

The Impossible Command

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Introduction

This addresses John 8, verses 1-11 (The woman caught in adultery) and is a perception from the Scriptures based solely upon what is stated in the Scriptures. It explores what was wrong with what the accusers of the woman did and why the Lord Jesus addressed them as He did. It further addresses the issue of the woman and the particular interchange that occurred between her and the Lord.

The setting

We must necessarily start in the context of the Law of Moses, as that is the context in which the scribes and Pharisees challenge the legitimacy of the Lord Jesus as one sent from God. They had previously tried to kill the Lord Jesus Christ because He had violated the Levitical Law by healing a man on the Sabbath. As yet, they were not trying to kill Him based upon His being the Son of God (though that happens shortly after this incident). Since they were not attempting to prove that He blasphemed God, but rather were trying to catch Him in the act of violating the Law of Moses, they apparently felt they had to catch Him 'red-handed' so to speak. Here it appears they would prefer to have Him discredit Himself regarding the Law of Moses by not being able to render proper judgement under the Law.

The writing upon the ground

Regarding what the Lord wrote on the ground, I note that many have made comment as to what the Lord wrote and have speculated much upon it. Personally, my thought is that the Lord did not see fit to tell us. Thus it is none of our

business and we ought to leave it alone. We should remember that God is under no obligation to tell us anything, let alone what He writes during a particular instance.

We could, however, take some lessons from the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ wrote upon the ground, in full view of the accusers and the woman, but spoke not a word to the crowd and the disciples at large. It is also notable that it is not recorded that the apostles asked what He wrote. What can be drawn from this is that the Lord was dealing with those accusers and the woman, but what He desired to convey to them was no one else's business.

It is clear, whatever He wrote had its particular effect upon those who saw it. We should note, whatsoever the Lord addressed to an individual or group of individuals frequently was for them alone. If we remember, the Lord rebuked Peter after the resurrection when he asked about John and what John was supposed to do, to wit: "Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what *shall* this man *do*?" (*John 21:21*) to which the Lord answered "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me." (*John 21:22*) Thus, the Lord reminded Peter (and us as well), what He has for one is not necessarily anyone else's business. Those things pertaining to all, He has insured they are contained, in full, in the Scripture. Incidentally, anything that the Lord would lay upon any individual or group would not be contrary to the already completed Scripture.

Finally, what we do know about the Lord's dealing with individuals is this: The Lord deals with everyone individually as they are able to understand what he must tell them. We also know the Lord does not deal haphazardly or randomly with anyone. Nothing the Lord does is "in isolation" or unconnected with anything else, but all drives toward the purpose of reconciling that person to the Lord through recognition of their sin, understanding of who God really is, repentance of sin, and trust in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ

for salvation. To that end, we can understand that whatever the Lord Jesus wrote upon the ground was for those individuals and them alone. What He wrote did not and does not apply to us as He did not make us privy to it. In short, we need to learn to mind our place and not delve into situations the Lord has not seen fit to reveal to us lest we sin in the manner of Job and speak words without knowledge.

The incident

With that, let's look at what the Scriptures state about the whole incident, without regard to what others may or may not have stated.

Jesus went unto the mount of Olives.

And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them.

And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act.

Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?

This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with *his* finger wrote on the ground, *as though he heard them not*.

So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.

And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground.

And they which heard *it*, being convicted by *their own* conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, *even* unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.

When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee?

She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more. (*John 8:1-11*)

By the time of this event it is clear that the Lord Jesus is recognized as a teacher of things pertaining to God and the Kingdom of God. However, no matter how well He was accepted by the people, the leadership of the Jews, specifically the scribes and the council which were under the control of the Pharisees and Sadducees, did not accept Him (with rare exception) as being at all from God. Rather, they believed He was a deceiver of the people and one who perverted the word of God. In addition, they also believed that He was attempting to overthrow their hold on the people. Therefore, they first sought to discredit Him, and having failed, kill Him.

In the above passage I note it is a group of scribes and Pharisees that bring the woman into the temple and declare unto the Lord Jesus, in front of everyone, that this woman was caught "*in the very act*" of adultery. I find this interesting in that I can go to Leviticus (which they had at the time) and point out that the crime of adultery requires two participants: A man and a woman. In Leviticus it states the following:

Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy: for I *am* the LORD your God.

And ye shall keep my statutes, and do them: I *am* the LORD which sanctify you.

For every one that curseth his father or his mother shall be surely put to death: he hath cursed his father or his mother; his blood *shall be* upon him.

And the man that committeth adultery with *another* man's wife, *even he* that committeth adultery with his neighbour's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death. (*Leviticus 20:7-10*)

Now, the whole passage is included because of another commandment that was given to Israel, which the Lord Jesus

Christ brought before the Pharisees when they challenged Him at another time concerning a transgression of one of the traditions of the elders (The washing of hands prior to eating). But at this point I will focus on the fact that there is a party missing if the scribes and Pharisees did indeed catch this woman in the “*very act*” of adultery. I have some questions that demand answers:

- Where is the man?
- Does not the Law of Moses demand that the man and the woman be put to death for adultery?
- If this woman were caught “*in the very act*” as the scribes and Pharisees state: Where is the man that was with her?
- Obviously they saw fit to bring the woman – why not the man?

Perhaps this is much the same case as the issue of “Honour thy father and mother” which is related in Matthew, Chapter 15.

Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying,

Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.

But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?

For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death.

But ye say, Whosoever shall say to *his* father or *his* mother, *It is a gift*, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me;

And honour not his father or his mother, *he shall be free*.

Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.

Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying,

This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me.

But in vain they do worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men. (*Matthew 15:1-9*)

Now I do find this interesting as the scribes and Pharisees were so eager to apply the Law of Moses to this woman, but were completely subverting the Law of Moses when it came to children honoring their parents (which is expressly stated in the passage from Leviticus 20:7-10 quoted above). Isn't this inequality in application of the law? Isn't this picking and choosing which commandments one will obey and which commandments one will ignore? Quite obviously, it is. This also is condemned by the Lord in the Law of Moses as verse 8 of Leviticus, Chapter 20 states "And ye shall keep my statutes, and do them: I *am* the LORD which sanctify you." Notice the Lord does not state which statutes, thus leaving it open-ended. Therefore, this necessarily includes all statutes He gives.

I am reminded that the Lord condemned Israel for this kind of inequality before. In Ezekiel, it was declared by the Lord through the mouth of Ezekiel:

Yet saith the house of Israel, The way of the Lord is not equal. O house of Israel, are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal? Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. Repent, and turn *yourselves* from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. (*Ezekiel 18:29-30*)

It is apparent the scribes and Pharisees were selectively applying the law as it suited their ends. Thus, hypocritically they brought a woman before the Lord that was supposedly caught in adultery "*in the very act.*" Yet, did not see fit to attempt to apply the law to the man she was with, neither did they see fit to apply that same commandment to all the rest of the harlots who were undoubtedly in Jerusalem at the time. Moreover, they have already been condemned as hypocrites for setting aside the commandment that children should honour their father and mother, which immediately preceded the commandment addressing adultery in Leviticus.

Thus, I find the Lord with ample material to put before them regarding the issue of their own sin. As He stated in one of the first recorded sermons He delivered:

And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam *is* in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye. (*Matthew 7:3-5*)

Moreover, in the same sermon He addressed the issue of adultery and the standards by which God judges that someone has committed adultery.

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. (*Matthew 5:27-28*)

Obviously, the first issue the Lord is going to resolve is the motivation of the accusers of the woman and whether or not they are also in accordance with the Law of Moses. Thus the statement "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." This had a chilling effect upon the scribes and Pharisees and their supposed ardor to uphold the "Law of Moses" as they saw it. We find they were convicted of their conscience for being gross hypocrites as the Scripture describes: "And they which heard *it*, being convicted by *their own* conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, *even* unto the last:" Thus, being so convicted, they decided that they were just as guilty as the woman, if not more so. Ultimately, they left.

Now, why did the Lord do nothing to the woman, other than apparently rebuke her for her sin and let her go? Possibly the answer lies in the law as well. In the law, the following

requirement is given before anyone can be lawfully put to death. If we remember, they declared this woman should be stoned, per the Law of Moses.

Whoso killeth any person, the murderer shall be put to death by the mouth of witnesses: but one witness shall not testify against any person *to cause him* to die. (*Numbers 35:30*)

If there be found among you, within any of thy gates which the LORD thy God giveth thee, man or woman, that hath wrought wickedness in the sight of the LORD thy God, in transgressing his covenant, And hath gone and served other gods, and worshipped them, either the sun, or moon, or any of the host of heaven, which I have not commanded; And it be told thee, and thou hast heard *of it*, and enquired diligently, and, behold, *it be true, and* the thing certain, *that* such abomination is wrought in Israel: Then shalt thou bring forth that man or that woman, which have committed that wicked thing, unto thy gates, *even* that man or that woman, and shalt stone them with stones, till they die. At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; *but* at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death. The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So thou shalt put the evil away from among you. (*Deuteronomy 17:2-7*)

One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established. (*Deuteronomy 19:15*)

Since the woman's accusers have now all departed, being convinced of their own sin and guilt before the law, the woman cannot be lawfully put to death. The Lord, who does know truly whether she was caught "*in the very act*," cannot act as a witness as He was not physically there by the standards of the Law of Moses.

He would, to fulfill the law, have to have firsthand knowledge that could be rightfully verified by some other person physically present. ((Obviously, the Lord knew that she was truly guilty of adultery. However, the highest likelihood is that most everyone present at the time was also guilty of the same sin. If He condemns her upon His own knowledge, then in all likelihood He would have to condemn everyone in the temple. Plainly, this is not why he came to the earth at that time.

And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world (*John 12:47*)) Since all other "witnesses" have failed to bear witness, the woman must go free. However, she does not go free without censure.

It is this censure that raises the most questions as it is impossible to fulfill in the flesh. If we look again at the exchange between the Lord and the woman after her accusers departed; perhaps we can see the strangeness of the last thing the Lord states to the woman in front of many witnesses.

When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee?

She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more. (*John 8:10-11*)

The first part of the exchange is fully understandable, even in the context of the Law of Moses. A question of the presence of the woman's accusers and the answer in the negative as to their presence form the basis of this short exchange. However, from this point on, it becomes unclear as to what is happening between the Lord and the woman. The Lord's answer might be marginally acceptable under the Law of Moses, but not under the law of sin and death. ((The law of sin and death is very clear in the Scriptures. As it is plainly stated in Ezekiel 18:4:

Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die. (*Ezekiel 18:4*)

Moreover, this is reinforced plainly in the New Testament, in Romans 8:2:

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. (*Romans 8:2*)

Which death by sin Paul relates plainly in Romans 7:9-11:

For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was *ordained* to life, I found *to be* unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew *me*.) Perhaps the Lord is merely operating exclusively under the Law of Moses? If so, we are still left with an impossible command to the woman. ((It is an impossible command under the Law of Moses due to the fact that even the High Priest had to offer up a sacrifice for sins for himself before he could offer up sacrifices for the sins of the people. This is made expressly clear in Hebrews, chapter 5.)) Clearly, what the Lord Jesus Christ tells the woman in His last statement is an imperative. Without doubt, the statement "go, and sin no more" is a commandment. However, there is no physical way the woman can fulfill this commandment as this does not refer strictly to adultery. Rather, the word "sin" encompasses any and all transgressions of the will of God. We can skirt the whole issue here and declare that the context is strictly adultery. But the Lord, if He were operating in that mode, would have used the express term "adultery" instead of the broader term "sin." If this is strictly under the auspices of the Law of Moses, then the Lord has done something the Scriptures state He does not do.

Now, we could stop here and simply drop the whole thing, as many have. However, we cannot be satisfied with the fact that

the Lord has given this woman (though He did not condemn her under the Law of Moses) something that is impossible to fulfill. Thus we are left with the strange, impossible commandment, either under the Law of Moses, or under the spiritual law of sin and death. The reason for this dilemma is found in the Law of Moses itself.

We should note that under the Law of Moses, sacrifices were given each year for the sins of the person bringing the sacrifice. So pervasive is sin that even the High Priest himself must give a sacrifice to atone for his own sin, as Aaron and his sons were instructed in the Law of Moses.

If the priest that is anointed do sin according to the sin of the people; then let him bring for his sin, which he hath sinned, a young bullock without blemish unto the LORD for a sin offering. (*Leviticus 4:3*)

Thus, no one in Israel was exempt from sin. Whether they wished to or not, all of the children of Israel sinned as the Holy Ghost reminds us in the epistle to the Hebrews.

For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things *pertaining* to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity. And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins. (*Hebrews 5:1-3*)

So we see here that the Lord has given this woman a commandment which is impossible to fulfill in any context that is readily apparent. Now, unless there is some context here, other than strictly the Law of Moses, we must end with a paradox in Scripture. Perhaps there is yet one other context that we can explore.

But before we continue on, I think it would be good to settle a particular issue here – the issue of God's commands to man:

Does God give impossible commands?

In the Scripture there are only two classes of people that have ever existed on this earth since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden: Lost (without Christ, or "in Adam") and saved (with, or "in Christ"). Thus to determine whether the commands of God are impossible, we must look at what commands God gives each respective group, and determine whether they are attainable or not. We will go one step further and look briefly at the third (but no longer valid) situation in which God gave a command to man: In the Garden of Eden prior to the fall.

The Lord God's Commandment to Adam

In the Garden of Eden the LORD God gave the following command:

And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. (*Genesis 2:15-17*)

Now, I am quite certain the Garden of Eden was not a small place. I am also certain there were plenty of different fruits to eat. Thus, the Lord's command to man was certainly an attainable command, with none of the excuses we have today. The reason for this is the simple fact that man had his own righteousness, a sound mind, and a clear, singular command. All man had to do was avoid the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Thus we can easily see; this command is readily attainable, and not impossible to fulfill.

The Lord God's Commandments to the Lost

As pertaining to the first class of people mentioned above (those who are without Christ), we find two commandments that are intertwined: Repent and believe (or obey) the Gospel.^A We see these two commands in several places throughout the New

Testament.

Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel. (*Mark 1:14-15*)

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: (*Acts 17:30*)

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (*II Peter 3:9*)

But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? (*Romans 10:16*)

For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. (*Romans 10:3-4*)

And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. (*Luke 13:2-5*)

So we see that the lost have two intertwined commands that are not at all impossible to follow. We also find that God has made them simple and attainable.

Now, there are those who argue that it is impossible for man to repent, as man is totally depraved in his nature. This is

very true. However, the interesting thing about repentance and man's ability to properly repent, is that although man has no inherent ability or desire to repent, the Lord has made provision for this difficulty as the Jews in the early church testified:

Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as *he did* unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life. (*Acts 11:17-18*)

This is confirmed by two other passages of Scripture that address the Lord's withdrawing someone's ability to repent. ((The withdrawing of repentance is not the same as withdrawing salvation. The command the Lord Jesus preached was "repent, and believe the gospel." This makes repentance only a part of salvation, and not equal to salvation as believing must be coupled with it. Thus the Lord could withdraw repentance from someone who is born again, yet not affect their salvation at all.

Moreover, the Lord will never withdraw His salvation from someone, as salvation is completely predicated upon the new birth in Christ Jesus. Repentance, on the other hand, is only a requirement for salvation to occur, not a condition for keeping it. Just as faith is a condition for salvation to occur, the keeping of our salvation is not dependent upon our faith. Rather, the keeping of our salvation is entirely dependent upon Christ, not us. If it were dependent upon us, we would be in the exact same position as Adam, except with innumerable more chances to fail – which we invariably would exercise. In short, heaven would never receive a single man as we would all fail – just like Adam. We must remember that only God is intrinsically righteous, and only God is intrinsically able to maintain His righteousness.

However, withdrawing repentance from someone who is not saved

would mean that they could never be saved.))

Lest there *be* any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears. (*Hebrews 12:16-17*)

For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put *him* to an open shame. (*Hebrews 6:4-6*)

Thus, it is God that grants man the ability to repent properly before Him, in a manner acceptable to Him. This is very much like the situation man faces when he hears the Gospel. Man has a requirement placed upon him by the Lord: Man must know who is doing the offering of salvation, what the salvation consists of or is, and why he needs that salvation. Since none of these things are readily apparent physically, we are at a considerable disadvantage. We must know and understand these things spiritually, which is impossible for us to do. This was the situation the woman at the well in Samaria faced.

Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water. (*John 4:10*)

By the Lord's statement to the woman, we know that the Lord will not accept blind belief. We cannot just believe because we believe, and have the Lord accept it. Rather, we must know with certainty who is doing the offering, what He is offering, and why we need it. This is why the statement is made in Hebrews:

But without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. (*Hebrews 11:6*)

However, again the Lord has not left the sinner without recourse. It is stated plainly in Romans 10:17: So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Now then, we can establish what this faith is, as it is now established how the sinner receives this faith. In Hebrews 11, which is the definitive discourse on faith and its power, the following statements are made:

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear. (*Hebrews 11:1-3*)

First, we see that faith is both a “substance” and an “evidence;” moreover, in verse two faith is declared to be an “it.” By these adjectives we can understand that the “faith” that saves is a noun, much like we would describe an instrument of some sort. However, as verse three describes, this instrument is quite special and unique among instruments. This instrument allows those possessing and using it to understand that God created the universe *ex nihilo*, or out of nothing. The rest of the chapter goes on to describe how that faith enabled the people of God to do things that would have been impossible otherwise. The how of this is that God grants an instrument to the one that hears the gospel, which enables that person to “see” who God is, what He offers to the sinner through the shed blood of Jesus Christ, and why that person needs salvation. This is a direct contrast to how the Apostle Paul described the Athenians at Mars Hill:

Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions,

I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. (Acts 17:22-23)

By this statement it is made clear, the Lord considers blind belief to be no better than superstition, as one cannot fulfill the requirement of knowing who God, and specifically the Lord Jesus Christ, really is. However, through this instrument of faith, which the Lord grants upon hearing the Gospel, one is entirely able to fulfill the requirements necessary to properly exercise the repentance God grants and thus obey the Gospel unto salvation in Christ.

In this we find, despite all the difficulties man's nature causes, that the Lord's commands to the lost are not impossible either.

The Lord God's Commandments to the Saved

There is one final class of individuals we must consider upon this earth. What commands are given to the children of the Lord, which are the saved or in Christ, that they must follow?

- First, we can see that the Lord commands proper scriptural baptism; which is easily established in Scripture.
- Second, we can see that the Lord commands His children to assemble in a specific local assembly, or church.
- Third, to briefly comprehend all other commandments; His children are to be holy and blameless in this world.

Are these commandments achievable by His children, especially the last one, as it is so broad and encompassing?

The first two commandments are readily seen as being attainable. Since the Lord sends preachers to preach the word, he also empowers these same preachers to properly baptize the new believer. The Scriptures attest to this fact in the instance of Philip the Evangelist and the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts, chapter 8.

The second commandment is just as attainable as the first if the child of God will heed the guidance of the Holy Ghost and allow himself to be added to the church the Lord has chosen for him. Thus, it is this third commandment where the most question is raised and where the rest of this portion will be spent. However, as we will see, even this command is realizable, as the Lord is the one who will uphold His child.

First, the Lord makes a way to withstand, or flee temptation which is the most difficult part of walking in a manner pleasing to the Lord. Secondly, it is the Lord who does all the real work in enabling the believer to fulfill the tasks set before him. And last, every trial, temptation, suffering, and challenge the children of God encounter are all for their growth and benefit. In illustration, all the following verses demonstrate this.

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God *is* faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear *it*. (*I Corinthians 10:13*)

Faithful *is* he that calleth you, who also will do *it*. (*I Thessalonians 5:24*)

I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. (*Philippians 4:13*)

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose. (*Romans 8:28*)

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. (*Galatians 2:20*)

So it is that the problem with the commandments of God seeming

impossible for his child lies with man and man's limited and self-centered perspective, even after salvation. After all, we are commanded to be "a living sacrifice" and even "sheep for the slaughter."

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is your reasonable service. (Romans 12:1)*

As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. *(Romans 8:36)*

Which, when taken into proper perspective with the rest of the Scripture, is not impossible for the child of God, as the Lord Jesus Christ purchased that child by His shed blood on the cross at Calvary, as we are reminded also in Scripture.

What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?*

For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's. *(I Corinthians 6:19-20)*

Therefore, in every circumstance that could be encountered in the life of the believer on this earth, it is entirely possible to fulfill the will of the Lord. The problem always rests with the believer and the lack of faith on the believer's part.

Thus, we can plainly see that the Lord never gives an impossible command. However, telling someone to not sin is impossible, except under certain circumstances.

1. They are in heaven. (No physical body)
2. As a child of God they have been resurrected in a glorified body.
3. Their soul was born again of Christ. (This means their soul cannot sin, but their flesh always sins)

The dilemma

Since the first two conditions are obviously not true, they can be excluded from consideration, and the focus devoted to the last condition. It is this last condition that makes the whole incident so problematic for many people. In the minds of many, this last condition cannot exist. Therefore they throw out any lessons that might be drawn from this incident and cannot explain what the Lord was doing by His use of the imperative "go, and sin no more."

As we begin to look for an answer to this dilemma, there are three statements that we must focus on to yield an answer to the problem of the impossible command. Since the only logical conclusion one can come to is that the woman was saved sometime during the exchange between the Lord Jesus and the Pharisees, we must examine the rest of the Scriptures to see if this is actually confirmed, or whether we are left with an insoluble puzzle. In searching for the proof, the three statements to begin the determination are: The woman's addressing of the Lord Jesus Christ as "Lord." The Lord's reply to her "Neither do I condemn thee:" And finally, the impossible command "go, and sin no more."

However, before beginning to examine the evidence for each of these statements, we need to briefly examine some things about salvation. We also need to look at what is required in the way of outward action and if the Scriptures actually require someone to make confession of salvation to be saved.

Salvation is an internal matter between man and God

The fact that we are not told when this woman came to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour means that it was an internal matter that took place between the woman and the Lord. In fact, in most of the Scripture, both Old and New Testament, we are not told *when* someone comes to believe, but that they *did* come to believe in the Lord and did confess it. A particular example of this is Nicodemus, in John, chapter 3. It is obvious in chapter 3 Nicodemus was not saved and did not

understand the first thing about salvation. However, by chapter 7 we find that Nicodemus defends Jesus' ministry and in chapter 19, Nicodemus assists in the burying of the Lord Jesus' body. Obviously, at some point Nicodemus came to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for his salvation.

And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound *weight*.

Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. (*John 19:39-40*)

We also find this to be the case with Saul during his journey to Damascus; at some point between the time he saw the light that blinded him and the time that he was baptised, he placed his full trust in the Lord Jesus for his salvation as well. What is not expressed, is exactly *when* he did so.

By not revealing to us exactly when, nor giving us outward cues, what the Lord makes plain through His word is that no outward show, no matter how wonderful in appearance, can substitute for the internal surrender that must take place in the person who comes to the Lord. This is strictly a matter of the heart of the individual, and is not accomplished by external, or outward ritual.

But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for *the LORD seeth* not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart. (*1 Samuel 16:7*)

And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. (*Acts 8:37*)

That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto

thee, Ye must be born again.

The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. (*John 3:6-8*)

Thus we find through the above verses that what happens spiritually in a person is not detectable outwardly. What is detectable outwardly occurs over time as the internal change wrought at salvation manifests itself by changes in the conduct of the person's life.

A brief word about Romans 10:10

In Romans there is a passage that states:

For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. (*Romans 10:10*)

The first part of this verse is quite plain and matches other parts of Scripture perfectly. It is the second phrase that raises the question as to outward action. If, as some have suggested, one must confess that they are saved, so that they may be saved; they create a paradox that is impossible to reconcile. If salvation only comes after confession of that salvation, then one cannot make that confession as salvation has not occurred, else one is a liar. One cannot be a liar in salvation and be saved, as this would be contrary to the righteousness of God. This would be sin. What the verse must then mean, is covered in verse 11, which states: For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

The verse has two applications, both of which are Scriptural. One is that the believer will not be ashamed before the judgement seat. The second is that the believer will not be ashamed before men. Thus the second phrase of verse 10 means 'confession is made unto salvation *that has occurred.*' Quite frequently (indeed, most always) those who have been newly

saved are ready to tell everyone.

With regard to believing in the heart, over and over again in Scripture the Lord clearly states that one must have a change of heart to be right with Him. The following two passages amply illustrate this:

Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye *even* to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning:

And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he *is* gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. (*Joel 2:12-13*)

Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers *did*, so *do* ye. (*Acts 7:51*)

Plainly, it is not the outward action that pleases God, but rather it is the change of heart or repentance, and belief in the Lord Jesus Christ and His sacrifice, that is acceptable to God.

Evidence of salvation for the woman

To begin any examination of whether this woman was saved during the exchange, we must understand some things about salvation that are not so readily apparent. We must understand that salvation is not a visible occurrence. Rather it is an issue of the spirit, and is thus not at all visible outwardly. We must also understand that the flesh is not changed at salvation. But rather, it is the soul that is born again. When the Lord Jesus told Nicodemus "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." He drew a clear and plain distinction between the two and demonstrated that the flesh and the spirit are indeed separate and distinct. Moreover, it is entirely the case that one can be born again of the spirit long after being born of the

flesh. Although the soul is brought into existence at conception, it can die and be reborn without any outward effect upon the flesh.

These are only two of the things we must consider and clearly understand before discarding the possibility that the woman was saved sometime during the whole exchange. The last major concept the Scripture clarifies is what the Lord does to the person's soul who has come to Him for salvation. It is this last thing that is perhaps the most difficult and challenging to the person who is without Christ and dead in sins and trespasses. We must consider what the Lord meant when He put before Nicodemus "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again."

The following verses state plainly a Scriptural concept concerning the spiritual relationship between salvation and sin. Please note the use of the terms "born of God" and "imputeth righteousness." Consider what they mean in light of becoming a new creature in Christ.

Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. (*II Corinthians 5:17*)

But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. (*Galatians 6:14-15*)

Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. (*I John 3:9*)

For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ. (*Romans 5:17*)

For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.

But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,

Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.

*Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.
(Romans 4:3-8)*

With these things clearly in mind, let's consider the possible indicators of salvation for the woman.

The Use of the Term "Lord"

If we look again at the exchange between the woman and the Lord, we find her answer to be interesting in that she addressed Jesus as "Lord" when she answered His question concerning the men who had accused her. Now, it was not unusual for someone to address an individual they recognized as being one of great authority and power as "Lord." This is particularly evidenced in at least two places where the Lord Jesus Christ was directly involved, but the persons addressing Him, not knowing who He really is, called Him "Lord" as a sign of respect. In the first instance, the man who was born blind addressed the Lord Jesus after he had been cast out of the temple by the council because he refused to condemn the man who had given him his sight. The Lord Jesus sought him out and proceeded to speak with him.

Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe.

And he worshipped him. (*John 9:35-38*)

The second instance involved Saul as he was on the road to Damascus to persecute the Christians he found there. During this journey, the Lord Jesus Christ addressed Saul from out of heaven.

And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: *it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.* (*Acts 9:3-5*)

In both these instances, the individuals did not know who they were speaking with other than this person had great power and authority. It was not until the Lord Jesus revealed Himself that they knew who they were dealing with. Thus we cannot state that the woman's use of the formal address of "Lord" reveals anything as to what she really knew about the man who had just defeated the scribes and Pharisees at their own game.

The Use of the Word "Condemn"

The second point turns on the particular phrasing used by the Lord Jesus Christ just before the imperative He gives her, when He states "Neither do I condemn thee:" However, the Scriptures do not support a single level of condemnation. Rather, the use of the word "condemn" can mean anything from simple verbal denunciation, to damnation in Hell forever. The following scriptures illustrate several uses of the word "condemn" that do not mean "damnation to Hell."

For all manner of trespass, *whether it be* for ox, for ass, for sheep, for raiment, *or* for any manner of lost thing, which *another* challengeth to be his, the cause of both parties shall come before the judges; *and* whom the judges shall condemn, he shall pay double unto his neighbour. (*Exodus 22:9*)

The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this

generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas *is* here. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon *is* here. (*Matthew 12:41-42*)

Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: (*Luke 6:37*)

I speak not *this* to condemn *you*: for I have said before, that ye are in our hearts to die and live with *you*. (*II Corinthians 7:3*)

It is plain in the Scriptures that we have no power to decide and declare the destiny of someone's soul. Only God has that prerogative. Thus, the Scriptures declare that a set, particular definition for the word "condemn" (meaning that one always must apply the same definition to the word, regardless of the context) does not exist. Thus we are left with one final option.

The Impossible Command

Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. (*I John 3:9*)

It is this verse that sheds a most important light on the exchange between the Lord and the woman, and His final command to her. Only in the context of this verse can the command "go and sin no more." be attainable. However, this verse only applies to someone who has placed their full trust and confidence in the finished work of Christ, in repentance and faith. Since we have established fully that the Lord does not give anyone an impossible command, this is the only option remaining. This is confirmed by other verses of Scripture.

For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.

For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.

If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that *it is* good.

Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but *how* to perform that which is good I find not.

For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.

Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.

For I delight in the law of God after the inward man:

But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin. (*Romans 7:14-25*)

In the above passage, the Apostle Paul, by the Holy Ghost, reveals the conflict that exists in the believer between the flesh that experienced no change in nature at salvation, and the soul that was completely changed. The last verse is most succinct in laying out that Paul's flesh could do nothing but sin (and thus warred constantly with his soul), and his soul which could not sin at all (and thus was at war constantly with his flesh). This matches the apparent paradox of I John 1:8 and I John 3:9:

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (*I John 1:8*)

Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. (*I John 3:9*)

Thus it is that the woman's soul would be made righteous at salvation, and would stay that way for all eternity. Since she would be *born of God*, the seed, or genetics of the Lord would remain in her soul as she became a *new creature* at salvation. Since our nature determines what we will do, we see that when she would be born again and become a new creature with a nature in conformity with God, she cannot go contrary to God's will in her soul. Therefore, she would not sin and she can fulfill the commandment of the Lord.

What we then see is that the Lord is speaking to the woman in the spiritual sense only as it is the only circumstance in which the woman is capable of fulfilling the commandment the Lord has given her that she should "go and sin no more." Sometime during the whole exchange, she has repented and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ for her salvation. Since this is a spiritual matter, no one else physically present would be privy to what has passed between her and the Lord. Thus, to every casual observer, the Lord has given this woman a command that she is to fulfill the "best she can" and let it go at that. However, as we can now see, what transpired is far more significant and well worth delving into.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are several things beyond the salvation of the woman caught in adultery that are also worthy of note:

1. What the people in the room, and all others who observed the Lord Jesus on this earth needed to understand clearly, was that He was not against the Law of Moses, but rather upheld the law in every point. As He stated

in the Sermon of the Mount "Think not that I have come to destroy the law, rather I have come to fulfill the law and the prophets." Furthermore, the Lord's fulfilling of the law, both of Moses, and the law of God is very necessary for the qualifications of the one that is the sacrifice for our sins. Since the Law of Moses is the visible part of the Law of God, how the Lord Jesus upholds the law in every tenet is essential. On this point He can now pose the question to other scribes and Pharisees, as is recorded later in chapter 8, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" Quite plainly, since He had totally upheld the law a short time before with the woman who committed adultery, they could not stand against Him and point out any sin. All they had to work with in their argument was in effect, the "You're no better than us; who do you think you are?" angle.

2. The Lord never violates His own law, as it is the expression of His nature. The Law of Moses is indeed an expression of God's nature. That is why it is so effective in demonstrating to us the futility of attempting to fulfill the law as a means of obtaining entrance into the Kingdom of God. I know that I could never fulfill the law of Moses. I am bound to make a mistake somewhere. This is especially true when the standard is "from the heart." However, the Lord Jesus Christ could and did fulfill the law from the heart.
3. The LORD God is a just God. If any of the law is not followed, then the whole procedure is unacceptable to God. He demonstrated this by refusing to condemn the woman as she was only guilty by the word of hypocrites. The scribes and Pharisees were hypocritical in their application of the law. This was entirely unacceptable to the Lord.
4. The LORD God's grace is demonstrated throughout. The Lord Jesus Christ could have just as easily and appropriately condemned the scribes and Pharisees for unequal application of the law. He did not, but gave

them space to repent and reflect upon their own sin. This he also did for the woman. No doubt, she knew she was guilty of adultery, but the Lord gives her space to repent and reflect on her sin as well. The consequences of her reflection were a conviction and repentance that led to her salvation.

5. God is a God of love; even for those who seek His destruction. It is so apparent the Lord could have accused the scribes and Pharisees of setting Him up and trampling all over the Law of Moses to do it. Instead, he held out to them a means of reconciliation. They were given the opportunity to relent of their attack upon Him. Wisely, this particular group of scribes and Pharisees chose to recognize they were wrong.
6. Man will do whatever he thinks he can get away with when it comes to destroying someone else. In their drive to destroy the Lord Jesus Christ, the scribes and Pharisees did not care that they condemned themselves as hypocrites in that they would not apply the law equally. Moreover, they did not care that they were going to kill someone unjustly.
7. Finally, I am reminded of the fact that the Lord gives everyone space to repent. Without this particular grace from the Lord we would all be condemned. This is so clearly seen in that the Lord even gives the abominable space to repent, as the Scriptures plainly tell us:

Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. (*Revelation 2:20-21*)

[Endnote](#)

Finis