

Did Jesus stone or enable stoning?

Let us read the story.

The Jewish leaders brought a woman caught in the act of adultery to Jesus. Read John 8 - New International Version (NIV)

1 Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

2 At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them.

3 The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group

4 and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery.

5 In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?"

6 They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger.

7 When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."

8 Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

9 At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there.

10 Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

11 "No one, sir," she said.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

COMMENT:

Jesus said, "If you want her stoned then fine but find somebody worthy to do so."

MAIN POINTS:

IT WAS A TRAP - THEY WANTED TO NAIL JESUS IF HE SAID MOSES LAW WAS WRONG

JESUS DOES NOT SAY HE FORGIVES HER

HE DOES NOT SAY SHE SHOULD NOT BE STONED ON PRINCIPLE

HE SAYS SHE SHOULD BE STONED BY WORTHY PEOPLE

HE COULD NOT SANCTION HER MURDER AS IT WAS IN THE TEMPLE AND AS SHE HAD NO TRIAL AND THUS STONING HER WAS AGAINST THE STONING REGULATIONS

THE STORY REINFORCES THE LEGITIMACY OF STONING WOMEN TO DEATH

AN ESSAY

Lazy people who know of Jesus guess that he saved a woman from being stoned to death for adultery. The Bible tells the story in John 8. God commanded his people in the Bible, in the law, to stone adulterous people to death without pity. The Jews brought a woman who committed adultery and was caught in the act to Jesus to see if he would tell them to go ahead. He said that only those of them who had no sin could stone her. They walked off and Jesus let her go.

The story allegedly says that Jesus condemned the sin not the sinner even though Moses' law said she should be condemned to death as a sinner. In fact, honest scholars admit that the story does say sinners should be condemned to death but the

problem is that everybody sins. That was why Jesus let her go. It was not about the principle but about the practicalities. The story cannot be used to argue that Jesus was so strongly pro-life that he abolished the killing laws.

Also, we are not told or cannot know all the circumstances. Jesus letting her go does not necessarily imply abolition of stoning. And if it did, it would be referring to her stoning being cancelled and would not mean that cancelling or abolishing stoning was now the policy for all sinners like her. You cannot argue from this individual case that Jesus wanted to save all adulterers from stoning.

"Jesus observed all of the [Jewish] Law" Dave Armstrong, *The One Minute Apologist*, Sophia Institute Press, Manchester, New Hampshire, 2007.

Christian, Matthew Henry "Christ neither found fault with the law, nor excused the prisoner's guilt; nor did he countenance the pretended zeal of the Pharisees."

"The thought is not that no human being has the right to execute another. No, the point is to say that they don't have to press charges this particular time. ...Jesus says he has no problem with it as long as the eager would-be executioners are quite sure they have the moral superiority to act as her judges." Blaming Jesus for Jehovah by Robert Price.

Jesus in Matthew 5 denies that he will alter the law but said he will fulfil it. His aim was the fulfilling the law for it came from God and is without error. If Jesus contradicted the law we must put that down to misinterpretation - it does not mean he meant to contradict it or that he thought contradicting it was okay.

Is the story a story of mercy? Let us assume it is for the purpose of argument. The story is adored by anti-capital punishment activists who cannot see that it only seemingly says Jesus gave mercy to a woman who in justice should have been stoned. Mercy upholds the law. A country that gives mercy to all on death row is not abolishing capital punishment but recognising it and just not implementing it. The capital punishment law is still upheld. Mercy only means that the judge is not able to give you what you really should get for some reason. Mercy reinforces the law as much as carrying the law out to the letter does and in a sense reinforces it even more. Mercy always retains the thinking of the law. If the law says she ought to die then mercy says she ought to die but she will be reminded of that and punished with that thought. Mercy and justice are meant to agree. Unjust mercy is not mercy at all.

Even the Church says that the woman Jesus "saved" from being stoned to death deserved to be stoned and should have been. Jesus's God - Jesus is God and the writer of the Bible ultimately according to core Christian doctrine - commanded stoning in his Bible. The Church says that the only reason she was not was because Jesus gave her mercy. That is extremist doctrine for nobody deserves that treatment or such a patronising passive aggressive "mercy". If somebody exaggerates what you deserve and then offers mercy that is not mercy but a farce. The Church has no right then to complain if some Catholics start stoning tomorrow. Strictly speaking, it was the men who were poised to stone her that saved her by walking away not Jesus. The story gives no hint that Jesus had any pity for the woman. That is unsurprising for the God of the law said pitying such was a sin.

They asked him if she should be stoned to death.

None did cast a stone.

They walked away.

Jesus told her he would not stone her and that she must not commit adultery again.

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG

William Lane Craig thinks that the brutal laws of the Bible really did come from God. But he says that does not mean they are for us today. Back then times were so godless and brutal that God had to make the best laws possible under the circumstances though those laws seem harsh to us.

First, the Bible says that God's book in which he wrote these laws, the Torah is perfect and ideal.

Second, the Torah never says that God was forced to make the laws.

Third, Craig is blaming the victims and is merely speculating.

Fourth, he is blaming the Israelites and saying they were so terrible that there was no option but to make laws for them that fell short of the ideal.

Fifth, what Bible verse has he got to back up his idea? None.

Jesus allegedly said that Moses wrote the divorce law for the Jews for they were too stubborn to live without it but it was not what God really wanted. But the law merely assumes that divorce was happening and tries to regulate it a bit but does not say that divorce is allowed. It does not mean that we can think the same about other laws. Adulterous people were not being stoned in Israel forcing God to regulate it. He did not regulate it. He simply commanded it. Religion says God has the right to tell you to kill specific people but here he is letting corrupt man decide who to kill! That does not sound like a God who is forced to make such laws for the people are so bad. You do not make laws like that that are to be implemented by uncivilised and corrupt and stubborn people. And people who are good at their core, not just people who do good things, do not make excuses for stuff like that. And if there is a God they have to answer for slandering him in the name of Christ.

Jesus was careful not to command that she not be stoned. That is significant and implies that the Church has the right to reinstate stoning.

We conclude that the story is about Jesus' support for killing the woman but the problem was that the people wanting to execute her were shown they should be stoned too. The story strongly reinforces the belief that Jesus Christ did not do away with killing adulterous people. And his permitting it if the circumstances were right means that even though the Roman Empire ruled the nation, the Jews had a moral right to continue with the executions. Some liberal Christians lie that the killing laws only applied to the Jews if they ruled themselves. Jesus strongly disagreed and rather than nudging the men to think about drowning her or something instead urged them to continue thinking she should be stoned if not by them. They left still wanting to stone her but unable. So much for the humane Jesus!

JP HOLDING

The theologian JP Holding says, "Jesus ... told the accusers that whichever one of them was sinless ought to start the stoning. A 'no, don't stone her', would not have challenged the power of the state; it would have challenged the authenticity and authority of the Old Testament law."

So he is clear that Jesus was not against the stoning for it was the stoners he had the problem with. And it shows he clearly did not want to challenge the authority of Old Testament law for he regarded it as infallible. If people want to think he was more concerned about the law as a cultural and religious law than her let them. But it seems the reason he was concerned not just because it was what he lived under but because he considered it to be God's infallible word.

APPENDIX

We are told by bleeding heart semi-Christians, "Jesus proved that God had revoked the capital laws of the Torah when he saved the adulteress from being stoned to death by a group of Jews though these laws required it - see John 8. When Jesus saved her it shows he revoked the death penalty in spite of the Law. He implied that the Law was evil for allowing sinners to kill sinners".

Christian books like *When Critics Ask* say that the passage does not support the proposal that Jesus was against capital punishment (page 415).

This is correct.

The reasons are as follows.

Jesus implies that the woman should be stoned when he said that if the accusers were not guilty of sin they could stone her for she was guilty. The Christians have to hold that he meant this for he could not deceive. Even if she had merely wanted to commit adultery but didn't carry it out physically he would have said the same.

Some say that the Jews could not execute under Jewish law but under Roman law for the latter was the law of the land. The Jews who sought to slay the woman did not obey the Law of Moses which demanded that both the guilty parties be brought before the people for trial and execution if guilty. Jesus would not have approved of the execution when it was planned only to trap him which does not mean he would oppose her being executed under any other different circumstances.

The Jews were wandering through different territories and different legal jurisdictions for they were a wandering people at the time God made the law of executing killers, homosexuals, adulterers and witches. This means the Law of killing has to be obeyed no matter what the jurisdictions think. The man who sinned with the woman might have been already dealt with or was to be dealt with later so the Law that both of them had to be brought before the people was obeyed – there is no reason to believe the Law would care if it were done at the one time or not. It is true that the people who brought the

woman to Jesus had a bad motive but the gospel does not tell us that it was their only motive or their main one. We read that they planned to trap him. Since nothing is said in the passage about Roman law and the Jewish law is mentioned they were hoping to get Jesus to break the Law of Moses by demanding that she be spared. But what Jesus does is make them see that they are as bad as her and deserve to die as well and they go away and he tells the woman he does not condemn her to death for there is nobody to condemn her. Jesus refused to condemn the capital punishment laws. Though he delighted in offending the Jews and their traditions he didn't dare because he wanted them to stay in force.

It is certain from reading the passage that Jesus believed that she deserved to be put to death and that the Law of Moses was right to demand the destruction of adulterers (page 373, Encyclopaedia of Bible Difficulties; page 124, The Enigma of Evil). Jesus could not abrogate a death penalty when his religious system said that the reason we can die and will die though it be by execution, murder or naturally is that God and himself has sentenced us to death for our sins (page 125, The Enigma of Evil).

Jesus could have cancelled the death penalty for the woman would not have had a fair trial because the accusers were big sinners or adulterers themselves. He was ready to air their dirty linen which was why they walked away one by one. That was why he would not let the men judge her and stone her. There is no hint that Jesus was postponing her trial for he could not do that. He told her he would not condemn her but did she get off? He meant he would not stone her to death and says nothing to stop her being judged properly and stoned at a later date. He only let her go on her way. He only said he didn't condemn her. He could have been leaving it up to the judges if they wanted to judge her legally and destroy her. He said nothing that indicated he forbade this.

The accusers broke the Law by accusing a woman without having her partner in sin there to bear witness against her. And they had no proof that one of the pair were married and did not take her to the elders for trial first so Jesus could not have let them stone her anyway though Jesus agreed that she should be. Since the man could not be punished with her Jesus would have had to let her go though he knew she was guilty for it could not be proved. The Christian book, The Enigma of Evil, tells us that Jesus had to save the woman for her execution would not have been in accordance with the Law of Moses but would have been a lynching by its standards (page 124). So his saving her does not mean he wanted the Jewish law repealed.

Also, the Jews were not permitted by Rome to kill unless they got the go-ahead from its representatives so Jesus would have had to forbid her execution but only at that particular time.

Perhaps Jesus knew the woman was not in her right mind or drunk when he told her he did not condemn her. She was guilty of adultery but not guilty enough to merit the death penalty. This would stop anybody appealing to the episode to prove that Jesus banned stoning adulterers to death.

The explanation I prefer is that Jesus was not having people who were deserving of stoning themselves stone this woman to death and that it would have been right to see her killed if the right people were doing it. He permitted those who had less sins than her to kill her with stones and he meant it for he said so. He was stating that despite the Roman law that forbade the Jews to kill without permission they should do it. He made it a duty for the Christians to kill homosexuals and prostitutes and adulterers in defiance of the state. He believed that the Law of Moses was for all.

Jesus was not saying the Law was wrong for he did indicate that it was right to stone her in the right circumstances. Martin Luther believed the Christian religion required the execution of adulterers and adulteresses (page 391, Martin Luther).

Jews when able to, put adulterous people to death. What about Jesus telling the Jews to judge men or women who remarried after divorce as guilty of adultery? He said that to Jewish leaders who were also lawyers meaning he was virtually telling them to execute the divorced and remarried and not just cheaters.

We must not forget that Jesus was serious when he said that he who has no sin must cast the first stone. He didn't say it was wrong to even want to cast the stone. This was not about it being wrong to stone her but about the hypocrisy of those who wanted to stone her. If there had been a person there who didn't deserve death then Jesus would have told him to cast the first stone. He told us that. Why didn't he cast it himself? Because he couldn't. He had to opt out because his job as teacher from Heaven came first.

The story was not in the original gospel. The best manuscripts don't have it. And though it is put in John 8 nobody knows where it belongs (some ancients thrust it in at the end of Luke) which is certainly due to the fact that it does not belong in the New Testament at all. The doctrine that it is inspired and is a part of the Bible is just a Catholic dogma proclaimed by the infallible Council of Trent. There is no evidence for any of this so Trent was guilty of fraud for it said that the Church could not make a dogma binding and infallibly proclaim it true without conclusive evidence. The story is in the King James Bible suggesting that Protestants accept it as canonical.

The evidences of the earlier manuscripts of the Gospel of John suggest that this particular passage was not included by John himself in the original text of his gospel.

The earliest surviving witness to this episode seems to be the sixth-century Codex Bezae" (Encyclopaedia of Bible Difficulties, page 371).

But, still, the passage could be true and it is certainly a testimony from early tradition that Jesus was pro-murder. He told an adulteress she should be stoned but only by people who didn't deserve to be stoned themselves! In other words, believing in or being fine with stoning people is not a moral flaw! Actually it is not a flaw but a heinous outrage.

Even if God does not want us to kill homos and adulterers he cannot condemn us harshly for doing it if they deserve it. It would be no worse than the sins we commit every day that defy him. We all know that if you attack person X without good reason and X attacks you back that X is not stooping down to your level (if free will exists that is and if the concept of deserving is true!) for you asked for it and X did not. To have X told off and perhaps punished while you get away would be sick indeed for you are more bad than he is.

NOTES: The story is thought to have been invented out of the apocryphal story of Susanna where Daniel saves her from being stoned to death. Like the Jesus version, the Jews do not keep to the legal procedure and lose any right to stone her. It seems the story appeared late and originally belonged to the Gospel of the Hebrews. Eusebius seems to have thought that. The Gospel of the Hebrews endorsed Jewish Christianity and thus having a Jesus who abolished the stoning penalty would have been inconceivable. This context verifies our interpretation.