

Our society is enthralled with courtroom drama. Just this month Alex Murdaugh was sentenced to life in prison for murder. Updates on the trial were all over news headlines. Just back in November, the trial of the Waukesha parade killer made international news.

Perhaps the reason why many love keeping up with news regarding trials is that we know there's wrong in this world and we want there to be justice. A courtroom is a glimpse at wrongs being righted. We want to hear the guilty verdict for the career criminal. We want to hear the not guilty verdict for the man who was framed.

What we don't like thinking about is us being put on trial. However, that is the picture that Paul paints all throughout the book of Romans most especially in Romans 8. Indeed, on Judgment Day, we will be set before the throne of God and be held accountable for our actions in this life.

Dear Christian friend, you need not fret. Through faith in Christ, you will be declared "not guilty!" **"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."** Our theme: YOU RECEIVE NO CONDEMNATION FROM THE FATHER BECAUSE OF JESUS, NOT YOU! But what does it mean to be declared "not guilty"? What does it mean to have no condemnation in Christ Jesus?

First, I. No condemnation means ditching the way of sinful flesh. God gave us His law to follow. We see this in the ten commandments: you shall have no other gods, do not take the name of the Lord in vain, remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, honor your father and your mother, do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not lie, and do not covet.

These ten commandments are not simply a random hoop to jump through, they are a window into the very heart of God and how reality needs to work for there to be peace, harmony, and justice.

For new member classes I will go through the ten commandments with the class and ask them to say how many they've broken. Then I confess that I have broken each of the ten commandments. Don't worry, it's not that I've literally murdered someone, committed adultery, or was convicted some form of grand theft.

The application, of course, is that for each of these ten commandments, God's standards are perfection. It's not enough to not murder, even a hateful word or glance is a violation of the command do not murder. Having no other gods is not simply not bowing down to a gold statue. It's fearing, loving, or trusting in anything more than the Lord Himself. Committing adultery is not simply cheating on a spouse, but it is any unclean thoughts towards others.

Paul writes, **"For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh**

**cannot please God.”** The point is: apart from Christ, that is, according to the flesh, we cannot obey God’s law to perfection. That’s what Paul is referring to in verse 2 when he said, **“For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.”** The law becomes the law of sin and death not because God’s law is evil, but because it will inevitably and unfailingly show us our sin if we want to do things apart from Christ.

Darrell Brooks, the convicted murderer who rammed his car through that parade in Waukesha in 2021, chose to represent himself in the trial. To say that was a poor decision was an understatement. His inappropriate behavior during the trial tested the judge’s patience.

**“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”** Yet there is always the temptation to try to prove ourselves not guilty by our own actions and good intentions. This is life under the flesh and life according to the law. To try to be our own defense attorney on the Day of Judgment would be a worse decision than Darrell Brooks choosing to represent himself. We need something better than that.

That brings us to our second point. II. No condemnation means vindication by the Spirit of Jesus. Paul explains how it is that we have no condemnation. **“For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”**

The Father sent the Son in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is fully man with one minor difference, He is without sin. Nonetheless, through His passion, through His condemnation to death at that court during Holy Week, through His suffering, death, and burial, He took on the sins of the whole world so that He could forgive them. Romans 8 is a paraphrase of what Paul writes elsewhere: **“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”**

Our sin was imputed to Jesus on the cross, that is to say, Jesus took on all your sins and the sins of the whole world. Your worst crimes, your lowest moments, your most selfish acts, were all attributed to Him and carried by Him.

Jesus received the verdict “guilty.” Yet in this indictment, our Heavenly Father was working out a reversal of fortunes. Through sin falsely condemning Jesus who indeed never sinned, the Father condemned sin in the flesh. It was sin that was on trial, and alongside death and the devil, it was declared “guilty.”

There was an interesting moment in the Alex Murdaugh case. The judge reflected that although the state was not pursuing the death penalty, ironically, Alex and his broader family of prosecuting lawyers likely prosecuted criminals with the death penalty for lesser crimes than double homicide.

In the events of Holy Week, we see Jesus going on the offensive. Satan is the great prosecuting attorney of history, accusing sinners and even using the law to trap them and damn them. Through Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection, Satan the prosecuting attorney is on trial. Through God's action, Satan is convicted! His lies are put on display. His murder is put on display. His evil is put on display and the Father condemns all of it!

To be certain, we were guilty. Yet Jesus is the great defense attorney who pays the penalties for our sin. He accepts the Father's wrath in our place. In this process not only does Satan receive the condemnation, we receive Christ's righteousness and the verdict, "not guilty!" **"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."**

Finally, III. No condemnation means eternal life by the Spirit of Jesus. This "not guilty" verdict has implications for the whole of our life. We get to live life like a bird freed from its cage knowing that we deserve death and hell yet Jesus suffered it for us. We know the law is fulfilled because of Jesus living the perfect life for us. Every one of the Ten Commandments Jesus obeyed perfectly and that was credited to our account.

We have hope for the future knowing that we will live forever with Jesus in Heaven. Paul encourages us writing, **"If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you."** Paul is essentially saying here that the same God who rose from the dead dwells within you and you will rise also!

The Father, the first person of the Trinity, on Easter raised Jesus the Son, the second person of the Trinity, and the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity dwells in you and because of that, you will be raised up on the Last Day.

In 1999, Adnan Syed was convicted of murder in Baltimore. After doubts were shed on the reliability of the evidence, in fall of last year, Adnan was exonerated and released from prison. It only took twenty-three years. What this means is that he will no longer be a criminal in the eyes of the law *and* he will be entitled to compensation for each year of imprisonment. In those years of prison, Adnan didn't waver from the fact that he was innocent, and he welcome outside help to assist in the gathering of evidence to overturn that conviction.

**"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."** Dear Christian friend, you are guilty of sin and rightly condemned under the law, but you have a powerful God who has taken on your punishment and has exonerated you. More than simply compensation for your years in prison, you have every blessing in the heavenly places. Continue to gather to have your faith strengthened and never waver that your final declaration of "not guilty" is coming soon!