

Pursue the Broken (Adulterous Woman)

March 6, 2022



PURSUE

BUILDING FOR PEOPLE. BELIEVING FOR MORE.

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

John 7:53-8:11

Session Outline

1. Sin is Sin (John 7:53–8:6)
2. Solution for Sin (John 8:7-10)
3. Repentance of Sin (John 8:11)

Theological Theme

Sin is any transgression of the law of God. God's law is good in that it makes clear what God's will is for His creation. However, the law is a curse because it condemns all people on account of their rebellion against God.



Leader Guide

Adulterous Woman

Introduction

- ❓ How certain are you that the law of gravity is real and consequential?
- ❓ What evidence has led you to this conclusion?

Our universe is governed by laws. The law of cause and effect states that for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. The law of gravity (on Earth) states simply that whatever goes up must come down. We don't question these laws, and we don't act in a way that assumes that they are not in effect. Furthermore, the laws we observe in nature (and there are many) are proof of a lawgiver. Who could have given the universe such precise and perfect laws to govern its existence?

God, of course, is the architect of all we see and all we don't see. God governs all matter in the universe. He also governs the souls of mankind. God has given His moral law to all people. In fact, the Bible states that God's basic law is written on the hearts of mankind (Romans 2:15).

God's moral law given by God to govern the souls of people is consequential. Those who obey the laws of God perfectly are counted as righteous and enjoy the favor and blessings of God. Those who transgress His laws are condemned and will be punished for their rebellion. Sadly, the Bible (as well as personal experience) makes it clear that there are none who are righteous and the punishment for sin is death (Romans 3:10; 6:23).

We would never jump out of an airplane without a parachute, thinking we could somehow beat gravity and float gently to the earth. Similarly, it is foolish for people to disregard God's moral law and think it will have no consequence. The fact of the matter is that all people are plummeting toward earth with no parachute and, unless someone intervenes, death is certain.

Session Summary

There are two important elements to understand as we begin today's study. First, the punishment did fit the crime. The Pharisees were right when they said the Law demanded that one who commits adultery ought to be put to death. Deuteronomy 22:22 states, "If a man is discovered having sexual relations with another man's wife, both the man who had sex with the woman and the woman must die. You must purge the evil from Israel." This command is repeated in Leviticus 20:10. While the Pharisees may not have had pure motives for their actions, they were correct in their assessment of what should take place regarding the adulterous woman.

Second, the text says the whole situation was meant to be a trap for Jesus. How was it a trap? Israel was controlled by the Roman Empire at this time. While Rome allowed regions like Israel a measure of freedom and self-government, there were limits. One of those limits was the prohibition from executing anyone without the consent of the Roman governor, as would come into play in the death of Christ. So, the Pharisees were seeking to force Jesus into either encouraging her execution because it was biblical and becoming an usurper of the authority of the Roman governor; or discouraging her execution, which would have been contrary to the written words of Scripture.

Jesus Christ, however, knew their intentions and refused to be trapped. No one was going to take His life from Him. He would give it freely according to the appointed time.


1. Sin is Sin (John 7:53–8:6)

The Pharisees said, "In the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" (v. 5). They appealed to the Scriptures, which is exactly what they should have done. It is exactly what Christians should do today. While we acknowledge that these leaders' hearts were wicked, this doesn't mean we should not look to the Scriptures as our rule for life and faith.


The law of God is best understood by recognizing its three uses. These are often called the three-fold purpose of the law. The first is that the law of God restrains evil. It's like a leash that holds back all the evil that could be done if it weren't for the law of God that is written on people's hearts. Secondly, the law of God is like a mirror that reveals to people their sinfulness. When they see the law and compare themselves to it, there can be no doubt about their spiritual state. Finally, the law of God serves as a roadmap for Christians. God's law helps those who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ to know how to walk in a manner that pleases their heavenly Father.

The Account of the Woman Caught in Adultery


The story of Jesus and the adulteress may be authentic, but it is doubtful that the account is part of John's original Gospel. Reasons include: (1) the account is absent from all the oldest copies of John; (2) where it does occur in later manuscripts, it is found at various places (after Jn 7:36, 44, 52; at the end of John's Gospel; or after Lk 21:38); (3) virtually every verse from 8:1–11 (except for v. 5) features words not elsewhere found in John's Gospel, and standard vocabulary used in John is conspicuously absent; (4) the account appears to interrupt the narrative flow from 7:52 to 8:12, breaking the literary unit 7:1–8:59; and (5) the account was virtually unknown by early church fathers before the fourth century.

 How is the law of God like a roadmap for Christians? Why can't it be a roadmap for non-Christians?

A grave error that some Christians make is to disregard the law of God as irrelevant and useless for them because they have already trusted in Christ and received forgiveness for sins. This point of view, however, is flawed. The law of God is a great blessing to all who are in Christ. It helps them remember to cling to Christ while it also gives them clarity about obedience to His will. Anyone who is truly born-again desires to please God with their lives because of His great mercy and kindness toward them in Christ. A Christian who has no desire to obey God doesn't exist.


 Would you label the woman who was brought before Jesus as a sinner or a victim? Why?

On the one hand, the woman was treated harshly by the Pharisees and used inappropriately as a part of their scheme to entrap Christ. On the other hand, she was a wicked woman who sinned greatly against her own husband, her lover's wife, and against her God. She broke His moral law, and she deserved the wages for that sin. We must be careful not to downplay her sin because of the Pharisees' wickedness.

 Application: When are you tempted to make excuses for your sin? How do you regularly practice repentance of sin in your life?

2. Solution for Sin (John 8:7-10)

It wasn't only the woman caught in adultery that had sinned but also the Pharisees. The bystanders who were likely observing the scene were also guilty of sin. It doesn't stop there. Each of us has disregarded God's law and gone astray. Every person stands guilty before God.


 How did Jesus answer the woman's accusers? What, then, is the solution for sin?

Jesus did not argue about whether the woman was guilty; He knew she was. And He didn't begin to discuss what her punishment should be. He knew what the Scriptures said. He simply pointed out the fact that they were in the same boat: "For whoever keeps the entire law, and yet stumbles at one point, is guilty of breaking it all. For he who said, Do not commit adultery, also said, Do not murder. So if you do not commit adultery, but you murder, you are a lawbreaker" (James 2:10-11).

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who came in the flesh was "tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). He obeyed the will of God the Father perfectly. He never did what God forbids and He always did

what God required. He was completely righteous, holy, just, and pure. The only person who was guiltless and able to throw the first stone was Jesus Himself.

Yet, He didn't. Jesus came to save sinners: "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:17). Jesus told the woman that He did not condemn her. He had come to earth to save sinners like her, like the Pharisees, and like the people in our group.


 How did Jesus truly and perfectly obey the law of God? What specific examples can you think of?

Jesus never worshiped idols. He never coveted anyone's wife. He didn't sin in His anger. He never spoke rashly or hatefully. Jesus loved His neighbor as Himself. Think about the parable of the good Samaritan that Jesus told to explain this command. In the parable, a Samaritan loved his neighbor who likely would've hated him. The Samaritan loved his enemy. This command was explained more fully in the sermon on the mount when Jesus said:

"You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I tell you, don't resist an evildoer. On the contrary, if anyone slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. As for the one who wants to sue you and take away your shirt, let him have your coat as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to the one who asks you, and don't turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

—Matthew 5:38-44

Jesus perfectly fulfilled these words by doing the unthinkable. From the moment of His betrayal, Jesus didn't resist the evildoer; He turned the other cheek; He loved his enemies and prayed for His attackers. Jesus earned perfect righteousness through this obedience while simultaneously paying the price for the sin of all who would trust in Him.

 Application: Do you more closely identify with the woman caught in adultery or the Pharisees? Do you see yourself as a guilty sinner in need of forgiveness or a self-righteous saint who has no need for mercy?

3. Repentance of Sin (John 8:11)



How did Jesus respond to the woman in this verse? Why might this be surprising? How might you expect Him to respond?

Jesus told the woman He did not condemn her and to stop sinning. While it's true that Jesus didn't condemn her to execution, that doesn't mean He excused the sinning. Forgiveness for sin is not tantamount to affirmation of sin. Jesus called the woman to abandon her sinful living. He does the same today. It is impossible for a person to both follow Christ and allow sin to reign in their hearts. Those who have truly been redeemed by the blood despise sin because their hearts have been made clean and the Holy Spirit dwells within them. They cannot abide by sin because they know that it is offensive to their heavenly Father.

Those who are in Christ not only continue to believe in the gospel, but they also continue to repent of their sin. Christians seek to live holy lives. A fundamental truth that Christians must keep in view is that their position in Christ has implications in their lives today, right now. His death and resurrection deal with their broken pasts and assure their futures, but also transform their present. Peter wrote, "For you were called to this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps" (1 Peter 2:21).

There are many adjectives we could use to describe Jesus's life, but it is best to start with holy. Jesus lived a holy life. In other words, Jesus lived a life that was set apart for sacred purposes, not profane. Or, to put it in an even clearer way. Jesus did not sin. Peter went on to say, "He did not commit sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth" (1 Peter 2:22). Jesus lived a sinless life. This matters for several reasons. If Jesus sinned, He wasn't God, but a fraud. Further, if Jesus sinned, He is unable to offer Himself as a substitutionary sacrifice on our behalf.

Christians are holy in a positional sense. When they are justified upon responding to the gospel with faith and repentance, they are made to be holy and righteous in God's sight because Jesus's righteousness was credited to their account (2 Corinthians 5:21). But they are not perfectly holy in a practical sense. Christians still battle against sin, and they sometimes lose the battle. They succumb to the old self and disobey God's will for their lives. The Bible says, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).




How do Christians live holy lives and what should be their posture as they battle against sin?


1 Peter 1 says:


As obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires of your former ignorance. But as the one who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct; for it is written, Be holy, because I am holy. If you appeal to the Father who judges impartially according to each one's work, you are to conduct yourselves in reverence during your time living as strangers. For you know that you were redeemed from your empty way of life inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of an unblemished and spotless lamb.
—1 Peter 1:14-19

In His Word, God calls Christians to actively battle against sin, to not be conformed to the passions of their former ignorance. The motivating factor for this holy living is found in the gospel, the fact that they were ransomed with the precious blood of Christ.

 Application: How does reflecting on the person and work of Christ help you to pursue holiness in your life?

Conclusion

 How have you seen your own inability to follow God's law perfectly?

 Why does it matter that Jesus kept the law of God perfectly? How does that help us?

 Why should the work of Christ on our behalf lead us to pursue others in gospel conversations?

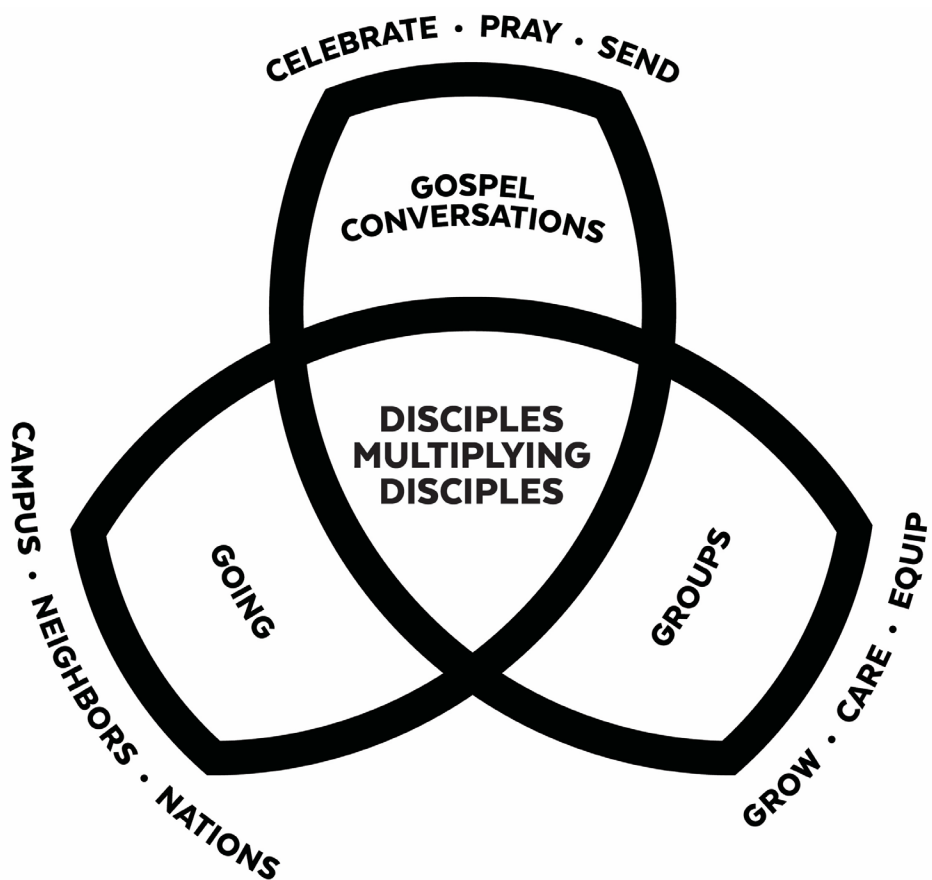
Prayer of Response

Close in prayer thanking God that Jesus has died for all who trust in Him, despite our sinfulness before Him. Ask Him to use today's lesson and this recognition to lead you to share with others about Him.

Additional Resources

- *Exalting Jesus in John* by Matt Carter and John Wredberg
- *John* by R.C. Sproul
- *John* by George Beasley-Murray

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



DxD This Week

Group Emphasis

Spend time in silence during this session allowing people time to consider their past, God's healing/or need of healing, and who in their life could benefit from this Bible story.

For Next Week

Session Title

- Pursue Those in Darkness (The Blind Man)

Main Passages

- John 9:1-38

Session Outline

1. The Mission of the Christ (John 9:1-12)
2. Self-Righteous Scoffers (John 9:13-34)
3. The Humble Repent and Believe (John 9:35-38)

Memorize

¹⁰ When Jesus stood up, he said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" ¹¹ "No one, Lord," she answered. "Neither do I condemn you," said Jesus. "Go, and from now on do not sin anymore."

- John 8:10-11

Historical Context of John

Purpose

The purpose statement in 20:30–31 indicates that John wrote with an evangelistic purpose, probably seeking to reach unbelievers through Christian readers of his Gospel. If the date of composition was after AD 70, the time of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, it is likely that John sought to present Jesus as the new temple and center of worship for God’s people in replacement of the old sanctuary.

Author

A close reading of the Gospel of John suggests that the author was an apostle (1:14; cp. 2:11; 19:35); one of the Twelve (“the disciple Jesus loved,” 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:20; cp. 21:24–25); and, still more specifically, John, the son of Zebedee (note the association of “the disciple Jesus loved” with Peter in 13:23–24; 18:15–16; 20:2–9; 21; and in Lk 22:8; Ac 1:13; 3–4; 8:14–25; Gl 2:9). The church fathers, too, attested to this identification (e.g., Irenaeus). Since the apostolic office was foundational in the history of the church (Ac 2:42; Eph 2:20), the apostolic authorship of John’s Gospel invests it with special authority as firsthand eyewitness (Jn 15:27; 1Jn 1:1–4).

Setting

The most plausible date of writing is the period between AD 70 (the date of the destruction of the temple) and 100 (the end of John’s lifetime), with a date in the 80s most likely. A date after 70 is suggested by the references to the Sea of Tiberias in 6:1 and 21:1 (a name widely used for the Sea of Galilee only toward the end of the first century); Thomas’s confession of Jesus as “my Lord and my God” in 20:28 (possibly a statement against emperor worship in the time of Domitian); the reference to Peter’s martyrdom, which occurred in 65 or 66 (21:19); the lack of reference to the Sadducees, who ceased to be a Jewish religious party after 70; and the comparative ease with which John equated Jesus with God (1:1, 14, 18; 10:30; 20:28).

Special Features

The Gospel of John is different from the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—in that more than ninety percent of its material is unique. John’s Gospel does not focus on the miracles, parables, and public speeches that are so prominent in the other accounts. Instead, the Gospel of John emphasizes the identity of Jesus as the Son of God and how we, as believers, should respond to his teachings.

Extended Commentary

John 7:53–8:11

8:1–6a. The earliest and most reliable manuscripts do not include John 7:53–8:11. Nevertheless, the NIV includes the entire segment—a wise choice, in my opinion. Borchert calls it “a text looking for a context” and refuses to deal with it at the beginning of chapter 8 since, in his view, “it disrupts the logic of the Johannine Tabernacles’ argument” (Borchert, p. 369). Carson agrees that the narrative was probably not a part of John’s Gospel (though Zane Hodges has argued its authenticity) but claims “there is little reason for doubting that the event here described occurred” (Carson, D. A. *The Gospel According to John*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991., pp. 333–34). He suggests it belongs in the record of the last week but nevertheless deals with it here as I shall do.

The Pharisees posed a dilemma. If Jesus agreed to stone the woman, he would incur the distrust of the sinners he came to save as well as break Roman law. But a refusal to stone her would make him vulnerable to the accusation that he treated the Law of Moses lightly. It is a sad commentary on the culture of first-century Israel that they brought in the woman but no mention is made of the man. The sin of adultery and its handmaiden, divorce, represent almost the norm in modern America. But at least in our day we recognize mutuality of responsibility.

John left no doubt regarding the Pharisees’ motivation: They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. So the chapter begins with public accusation, but it also goes on to talk about personal guilt. In one sense the Pharisees stood on solid ground with their appeal to the Law of Moses (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22–24), but the law was not as clear as their accusation seems to imply. For example, her marital status would be a defining factor.

Whatever the particulars, the case indicated the intent of the Pharisees to trap Jesus with these charges with complete disregard for the woman in question. The real issue was the political motives of the accusers. Boice suggests that the entire thing was a set-up, what we would call today entrapment. In the rabbinical law, two or three witnesses had to observe the act of adultery in order for the death penalty to be enforced. Boice claims, “Under such circumstances it is almost self-evident that the rulers must have arranged the liaison somewhat as a trap, having stationed the witnesses in the room or at the keyhole. It was a situation quite similar to the use of private investigators and photographers in order to prove adultery today” (Boice, II, p. 315).

8:6b–8. Interpreters seem fascinated by Jesus’ writing in the sand, certainly a reaction unexpected by the Pharisees. Why did Jesus do this? What did he write? One answer suffices for both questions: We do not know. It is useless to speculate, as some have done, that he wrote the names of other adulterers who were standing there among the group of accusers. We are bound to the text which tells us nothing more than that Jesus refused an immediate or reactionary response to the Pharisees’ accusation. The centerpiece of this scene is the Lord’s answer: If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.

The writing in the sand was followed by the wisdom of the Son. This rubric is certainly valuable for judgmental Christians in our times. The perfect reply preserved both Jewish and Roman law

while exposing the wickedness of the accusers. As Jesus began writing on the ground a second time, they had time to think about their own lives and God began to speak to those who were open to hear his voice. Again the accusers were brought face to face with the law they themselves had quoted. According to Deuteronomy 17:2–7, the witnesses of a crime who had reported it to the authorities would be the first to cast the stones.

8:9. What followed was the withdrawal of the sinners, one at a time, the older ones first. Did the older ones leave first because they had more time to accumulate sins of their own? Was it their maturity and sense of impending judgment that made them fleet of foot to escape this embarrassing predicament? Did they recognize that perhaps their sin was greater than the woman's and Jesus knew that full well? Again, the text does not tell us. But conscience must have played some role in this scene as the accusers left Jesus alone with the woman.

Imagine a stage play as you watch in silence—no dialogue, no music. The confident and critical Pharisees, moments ago pointing their fingers at the woman and at Jesus, now silently exit stage right or stage left without another word. Christians are not perfect—just forgiven. And because of the extent of God's forgiveness to us, we ought to be the least judgmental people in the world.

8:10–11. The first two scenes of the story described the charges and their response. Now we come to the verdict. With the accusers gone, there remained no condemnation. The Son of God refused to press the issue. Her sin was not just set aside; soon Jesus would pay the penalty for both the woman and her accusers.

Jesus asked a rhetorical question and the woman answered it simply. Forgiveness rests upon the Lord's understanding. In this vignette we find recognition, repentance, regeneration, restitution, and reconciliation.

A second important lesson in these two verses is that forgiveness rests upon the Lord's grace. Remember the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15? The father showed unconditional forgiveness and restoration when the son returned. Salvation does not come from suffering; it comes from grace—from the suffering and death of Jesus on our behalf.

Finally, we see that the verdict rests upon the Lord's forgiveness. Forgiveness demands a clean break with sin. In Matthew 9:2 we read, "Some men brought to him a paralytic, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Take heart, son, your sins are forgiven.'" In searching for a way to translate this, a missionary linguist working among the Guajira tribe in Colombia rendered the Lord's words, "I forgive you. Let's be friends again."

The same Jesus offers forgiveness today to sinners whose sins equal that of the woman or those of the Pharisees. And not only forgiveness for initial salvation but also for daily sins of anger, disobedience, envy, greed, and the judgmental character shown by the Pharisees which gave birth to this episode.¹

References

1. Kenneth O. Gangel, *John*, ed. Max E. Anders (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2000).

Author Bio

Kenneth Gangel (John)

Dr. Kenneth O. Gangel (1935-2009): A prolific author and an experienced leader has been influential in the field of Christian education for over forty years. He's written numerous articles and over 50 books, while pastoring, teaching, raising a family and leading schools. His impact reaches around the world through students, co-authored books, and working with leaders of churches and schools.

Matt Carter (Exalting Jesus in John)

Matt Carter serves as the Pastor of Preaching and Vision at the Austin Stone Community Church in Austin, Texas, which has grown from a core team of 15 to over 8,000 attending each Sunday since he planted it in 2002. Matt has co-authored multiple books including a commentary on the Gospel of John in The Christ Centered Exposition Commentary series. Matt also co-authored a novel of historical fiction, *Steal Away Home* which tells the real life story of famed pastor Charles Spurgeon's unlikely friendship with former slave-turned-missionary, Thomas Johnson. Matt holds an M.Div. from Southwestern Seminary and a Doctorate in Expository Preaching from Southeastern Seminary. He and his wife Jennifer have been married for over 20 years, and they have three children, John Daniel, Annie, and Samuel.

John Wredberg (Exalting Jesus in John)

Josh Wredberg has served on the pastoral staff of churches in Michigan, Illinois, and North Carolina, and as teaching pastor at Redeemer Community Church in Fuquay-Varina, North Carolina. He is a graduate of Maranatha Baptist University and Shepherds Theological Seminary. Josh has also earned a doctorate in preaching from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He and his wife, Cari, have three boys, Jack, Max, and Caed.

R.C. Sproul (John)

R.C. Sproul (1939–2017) was founder of Ligonier Ministries in Orlando, Fla. He was also copastor of Saint Andrew's Chapel, first president of Reformation Bible College, and executive editor of *Tabletalk* magazine. His radio program, *Renewing Your Mind*, is still broadcast daily on hundreds of radio stations around the world and can also be heard online.

George Beasley-Murray (John)

Dr. George R. Beasley-Murray is former Principal of Spurgeon's College, London, and has served as James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He holds the M.A. from Cambridge University and the B.D., M.Th., Ph.D., and D.D. from the University of London. Among Dr. Beasley-Murray's many important publications are *Revelation in the New Century Bible Commentary*, *Baptism in the New Testament*, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*, *Jesus and the Last Days*, and *Gospel of Life: Theology in the Fourth Gospel*.