

## Shorthand Sermon on John 8:1–11<sup>1</sup>

This is the fourth of six sermons by Charles Wesley, written shortly after his evangelical awakening, that survive only in copies he composed in the shorthand that he had learned from John Byrom. CW appears to have preached directly from the shorthand manuscript. These sermons were inaccessible, even to most scholars, until an expansion of the shorthand was published by Thomas R. Albin and Oliver A. Beckerlegge in 1987.<sup>2</sup>

John Byrom’s shorthand is constructed of consonant sounds, with vowel markers; though the latter are often omitted when assumed to be obvious. It also frequently uses single letters for entire words, abbreviations for phrases, and the like. As such, expansion of shorthand texts necessarily involves varying degrees of interpretation and hypothetical renderings.<sup>3</sup> Since the entire sermon that follows is in shorthand, we do *not* enclose each line or paragraph in double square brackets “[[]],” as we do for brief shorthand additions to longhand texts. But when more than one expansion might make sense, the letters indicated by the shorthand are given, enclosing the remainder of our suggested expansion in single brackets “[ ].” When the expansion is more tentative, a question mark is included within the brackets “[?]”.

The first time that CW mentions in his MS Journal preaching on “the woman taken in adultery” was an extemporaneous exposition at the home of George Stonehouse on Tuesday evening, February 20, 1739. The next mention was as a Sunday sermon on April 15, at St. Mary’s church in Islington. CW prepared a full (shorthand) manuscript for this occasion. He recorded this instance of preaching (in longhand) on the inside cover of the manuscript. The initial manuscript survives at the Methodist Archive and Research Centre (MA 1977/597/8). In the same folder is a “clean copy” of the sermon, also in shorthand, which CW noted in shorthand on the outside of the folder for the two manuscripts was “transcribed Nov. 24, 1758.”

The transcription which follows is our expansion of the shorthand of the earliest copy, since that reflects the text CW preached the first time. We focus on CW’s final text—ignoring any text ~~struck out~~ and replaced by CW. One of the values of the 1758 transcription is that CW spelled out (in shorthand) more completely some words and phrases which appear in abbreviated form in the early copy. Any significant revisions in the later transcription are mentioned in footnotes (see particularly the note on §§25–30). Our expansion differs on a few occasions from that of Albin & Beckerlegge. Once again we indicate the page transitions (in **red** font) of the earliest manuscript.

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<sup>1</sup>This document was produced by the Duke Center for Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition under editorial direction of Randy L. Maddox, with the assistance of Aileen F. Maddox. Last updated: Sept. 27, 2024.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas R. Albin and Oliver A. Beckerlegge (eds.). *Charles Wesley’s Earliest Evangelical Sermons: Six Shorthand Manuscript Sermons Now for the First Time Transcribed from the Original* (Ilford: Wesley Historical Society, 1987), 71–86.

<sup>3</sup>See Timothy Underhill, “John Byrom’s Shorthand: An Introduction,” *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society* 104 (2008): 61–91.

**John 8:1ff.:** “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 lift 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 consciences, 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 lift 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.<sup>2</sup>

[1.] *Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives, and early in the morning he came again into the temple.*<sup>3</sup> – The life of Christ is the life of Christians.<sup>4</sup> Who, if they are Christians indeed, walk as he also walked,<sup>5</sup> spending their time in works of piety and charity, on the mount or with the multitude.<sup>6</sup> From prayer they return with their Lord to doing good, from doing good they retire to prayer. Each fits for other—retirement for action, and action for retirement.

[2.] *And early in the morning he came again into the temple* – leaving us an example that we should tread in his steps. A Christian therefore, as such, is early at his devotions; else he has nothing of Christ but the name.

[3.] *He came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him.* – It is into the temple we must come, if we would find Christ. At the hours of prayer, it is here only we must look for him. Whoever willfully neglects to seek him here shall find him nowhere else. Many indeed come to this place without meeting him, but no man can expect to meet him without coming to this place. Many miss finding him here because they come scribes and Pharisees. But they who forbear assembling themselves together are no followers of Christ.<sup>7</sup> They are quite out of his way. They cannot find, for they will not seek him. [p. 2]

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<sup>1</sup>I.e., I[n] N[omine] I[esu]; “In the name of Jesus”

<sup>2</sup>John 8:1–11.

<sup>3</sup>CW placed these scattered excerpts from his text in square brackets. We have rendered them in italics and a dash, to highlight he is working through the text, expounding on it.

<sup>4</sup>The later transcription changes “is the life” to “should be the life.”

<sup>5</sup>See 1 John 2:6.

<sup>6</sup>See Matt. 8:1.

<sup>7</sup>See Heb. 10:25.

[4.] *All the people came unto him.* – All the publicans and sinners drew nigh unto him to hear him, saith St. Luke (15:1). But have any of the rulers believed on him? No! They were too wise and too holy. But this people which is accursed, harlots and publicans, run after him,<sup>8</sup> the poor have the gospel preached to them.<sup>9</sup>

[5.] *He sat down and taught them.* – For they only had ears to hear. They were not whole, but such as had need of a physician.<sup>10</sup> They were not righteous but sinners, and utterly lost without him. Therefore they were the very persons he came to call to repentance.<sup>11</sup> They were the very persons he came to seek and to save.<sup>12</sup> And accordingly these outcasts of men were almost his only followers.

[6.] *He taught them.* – For they knew themselves ignorant. He healed them, for they felt themselves sick. He pardoned them, for they confessed themselves sinners. He saved them, for they owned they deserved to be damned.

[7.] *The scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery.* – What a triumph is here for the scribes and Pharisees! A woman taken in adultery! What a glorious occasion of setting forth their own virtues—their spotless chastity, their zeal for justice, their abhorrence of sinners! On this only occasion they can touch sinners without being defiled, when they are dragging them to execution. And they are never so happy as in this employment. They never shine so bright as by this comparison!

[8.] *They brought unto him.* – The friend of publicans and sinners!<sup>13</sup> As they truly called him, though he was so in a sense more glorious than their malice meant it. Seeking to gratify their revenge no less than their pride, *they brought unto him a woman taken in adultery.* – And why the woman rather; since the man's offence was equal if not greater? Perhaps they hoped for more likely matter to accuse Christ in the case of the woman than of the man, as supposing his merciful disposition might more probably incline [him<sup>14</sup>] to compassionate her wickedness, and so illegally to acquit her.

[9.] *And when they had set her in the midst.* – Shame must make way for punishment. She had escaped too cheaply had they suffered her to die without first insulting and triumphing over her. Therefore they drag her out to light, and place her in the face of the congregation. See then this miserable adulteress! How she stands confounded in the midst of that gazing and disdainful multitude! How she hides her head, and with trembling silence expects and anticipates the dreadful sentence.

[10.] Not so the scribes and Pharisees. They stand forth to accuse her. With boldness and confidence *they say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act.* – How plausibly do they begin! With what reverence do they accost him! With what veneration to his person, and deference to his judgment! What holy, honest, and conscientious men are these! Such strict lovers of justice! Such devout followers of Christ! So [p. 3] we should be apt to think

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<sup>8</sup>See Matt. 21:31.

<sup>9</sup>See Matt. 11:5.

<sup>10</sup>See Mark 2:17.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>See Luke 19:10.

<sup>13</sup>See Matt. 11:19, etc.

<sup>14</sup>This missing word was added in the later transcription.

of them.<sup>15</sup> But he who made and knows their hearts tells us all this is but done to tempt him. Whence we may justly infer that the highest outward profession of righteousness, the greatest seeming esteem of it, is perfectly consistent with all filthiness of spirit, and may proceed from the corrupt heart of a wholly false, hypocritical Pharisee.

[11.] But what say these holy executioners? – *Master this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act.* – This is made an aggravation of her guilt. *She was taken!* – And with a Pharisee this is all in all. It is not the guilt, but its discovery, makes the sinner. It is not the sin but the scandal they are afraid of. Sin concealed is with them no sin at all. But when detected, it is most abominable. If they can but preserve their reputation, all is well. If they can but hide their vices from men, they think themselves as good as innocent. While only God and their own conscience knows it, they are safe enough. But alas, what shall it avail them to lurk a while under the mask of innocence! When the secrets of all hearts shall so soon be revealed,<sup>16</sup> and God shall bring to light the hidden things of darkness.<sup>17</sup> In that day they shall find their conscience more than a thousand witnesses,<sup>18</sup> and God more than a thousand consciences.

[12.] Till then they may happily pass for saints, and hide their sin under a seeming abhorrence of sin, and drown their own guilt in a clamorous cry for justice upon others. So their holy predecessors in the history before us. They accuse and loudly call for punishment against a notorious offender. *Now Moses in the law commanded us that such should be stoned, but what sayest thou?* – What a suspicious, subtle, ensnaring question! Here, they think, he cannot escape, but which way soever he answers must give them the occasion they sought for. *For this they said tempting him, that they might have to accuse him.* – Like their father the devil, the tempter, the accuser!—and who therefore tempts that he may accuse. Like his genuine children of this generation, who come after the preacher, laying wait for him, and seeking to catch something out of his mouth that they may accuse him. Poor miserable men, ye know not who employs you, ye consider not who sends you, or that you are the apostles of Satan. He inspires your thoughts, he speaks your words, he sets you to work, and he will pay you your wages.

[13.] *Now Moses in the law commanded us that such should be stoned, but what sayest thou?* – They know Christ's inclination to mercy and compassion. Their self-righteous souls had been often grieved at seeing him eat with known sinners. They had murmured at his receiving them, his dismissing one, justifying another, inviting and speaking kindly to all. Hence they hoped his pity might draw him to acquit her, whom the law condemned. And they would not have desired a better [p. 4] advantage than that he should contradict their received lawgiver. “We are Moses' disciples. We know God spoke to Moses.”<sup>19</sup> And had our Lord spoken otherwise, they would have had to accuse him. It is still the aim of those that are enemies to the truth to set Christ and Moses at variance, particularly as to the use of the law. “You make void the law through faith,”<sup>20</sup> say they, “that is, through your doctrine of justification by faith only.” We

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<sup>15</sup>The later transcription changed “should be apt” to “should have been apt.”

<sup>16</sup>The later transcription reads “shall be soon revealed.”

<sup>17</sup>See 1 Cor. 4:5.

<sup>18</sup>See Rom. 2:15–16.

<sup>19</sup>John 9:28–29.

<sup>20</sup>Cf. Rom. 3:31.

answer with St. Paul, “Yea, we establish the law.”<sup>21</sup> Christ and Moses are two inseparable friends. Each speaks for each. One confirms the other. They are subordinate, not opposite. Moses as the servant, Christ the Son. Moses as the schoolmaster,<sup>22</sup> Christ to supply Moses. “By him all that believe are justified from all things from which they could not be justified by the law.”<sup>23</sup> Moses brings us to Christ; Christ brings us to glory. Faith does not destroy good works, unless the cause destroys the effect. Faith alone is necessary to justification; works ought evidence our justification as consequents not conditions,<sup>24</sup> as fruits not causes.

[14.] As vainly therefore do our Pharisees labour to make Christ contradict Moses as their predecessors of old, whom we are now considering. These reasoned thus: “Either he must clear the guilty, or condemn her. If he acquits her, where is his justice? If he condemns her, where is his mercy?” Let them extort a legal sentence, and they thereby blast the honour of his clemency. Let him consent to the law, and he loses his reputation with the people. And his enemies will immediately cry, “See here your friend of sinners! Who condemns them without mercy. Who inflicts the cruellest punishment. Who stones them that are brought unto him!” Howsoever he answers, they gain their point. He cannot escape; but they will have [cause] to accuse him either of injustice or unmercifulness. Such is the cunning folly of vain men that would hope to beguile wisdom itself!

[15.] *But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not.* – Silence and neglect is their first answer; and in many cases we shall find it the best.

[16.] *As though he heard them not.* – His ear is not heavy that it cannot hear our calls for mercy.<sup>25</sup> His ear is ever open to the sinner’s cry. But when devils and Pharisees cry out for justice, he becomes as a deaf man and one that heareth not. How often have our sins demanded justice against us, and he would not hear? So rich is he in goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, so slow to anger and averse from punishing! Which he therefore calls his strange work,<sup>26</sup> and comes to it, as it were, with the utmost reluctance. Nay, he pauses in the very act of punishing. His justice lingers and relents and yields. He drops the lifted bolt and says,<sup>27</sup> “How shall I give thee up, Oh Ephraim!”<sup>28</sup> [p. 5]

[17.] The more unwilling he seems to give an answer, the more eager are they to extort one from him. And in this case we are to follow our Lord’s example. When our Pharisees insist and urge us to answer, we must at last reply plainly and fully. We are even under a necessity of uncasing them, of tearing off the mask and exposing them to the people.

[18.] *So when they continued asking him, he lift up himself and said unto them, He that is without sin, let him first cast a stone at her.* – He lifted up himself, as if his action had said: I was

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<sup>21</sup>Rom. 3:31.

<sup>22</sup>See Gal. 3:24.

<sup>23</sup>Acts 13:39. The later transcription omits “that believe.”

<sup>24</sup>“Ought evidence” changed to “to evidence” in later transcription; the change involves moving a dot from one side of a line to the other—so “ought” might have been a slip.

<sup>25</sup>See Isa. 59:1.

<sup>26</sup>See Isa. 28:21.

<sup>27</sup>The later transcription changes “says” to “cries.”

<sup>28</sup>Hosea 11:8.

willing to let you escape. I was loth to shame you. But since you will needs have it, and by your vehemence force my justice, I must tell you there is no one of you but is as faulty as she whom ye accuse. There is no difference. Only your sin is secret, and hers notorious. You have more need to make your own peace with God by a humble repentance than to urge severity against her. Death is justly due to such horrid offences. But what then would become of you? She deserves to die, but not by your unclean hands. Your hearts know you are not honest enough to accuse.

[19.] *He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.* – How wise an answer; how worthy of him that spoke it! Here both his justice and his mercy are preserved. He takes neither part of our dilemma, not condemning either Moses or the sinner. In this punishment the witnesses were first to lay their hands upon the guilty. Well therefore doth our Lord check these accusers with the conscience of their so foul incompetency. He takes off these bloody hands by turning their eyes upon themselves. Innocence is justly required in the accuser. She is worthy to be stoned, but by whom? Who shall first cast the stones at her? Not scribes and Pharisees. Ill would it become hands as guilty as her own. With what face, with what heart could they stone their own sin in another person!<sup>29</sup>

[20.] These scribes and Pharisees, we know, were noted for holiness. They went beyond even our good sort of people, and in all outward appearance were most exemplary saints. But God's thoughts are not as our thoughts.<sup>30</sup> These are they that justify themselves before men, but God knoweth their hearts. For that which is highly esteemed among men is abominable with him. He searcheth them out to perfection.<sup>31</sup> In vain do they hope to escape that all-seeing eye which can find folly in the angels.<sup>32</sup> The heavens are not clean in his sight.<sup>33</sup> How much less they that dwell in houses of clay. How least of all the self-justifying Pharisees! Such as be unrighteous shall not stand in his sight. And now they find it. Now indeed his eyes are as a flame of fire, and out of his mouth goeth a sharp two-edged sword, [p. 6] and his countenance is as the sun shineth in his strength.<sup>34</sup> No wonder therefore that Pharisees cannot behold him, but are thunderstruck, astonished, confounded! The accusers are cast down, the high looks are fallen. Pharisees themselves are silent, and no longer outrageous against notorious sinners.

[21.] Perhaps these secret sins, with which our Lord now stops their clamorous mouths, had been long since forgot. They thought no more of them, and said, Hath not God forgotten?<sup>35</sup> But all these things are noted in his book, and are now brought to remembrance by their Judge. "These things hast thou done, and I held my peace, and thou thoughtest wickedly that I am even such a one as thyself. But I will reprove thee, and set before thee the things which thou hast done."<sup>36</sup> So will God speak to every lurking sinner.

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<sup>29</sup>The later transcription drops "their own."

<sup>30</sup>See Isa. 55:8.

<sup>31</sup>See 1 Chron. 28:9.

<sup>32</sup>See Job 4:18.

<sup>33</sup>See Job 15:15.

<sup>34</sup>See Rev. 1:14–15.

<sup>35</sup>See Ps. 10:11.

<sup>36</sup>Ps. 50:21.

[22.] But if we would that he should not remember our sins, we should never forget them ourselves. Let them be ever before us, that he may not set them in the light of his countenance.<sup>37</sup> And for the time to come, let us see ourselves seen by him, and we shall not dare to offend.

[23.] *And again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.* – To give them an opportunity of escaping unobserved. He seems to disregard them, but we all know how his medicine worked. Accordingly, we do not see them stand out in their innocence. No! Their hearts misgive them. And they feared if they had stood out<sup>38</sup> he would have utterly shamed them, by displaying all their old sins and turning their pretended saintliness inside out. This was a discovery they were not fond of; especially before the people, who began to find them out and to beware of scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.<sup>39</sup> They saw the rod held over them, they felt the smart, and willingly spared our Lord any further explanation—going out one by one, that they might not seem driven away.

[24.] *And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last.* – Oh irresistible truth! Oh wonderful power of conscience! Man can no more stand out against that than that can against God. When the Almighty (whose substance it is) sets it on work, it has, as it were, the force of omnipotence. When that says we are guilty, there is no denying. In vain does the world acquit us while our hearts are consumed by the worm that never dies.<sup>40</sup> No wicked man need seek out of himself a judge, accuser, witness, tormentor.

[25.]<sup>41</sup> *And they which heard it, being convicted by their own consciences, went out.* – How boldly did these hypocrites set upon Christ! With what insolent triumph, what diabolical subtlety, what foulness of self-righteousness! Now are they thunderstruck, [p. 7] and drop away confounded. No sooner do they hear of their own sins from the mouth of Christ, but they are gone. He had given them a convincing proof that he was God, and as such had power to forgive sins upon earth.<sup>42</sup> They ought therefore to have humbly confessed their sins unto him, and earnestly prayed him to forgive them their sins, and to cleanse them of all unrighteousness.<sup>43</sup> But you will not easily bring a Pharisee to that, to own himself a sinner that deserves to be damned. No. Instead of that, he turns his back upon his Saviour and hastes away.

[26.] A Pharisee cares not how little he hears either of the power of God or the multitude of his sins. When he does hear a searching truth, which he cannot deny and will not receive, he has nothing else for it but to flee as fast as he can. This, as it is a certain token of guilt, so is it an infallible mark of a Pharisee: Your turning your back upon the ambassadors of Christ and by despising them, despising him that sent them.<sup>44</sup> Your going out of church, as your predecessors out of the temple, and thereby counting and proclaiming yourselves unworthy of eternal life. By

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<sup>37</sup>See Ps. 90:8.

<sup>38</sup>The later transcription changes “stood out” to “stood it out.”

<sup>39</sup>See Matt. 23:13.

<sup>40</sup>See Mark 9:48.

<sup>41</sup>A notation and vertical line begins at this point in the later transcription marking §§25–30 for omission (apparently to shorten the delivery time of the sermon).

<sup>42</sup>See Matt. 9:6, etc.

<sup>43</sup>See 1 John 1:9.

<sup>44</sup>See 1 Thess. 4:8.

this speechless action you cry out, like Paul in the council, “I am a Pharisee, and the son of a Pharisee.”<sup>45</sup> You make the application of what is spoken to yourselves, as plainly as if you answered with an audible voice, “I am the man!”<sup>46</sup> My conscience is my accuser! I cannot cast the first stone. I myself am a secret adulterer, an hypocritical fornicator—and come not to the light because I love darkness, and cannot bear the light because my deeds are evil.”

[27.] My brethren, I wait to see which of you goes out now. If your conscience will not let you stay, I would even favour your escape, and not see you—was it not that by seeing you I might recommend you to the prayers of the congregation. Indeed you need them, as many among you as have ever dared to go out of church, for you are in the very gall of bitterness, in the bond of iniquity.<sup>47</sup> And now you know you cannot fly from conviction I think it my duty to tell you so.

[28.] You that go out of church and yet call yourselves Christians, to you I speak, and set before you the things which you have done. You are they that cannot endure sound doctrine.<sup>48</sup> Well do you Pharisees reject the counsel of God against yourselves, even his counsel to save lost sinners, to justify them freely when they own they deserve to be damned. But you spurn away from you so cheap salvation. You will not accept of Christ upon his own so easy terms. You will not have this man reign over you. When I speak as the oracles of God,<sup>49</sup> and tell you the truth as it is in Jesus,<sup>50</sup> [p. 8] is it a small thing, think you, not to receive my testimony? Nay, but in not receiving it, in not embracing these offers of salvation by grace, you have trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and done despite unto the Spirit of grace.<sup>51</sup> Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost.<sup>52</sup> Though you are cut to the heart and gnash upon me with your teeth,<sup>53</sup> yet must I warn you of this your wickedness, else you shall die in your iniquity, but your blood will God require at my hand.<sup>54</sup> Wherefore in his name who hath set me a watchman unto the house of Israel,<sup>55</sup> I warn you of the dreadful consequences of your having so denied the Lord that bought you;<sup>56</sup> for which, unless you truly repent, you shall surely die in your iniquity. But I have delivered my own soul. Hear ye this and tremble, you who have turned your back upon a Saviour! For to you am I sent to cry aloud and spare not, to lift up my voice like a trumpet and show you your transgressions and your sins.<sup>57</sup> How shall you escape who have neglected so great

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<sup>45</sup>Acts 23:6.

<sup>46</sup>See Lam. 3:1.

<sup>47</sup>See Acts 8:23.

<sup>48</sup>See 2 Tim. 4:3.

<sup>49</sup>See 1 Pet. 4:11.

<sup>50</sup>See Eph. 4:21.

<sup>51</sup>See Heb. 10:29.

<sup>52</sup>See Acts 7:51.

<sup>53</sup>See Acts 7:54.

<sup>54</sup>See Ezek. 33:8.

<sup>55</sup>See Ezek. 33:7. The later transcription changes “watchman unto” to “watchman over.”

<sup>56</sup>See 2 Pet. 2:1.

<sup>57</sup>See Isa. 58:1.



salvation?<sup>58</sup> Why, hitherto you have never thought about it [...<sup>59</sup>]. If I am come amongst you preaching the gospel, if it be the gospel,<sup>60</sup> and you have rejected it, and I shake off the dust of my feet again,<sup>61</sup> “Verily, verily,” Christ saith unto you, “it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for you.”<sup>62</sup>

[29.] Unhappy foolish men! What doth it profit you to flee from him? If you could run away from God, it were something; but while ye move in him,<sup>63</sup> what do ye? Where go ye? You may run from his mercy; you cannot from his justice. Nay, you must run upon his justice by fleeing from his mercy.

[30.] Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps it may be forgiven you.<sup>64</sup> Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God.<sup>65</sup> Bow your stiff necks, ye rebellious worms. Ye potentates of the earth, strive no longer with your Maker.<sup>66</sup> Justify God in his saying. Clear him whom ye have judged,<sup>67</sup> and confess you do deserve to be damned. Till you do confess it, you are in a state of damnation still, as surely as God is true. And the man that dares tell you otherwise—to say, “Peace, peace,” where there is no peace<sup>68</sup>—he shall bear his burden, whosoever he be. I myself shall rise up in judgment against that man. And I put all my hopes of finding mercy in that day upon the truth of this report, that whosoever does not from his heart believe<sup>69</sup> he deserves to be damned, is in a state of damnation at this very hour! [p. 9]

[31.] Return we now to the history. *And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.* – Jesus was left by the scribes and Pharisees, but the people and the mournful adulteress remained. She still stands in the midst, being fastened down by her own guilt, not daring to lift up her eyes, or to encourage the faintly dawning hope of mercy. Oh how well was this sinner to be left there! Could she be in a safer place than before the tribunal of a Saviour! Might she have chosen her refuge, where should she have rather fled? Happy, happy are we, if when convinced of sin we can set ourselves before that judge who is our surety, our advocate, our redeemer, our ransom, our peace!

[32.] Some hope she doubtless had from her accusers being gone, but a much stronger fear of the punishment she deserved. Divided she is, but not equally between hope and fear. And now while she trembles in expectation of a sentence, she hears, *Woman, where are those thine accusers?* – We do not hear him railing on her, or reviling her. He doth not say, “Thou vile

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<sup>58</sup>See Heb. 2:3.

<sup>59</sup>CW leaves a couple open lines here in the original sermon. He may have intended to add text, or been leaving this open as a leading question.

<sup>60</sup>The later transcription reads “the true gospel.”

<sup>61</sup>See Matt. 10:14.

<sup>62</sup>Matt. 10:15.

<sup>63</sup>See Acts 17:8.

<sup>64</sup>See Acts 8:22.

<sup>65</sup>See 1 Pet. 5:6.

<sup>66</sup>See Isa. 45:9.

<sup>67</sup>The later transcription changes “whom ye have judged” to “when you are judged.”

<sup>68</sup>See Jer. 6:14.

<sup>69</sup>The later transcription changes “believe” to “confess.”

creature, thou execrable adulteress, thou shameless strumpet,” but “Woman, where are those thine accusers?”<sup>70</sup> Those who but now so importunately demanded justice against thee, who hauled thee so triumphantly to execution? Has the Ethiopian changed his skin,<sup>71</sup> or the Pharisee forgot his implacable hatred against open sinners? Whence is it that their cries for blood are suspended and they suffer the prey to be taken out of their teeth? What unnatural compassion is this which makes them drop their charge and leave a gross sinner any hope of mercy? Is it out of pity that they leave thee unpunished? Or is it not rather guilt which has driven them away and withheld their foul hands from inflicting a punishment they themselves deserve?

[33.] *Hath no man condemned thee?* – Or cast the first stone at thee? Is there then none among them without sin? Is there none righteous, no not one,<sup>72</sup> even among the self-justifying scribes and Pharisees? He seems, as it were, to triumph over these self-righteous ones, whom their flight convinces of sin far more abominable than hers.

[34.] *She said, No man, Lord.* – And what though every man had condemned, if God acquitted her? *And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee, go, and sin no more.* – A gracious word! A comfortable sound in the ears of a despairing sinner! *Neither do I condemn thee.* – I judge no man. “For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him should be saved.”<sup>73</sup> “As I live, saith the Lord [God], I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.”<sup>74</sup> Man’s miserable justice oft-times has; but God is love, and mercy rejoices against judgment.

[35.] It is thus in the case before us. The Pharisees thought he could not save so great a sinner. He therefore [p. 10] shows them he can. But these things were written for our instruction.<sup>75</sup> For our sakes principally he lets her go free,<sup>76</sup> to convince us our sins cannot be too great for his mercy, and to show us the temper which fits us for our pardon.

[36.] When a notorious sinner is hauled to justice, and by men not even suffered to live, let him by the Holy Ghost call Jesus Lord,<sup>77</sup> and he shall know that the arm of the Lord is not shortened,<sup>78</sup> but that Christ is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him.<sup>79</sup> Oh that the greatest sinner now out of hell were present, that I might show unto him the way of salvation, and make him a free offer of it in the blood of Jesus! “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all men to be received, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief!”<sup>80</sup> This let him see and feel. Let him place himself like the miserable adulteress in the

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<sup>70</sup>The later transcription elides this and the previous sentence.

<sup>71</sup>See Jer. 13:23.

<sup>72</sup>See Rom. 3:10.

<sup>73</sup>John 3:17.

<sup>74</sup>Ezek. 33:11.

<sup>75</sup>See Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11.

<sup>76</sup>The later transcription changes “principally” to “brethren.”

<sup>77</sup>See 1 Cor. 12:3.

<sup>78</sup>See Isa. 59:1.

<sup>79</sup>See Heb. 7:25.

<sup>80</sup>1 Tim. 1:15.

presence of his judge, not daring so much as to lift up his eyes, but with confusion of face,<sup>81</sup> and horror of heart confess that all his desert is hell. Let him be as fully convinced that he deserves damnation as the woman that she deserved a temporal punishment. Let him stand before his judge trembling and self-condemned. Let him become guilty before God, having his mouth stopped, and before his eyes the sentence of eternal death. Let the greatest sinner upon earth be thus humbled, thus convinced, and to him,<sup>82</sup> even to him, do I glory in giving encouragement. To him do I publish the glad tidings of a Saviour.<sup>83</sup> And he may have a strong consolation, who flies for refuge to lay hold upon the hope which I set before him:<sup>84</sup> Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever!<sup>85</sup> Christ Jesus, the same physician of them that are sick,<sup>86</sup> the same quickener of them that are dead in trespasses and sins,<sup>87</sup> the same justifier of the ungodly,<sup>88</sup> the same friend of publicans and sinners,<sup>89</sup> the same Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.<sup>90</sup> Believe this, O thou chief of sinners. Believe he suffered once for all, the just for the unjust.<sup>91</sup> He tasted death for every man.<sup>92</sup> He loved thee and gave himself for thee.<sup>93</sup> Then shalt thou feel the power of this Scripture: “Hath no man condemned thee?”<sup>94</sup> Let any, let every man upon earth, let all the devils in hell condemn thee—yea, if thy heart condemn thee too<sup>95</sup>—and thou canst believe in Jesus, he himself shall say, “I do not condemn thee. Go, and sin no more.”<sup>96</sup>

[37.] He that believeth on the Son of God shall never come into condemnation,<sup>97</sup> but may boldly make the apostle’s challenge, “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died; yea rather, that is risen again. Who is even at the right hand of God. Who also maketh intercession for us!”<sup>98</sup> How great or many soever his sins have been, it matters not. Allow we that he was the first born son of the

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<sup>81</sup>See Dan. 9:7–8.

<sup>82</sup>The material from “Let him become ...” to this point is elided in the later transcription.

<sup>83</sup>See Luke 2:10–11.

<sup>84</sup>See Heb. 6:18.

<sup>85</sup>See Heb. 13:8.

<sup>86</sup>See Mark 2:17.

<sup>87</sup>See Eph. 2:1, 5.

<sup>88</sup>See Rom. 4:5.

<sup>89</sup>See Matt. 11:19, etc.

<sup>90</sup>See John 1:29.

<sup>91</sup>See 1 Pet. 3:8.

<sup>92</sup>See Heb. 2:9.

<sup>93</sup>See Eph. 5:2.

<sup>94</sup>John 8:10.

<sup>95</sup>See 1 John 3:20.

<sup>96</sup>Cf. John 8:11.

<sup>97</sup>See John 5:24.

<sup>98</sup>Rom. 8:33–34.

devil, he had seven devils, [p. 11] his name was Legion<sup>99</sup>—but he is washed, but he is sanctified, but he is justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.<sup>100</sup>

[38.] I know the offence this gives to Pharisees. Here therefore will I join issue with you self-righteous ones, and show you what manner of spirit ye are of.<sup>101</sup> This woman is my touchstone, and shall discover your counterfeit virtue. What says your holiness to an adulteress, a notorious open sinner? Is pity the first emotion you feel at the sight of her, and do your eyes gush out with water because she hath not kept God's law? Do you see yourselves in her? Do you immediately look within and say, "I am as this adulteress! By nature I am in no wise better than she. There is no difference but that which grace hath made." Are you ready to encourage the first divine spark of grace in her, the faintest endeavours toward a return? Have you compassion on her while she is yet a great way off?<sup>102</sup> And can you run unto her, while she is beginning to come to herself and say, I will arise and go to my Father?<sup>103</sup> Can you put yourself upon a level with her, and take her unto your bosom, and call her "sister" the moment she looks up to the brazen serpent?<sup>104</sup>

[39.] Are you thus affected towards her—thus full of pity, sorrow, and love—and duly humbled under a sense of your own like sinfulness? Or do you not find the contrary tempers? Are you not out of patience at the sight or mention of her? Does not the Pharisee rise within you in resentment and disdain and abhorrence and vindictiveness? Are you not like the troubled sea when it cannot rest,<sup>105</sup> whose waters cast up mire and dirt?<sup>106</sup> Have you put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and evil speaking?<sup>107</sup> Or do you exercise all these blessed tempers upon her? Dare you bring against her what Michael durst not against the devil,<sup>108</sup> a railing accusation?<sup>109</sup> Do you not find a disdain and loathing of her person? And can you understand that distinction of hating the sin, but loving the sinner?<sup>110</sup> Deal plainly with yourself and examine whether you do not think stoning too good for her? And are you not for tearing the creature to pieces? I need not multiply these questions. If you do feel a fierceness and bitterness against sinners, a scornful disdain, an unrelenting hate, a forwardness to accuse, a readiness to condemn, a joy and triumph in their punishment; however you may cloak this spirit under the mask of zeal for justice, it is the Pharisee, it is the devil in you. It is as contrary to the mind which was in

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<sup>99</sup>See Luke 8:2, 30.

<sup>100</sup>See 1 Cor. 6:11.

<sup>101</sup>See Luke 9:55.

<sup>102</sup>See Luke 15:20.

<sup>103</sup>See Luke 15:18.

<sup>104</sup>See Num. 21:9; John 3:14–15.

<sup>105</sup>The later transcription changes "when it cannot rest" to "which cannot rest."

<sup>106</sup>Isa. 57:20.

<sup>107</sup>See Eph. 4:31.

<sup>108</sup>The later transcription reads "devil himself."

<sup>109</sup>See Jude 1:9.

<sup>110</sup>This saying is often traced back to St. Augustine, Letter 211, which contains the phrase "with love for humankind and hatred of sins." The later transcription changes "understand" to "comprehend."

Jesus as darkness to light, hell to heaven, you to Christians. [p. 12]

[40.] “Fury is not in me,” saith God.<sup>111</sup> The Lord is full of mercy and compassion, slow to anger, long-suffering and of great kindness,<sup>112</sup> and repenteth him of the evil.<sup>113</sup> God is love<sup>114</sup>—love in himself, love towards a world of sinners. He wept over the bloody city.<sup>115</sup> He lamented and mourned for scribes and Pharisees.<sup>116</sup> He prayed for his very murderers.<sup>117</sup> He was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before his shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.<sup>118</sup> When he was reviled, he reviled not again. When he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.<sup>119</sup> And can you call yourselves followers of the meek and lowly Jesus?<sup>120</sup> You that allow no mercy, no place for repentance to known sinners, but deliver them over to Satan in the fullness of your own self-righteousness? You who brought out nothing but threatenings against them, and think you are called, like Samuel, to hew them to pieces in the presence of the Lord?<sup>121</sup> Nay, you even pride yourselves on this temper, and would have your outrageousness pass for virtue. Your very vices must be countenanced, and you yourselves thought children of God for that very thing which proves you children of the devil.<sup>122</sup> Saints you are indeed. But it is of his and the world’s making. For had not the god of this world blinded your eyes,<sup>123</sup> was you not given up to a strange delusion, you could not so believe a lie,<sup>124</sup> or so much as dream there is anything of Christian in you.

[41.] Bring forth the meanest object of your scorn, the filthiest prostitute that walks the streets, and he that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. Tell the searcher of hearts,<sup>125</sup> in whose presence ye are, that you never had any lustful thought in your lives; and then, and not till then, let your hands be upon her. If you are convicted by your own conscience of but one impure thought which you ever entertained, then consider who checked that thought, and restrained you from running into her excess of lewdness. Give God the glory, and confess that you are a sinner. That you are as this harlot—whose wickedness, like yours, began with a single thought. Who maketh thee to differ from another? From a notorious sinner? From an abandoned harlot? If you think you make yourself differ from her, then are you as much worse

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<sup>111</sup>Isa. 27:4.

<sup>112</sup>See Exod. 34:6; Ps. 86:15; Ps. 145:8.

<sup>113</sup>See Exod. 32:14.

<sup>114</sup>See 1 John 4:7, etc.

<sup>115</sup>See Luke 19:41; Ezek. 22:2; Matt. 23:37.

<sup>116</sup>Matt. 23:13–36.

<sup>117</sup>See Luke 23:34.

<sup>118</sup>See Isa. 53:7.

<sup>119</sup>See 1 Pet. 2:23.

<sup>120</sup>See Matt. 11:29.

<sup>121</sup>See 1 Sam. 15:33.

<sup>122</sup>See John 8:44.

<sup>123</sup>See 2 Cor. 4:4.

<sup>124</sup>See 2 Thess. 2:11.

<sup>125</sup>See Jer. 17:10; Rom. 8:27.

than this harlot as filthiness of spirit is worse than filthiness [of flesh],<sup>126</sup> or a devil worse than a beast.

[42.] But must notorious offenders go unpunished? Should any sincere person ask the question, I would answer, No, in no wise. But you are not to revenge yourselves. Neither is anyone to punish but the ruler whom God hath ordained. He beareth not the sword in vain, for he is the minister of God to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.<sup>127</sup> And let him follow the example of a judge of our own, who never pronounced sentence without tears. As to you, my brethren, [p. 13] let me earnestly warn you against that abominable abhorrence, that sinful bitterness against sinners, in which some men's righteousness altogether consists; against that spirit which rails on the children of unbelief. Let me at the same time recommend to you the deepest compassion,<sup>128</sup> the utmost gentleness, the tenderest love toward known sinners; towards even these worst of sinners, the Pharisees. It is my duty to warn you of these serpents, this generation of vipers,<sup>129</sup> that you may beware of the scribes and Pharisees hypocrites.<sup>130</sup> With my Lord I must rebuke them sharply, that you, and if possible they, may be sound in the faith.<sup>131</sup> But you and I must love and pray for them, and bless them.

[43.] I hope, my dear brethren, you can truly say with me: I do not despise others; no, not even Pharisees. I am as other men. I am as this publican. Nay, I was as this Pharisee. Nor can I therefore cast the first stone at him. For I have swelled with proud wrath against sinners greater, as I supposed, because more scandalous than myself. Though I am a sinful man myself, though I am altogether born in sin, I have said to the gross sinner, Depart from me, stand by thyself! But God has opened my eyes; but God has stopped my mouth, and from a Pharisee changed me into a publican. GOD BE MERCIFUL TO ME A SINNER!<sup>132</sup>

*Source:* Methodist Archive and Research Centre, MA 1977/597/8.

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<sup>126</sup>See 2 Cor. 7:1.

<sup>127</sup>See Rom. 13:1–4.

<sup>128</sup>The later transcription elides “the deepest compassion.”

<sup>129</sup>See Matt. 23:33.

<sup>130</sup>See Matt. 23:13.

<sup>131</sup>See Titus 1:13.

<sup>132</sup>See Luke 18:13.