And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him, and he sat down, and taught them. 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 cast the first 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.

John 8:2-11

Introduction: One of the basic responsibilities of Christianity has to society and to individuals is that of condemnation. The Church must forever stand in judgement upon every political, social, and economic system, condemning evil wherever they exist. The Church can never condone evil either in its social or [strikeout illegible] ind dimensions. Jesus realized this, and throughout the gospel he is pictured condemning evil in no uncertain terms.

1. He goes in the temple.
2. He see the Pharisees and says “ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell.”

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1 King wrote “BC Preached at Dexter Nov., 1954” on the inside of the folder containing this document. King was scheduled to give this sermon as early as 27 May 1951 (“Rev M L King, Jr to Fill Ebenezer Pulpit Sunday A M,” Atlanta Daily World, 26 May 1951). A few months after joining his father as co-pastor of Ebenezer in 1960, King again delivered this sermon (see Ebenezer Baptist Church, Program, Sunday services, 24 July 1960).

2 King may be referring to Jesus’ eviction of the moneychangers from the Temple, see, for example, Matthew 21:12-13.

On one occasion however we find Jesus failing to condemn a person who has committed an obvious sin, and we wonder why. Our discussion for the morning grows out of this situation. Why did Jesus go beyond condemnation on this occasion?

1. In his assessment of sins, her sin was no worse than the sins of those who sought to stone her. Don't mistake the argument. Jesus is not making light of adultery.
   a. He looked at the Pharisees. They boasted how the followed the law from the dotting of an I to the crossing of a T. They could say slyly I thank thee, Lord, that I am not like other men. And as he looked deeper he saw their tragic pride, their pompous hypocrisy. And Jesus is saying all of this is as bad or worse than adultery. Here were these pompous, self-righteous, arrogant Pharisees standing up ready to stone this woman. They were victims of the gravest sin that one can commit, and that is the sin of feeling that one has risen above the capacity for sin.
   b. How many of us are ready to stone our contemporaries. We often have something of the Pharisee in us. We so easily see the faults of others. We are so ready to condemn. Yet we never stop to see that some of the sins we are committing are just as bad. Pride, bad temper, refusing to make up a quarrel, spreading lies, indulging in malicious gossip, mental cruelty and social injustice are all terrible sins that we often think lightly of.
   c. How we turn up our noses at those who commit sins like stealing or drunkenness or murder or crimes of the criminal courts. We think that we should never be tempted to commit them. Surely it comes as a shock to hear Christ saying, "But you do things which are far worse.

You might not rob a bank, but you steal others good names.
If our sins were punished in society by Christ's assessment, all of us would be in jail.
Jesus is not making light of adultery, but he is stirring the consciences of men and compelling them to see the gravity of all sin.

2. A second reason why Jesus did not condemn the woman was because she had already condemned herself. The object of condemnation is to produce a sense of guilt, then of penitence, and thus to inaugurate a new beginning.
   a. Jesus was continually condemning the Pharisees because they felt no sense of guilt. They thought themselves the moral examples which all should emulate.
   b. The woman had a burning and terrible sense of guilt. Further condemnation would have been unnecessary and cruel.
   c. How we Christians have often been cruel at this point. Give examples of people who have made mistakes.

D. Let us be slow to condemn others. Most of the people we meet in daily life.

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5. For more on King's analysis, see "Pride Versus Humility: The Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican," Sermon at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 25 September 1955, pp. 230-234 in this volume.
are not hardened hypocrites demanding fierce words. Most of the people we meet are not like the Pharisees thinking to highly of themselves, but they think too little of themselves. They need to be given new confidence in their power to do the good. They need not our condemnation, but our help. As Jung says in the last chapter of his great work, Modern Man In Search of a Soul:

Condemnation does not liberate, it oppresses. I am the oppressor of the person I condemn, not his friend and fellow sufferer. Modern man has heard enough about guilt and sin. He is sorely beset by his own bad conscience and wants rather to learn how he is to reconcile himself with his own nature, how he is to love the enemy in his own heart and call the wolf his brother (pp 271, 274)\(^6\)

In the private interview a psychologist must always learn to identify himself with the patient, walking along the same road with him, never condemning or being shocked, trying to understand how the patient got into the distress which troubles him.\(^7\)

3. Notice Jesus' final words to this [strikeout illegible] woman: "Neither do I condemn thee, Go and sin no more" He bids her to look at the future, and not to the past. We are to concentrate on the heights we are determined to attack, not look back into the depth in which he once wallowed.

AD CSKC Sermon file, folder 43, "Beyond Condemnation"

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"Christ, The Center of Our Faith"

[1953–1955?]

In this handwritten sermon outline, King reflects on the human tendency, for better or worse, to support causes based on personalities rather than ideologies. As he explores the impact of others on his life, King refers to Morehouse professor George D. Kelsey, who influenced his decision to attend seminary and his approach to pastoral ministry.

I Before men can devote their lives to a cause or a movement, they must find some person who, for them, becomes the personification or incarnation of that cause or movement. People always seek, not so much for some thing as for some one to believe in. They seek for some person that for them becomes the center of the cause. We often tell people to love the cause. But people cannot love a cause in abstract.