

Question: A young woman got pregnant out of wedlock, but she acknowledged that what she did was wrong. However, her church refused to allow the women to give her a baby shower. What do you think Jesus would have done?

The gospel of John reports the story of the woman who was brought to Jesus after she was caught in the very act of adultery (John 8:1-11). However, the Pharisees who brought the woman to Jesus viewed her as a mere object to be used in their attempt to entrap Jesus in his words. They said, "In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" (John 8:5). In response, Jesus wrote on the ground and then said, "Let the one without sin cast the first stone." The woman's accusers walked away one at a time. Then, we are told that Jesus asked her: "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared, "Go now and leave your life of sin" (John 8:10-11).

Apparently, Jesus did not think that offering a chance of repentance, forgiveness and a new life meant he was condoning sin. He saw value in every person that made her or him worth redeeming no matter how great the sin. He ministered to people in their needs without asking if they were worthy. As a result, the very people that are often repulsed by churches of today were constantly coming to Jesus. He helped them and changed their lives forever.

I believe that the apostle Paul helps us understand why Jesus treated sinners the way he did. To the church in Rome, Paul wrote, "Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?" (Romans 2:4). Some people seem to think that unless sinners are immediately disciplined severely they will continue in their sin. But instead of saying that strong condemnation leads to repentance, Paul said the kindness of God brings repentance (Romans 2:4). The truth of this statement was demonstrated in a sociological study of churches that was published in 1989. To the surprise of many, the more rigid and strict churches had more teenage pregnancies than did the more grace-oriented churches. While the fear of exposure in the strict churches kept their young people from openly dealing with their problems, the teens of the grace-oriented churches felt they could talk about their problems

and find help instead of condemnation (*Shattering the Silence* by David Lewis, Carley Dodd, Darryl Tippens, 1989).

But some people will not repent and turn from their sinful ways no matter how we treat them. Yet, Jesus would have us leave the judging of who will or will not repent to God. The mission of those who would be like Jesus is to reach out to sinners with grace and hope. Since Jesus told a story of a father who held a party for his sinful, prodigal son who had returned home (Luke 15:11ff), I believe he would have encouraged a baby shower and helpful kindnesses toward someone like a pregnant young woman. This is nothing less than the same mercy God has shown to all of us sinners.

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