

Pharisees Accuse Others

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen's sermon emphasizes the dangers of legalism and the importance of mercy and self-examination in the Christian life.

Scripture: John 8:3

Topics: "Legalism", "Mercy"

Description

Zac Poonen addresses the hypocrisy of the Pharisees who accused a woman caught in adultery, emphasizing their lack of understanding of God's heart behind the law. He illustrates how they sought to trap Jesus, but instead, He demonstrated mercy and wisdom, highlighting the danger of legalism over genuine compassion. Poonen urges believers to examine their own hearts and stop judging others, as the spirit of accusation reflects a lack of self-awareness and spiritual blindness. He calls for a deep repentance from the judgmental attitudes that can harm both the accuser and the accused, reminding us that true progress in faith comes from self-examination and mercy. Ultimately, he stresses that God's grace forgives sin but also calls for a transformation away from it.

Transcript

"The Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the center of the court, they said to Him, 'Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act. Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?' They were saying this, testing Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him" (John 8:3-6).

The Pharisees had not understood the heart of God behind the law that stated that adulterous women must be stoned. God did not love to see women stoned to death, but He did want to put a severe deterrent in the way of adultery. The Pharisees were not actually interested in obeying the Law here. All they wanted was to find some grounds to accuse Jesus. They had already accused the sinful woman and now they wanted to accuse the sinless Son of God as well. That is how Pharisees are. They have no fear of God and would accuse the godliest men as much as they would accuse anyone else.

The Pharisees thought this was a "Catch-22" situation, where whatever Jesus said would give them grounds to accuse Him. If He said, "Stone her to death", they would accuse Him of lacking compassion; and if He said, "No. Don't stone her to death", then they could accuse Him of not keeping the Law of Moses. It was like tossing a coin and saying, "Heads we win, tails you lose". We will win either way. But they didn't win. They lost! Jesus did not reply immediately but sat down and waited for a word from His

Father. As soon as He heard the Father's reply, He told them, "Let him who is without sin, cast the first stone". One sentence from the Father was enough to solve the problem.

If you listen to the Holy Spirit, you won't have to preach a long sermon in situations like this. One sentence can shut the mouths of your enemies. God gives such words of wisdom even today to those who are not Pharisees and who do not accuse others. God's promise to such people is

I will give you the right words and such logic and wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to reply or refute! (Luke 21:15 - NASB & TLB).

Was Jesus against adultery? Yes, He certainly was. But He was much more against legalism than He was against adultery. We see that very clearly here: The adulterous woman was on one side of Jesus and the legalistic Pharisees on the other. In the end we find only the adulterous woman at Jesus' feet. The others were driven away by the word that Jesus spoke. Adultery was only a speck in the woman's eye compared to the massive logs of legalism and hatred in the eyes of the Pharisees.

Now ask yourself how many times you have accused good brothers and sisters of things which are not even one-millionth as bad as adultery. Think of the things you have spoken about them behind their back, in your house and elsewhere. Every time you have indulged in such accusations, the log in your eye - your hard, judgemental, accusative attitude towards others - has become bigger and bigger and made you more and more blind to spiritual things. Who have you harmed ultimately? Yourself, more than anyone else.

Do you think that a man with a log in his eye can be an eye-doctor to remove specks from the eyes of others? You need to hear the word of the Lord saying to you, "Leave your brothers and sisters alone. They only have a few specks in their eyes. The log in your eye is much worse than all their specks put together."

Why was Jesus so much against this spirit of accusation? Because, when He was in heaven, He had heard Satan (the "Accuser of the brethren") accusing people "day and night" continually (Revelation 12:10). When Jesus came to earth and saw people having that same spirit, they reminded Him of Satan. Jesus hated this spirit of accusation then and He hates it even today. Do you realise that when you accuse others you remind Jesus of Satan? Most believers don't see this - because the log in their eyes has blinded them.

If there is one message I have preached for 30 years it is this: If you want to progress spiritually, stop judging others and start judging yourself. Use your microscope on yourself and not on others. And after you have judged yourself, I'll tell you what you should do. Judge yourself some more. When should you stop? When you have become completely like Jesus Christ. The apostle John told believers at the end of his life,

When Christ appears, we will be like Himand everyone who has this hope will purify himself, just as Christ is pure (1 John 3:2, 3).

How then should a church-leader correct someone who is wrong? With mercy - with tremendous mercy, with as much mercy as the Lord has shown him. Jesus did not ignore the sin of adultery that this woman had committed. No. He first told her with great compassion, "I don't condemn you". Then He warned her strongly, "Don't ever commit this sin again". God's grace doesn't condone our sin! It forgives our sin first and then warns us not sin and then helps us not to sin.

Why did all the Pharisees go away? They should have come all to the Lord in brokenness saying, "Lord, please forgive me. I have got light on my own hidden sins and my hard legalistic attitude now. I see now that I am much worse than this woman. Please have mercy on me." But not one of them came to Jesus like that.

What about you who have been finding fault with so many people for some fault or the other that you see in them? Will you let the Lord break you today?

When some people have come to me and apologised for something they said or did against me, I have sensed that they were not broken. This proved that they had not really repented of their sin. They were just obeying a law to keep their conscience clean. I forgave them immediately. But I am certain that they will fall into those sins again, because they are legalistic. They had realised technically, that they had disobeyed "Law Number 347 - Thou shalt not speak evil against an elder brother behind his back" and needed now to apologize. So they go through the formality of an apology, in order to obey "Law Number 9 - Thou shalt apologize to the one thou hast wronged"!! But nothing has changed within them. They go on with their lives as before.

When God gives us light on our own sins, we will be so blinded by that light, that we will fall at Jesus' feet like a dead man (Revelation 1:17) and we will consider ourselves to be "the greatest sinners on earth" (1 Timothy 1:15). Have you ever felt like that? Or do you just feel that you slipped up slightly? Then you are a Pharisee and it cannot go well with you until you repent of stoning poor people who have specks in their eyes. Let God to break your stubborn heart.

James 2:13 reminds us that "God will be merciless in judging all who have not shown mercy to others". And church leaders are usually the Number One culprits in this area. Parents also need to be careful that they are not unmerciful to their children.

A church-leader who falls into adultery can never destroy a church, because every believer knows that adultery is a sin, and that leader will be removed from his position immediately. But if a church-leader is a legalist, he is a far greater danger - because he is preaching "holiness". And those who don't have light on legalism will follow him and become legalists themselves. As a blind Pharisee he will thus lead others also into the deep pit of legalism into which he himself has fallen.

Have you actually seen that your attitude of judging and accusing others is worse than if you had fallen into adultery ten times? How would you repent if you had fallen into adultery ten times in the last one month? You must repent even more than that for having the spirit of accusation.

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