

“Through the Bible in a Year with Pastor Don and the FBC Family”

Feb. 21, 2016

- Leviticus 9-11 – The public sacrificial system (9-10); clean & unclean animals (11).
- John 7:53-8:11 – The woman caught in adultery.
- Song of Solomon 7:1-2– Solomon praises the Shulamite’s beauty.

Commentary:

1. Leviticus 9-11. In chapter 10 we have the story of divine punishment of the sin unto death, which is connected with the preceding chapter by a simple ‘and.’ Therefore, it is safe to conclude that Nadab and Abihu ‘offered strange fire,’ immediately after the fire from Jehovah had consumed the appointed sacrifice. Their sin was aggravated by the time of its being committed. The sin was further aggravated by the sinners being priests, who were doubly obliged to strict adherence to the instituted ritual. If they set an example of flagrant violation, what would that teach the people? Moreover, all precepts are God’s uttered will, and all disobedience is rebellion against Him. The designation of ‘strange fire’ refers to fire not taken from the altar.

What was their sin in thus offering it? Plainly, the narrative points to the essence of the crime in calling it ‘fire which He had not commanded.’ So, their crime was in tampering with the appointed order which but a week before they had been consecrated to conserve and administer—they were demonstrating self-will in the worship of God. They were arrogating authority to



themselves the right to cut and carve up God’s mandates at their whim. Is this not what we find today in modern forms of Christianity? How much of so-called the Christian spiritual life today glows with self-will? When we seek to worship God for what we can get, when we rush into His presence with hot, eager desires which we have not subordinated to His will, we are burning ‘strange fire which He has not commanded. The Christian life is about growing in love of God and drawing nearer and nearer to Him as we grow liker and liker to Jesus Christ. Daily worship of God is not about Him solving our temporal problems as typified grossly in the prosperity movement and subtly in Bible and doctrinal movements. This does not mean that trusting God by applying His promises to the problems of life is invalid in itself. However, it is a strange fire when the goal is to have the peace for the sake of peace. The difficulties of our lives are not given *primarily* to get us to trust and so experience His

peace. The difficulties of our lives are given to teach us to love Him by trusting Him no matter the outcome. There is a vast difference between a believer who has been told he has cancer and claims promises *for the purpose of experiencing peace* and a believer who understands that the cancer is perhaps God's best means to humble him so can draw near to God and by drawing near experience the peace that only God gives by giving Himself. The former is just another strange fire cloaked with Bible verses for psychological, pragmatic, and temporal reasons that really have little to do with really growing in greater love for God.

2. John 7:53-8:11. While many biblical scholars do not accept the story of the woman caught in adultery as part of the Word of God, I (along with scholar Zane Hodges do) for several reasons, which the constraints of this 'through the Bible in a year' series does not permit. I will just say that this part of Scripture has been considered as part of the canon of Scripture both by orthodox Protestants as well as Roman Catholics. The story of the woman caught in adultery is a magnificent example of Jesus toughness in dealing with His critics and at the same time dealing

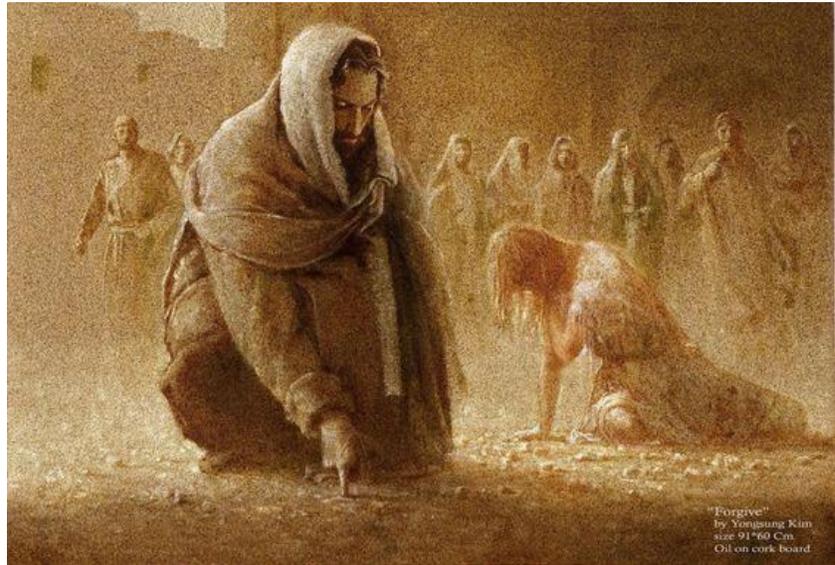
graciously with someone in need. Moreover, it is a story in which anyone burdened by sin and guilt can find consolation and yet recognize that moral standards are not diminished by the grace and mercy of God. The scribes and Pharisees are said to have brought a woman seized in the



act of adultery before Jesus to determine how He would judge her. These legalists were undoubtedly seeking to test Jesus' skill of decision making and His conformity to orthodoxy because they set out their basic perspective by referring to a precedent from Moses, namely, that the woman should be stoned. The story raises a number of questions. What happened to the man in the story? Why was he not brought before Jesus? Did he escape? Was he merely a plant by a vengeful husband? or by a group seeking to condemn Jesus? Also, was the husband among the accusers? What was the nature of the woman's matrimonial state? Was she married or merely engaged? What law is being cited and what was the state of the law in Jesus' day? Whose responsibility was it to execute punishment? In the Torah stoning was the punishment designated for the breach of a betrothal or engagement. And in such a case *both the man and the engaged woman* were to be put to death by stoning (Deut. 22:23–24). In the case of a married woman's unfaithfulness both the woman and the guilty man were likewise to be put to death, but the method of death remained unspecified (cf. Lev 20:10; Deut. 22:22). The bringing of the woman to Jesus was obviously an attempt at entrapment (*peirazein*, 8:6). Given the context, one cannot help but wonder if the legalists when addressing Jesus as "Teacher" (*didaskale*, 8:4) were not beginning their trap by approaching

Him with insincere politeness. The story has all the features of a set-up where only the poor woman is presented (not her partner) and the parameters are defined in such a way that mercy and justice are made to be opposing principles. To choose either one would call for the condemnation of Jesus because He would be viewed on the one hand of being against the law of Moses and on the other of advocating mob action involving capital punishment. The legalists probably thought they had Jesus on the horns of a dilemma, as they thought they caught Him in the question about taxes (cf. Matt 22:17; Mark 12:14; Luke 20:20). Moreover, stoning for adultery probably was not used much in the time of Jesus. The old law was quite unpopular with the people.

Enforcement of such ethical standards by severe punishment patterns was quite selective at best. And given the Roman jurisdiction in capital matters, it was much easier to sue for a Jewish divorce than to break the Roman Peace directive in mob violence. Instead of falling into the trap of answering them, Jesus stooped down and used his finger to write or draw (*katagraphein* at



8:6 and *graphein* at 8:8) on the ground (*ge*). What did He write or draw? There have certainly been many theories. The first writing or drawing (8:6) of Jesus apparently did not have the desired effect because the text says that the accusers persisted (*epimenein*, 8:7) in their statements. So Jesus arose and firmly announced his verdict. It was hardly what they expected, but it was potent. The one who was sinless, He said, could throw the first stone. According to the Torah (Deut 17:7), the actual witnesses were responsible for casting the first stones. But Jesus went beyond the usual interpretation of that prescription and demanded of the accusing witnesses that they themselves not be in breach of God-given precepts, namely, that they be without sin. The standard Jesus demanded was that authentic accusers themselves not be subject to accusation. When Jesus uttered this startling declaration, He returned to his writing in the dirt. In reflecting on this declaration of Jesus, it is imperative to remember two matters. First, one must not overgeneralize and argue that Jesus was ruling out a critical evaluation of sin (8:11; cf. 5:14; 8:21, 24; 9:41; 15:22; 16:8–9). Second, one must remember that the context here involved self-righteous men who were full of judgment and ready to destroy a woman for their own evil ends. Jesus saw through their self-righteousness and judged it for what it was. Religious people are thus here fully forewarned of the temptation to self-righteous judgment of others. We all need to cease and desist any and all activities involving the condemnation of others from a self-righteous “vantage” point. As Christ put it, we should first take the log out of our own eye before criticizing the speck in the eye of others (Matt. 7.3). Anytime we have a persistent negative attitude toward anyone, we can be sure that it is only because of logs stuck in our own eye—ungracious and unloving logs.

3. Song of Solomon 7:1-2. His praise of her beauty moves generally from bottom to top, the reverse of 4:1-5. Sandals are mentioned because they enhance the natural beauty of her feet. The comparison of her thighs (rather than “legs”) to jewels means only that they seem finely crafted; no actual description of their appearance is meant. The comparison of the navel to a goblet arises from its rounded shape and points to the fact that her body was as desirable and as intoxicating as wine (cf. 4:10). The comparison of her waist to a mound of wheat would be absurd if interpreted visually—I do not recommend

that you tell your wife that her belly is like a heap of wheat (like we have been studying, the meaning is not in the word). The meaning is in the reality that the word points to and in ancient times wheat was one of the main food sources in ancient Palestine (Deut. 32:14; 2 Sam. 4:6; 17:28). Thus his wife was both his “food” (wheat) and “drink” (wine) in the sense that her physical expressions of love nourished and satisfied him.

On the Glory Road,

Pastor Don

