

The Gospel of John, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 12: The Woman Caught in Adultery and the Light of the World

John 7:53–8:30

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson covers two units that John places together: the account of the woman caught in adultery (7:53–8:11) and the great “I am the light of the world” discourse (8:12–30). The teacher must handle a textual matter honestly. The passage about the woman is absent from the earliest and best manuscripts of John and is widely regarded as not originally part of the Gospel. This should be taught plainly: the account should not be used as the foundation for any doctrine, but it is consistent with the character of Jesus revealed everywhere else in the Gospels and may be taught for its harmony with His mercy and His call to “sin no more.” Question 9 carries the heaviest doctrinal weight, on the “I am” saying and the textual note.

Doctrinally, the discourse that follows reveals Jesus as the light of the world (the second great “I am” saying), contrasts His heavenly origin with the world’s, and presses the stark claim that unless people believe “I am he” they will die in their sins. The “I am” language echoes the divine name and points to His deity. The teacher should help students see both the offer of light and life and the seriousness of believing rightly in who Jesus is.

At the same time, the lesson is deeply formational. It exposes the ease of condemning others while blind to ourselves, it holds together mercy and the call to change, and it invites us to walk out of darkness into the light by following Christ. So aim at both: a clear, honest grasp of the text and its doctrine, and a heart that receives mercy, walks in the light, and follows the Light of the world.

Question 1

Student Question:

The scribes and Pharisees used the woman as a trap, caring more about catching Jesus than about righteousness (8:3–6). What does their use of God’s law as a weapon reveal about the difference between true righteousness and self-righteous religion?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The scribes and Pharisees bring the woman “caught in the act of adultery” but show no concern for righteousness. John tells us their motive: “This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him” (8:6). She is bait. They weaponize God’s law to trap Jesus.

Draw out the contrast between true righteousness and self-righteous religion. True righteousness cares about God’s holiness and the sinner’s soul; self-righteous religion cares

about winning, about being right, about exposing others while excusing itself. The accusers used the law not to honor God or help the woman but to advance themselves.

Note the telling omission: where is the man? The law required both parties (Leviticus 20:10), yet only the woman is dragged out. Their selective use of the law reveals that justice was never the point. Self-righteousness is often selective, harsh toward some sins and blind to others, especially its own.

Apply it to the students. Religion can become a tool for self-justification and for managing others rather than a humble walk with God. Help students examine where they use truth or standards as weapons, to win arguments, to feel superior, to expose others, rather than in love. True righteousness is humble, merciful, and concerned for souls.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The difference between true righteousness and self-righteous religion.
- The weaponizing of God's law for self-advancement.
- The selective, hypocritical application of standards (the missing man).
- Truth held and applied in love rather than as a weapon.

Discussion Prompts

- What does the accusers' use of the law reveal about their hearts?
- Where might you use truth or standards as a weapon?
- How is true righteousness different from self-righteousness?

Question 2

Student Question:

Jesus exposed the accusers by saying, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her" (8:7), and they left one by one. When you are tempted to condemn someone else, what would it look like to first remember your own need for mercy?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes up Jesus' disarming words: "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her" (8:7). One by one, beginning with the oldest, the accusers leave. Confronted with their own sin, they cannot condemn.

Help students see the principle. We are quick to condemn others and slow to see ourselves. Jesus does not deny the woman's sin; He simply turns the light on the accusers' sin too. The remembrance of our own need for mercy transforms how we treat those who have fallen.

Apply it to the impulse to condemn. When we are tempted to look down on someone, the gospel calls us first to remember that we, too, are sinners saved by mercy. This does not mean

we call evil good or never address sin; it means we approach the fallen as fellow debtors who have been forgiven much (Matthew 18:21–35).

Press for specifics. Ask students who they are most tempted to condemn, a public figure, a family member, someone whose sin is different from theirs, and what it would look like to first remember their own need for mercy before God. Mercy received makes mercy given possible.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The ease of condemning others while blind to our own sin.
- Remembering our own need for mercy as the cure for a condemning spirit.
- Addressing sin without self-righteous condemnation.
- Mercy received as the ground of mercy given (Matthew 18:21–35).

Discussion Prompts

- Whom are you most tempted to condemn?
- How would remembering your own need for mercy change that?
- How do we address sin without becoming self-righteous?

Question 3

Student Question:

Jesus said to the woman, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more” (8:11). How do mercy and the call to a changed life belong together, and why is it a distortion to hold one without the other?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus’ words to the woman hold two things together that we constantly try to separate: “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more” (8:11). Mercy and the call to change come in the same breath.

Unfold the first half: “Neither do I condemn you.” This is full, free mercy. Jesus does not lecture her, place her on probation, or extract a promise first. He simply does not condemn. The only sinless One present, the only One with the right to cast a stone, refuses to condemn her.

Unfold the second half: “Go, and from now on sin no more.” This is the call to a transformed life. Jesus does not excuse her sin or pretend it did not matter; He names it and calls her to leave it. Mercy does not mean indifference to sin; it means forgiveness that summons us to change.

Show why holding one without the other distorts the gospel. Mercy without the call to change becomes cheap grace that leaves people in their sin. The call to change without mercy becomes crushing law that offers no hope. The gospel holds both: we are fully forgiven and genuinely called to a new life. Help students feel the balance and resist collapsing it either way.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Mercy and the call to change held together in the gospel (John 8:11).
- Free forgiveness that does not excuse sin.
- The distortion of cheap grace (mercy without change).
- The distortion of crushing law (the call without mercy).

Discussion Prompts

- How do mercy and the call to change belong together?
- What happens when we keep one without the other?
- Which half do you more easily forget, the mercy or the call?

Question 4

Student Question:

Jesus showed the woman mercy without excusing her sin and called her to leave it behind (8:11). Is there a sin Jesus has forgiven you for that He is also calling you to finally “sin no more” in? What would walking that out look like?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes the woman’s story personally. Jesus forgave her and then called her to “sin no more.” Every forgiven believer faces the same twofold reality: mercy received, and a sin to leave behind.

Help students connect forgiveness to ongoing transformation. The grace that forgives is also the grace that changes (Titus 2:11–12). To receive Christ’s mercy is not to be left where we were but to be summoned forward into a new life. Forgiveness and repentance belong together.

Invite honest reflection. Is there a specific sin Christ has forgiven that He is also calling them to finally leave, a habit, a pattern, a compromise they have made peace with? The woman was not told merely to feel forgiven but to go and stop sinning. Grace empowers a real change of direction.

Press for what walking it out would look like. Ask each student to name one such sin and one concrete step of turning from it this week, perhaps a safeguard, a confession, an accountability, a removed temptation. Remind them that the same Jesus who says “neither do I condemn you” also gives the grace to obey “sin no more.”

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Forgiveness joined to ongoing repentance and transformation (Titus 2:11–12).
- Grace that empowers a real change of direction.
- Leaving sin behind as the response to mercy.

- Concrete steps of turning from a forgiven sin.

Discussion Prompts

- What sin has Christ forgiven that He is also calling you to leave?
- What would walking out “sin no more” look like there?
- How does His mercy give you courage to change?

Question 5

Student Question:

Jesus declared, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (8:12). What does this second great “I am” saying claim about who Jesus is and what He offers?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus declares the second great “I am” saying: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (8:12). The setting, likely during or just after the Feast of Tabernacles with its great lamps, heightens the claim.

Unfold the claim. To call Himself “the light of the world” is to claim to be the source of truth, guidance, and life for all people, not for one nation only but for the world. Light in Scripture means revelation, holiness, and life; darkness means ignorance, sin, and death. Jesus claims to be the light that dispels all of it.

Note the “I am” form again. As in “I am the bread of life,” the language echoes the divine name and asserts Jesus’ unique identity. He does not point to the light; He is the light. This is a claim only God could rightly make.

Apply the promise: “Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness.” The light is received by following. Help students see that walking in Christ’s light is not automatic but comes through following Him, ordering life by His word and presence. Ask them what it means to follow the Light rather than merely admire it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- “I am the light of the world” as the second great “I am” saying (John 8:12).
- Light as revelation, holiness, and life; darkness as ignorance, sin, and death.
- The “I am” form echoing the divine name and asserting deity.
- The light received by following Christ, not merely admiring Him.

Discussion Prompts

- What does this “I am” saying claim about who Jesus is?

- What is the difference between admiring the light and following it?
- How is walking in His light tied to following Him?

Question 6

Student Question:

Jesus promises that those who follow Him “will not walk in darkness” (8:12). What areas of darkness, confusion, sin, or fear, is Jesus inviting you to bring into His light by following Him more closely?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes up the promise that those who follow Jesus “will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (8:12). It invites students to bring their own areas of darkness into His light.

Help students name their darkness honestly. Darkness can be sin we hide, confusion about a decision, fear that grips us, or simply areas of life we have kept from Christ. The promise is that following Him brings light to these places, not all at once, but as we walk with Him.

Show how light comes by following. We often want clarity before we will follow, but Jesus says light comes to those who follow. As we walk with Him, ordering our lives by His word and staying close, the darkness gives way. Following is the path into the light.

Press for specifics. Ask each student to name one area of darkness, sin, confusion, or fear, and one way they will bring it into Christ’s light this week by following Him more closely, perhaps through confession, obedience, Scripture, or prayer. The Light of the world is willing; the call is to follow.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Following Christ as the way darkness is dispelled.
- Light coming as we walk with Him, not before we follow.
- Bringing sin, confusion, and fear into His light.
- The reliability of His promise to those who follow.

Discussion Prompts

- What area of darkness is Jesus inviting you to bring into His light?
- Why does light come by following rather than before?
- What is one way you will follow Him more closely this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

When challenged about His testimony, Jesus said, “I know where I came from and where I am going” and pointed to the Father who sent Him as a second witness (8:14–18). What does Jesus’ certainty about His origin and destiny teach us about His unique identity?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

When challenged that His self-testimony is invalid, Jesus answers with striking certainty: “Even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going” (8:14). He knows His origin (from the Father) and His destiny (to the Father).

Draw out what this certainty reveals. Jesus is not an ordinary man uncertain of his place in the universe. He speaks with full knowledge of His heavenly origin and His return to the Father. This self-knowledge is part of His unique identity as the Son who came from God and goes to God.

Note the witness He appeals to. He points to the Father as a second witness alongside His own (8:18), satisfying the law’s requirement of two witnesses. The Father and the Son together testify to who Jesus is. His claim is not unsupported; it rests on the Father’s confirming witness.

Apply it to the students’ confidence in Christ. Jesus knew exactly who He was and where He was going, and that certainty grounds everything He said and did. We can rest our faith on One who was not confused or guessing about His identity but spoke from sure knowledge of His relationship with the Father. His certainty invites our trust.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus’ certain knowledge of His heavenly origin and destiny (John 8:14).
- The Father and the Son as the two witnesses to His identity (John 8:18).
- The unique self-knowledge of the Son who came from God.
- Christ’s certainty as the ground of our trust.

Discussion Prompts

- What does Jesus’ certainty about His origin and destiny reveal?
- Why does He point to the Father as a witness?
- How does His sure knowledge of who He is invite your trust?

Question 8

Student Question:

Jesus told them, “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world” (8:23). How does this contrast between earthly and heavenly origin shape the way you understand Jesus, and the way you live as one who belongs to Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes up the sharp contrast Jesus draws: “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world” (8:23). Jesus belongs to a different realm than His hearers, and that difference shapes everything.

Unfold the contrast. Jesus is from above, from the Father, not of this world in its values and bondage. His hearers were from below, bound to earthly thinking and unable to grasp heavenly realities. The gulf between them was not merely intellectual but a matter of origin and allegiance.

Apply it to the believer’s identity. Those who belong to Christ are, in a real sense, no longer merely “of this world.” Like their Lord, they have a heavenly origin (born from above, 3:3) and a heavenly citizenship (Philippians 3:20). This shapes how they live: not conformed to the world but transformed, living by heavenly values amid an earthly society.

Press for application. Ask students where they are still thinking and living “from below,” shaped by the world’s assumptions about success, security, and significance, rather than “from above.” What would it look like to live more as one who belongs to Christ’s realm? The contrast is meant to lift their eyes and reorder their loyalties.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus’ heavenly origin contrasted with the world (John 8:23).
- The believer’s heavenly origin and citizenship (John 3:3; Philippians 3:20).
- Living by heavenly values rather than worldly ones.
- Identity in Christ reordering our loyalties.

Discussion Prompts

- How does the contrast of “above” and “below” shape your view of Jesus?
- Where are you still thinking and living “from below”?
- What would living more “from above” look like for you?

Question 9

Student Question:

Jesus warned, “unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins” (8:24), using the words “I am” that echo the divine name. Why does Jesus make believing in who He is, the divine “I am,” a matter of life and death, and how does this fit with the kind of saving faith the whole Gospel describes? (Note for the class: the account of the woman in 7:53–8:11 is absent from the earliest and best manuscripts; see the teaching notes.)

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, and it has two parts: the great “I am” claim, and the honest textual note about the woman caught in adultery. Handle both clearly.

First, the textual matter, since this lesson covers 7:53–8:11. Teach it honestly and without alarm. The account of the woman caught in adultery is absent from the earliest and most reliable manuscripts of John, and its placement varies in the manuscripts that do contain it. The careful conclusion of most scholars is that it was likely not part of John’s original Gospel. Therefore we should not build any doctrine on it. At the same time, the story is entirely consistent with the character of Jesus revealed throughout the Gospels, His mercy to sinners and His call to “sin no more,” so it may be taught for that consistency, not as an independent foundation for doctrine. Modeling this honest handling of the text also teaches students a healthy respect for the integrity of Scripture.

Second, the “I am” claim, which is the doctrinal center. Jesus warns, “unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins” (8:24). The phrase “I am he” (ego eimi) deliberately echoes the divine name God revealed to Moses (Exodus 3:14) and the “I am” declarations of Isaiah. Jesus is claiming to be the divine “I am.” To believe in Him truly is to believe in His full deity; to refuse is to die in one’s sins.

Explain why this belief is a matter of life and death. Salvation depends on receiving Jesus for who He actually is, the divine Son. A Jesus reduced to a good teacher cannot save; only the divine “I am” can take away sin. This is why the stakes are so high. And note the kind of belief Jesus means: not bare acknowledgment of a fact (even demons acknowledge who He is), but the living, trusting, obedient faith the whole Gospel describes. Indeed, the chapter notes that “many believed in him” (8:30), and the verses that follow will test whether that belief abides in His word. Help students see that believing “I am he” means receiving the divine Christ in a faith that holds fast and obeys.

Bring it home. The same Light that exposed the accusers and forgave the woman now confronts every hearer with His deity and calls for belief that takes hold of Him. To die in our sins is the great danger; to believe in the divine “I am” with a living faith is the way of life. Let students feel the weight of getting Jesus’ identity right.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The honest textual note: 7:53–8:11 is absent from the earliest and best manuscripts and should not ground doctrine, though it is consistent with Jesus’ character.
- A healthy respect for the integrity and transmission of Scripture.
- Jesus’ “I am he” echoing the divine name and asserting His deity (John 8:24; Exodus 3:14).
- Salvation dependent on believing in Christ for who He truly is, the divine Son.
- Saving belief as a living, obedient faith, not bare acknowledgment (compare John 8:30–31).
- The danger of dying in one’s sins by refusing the divine “I am.”

Discussion Prompts

- How should we handle the account of the woman caught in adultery honestly?
- Why does Jesus make believing “I am he” a matter of life and death?

- What kind of belief does saving faith in the divine “I am” involve?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over this passage, from the rescued woman to the Light of the world. What is one specific way Jesus is forming you to receive His mercy, walk in His light, and follow Him out of the darkness?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone question gathers the lesson's threads: receiving mercy, walking in the light, and following Christ out of darkness. The aim is a disciple formed by both the mercy and the light of Jesus.

Help students hold the whole movement together. The woman received mercy and a call to change; the discourse calls all to follow the Light out of darkness. The Christian life involves both being forgiven and being transformed, both receiving the light and walking in it.

Make it concrete. Ask each student to name one way they need to receive Christ's mercy more deeply (perhaps for a sin they keep condemning themselves over), one area of darkness they will bring into His light, and one step of following Him out of that darkness this week.

Close by holding mercy and light together. The same Jesus who would not throw a stone is the Light of the world who calls us to follow Him out of the shadows. To be formed by this passage is to live as the forgiven who walk in the light, neither crushed by condemnation nor comfortable in darkness, but following the Light of life.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Receiving mercy and walking in the light as two sides of discipleship.
- Forgiveness and transformation held together.
- Following Christ out of darkness as the path of life.
- Concrete, specific formation as the goal of the lesson.

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you most need to receive Christ's mercy more deeply?
- What darkness will you bring into His light this week?
- What is one step of following Him out of darkness you can take?