

***Question: Do you think Jesus would be as tolerant of sinners as some people are today? Would he not strongly condemn their sins?***

I do not believe Jesus considered toleration of sin and strong words of condemning judgment to be the only alternatives for dealing with sinners. Consider what Jesus did on the day some of the Jewish religious leaders brought to him a woman caught in the very act of adultery. They reminded him that the law said that adulterers should be stoned to death. Their real purpose was to entrap Jesus in his words. If he had let her go, they could have accused him of contradicting the law of God; but if he had said put her to death, they could have charged him with rebellion against the Roman governmental officials (John 8:1-11).

To their surprise, Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with his finger. Then he said, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:7). Her accusers quietly walked away from the oldest to the youngest. Then Jesus asked the woman, "Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," he declared, "Go now and leave your life of sin" (John 8:10-11).

Whether in a moment of weakness or as an act of open rebellion against the law of God, neither adultery nor any other sin should be glossed over. According to Jewish religious law, the woman deserved to die. But the first thought in the mind of Jesus was not of condemnation. Instead, he felt a loving desire to save her. Jesus said, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:17).

As the moral watch dogs of their society, the Pharisees had not considered the role of mercy, healing and restoration. They only thought of unforgiving punishment and banishment. As the great physician, Jesus was not repulsed by the sight of a diseased soul. He was overcome by the desire to help and to heal. This does not mean that Jesus regarded sin or forgiveness lightly. He knew the seriousness of all sin and how it destroys lives. That was why he gave himself to die on the cross. Only his innocent blood could atone. Anything less was inadequate. However, there will come a time when all unrepentant sinners will be condemned to eternal separation from God (Revelation 21:8).

Thus, for Jesus it was not a matter of toleration of sin. He loved and died for all of us, because we have all sinned—including the preacher, pew-warmers and self-righteous saints. When it was needed, he spoke honestly of the evil of specific sins (Matthew 12:34; 15:19); but he also offered the possibility of a new and different kind of life (John 3:1-8; 1 John 1:8-10). We have no reason to believe Jesus would act any differently today,

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