

Women, Sex, and a Question of Double Standards

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Abstract

This article examines the subject of women and extramarital sex as addressed in Old Testament law—and ultimately by Jesus himself. It is a revised excerpt from a book that aims to show God's good care and purpose for his female image-bearers from beginning to end of the Bible's story (*Women and God*, 2018). A focus on Deuteronomy 22:13–30 shows that women are not only held equally responsible for sexual sin but also carefully protected, especially in cases of mistreatment and sexual abuse. The ultimate care and purpose revealed in the Scriptures for women and men alike is God's gracious redemption through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

Introduction

A few introductory comments will provide a framework for the developments that follow.¹ First, the original context of this article, the book *Women and God*, asks a question of the Bible from beginning to end: *How does God view women?* The question arises in a world full of struggle and pain in regard to gender and sexuality. In particular, with increasing light shed on

¹ This article is a revised version of chapter 6 in Kathleen B. Nielson, *Women and God: Hard Questions, Beautiful Truth* (Epsom, Surrey, UK: The Good Book Company, 2018), 93–108. Reproduced with the permission of the Good Book Company.

the abuse of women globally and even in Christian communities today, we do well to ask what all this looks like in the eyes of heaven.

We ask this question on the foundation of God's inerrant Word, aiming to dig deep into every part and to hear the voice of the God who made us and redeems us through his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. As believers, we can dig into every part of the Scriptures and expect to find God's redemptive purposes at work in the lives of both his male and female image-bearers. But we must do the digging, and we must teach the rising generations to do the digging, especially with many challenging voices and views all around.

The digging begins, of course, in the first chapters of Genesis, which hold the seeds for the whole biblical story. It does little good to mine New Testament texts for answers to our questions about men and women without studying the Old Testament accounts that those texts consistently and insistently reference. The following discussion grows out of a focused study of women in creation, in the fall, and on into the early generations of God's unfolding redemptive promises to his people. Both in the order of creation and in the disorder of a world invaded by sin, everywhere we look, we see God's unceasing care for women and his regard for them as bearing a crucial role in his redemptive plan. In this particular discussion of the Old Testament law, as it treats women and sexual sin, we find the Lord's protection and purpose for his female image-bearers again.

Second, it will be helpful to note not just the context of my writings but the broader context of my intended audience. In general, I aim to offer not an academic treatise but a winsome study of God's Word on women accessible to any lay person with a Bible and a desire to explore it. I have many friends who have told me they wish they could understand and explain clearly what the Bible teaches about women and men—not only for themselves but also for challengers and questioners all around them. This attempt to shine light on the Bible's gracious teachings is one limited articulation, one with debts to many teachers and scholars, but one that above all aims to listen humbly and well to the Bible's words and to share them with clarity, compassion, and joy.

Third, I would mention an even broader context, one already alluded to: that of our world of disruption in matters of gender and sexuality. The twenty-first century has left the creation order far, far behind in regard to sexual practice in general. In relation to cases of sexual abuse, the "Me Too" movement has flooded minds and media, as women from all circles join the call for light and justice. Church denominations are coming alive to the topic: The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, the public policy arm of the Southern Baptist Convention, has declared that the American

church is facing an abuse crisis and has called for an immediate and urgent response.²

Of course, the issue of abuse is not limited to one group or country or time. Even as we rush with urgency to bring healing and justice and change, whenever and wherever we meet it, we believers rush with an urgency spurred on by gospel-centered faith. We know the beginning and the end of the story, and so as we give ourselves to the work of justice, we do not despair when the evil seems too great. We do not enlarge ourselves as especially good or especially evil, knowing the history of fallen human beings redeemable finally and only through Christ's death and resurrection. Most important, through the gift of faith we know and follow the Lord God, who is redeeming a people for himself through his Son.

Biblical passages like the ones discussed here can help us cultivate the perspective of faith as we confront the evils of sexual sin all around us, including that of abuse. Centuries ago, the Lord God saw and named these evils. He does not and has not ever overlooked them. They are written down in his revealed Word for all to see. "From the beginning it was not so," Jesus said, when confronted with the law's allowance for divorce (Matt 19:8 ESV). And in the end, it will not be so. In the end, all the sinful brokenness of God's created order will be restored through Christ who took our sin upon himself and died bearing God's wrath in our place.

In the meantime, we live by faith in the One who died and rose again. We live naming and confronting the evils named and confronted in his Word. We live humbly, knowing our own need for a Savior from our sin. We live with urgency, sharing with others the good news of this Savior. And we live in hope, pointing to our Savior, who will come again to judge all and to reign with his people forever.

In these contexts, then, the following excerpt delves into the subject of women and extramarital sex as addressed in the Old Testament law—ultimately as addressed by Jesus himself.

I. *Evangelicals and Infidelity*

"So much for 'thou shalt not commit adultery.'" The *New York Daily News* offered this verdict in 2014, reporting on survey results from "Ashley Madison," a web-based service that helps married people find partners for extramarital affairs. The survey revealed that a quarter of their users self-identified as "evangelical"—by far the highest percentage among all

² See <http://www.caringwell.com>.

responders.³ The truth was painfully evident when in 2015 Ashley Madison's online accounts were hacked, and names of over thirty million users of their services were publicly shared.

People were shocked and embarrassed by all this, but not *that* shocked or even *that* embarrassed. We have seen too much. How many dozens of movie and TV scenes have drawn in even Christians, numbing our minds to the fact that we were watching extramarital sex? (Not only watching but feeling happy for heroes and heroines in love who consummate something that is not a marriage.) What of our friend the successful Christian business owner who left his wife for another woman—but who maintains his success, gives generously to the community, and provides good jobs for many people? Do we tend, after a while, to minimize or forget about his adultery? What of the many students who cannot understand why Christians would hold on to antiquated sexual standards that represent only repression—and that seem unnecessary with the advent of birth control?

American-based websites that quantify such behavior generally report that in around one-third of all marriages, one or both of the partners say they have “cheated” on the other.⁴ One United Kingdom news source reports that barely a third of British men and women think an extramarital affair puts a strain on the relationship; in other words, it is not that big of a problem.⁵ But if you are reading this and you have experienced adultery in one way or another, you know statistics do not tell it all. You may be experiencing the grief of being betrayed or perhaps the guilt of having betrayed. You may be in a relationship, not married, and struggling to figure out how sex and commitment go together—or do not go together. Or perhaps you have suffered the agony of sexual abuse. God's Word speaks to it all.

We have seen in Genesis the God who designed us male and female from the beginning; we know he cares about these issues in detail. We know he set up marriage between a man and a woman and blessed that union. We know the seventh of the ten commandments, plain and unadulterated: “You shall not commit adultery” (Exod 20:14). And yet we Christians struggle with issues of sexual ethics; we struggle with living out sexual purity, and we struggle with talking about it. We might waver: in the Ashley Madison era,

³ Victoria Taylor, “Evangelicals Are the Least Faithful When It Comes to Spouses, Survey Suggests,” *nydailynews.com*, June 3, 2014, <http://www.nydailynews.com/life-style/survey-reveals-faiths-unfaithful-article-1.1815733>.

⁴ “Infidelity Statistics 2017: Why, When, and How People Stray,” February 1, 2017, <https://www.trustify.info/blog/infidelity-statistics-2017>.

⁵ John Bingham, “Adultery Not a Problem for Most Britons,” *The Telegraph*, February 12, 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/11408328/Adultery-not-a-problem-for-most-Britons.html>.

are we just way too judgmental? Should we continue to hold the view that sexual relations are a gift from God intended only for a man and woman within the bonds of marriage? We might wonder: should these issues perhaps just be resolved privately and individually before God, who surely understands our needs and desires our happiness? Even as we acknowledge that sexual abuse is a great evil, we ask: how shall we regard the spectrum of sexual sin?

It is with all this in mind that I want to invite you to join the crowd surrounding Jesus as a woman is dragged alone before him—a woman deserving death by stoning, say her accusers, according to the Law of Moses. Their question to Jesus hangs in the air: “So what do you say?” (John 8:5). And there she stands, this woman, head down, waiting for his response.

II. *What Kind of Mercy?*

Although this passage, John 7:53–8:11, does not appear in the earliest manuscripts, most of our Bibles include it, as most scholars take these verses as a true encounter, if not a legitimate part of the Scriptures. The scene takes place in the temple courts, with all the people gathered around to hear Jesus teach. It is a vivid, emotion-filled scene—probably a shocking one for many today, who might find it hard even to imagine a woman being stoned for adultery. But in come the teachers of the law and the Pharisees (all the Old Testament experts) with this woman, whom they set before the whole group and accuse of being caught in the act of adultery. Most of us might have for many years taken without question the Pharisees’ words: “In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women” (John 8:5).

The Pharisees were experts in the Old Testament law.⁶ And yet we must ask: Are they representing well God’s instructions given through Moses? The scene feels brutally harsh. Questions inevitably arise. Here is this woman dragged alone in shame before this group in the temple courts and accused of a sin that clearly involved two people. When she was “caught in the act” (v. 4), there must have been a man with whom she was acting! Did he run off? Did they let him go? Are they telling the truth? Why do these men say only that the law condemns such *women*?

Jesus does not condemn this woman. He bends down and starts to write on the ground with his finger. He is quiet, but the proud law-enforcers keep

⁶ By “Law,” the Pharisees would have been referring to the Torah—what we call the Pentateuch, or the Books of Moses. They were also referring to the law given within that Law: that is, the set of laws given by God to his people.

demanding a response. They do not really care about this woman or about keeping the law; they are just baiting Jesus, “to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him” (v. 6). How ironic: we know that the Old Testament law reflects the character of the God who gave it. Here in this scene is the very Lord God, in the flesh, and these men aim to use his law to undermine, accuse, and destroy him. But their trap remains unsprung. Jesus finally straightens up and speaks: “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her” (v. 7). With that, he is right back down writing on the ground, ignoring them. They slip away one by one. And then comes mercy. “Has no one condemned you?” he asks the woman. “No one, Lord,” she says. “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more” (vv. 10–11).

But wait—before we embrace Jesus’s gentle mercy here (and it is gentle mercy), we must ask about the law. According to the Old Testament, should not this woman have been stoned? Why did Jesus, the Son of God, spare her? Did his merciful response imply that the Old Testament laws on adultery were bad, or wrong? Let us go back and find two important truths about the Old Testament law and its treatment of women involved in extramarital sex.

III. *Responsible Together*

Deuteronomy 22:13–30 is a key passage, offering a series of scenarios and related laws that help us make clear observations concerning women and extramarital sex. The first is that women and men were in general held equally responsible for the sin of extramarital sex. The woman was not exempt from responsibility, but neither was she held more responsible. She shared both the guilt and punishment.

Deuteronomy 22:13–19, first, is all about protecting a wife falsely accused and slandered by her husband, who claims he found her not to be a virgin when he married her:

If a man takes a wife and goes in to her and then hates her and accuses her of misconduct and brings a bad name upon her, saying, “I took this woman, and when I came near her, I did not find in her evidence of virginity,” then the father of the young woman and her mother shall take and bring out the evidence of her virginity to the elders of the city in the gate. And the father of the young woman shall say to the elders, “I gave my daughter to this man to marry, and he hates her; and behold, he has accused her of misconduct, saying, ‘I did not find in your daughter evidence of virginity.’ And yet this is the evidence of my daughter’s virginity.” And they shall spread the cloak before the elders of the city. Then the elders of that city shall take

the man and whip him, and they shall fine him a hundred shekels of silver and give them to the father of the young woman because he has brought a bad name upon a virgin of Israel. And she shall be his wife. He may not divorce her all his days. (Deut 22:13–19)

The scenario is complicated, and we will not go into the details, but the point is that the woman must be given an opportunity to prove her innocence (apparently by showing a cloth stained with the blood of her broken hymen from her wedding night). With her innocence proven, she cannot be divorced or disgraced but must be cared for as a wife in her husband's house. We are looking into scenarios of sin here; the man in this case is perpetrating evil, slandering and mistreating his wife. The law names, reveals, and punishes his evil while protecting his wife from it.

Those nine verses protecting a falsely accused wife are followed by two verses (vv. 20–21) condemning a guilty one—a wife who had indeed been falsely presented to her husband as a virgin, with no evidence to the contrary. She was to be stoned. (We will go on without comment at this point, and come back to the nature of this severe judgment. First, we need to hear the rest of the chapter, in order to take these verses in context.)

The very next verse (v. 22) prescribes that, if a man is found sleeping with another man's wife, both the man and the woman must die. The difference between this scenario and the previous one is obviously that concrete evidence exists in this case against both the man and the woman. Both are present and guilty—and punished by death. (Again, we will come back to the severity of the judgment—here, we need to notice the equality of the judgment.) Without concrete evidence against a man, a woman condemned by evidence was alone put to death. With evidence against both, the two shared the same guilt and judgment.

The next section of Deuteronomy clarifies further, with another scenario of equally shared guilt (vv. 23–24). To understand, it helps to know that in that culture, a betrothed woman was not just engaged to be married in the way we think of it; she was committed, as good as married. She was considered the man's wife. These two verses picture a town scene in which a man sleeps with a woman betrothed to another man. The implication is that the sexual act was consensual: this is the point of noting that the woman did not cry out. In a town with open-air dwellings in close proximity, others would have been sure to hear her if she had. She is guilty for agreeing, and he is guilty "because he violated his neighbor's wife" (v. 24). They are both to be stoned.

The Pharisees in John 8 were referring either to this scenario or the previous one, depending on whether the woman was betrothed or actually

married. In either case, the law stipulated that *both* the man and the woman were to die. However, as that woman is dragged before Jesus, the man is ... nowhere to be seen. Obviously, if she was indeed caught in adultery, the man must have been caught there, too. The Pharisees were telling at best partial truth, both about the incident and about the law. Their partial truth reveals sexism—but only on their part, and not on God’s.

Even as we are shocked by the severity of the punishment in Deuteronomy 22, we can see that the punishment does not unfairly single out women. In the whole scope of these laws, women participating in extramarital sex are respected as equal partners in the sexual act, bearing not more but equal responsibility. We all know, however, that women too often are not equal partners but forced sexually against their will. We must keep reading.

IV. Protection for the Abused

Numerous laws in the Old Testament protect women (wives unjustly accused; women captured in battle).⁷ Deuteronomy 22:25–29 deals with scenarios specifically involving sexual abuse. Here is our second observation: Old Testament law protected women in cases of sexual abuse. I wish I could sit down and talk this through with you as you are reading this. Both adultery and abuse are subjects that can rub hard against unhealed wounds, with deep hurt. If you know such wounds personally, I pray God’s Word will bring healing, not hurt, to your soul. I pray that even these hard Old Testament passages will reveal grace as you read them, the grace of our God who has redeemed a people for himself through his beloved Son. It is his Son, our Lord Jesus, who best knows what it means to be shamed and publicly violated.

From the next scenario (vv. 25–27) emerges one of the strongest and, I think, most encouraging laws to be seen about this subject. In contrast to the town setting, this sexual act takes place “out in the country” where no one would be able to hear a woman cry out for help. In this case, the betrothed woman is given the benefit of the doubt: she can be assumed to have cried out when found and violated by a man. Most literally translated, as in the English Standard Version, the man in this case “seizes her and lies with her” (v. 25); the New International Version (2011) appropriately calls this “rape.” Only the man is to be put to death. Verse 26 reiterates: “You shall

⁷ Chapter 4 of *Women and God*, for example, examines Deuteronomy 21:10–14, a challenging passage but one which shows God’s hand of protection on women from other nations who undergo the humiliation of being taken captive by Israelites in war; see Nielson, *Women and God*, 61–70.

do nothing to the young woman; she has committed no offense punishable by death” (ESV). Verse 27 defends the woman further, acknowledging her plight: “though the betrothed woman cried for help, there was no one to rescue her.” God sees and steps in to defend.

Even in recent times and in many Western countries, it has often been difficult to prosecute a man who raped a woman because female victims of rape have commonly been portrayed as seducers, guilty of inciting men to actions that in some way the women must have desired. So a guilty man could himself play the role of victim, rather than being convicted for the crime of rape against an unwilling woman. In some countries and cultures today, a female victim of rape is considered dishonored and is even sometimes killed to protect the family’s honor. It is good to find that the Bible is clear from the beginning in condemning the evil of rape, punishing men who do it, and protecting women who suffer the ravages of it.

The chapter’s next (and even more challenging) scenario involves a man who rapes an unmarried virgin (vv. 28–29; see the similar passage in Exod 22:16–17). *Another* scenario, you might say! If we do not regularly spend much time reading God’s law in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, we might be amazed at the detail of all these different scenarios in God’s inspired revelation. But we should expect such detail, for the subject of sexual relations is central and crucial to human experience. We human beings think about all these things in detail; how revealing and encouraging that God likewise pays so much attention and tells us so.

The sexual union in these verses does not break an existing marriage bond; the solution offered is marriage. This case does not resolve all well for the woman: she evidently will be offered her rapist for a husband, who gets off by paying fifty shekels to her father (along with the lifelong obligation of marrying and caring for her). There are nuances here that offer a bit more light on the subject. Daniel Block suggests that the verb in verse 29 (“He shall pay” NIV) could well be translated “may pay”—which would offer the woman’s father a choice as to whether or not to accept this potential son-in-law.⁸ As the extramarital sex in any case would make it difficult for this woman to be accepted by another husband, the required money and the security of marriage in themselves are meant as a help to the woman who has been violated and who is viewed not as the guilty one but as the one to whom reparation must be made. At the least, the woman is covered by certain protections that were available to her and her family.

⁸ Daniel Block, *Deuteronomy*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 525–26.

All these Old Testament laws take place within a distorted patriarchal system. In a patriarchal system, the husband holds authority over his household. All sorts of practices grew up around patriarchy in ancient times: for example, a wife usually went to live in the household of her husband, and her role in bearing children to carry on her husband's line was crucial. Unmarried women were often unprotected and unrespected. Married women were often mistreated. Practices of polygamy developed. When we use the word "patriarchy" today, it is almost impossible to separate that word from all sorts of ungodly and sexist practices that have come to cling to it like barnacles to a seaside dock. In many contemporary contexts and cultures, lots of the barnacles still cling. The fulfillment of Genesis 3:16 is everywhere in evidence in this fallen world of sin. As Jesus said, the hearts of people are hard, and "from the beginning it was not so" (Matt 19:8).

Jesus knew the beginning of this story; he was there. Then he entered the story to save law-breakers. But through the Old Testament law God was mercifully revealing himself. The law points relentlessly to the truths God established from creation, in particular, the value of women and men alike as God's image-bearers, worthy of his attention, provision, and mercy. In a world full of sin and shame, laws such as the ones we have discussed served the merciful purpose of restraining sin and protecting and providing for the most vulnerable in the midst of it. That would often be the women. Hence the existence of so many specific laws focused on protecting them from the abuse of men.

V. God's View of Extramarital Sex

Even as we see that God treats women as equally responsible and protects women when abused, we still might have a good deal of trouble accepting the harshness of the punishment. Stoning? Death? For adultery? This is hard indeed. What is clear is that God views extramarital sex as a grievous evil, not to be tolerated among his people. This is evident from the refrain that comes after many of the scenarios in Deuteronomy 22, commanding the people to "purge the evil" from among them (vv. 21–22, 24). Extramarital sex in God's eyes is evil first and foremost because of God's established order in creation: one husband and one wife should become one flesh. Jesus makes clear not only that this is God's established order but also that to break it apart is an offense against God. It was Jesus, not some pastor or priest, who first said: "What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matt 19:6; Mark 10:9).

The sober details of the laws we have seen, including the shocking extremity of the penalties, tell us that in messing with God's establishment of sex within marriage, we are messing with the way he has set up his world to work. To reject his creation order is to reject our Creator personally—breaking apart what he himself created.

This is why sexual sin is just as grievous to God today as it was centuries ago. As with all sin, it brings sickness of soul—not only in agonizing cases of overt abuse but also in the more common and increasingly accepted instances of disregard for God's design for sexual union within marriage. If we could see through to spiritual reality, we would probably tremble to contemplate the careless breaking apart of God's good and holy design for human sexuality. These breaks bleed death, although all the wounds are not always visible right now.

When a couple engages in sex outside of marriage, they often do not feel the impact of their sin in the moment, or sometimes even in a lifetime. Husbands or wives who commit adultery might feel satisfaction, sometimes guilt, but not usually the heat of God's hatred for sexual sin as an evil to be purged. When women and men claim sexual independence, rejecting marriage bonds, they often do not realize the harm to their souls (and the harm to others) that comes with calling good what God calls evil. And those women and men include all of us; Jesus nailed every one of us when he explained that when we even look at another person lustfully, we have already committed adultery with that person in our heart (Matt 5:27–28). All our hearts are broken.

It is hard for us sinners to see through to spiritual reality, especially while enjoying pleasure or power. Stoning is shocking; perhaps the shock of it helps open our eyes. God's Word, by God's Spirit, does open our eyes to the sin that infects all of us—and by his grace, we are drawn to bow in repentance before a holy God and find the mercy that he is always ready to extend. God is a God of justice who holds the sexually unfaithful to account. He is a God of compassion who protects the vulnerable and abused. And he is a God of mercy who forgives the guilty who turn to him for cleansing.

There is another aspect of the grievous evil of sexual sin: it infects not just one person but the community of God's people. God gave this Old Testament law to these offspring of Abraham to set them apart as his people. He had grown them into a great nation just as he promised. He had redeemed them from Egypt. Now they were to live as his "treasured possession," a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod 19:5–6). This was the people through whose offspring God would bless the world, in the promised Christ. That offspring was not to be defiled.

Today, those who live in Christ are by faith part of that offspring, and we inherit that call to holiness—now to praise together our God who has redeemed us in Christ: “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9). Our holiness, including our sexual purity, is not just for our good. As the Scriptures unfold, we see that marriage is a divinely given picture of Christ and the church. The ultimate end for keeping marriage pure is that we his people might shine forth the glory of our Savior. God gives such stark prohibitions about the holiness of marriage in order to protect something beautiful and precious—a picture of his own Son.

VI. *Redeeming Gomer*

In the end, sexual unfaithfulness reveals the unfaithfulness of our sinful hearts before God. Which brings us to a woman named Gomer, who lived in Israel in the eighth century B.C. (by this time, God’s people were split between two kingdoms—the northern one called Israel, the southern one Judah). Gomer was a “promiscuous woman” whom God told the prophet Hosea to marry to live out the story of God’s mercy toward his unfaithful people. God’s initial message through Hosea was that “the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord” (Hos 1:2). The New International Version clearly explains this verse: God’s people were “like an adulterous wife, guilty of unfaithfulness to the Lord.”

So Hosea the prophet married Gomer the promiscuous woman—it was a living parable. God told them to name their three children “God Scatters,” “No Mercy,” and “Not My People,” showing God’s impending punishment on his rebellious, idolatrous people (Hos 1:4, 6, 9). This is not a happy story. Gomer eventually left Hosea and their three children for another man.

And what did God tell Hosea to do? “Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods” (Hos 3:1 ESV). And so Hosea bought back his wife, paying the bride-price customarily paid to the family left behind by a woman when she married. This was a bride who had deserted her family; Hosea bought her back and took her home.

This is a picture of God; he tells us so. God promises ultimately to make a way for the people he called “No Mercy” to receive his mercy. To the people he called “Not My People” he will say, “You are my people,” and they will say, “You are my God” (Hos 2:23).

That is how merciful God is. I am Gomer. You are Gomer. We are Gomer—spiritual adulterers. But from the beginning God had a plan to buy us back, and that plan has been accomplished. The God who loves us has redeemed us, bought us back, through the blood of Christ. We his redeemed people are pictured finally as Christ's bride, and we will one day be given "fine linen, bright and pure" to wear to our wedding (Rev 19:7–8).

What is God like? Look at Jesus. Look again at Jesus standing before that woman caught in adultery. Jesus has mercy on her. He calls her to turn from her sin. He has come to redeem her from that sin through his sacrifice on the cross on her behalf. She does deserve death. But that is not the whole story. Every woman and every man deserves death, the wages of our sin. But that is not the whole story. The hope of the Scriptures, for every woman and every man, is that Jesus came to offer us mercy. Through faith in his death on our behalf, we receive full forgiveness and new life in him, now and forever. That is the whole story.