

~~good because they are the works of God performed through His yielded instruments. As Jesus said to the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:17, "There is none good but God." Therefore there are no good works except those that are done by the Lord Himself through truly surrendered believers.~~

~~In light of these passages, we must conclude that neither John 5:28-29 nor any other such passage conflicts with the principle of salvation by grace through faith. It is simply a matter of distinguishing between a genuine faith and a counterfeit faith.~~

How can John 8:11 be reconciled with Romans 13:4 in regard to capital punishment?

In Romans 13:4, the apostle Paul, speaking of the authority of human government, says, "It is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil" (NASB). This verse makes it perfectly clear that the God-inspired author taught that capital punishment (for the "sword" is not used for imprisonment or for releasing killers on parole) is ordained of God and intended by Him for the protection of human society against those who would unjustly deprive others of their right to life.

Some students of Scripture, however, have found difficulty in reconciling Christ's treatment of the adulterous woman in John 8:3-11 with the imposition of the death penalty for capital crime. To be sure in this particular case the offense was marital infidelity rather than first-degree murder. But adultery was defined by the Mosaic Law as a heinous crime, punishable by death—normally by stoning (Deut. 22:22-24). Nevertheless it has implications for other capital

crimes, such as murder and treason. Did Jesus intend to abolish the death penalty altogether by taking this action of releasing the guilty woman in the way He did?

The evidence of the earlier manuscripts of the Gospel of John suggests 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, although it was received into the koiné or Byzantine family of manuscripts, on which the Textus Receptus (and the $\kappa\tau\nu$) are based. Nevertheless it appears to be an authentic account of an episode in Christ's ministry, and it is written in characteristically Johannine style. Therefore it should be reckoned with as an authoritative word of Christ, despite the uncertainty of its relationship to the Gospel in its earliest form.

In this incident Christ is portrayed as responding to a challenge by His adversaries, who wish to catch Him on the horns of a dilemma. If He condemns the adulteress according to the law of Moses, He will tarnish His image as a merciful and kindly messenger of God's love. On the other hand, if He refrains from condemning her to death, He will be open to the charge of annulling or revoking the law of God—contrary to His own affirmation in Matthew 5:17. This was an entrapment device somewhat similar to the question later put to Him concerning the obligation of the Jewish believer to pay tribute to Caesar (Matt. 22:17). Whichever way He answered, He could be chargeable with opposing either the holy law or the duly constituted government of Rome.

At the close of the hearing in this particular case, Jesus found Himself alone with the woman; and He said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go your way; from now on sin no more" (John 8:11, NASB). What did He mean by this? Did He mean that the woman

was not guilty of the offense as charged? Hardly, since the defendant herself made no effort to deny that she had committed adultery and had been caught “in the very act” (v.4). In that sense, of course, the Lord Jesus did condemn her; His words “sin no more” indicate that she was indeed guilty of the capital crime with which she was charged. But the Greek term *katakrinō* (“condemn”) carries with it the connotation of imposing a sentence on the defendant with a view of its execution. Compare Mark 14:64: *katekrinan auton enochon einai thanatou* (“They condemned Him as being worthy of death,” i.e., speaking of the Sanhedrin’s sentencing of Jesus to death on the cross). *Katakrinō* in other contexts might mean only defining the nature or gravity of the offense charged, but in this forensic setting it involved the actual imposition of sentence and the authorizing of her penal death by stoning.

As we analyze the situation faced by Jesus in this particular confrontation with His enemies, we must take into account the special factors that tainted the whole process with illegality. First, the law of Moses required *both* offenders to be dealt with on an equal basis. Leviticus 20:10 states: “If there is a man who commits adultery with another man’s wife, . . . the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death” (NASB). Deuteronomy 22:24 indicates that both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman herself. Thus this entire process in John 8 was legally defective because the woman’s accusers had not brought forward her male partner-in-sin. Without him there could be no valid action taken against her.

Second, such an action as this has to be taken before a duly constituted court of law, such as a panel of elders near the gate of the city, whose duty it was to hear cases. What this group of accusers had undertaken was not a

lawful court action, therefore, but a lynching. Since Jesus of Nazareth was no official judge in criminal actions, even as He made clear in an attempted civil case (the settling of a probate dispute in Luke 12:14: “Who has appointed Me a judge over you?”), this attempt to remand the case to Him was an obvious farce, devoid of legal justification, and intended only to embarrass the Teacher from Nazareth whom they hoped to discredit.

Third, by their own admission, not even the Sanhedrin had the right under the Roman government to execute the death penalty. While they had authority to impose a sentence, capital punishment could not be carried out except under the authorization of the Roman governor. Thus we read in John 18:31: “Pilate therefore said to them, ‘Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law.’ The Jews said to him, ‘We are not permitted to put any one to death’” (NASB). Therefore it follows that this proposal to Jesus to have the guilty woman stoned to death right there before Him was itself a flagrant violation of the law of Rome. Our Lord would have no part in this. As a law-abiding citizen, Jesus could have no part in such a lynching.

Nevertheless the question raised was whether the woman deserved to die. “Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?” (John 8:5, NASB). Jesus might have pointed out that they had violated the law of Moses by failing to bring along her male partner. But Jesus pursued another tack because He saw that the accusers themselves needed to realize that they also were very guilty before God, and that they therefore were hardly in a position to carry out the penalty that they demanded of their prisoner. We are told that He stooped down to write on the sand or dust of the ground. What He wrote convicted them of their own sins—sins that they had hoped would

remain hidden and unknown to all but themselves. Since He had ruled that the witness who was “without sin” had the responsibility of casting the first stone at the guilty woman, it was essential for at least one of them to have a completely clean conscience before God’s law. But not one of them could honestly claim to be free from sin before the Lord, and all the accusers suddenly found themselves accused and guilty. Hence they took their leave, one by one, until not one of them was left.

As we study Jesus’ response to this challenge, we must clearly observe that He neither covered over the guilt of the accused (as if adultery was not, after all, really heinous enough to require the death penalty—in that modern-minded, enlightened first century A.D.); nor did He suggest that death by stoning was no longer the proper way to deal with this offense. He plainly implied that the woman was guilty enough to die, and that the legal mode of execution was by stoning. The point He raised was that the accusers of the woman were themselves guilty under the law, and that they were hardly competent to carry out the sentence. Certainly they had all become guilty of an attempted lynching, completely contrary to the law of the Roman government to which they were all subject. Hence the whole process was voided by their incompetence and illegality.

In this episode of the adulterous woman, Jesus was hardly affirming that capital punishment was no longer to be imposed, nor that He was revising the Law of Moses in favor of a new policy of compassion toward those who had incurred the penalty of death. On the contrary, He upheld the continuing sanction of execution for capital crime; but He brought home to His countrymen—and, indeed, to all mankind—the solemn truth that before the Lord every man is guilty of

death—eternal death—and that He had come for the express purpose of paying that penalty in the sinner’s stead.

~~What did Jesus mean by saying that men are “gods” (John 10:34)?~~

~~John 10:34 reads: “Jesus answered them, ‘Is it not written in your Law, “I said, you are gods?”’” This remark came right after the Jews had made preparations to stone the Lord because of His affirmation in v.30: “I and the Father are one.” Jesus’ audience rightly understood Him as asserting His deity, in terms suggestive of the Trinity. They therefore concluded that He had blasphemed God; for though He was only a man (as they supposed), He was making Himself out to be God (v.33). To counter their hostility and rejection, Jesus quoted from Psalm 82:6, which reads as follows: “I said, ‘You are gods, and all of you are sons of the Most High God.’”~~

~~In citing Psalm 82:6, Jesus was appealing to a verse from the infallible Scriptures (infallible because they can not be broken) that attaches the name or title “god” to certain men, not to all men, of course, but only “those to whom the word of God came” (John 10:35). A divine dimension was added to those people who had been especially chosen by God to be bearers of His saving truth and administrators of His holy law. In Psalm 82 God is addressing judges and administrators who have been chosen to serve as His representatives in teaching and enforcing His holy law. To be sure, some of these solemnly commissioned judges exercised their office unjustly and showed partiality to the rich, even though they were in the wrong (v.2). Essentially the psalm expresses a condemnation of these unjust jurists, saying, in effect, “Although you have the status of membership in the family of~~