“John 8 is a Condemnation of Capital Punishment!”

In your commentary on capital punishment you completely miss the point of John 8:1-11. This passage is a condemnation of capital punishment and the hypocrisy that is inherent in it. You say, “Since He did teach that a stone be thrown (John 8:7), this is not an abolition of the death penalty.” Jesus knew that none of them were without sin, just as none of us are without sin. Jesus knew that his answer would lead to no stones being thrown, just as he intends for us (today) to not throw stones. An example of “throwing stones” today, is sitting on a jury and sentencing someone to death (since we don’t stone criminals today). You seem to think this passage is in the Bible simply to illustrate Jesus’ craftiness at conflict avoidance.

Thank you for writing about my radio program on capital punishment. Although I taped that radio program back in 1992, it amazes me that I still receive e-mails about the transcript posted on the Probe website.

I believe this is the first time I have received a response to my passing comment on John 8. When you are doing a radio program with a set time limit, words are at a premium. So I welcome the opportunity to elaborate on my very short comment in the midst of a week of radio programs devoted to the issue of capital punishment.

First, I should point out that this passage in John 8 is a disputed text. There are very few disputed texts in the New Testament. This is one of them. The passage is not found in any of the important Greek texts. So I think it would be fair to say that most Bible scholars do not believe it was in the original.

Whether you believe it was or was not in the original, I think you would have to admit that it is a disputed text. And a basic principle of biblical exegesis is to never build a doctrine on a disputed text. In other words, I wouldn't use this passage in John 8 to argue for or against capital punishment.

Second, I only mentioned the passage in passing because there are a number of opponents of capital punishment who have tried to use this biblical passage to argue against capital punishment. It does not. In fact, you can make the point (as I did) that it argues just the opposite.

Third, I am not the first person to point out that Jesus did not set aside capital punishment in this passage since "He did teach that a stone be thrown." In one of his early books on ethics, Dr. Charles Ryrie makes a similar point. He argued that since Jesus said a stone should be thrown, he was not forbidding the Old Testament practice of capital punishment. Dr. Ryrie is the author of the *Ryrie Study Bible* and former professor of theology at Dallas Theological Seminary. I think it is safe to say that Dr. Ryrie knows more about New Testament theology and exegesis than both of us combined.

Finally, the Pharisees were indeed trying to trap Jesus between the Roman law and the Mosaic law. If Jesus said that they should stone her, He would break the Roman law. If He refused to allow them to stone her, He would break the Mosaic law. I don't believe that the passage is (to use your words) about "Jesus' craftiness at conflict avoidance." But I do believe it shows His response to a deliberate trap set by His enemies.

This passage does not forbid capital punishment, despite what some opponents might try to make it say. Since it is a disputed passage in the Bible, I would not base a doctrine on it anyway. But even if you accept its authenticity, the passage doesn't teach what you say it does.

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