

Let It Go (Revised)

Stone has always been the building material of choice in the nation of Israel. From the beginning, stones were used for ...

- Building walls
- Closing access (to wells, springs, caves, graves, etc.)
- Ammunition (for slings and catapults)
- Boundary markers
- Idols (objects of devotion)
- Spoiling the land of an enemy
- Marking the grave of an offender (passersby added stones)

Is it any wonder that stones were also used for the ultimate penalty? Death by stoning was the punishment meted out for crimes that could not be forgiven under the law of Moses.

Stones by their very nature represent “hardness” and were thus a fitting symbol of the inflexibility of the law. Stone against flesh was like the Law against life – unforgiving. One critical mistake, and the ultimate penalty ensued.

John 8:3-11 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.

The religious leaders hoped to impale Jesus on the horns of a dilemma: If he agreed with the Old Testament law and called for her execution, they could accuse him of sedition before the Romans, because they had taken away the Jews' right of capital punishment. Also He would appear merciless. But if he said she shouldn't be stoned, they could accuse him of false teaching and discredit him with the people, because of what the Old Testament law mandated.

The scribes and Pharisees were entirely within the law and within their right to be “unforgiving” this particular day; after all, this woman had broken the law and deserved death! But the unexpected happened!

As these religious men stood holding stones of judgment in their hands, they were ready to kill for the sake of the law ... and yet each of them had undoubtedly broken the law in one way or another (that's what temple sacrifices were all about).

This day was not a case of the righteous against the sinner; this was a case of the “haven't been caught” against the “already caught.”

The Law said “Go and sin no more (actually, go and don't sin at all!), and then I won't condemn you.” But Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you, now go and sin no more.” How could He do this without making a mockery of God's Law? By taking the penalty for her sins Himself!

The LAW says, “Change, or I will condemn you.” The threat of God's condemnation is always hanging over our heads in order to “keep us in line.” This does not promote deep and lasting change. People who live under Law tend to have a superficial and self-righteous kind of holiness.

But GRACE says, “I have forgiven and accepted you. Now respond to my love by allowing me to change your life.” Loving gratitude is the most powerful motivator in the universe. We don't change in order to be accepted, but because we have been accepted. This is why grace, when understood, produces real righteousness in the lifestyle of its recipient.

Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust, a place where whatever He wrote could be easily wiped away! When He finally responded, Jesus' immortal words cut them to the quick – “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.” Eventually, the words penetrated their conscience, and they dropped the stones and left.

These men held stones in their hands, but they also held the hardness of unforgiveness in their hearts. Unforgiveness is very much like a stone ...

- It builds walls
- It closes access
- It provides ammunition for weapons
- It jealously guards boundaries
- It demands devotion to an absolute cause
- It attempts to spoil the life of another
- It marks the spot of an old offense, and continually heaps it up

Sometimes, no matter how bad the offense, you have to be willing to “let it go.” If Jesus is willing to forgive, we have to be willing also!