

I think it is one of the sweetest words in the entire Bible. It's a short word, two letters in Greek and English – “no.”

There is now *no* condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

I have a hard time thinking of a sweeter word than that.

There is now *no* condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

It reminds me of one of my favorite snippets from Jesus' life (John 8). There we meet a woman who is as guilty as you can possibly be. Jesus is sitting in the temple courtyard when he met this woman. She was dragged there by an angry mob fresh from the bed of a man who was not her husband – caught in the act of adultery. This wasn't hearsay, this wasn't gossip. She was caught in the act and dragged in front of Jesus.

Imagine the humiliation and the guilt; caught in the act, dragged to the temple and dropped in front of Jesus.

Remember that according to the Biblical Law of Moses adultery was a capital offense. According to the letter of the law, she should be dragged outside the city and stoned to death – this is why the angry mob and come together: to pelt her with stones until she died.

So, imagine the shame, the guilt, and the terror coursing through this woman.

“Jesus, what should we do with this woman? She was caught in the act. Moses says we should stone her. What do you say?”

John tells us that Jesus bends down and starts writing in the dirt of the Temple courtyard with his finger. He doesn't tell us what Jesus wrote, but we do know what happens next.

Jesus finished writing in the ground, stood up and said, **“Let any of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”** Then he stooped back down and continued writing in the dirt.

One by one, John tells us, starting with the oldest, they drop the stones and walk away. The oldest first... those with decades worth of guilt, those with more years under their belt and more regrets on their conscience, who saw the woman, saw what Jesus wrote, thought about Jesus requirement and walked away.

One by one the crowd walked away until only Jesus was left with the woman standing there.

Imagine how this woman felt as one by one the rocks hit the dirt and the crowd dispersed – did the shame, guilt, and fear give way to shock and then maybe a glimmer of hope?

Ah, but one man remained... one who *was* without sin... one who had every right to throw the first stone... Jesus – the one who had created her to live and love his way, not her way; the one who felt so strongly about the cheapening of his gift of human love that happens through adultery that he had ordered the execution of any who disobeyed.

Jesus lifted her face to look him in the eye, **“Woman, has no one condemned you?”**

“No one sir,” she said.

“Neither do I condemn you.”

There is now *no* condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

I imagine that whenever I finally see Jesus face to face that guilt, shame, and fear could be my gut reaction.

They should be, right?

It's going to be the ultimate caught in the act moment. The excuses I swallow and regurgitate (It's not that big of deal; no one's going to find out; it's not hurting anyone else; they had it coming) – all those excuses don't hold up when you are caught in the act.

If I stop and imagine my last 24 hours and how I would feel if Jesus were visibly standing right there – watching me throw a pity party when things didn't go my way; watching me lose my patience when my kid asked me for something at a time that was inconvenient for me; listening to my incredibly judgmental thoughts and words about someone else's decisions or actions.

Caught in the act of any one of those – shame and guilt would be justified feelings... and fear, right? Because the soul who sins is the one who will die. As Paul reminds us in Romans 8, our bodies are subject to death because of sin.

And that is why I think it is one of the sweetest words in the entire Bible.

No.

There is now *no* condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Like that woman caught in the act of adultery, even though shame, guilt, and fear *should* be my gut reaction, they are not what I will feel when I finally see Jesus face to face. Instead, I get to feel what that woman felt when Jesus lifts my face, looks me in the eyes, and says, **“Neither do I condemn you.”**

I get to feel that because of Christ Jesus – because, as Paul reminds us, God **sent his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering.** What that woman caught in the act deserved, what I deserve, what you deserve, all of it was given to Jesus...

All the shame, as he was stripped, beaten, mocked, and crucified.

All the guilt; the just judgment and anger God has over people who continue to ignore his commands, were put squarely on his shoulders on his cross.

The fear, the fear of being abandoned by God, the fear of getting what we deserve, is taken away by him who looks us in the eyes and says, **“Neither do I condemn you.”**

There is now *no* condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

It is one of the sweetest words in the entire Bible.

Because of that, it is also a word that the devil would love you to forget. The devil is not happy when we have life and peace (as Paul says). He would much rather we stay crushed with shame, guilt, and fear.

The devil's goal is shame, guilt, and fear – and judging by the amount of shame, guilt, and fear I feel daily, he's really good at what he does.

Would you agree?

He twists God's beautiful creation into this hotbox where shame, guilt, and fear thrive.

He does it through the crushing expectations of society – about how you need to dress to fit in, how you raise your children, what you feed your family, where you go to school, what you do for a living. Just stop and think for a minute about how many of your daily choices are motivated by potential shame, guilt, and fear about what other people might think about you.

He does it using the crushing expectations of God's own word – through the “yeah buts” of your conscience.

“Yeah, Jesus said, ‘Neither do I condemn you,’ but he also said, ‘Now go leave your life of sin.’

“Yeah, Jesus said there is no condemnation, but what if you keep doing the same sins over and over again? Where you really ever sorry for those sins in the first place?

“Yeah, Jesus said you are forgiven, but what if you really messed up? I get that pastor says a sin is a sin, but we all know that some sins are really bad (like speeding ticket vs. cheating on my wife; or getting frustrated at someone who cuts me off in traffic vs. getting drunk and abusing a child). There is no condemnation? What about those big ugly sins?”

Through the “big L” Law of God or the “little l” laws of society this world is a hotbox where shame, guilt, and fear thrive.

Nothing makes the devil happier than when he can take a teenage girl, a young woman loved and forgiven by Jesus, and makes her feel shame because of what other people think about her.

Nothing makes the devil happier than when he can take a young man whom Jesus loves and forgives and suffocates him with guilt because he messed up again.

Nothing makes the devil happier than when he can take that old woman sitting in a nursing home whom Jesus loves and forgives, and fill her with fear because of her past, or what might be coming down the road.

Into this hotbox of shame, guilt, and fear comes this sweet two letter word: no.

There is now *no* condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

That teenage girl and the shame she feels when she looks in the mirror: no! Your Jesus loves you and accepts you just the way you are.

That young man and the guilt he carries around: no! If while Jesus hung on the cross, he could look at his executioners and say, “Father, forgive them,” he forgives you too!

The old woman whose days and nights are filled with fear: no! Will Jesus die on the cross for you and then fail to see the job through and bring you safely home to heaven?

No more shame.

No more guilt.

No more fear.

No. One of the sweetest words in the Bible.

God grant that Jesus would daily lift our eyes to his and give us life and peace through this beautiful word: **There is now *no* condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.**

Amen.