with the death penalty.

Here's the truth: God is still concerned about the sanctity of marriage. He still intends it to be a lifetime covenant between a man and a woman. He instituted it as the closest of all earthly bonds, the two becoming one, the foundational unit of society for the protection of our families. In His Word, God still maintains that marriage and the marriage relationship are holy (Hebrews 13:4). The seventh of the Ten Commandments is the prohibition against adultery. Adultery is still offensive to Him, and God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). We are not godly when we minimize its damage. In the books we read and the media we watch, we must be cautious of our tolerance of it. We must be ever on guard for our own temptation and rationalization. But thankfully, the Lord of grace intervened with mercy and forgiveness for this woman—and for all who will turn to Him.

Their Motives: Fake or Real?

How does John 8:6 describe the motives of the scribes and Pharisees?

Who are some of the others who tried to trip Jesus up with difficult questions or situations? What did they

ask Him?

Mark 12:13–17

Mark 12:18–27

Mark 12:28–31

The scribes and Pharisees hauled her in—not out of concern for the Old Testament Law or protection for the institution of marriage. They thought Jesus would look like an enemy of the Law or a friend of sinners; either would be offensive to the Jewish pub-



lic. In their effort to trick Jesus, this woman was used as an expendable pawn. They set her up and subjected her to public ridicule.

Consider for a moment a further injustice. Where was the man? Not to be indelicate, but if she were caught in the act of adultery, should not two people

have been brought before Jesus? We see only the woman—perhaps clutching the bedsheets around herself, all eyes on her, with no dignity or pretense left. Had she been further crushed by a lover who deserted her to this public scrutiny and accusation?

And to you, stranded on the judgment block of public opinion, caught in your sins with no way to crawl out, feeling the shame and guilt, and deserving punishment, Jesus knows the motives of your accusers, too. He warns you to stop your ears to the lies of the



Devil and others who would accuse you. Put off your shame and hear His words of grace. He is on your side. You are forgiven. You are chosen. You are precious to Him.

Writing in the Dirt: Fake or Real?

Instead of a verbal response, what did Jesus do? (John 8:6, 8).

What did He tell the scribes and Pharisees (verse 7)?

This is the only time the Scripture records Jesus writing. What do you think He wrote?

Here are some theories from legend and speculation:

- He doodled in the dirt to patiently buy time and deescalate the situation. Stooping put Him in a humble position—not challenging or confronting the accusers, but probably on the same level as the accused woman.
- He wrote Scripture verses or maxims about judgment.
- He wrote what He would speak next to the accusers as sort of a court record.
- He wrote the names of the accusers or listed their sins.

No matter what, His patient answer helped to turn away wrath (Proverbs 15:1). How can delaying a response help you practice self-control and answer wisely?

(Side study: Daniel 5:1–31 records another time God wrote. Describe the scene and interpretation of His handwriting.)

You'd think it was all about her—and her sin. But Jesus took her story and turned it upside down. Now it became about her accusers and their sin. He confronted their false pride and their better-than-thou attitudes. The One, Who was without sin, looked into their hearts, and wrote in the dirt, and one by one, the accusers left. No one could have anticipated how the Teacher would respond to their accusations, but this was certainly not the response the scribes and Pharisees desired.

Take heed when you are confronting the faults of others. It is natural for us to see ourselves in a better light, to look down our noses, or to feel above 'their'

temptations. Galatians 6:1 requires a spirit of meekness, careful thoughtfulness, and a goal of reconciliation and restoration. We must see the sins of others from a position of humility.

What Jesus Told Her—Fake or Real?

If you are a child of God, you can find your name in His journal. What do these verses tell you about what He has written about you?

Psalm 139:16–18

Colossians 2:13–14

Revelation 21:27

We don't even know her name. Her sin describes her. "That woman, you know. The one who . . ." Her back story is unknown to us. We have no idea what brought her to the adulterous encounter.

She spoke only one short sentence, but she addressed Jesus as Lord. She understood His compassionate words, making no excuses for her sin. In repentance, facing Jesus was much easier than facing the religious leaders who brought her to Him.

Yes, He is a righteous, holy God who is completely without sin. But He is also a compassionate God who does not want to sentence us as we deserve. He offers forgiveness and peace, providing a way for this woman and for us to be justified and counted as righteous. Instead of condemnation, He offers salvation (John 3:17). Instead of Hell, He offers Heaven. Instead of tumult, He offers peace.

It doesn't matter if the scribes and Pharisees or you or anyone else knew her name—Jesus knew it. And with her repentance, He wrote her name in His Book of Life.

Possibility for Change: Real or Fake?

Jesus pronounced others as free from sin after He confronted them. Who were the people in these examples?

Luke 5:28

Luke 7:48

Luke 8:48

Mark 5:34

In John 5:14, Jesus' instructions to the blind man He had healed were the same as to the woman in John 8. What did He tell the man who was healed?

Because of God's grace and forgiveness, we can put our sinful past behind us. What promise does Romans 8:1 give us?

Some have said that shame serves a helpful purpose, but it is not meant to be a permanent condition. Jesus did not minimize the woman's sin or condone her actions; He required repentance and change. But He gave her hope that her future would not be like her past. Her past would not determine her future. He gave her forgiveness and instructed her to sin no more.

Whatever others see, Jesus sees your heart. He can see through self-righteous pride or self-condemning despair. He can see through judgmental accusations as well as depression and discouragement. His goal is not to punish you but to restore you.

Gently, lovingly, Jesus reaches out to every one of us to say, "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more." Sit with that truth for a moment. God's mercy and grace do not give us what we deserve. Instead, we have a fresh start, a new beginning. His words welcome us to freedom from sin and judgment, restoration into His family, peace, and joy. You haven't gone too far; you haven't sunk too low; you haven't messed up too much. Like the woman caught in adultery, He invites you to come to Him, then go and sin no more. *W*

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