

The fact that God is able to forgive us again and again doesn't mean that there isn't a basis for judgment or that God doesn't have requirements of us.

Q. How does the image of the trapeze artist - able to fly confidently through the air because he knows he will be caught by the net when he falls - help us to see that we may break free of the compulsive patterns of sin and failure because of God's grace? What does the wisdom of God teach us about our attitudes towards those who have failed?

God demands perfection of us but along with that He gives us **two wonderful gifts**:

1. **The power of the Holy Spirit** – who helps us in our weakness.
2. **And the promise of forgiveness when we fail.**

When we are convinced that God's love cannot and will not change **only then is the compulsiveness of our sin broken** and we are released to live life as it was meant to be lived.

"If the mystery of divine forgiveness towards us does not create in us a new horror of sins to which we had grown accustomed or which we like too well to renounce and a new power to resist them then in us God's tremendous plan of salvation has as yet failed. Even His willingness to save us cannot save us from our doom." Arthur John Gossip

Q. If we see God's love and forgiveness only as an escape from God's justice then we have not truly experienced God's love. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

This is our hope as we come to the Lord's Table. As we take again the bread and the cup, we resolve again to 'sin no more' seeking perfection as our standard. But it will not be the strength of our promise or our diligence in 'following through' that will change us. It will be our love for the Lord.

God's love and forgiveness is most powerfully represented by the broken body and shed blood of His Son who suffered and died for us.

The Invitation to the Lord's Table:

"Come not because you are strong, but because you are weak. Come, not because any goodness of your own gives you the right to come, but because you need mercy and help. Come because you love the Lord a little and would like to love him more. Come because he loved you and gave himself for you."

Resources: Resources: 'Knowing God' JI Packer. Cup of Wonder Lloyd Ogilvie

Sermon Outline and Questions

How God Deals With Our Sin and Failure.

John 8:1-11

The story of the woman caught in the act of adultery and brought to Jesus is a beautiful story of failure and redemption.

There are several extraordinary things about this story, including Jesus' empathy, compassion and wisdom, which far exceeds and confounds that of the Scribes and Pharisees.

I. A Beautiful Story of Failure and Redemption.

The most extraordinary thing about this story must surely be Jesus' final words to the woman:

"Then neither do I condemn you,..." (Are there any more welcome words than these?)

'Go now and leave your life of sin.' (Are there any more impossible words than these?)

Q. Are there things in your life of which you are so ashamed that you can't even bring them to Jesus? Have you ever felt that you cannot go back to God to seek His forgiveness for the same sin again and again?

The story of a woman caught in adultery expresses a profound truth about how God deals with our sin and failure.

(Jesus) *"I did not come to judge the world, but to save it."* (John 12:47)

The wonderful message of this story and others like it in the Scriptures, is the liberating knowledge that God responds to us in the same way every time we fail and confess to him our sin. 1 John 1:9.

Out of his deep love for the world, Jesus affirms again and again the forgiveness and unconditional love of God, which he came to make real to us.

This is the wonderful truth which we affirm through the symbols of Holy Communion. Otherwise, what right do any of us have to come back to the Lord's Table?

Q. Read the story of Jesus' recommissioning of Peter after his denial in John 21:15 – 17. What was Jesus priority for Peter? What do these two stories say about God? Will God always forgive and are we doomed to a cycle of failure, futility and forgiveness? What do you think?

"Forgiveness says, "I know you love me, but you don't have to love me unconditionally, because no human being can do that." Henri Nouwen

i. The People in Jesus' Story

1. The religious leaders Self-righteous and uncaring.

The Pharisees had plotted carefully for this confrontation with Jesus. Their question was carefully designed to trap and discredit Jesus to provide them with a legal base for doing away with him.

'What about the Law?' This is what they wanted to know? How long could Jesus go on violating the blessed order that they so loved and obeyed?

Q. What the Pharisees didn't see was that their own heartlessness was as immoral as this woman's promiscuity. Do you agree/disagree? Why?

2. The woman caught in adultery

What caused her to behave the way she did - to lose sight of the sacredness of marriage? What was the unfulfilled need and longing of her heart?

Shamed and humiliated and now lying at the feet of Jesus. Perhaps realising that she has been used in a diabolical plot which she does not understand.

3. Jesus (The sinner's Saviour)

The issues were immediately clear to Jesus. If he defended the Law, the ordinary people would feel that he no longer had empathy with them. If he took issue with the Scribes and Pharisees he could be accused of being a law breaker.

Jesus knew the Law – the relevant passage was Lev. 20:10

'If a man commits adultery with another man's wife—with the wife of his neighbour—both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death.'

ii. Jesus' Response to the Crowd and the Woman

How would Jesus bring the **justice of God** and the **mercy of God together**?

There have been many theories about what Jesus wrote in the sand. Some people have said that he wrote out of embarrassment and shame at the cold heartedness of the Scribes and Pharisees.

The most likely explanation is that he wrote something against the woman's accusers i.e. a list of their own sins.

Perhaps only one word – 'anomatetos' which means even more than 'without sin' i.e. '**without sinful desire**'.

"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.'²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Matt. 5:27 -28

*"What Jesus was really saying was. "Alright, you may stone her but only if **you have never wanted to do the same thing yourselves**. If you have no deep and hidden sins in your own being, then you may cast the first stone."*
William Barclay

Suddenly the accusers became the accused. There was nothing to do but leave. Most likely the oldest left first – someone has said '*we need only to grow older to become gentler in our judgments.*'

Q. How have your attitudes, towards people who have had moral failures, changed as you have grown older?

Only Jesus was left to administer the Law – he was the only one without sin.

"Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you? No one, sir," she said."

In the few minutes Jesus spent with this woman Jesus loved her as she had never been loved not for what she could give him but for who she was.

The Pharisees wanted to stone her Jesus wanted to save her.

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

God's primary concern is for our redemption.

The Gospel is not about condemnation but salvation. See Roman 8:1 & 2. Condemnation seeks to take us down while salvation seeks to lift us up.

iii. Where Heaven's Justice and Heaven's Mercy Meet

In this story, heaven's justice and heavens mercy meet wonderfully to offer us hope and freedom and a way of learning to fail less.

Jesus' response towards this woman contains three basic ingredients:

1. **Mercy** – Jesus always used His authority to love people into goodness. It was his deepest wish to express forgiveness to them so they might seek a new life based on God's way and God's power.

Jesus knew that this is the only thing that would break the pattern of sin in her life.

2. **Challenge** – 'Go and sin no more'. Jesus expects us to seek to be the best we can be. He knew that it was the power of his love that would release her from the need to sin.

3. **Forgiveness** – knowing the forgiveness and never-ending acceptance of God is the only basis for a lasting change.