

Identity #5: Accepted

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Searcy, Arkansas
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Scripture Reading

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death." (Romans 8:1-2 NIV)

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him (John 3:16-17 NIV)

Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin." (John 8:10-11 NIV)

NOT GUILTY: JOHN 7:53-8:11¹

Everyone had gone home. That's how the story begins. You may have missed it, since it's the last verse of chapter 7. Everyone had gone home. But Jesus had no home. "Foxes have holes; birds of the air have nests. But the son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Matt 8:20; Lk 9:58). So Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. I can see him there, out in the open, exposed to the weather, sleeping with his head on a rock. There are an estimated 150 million people without house and home in the world today. When the question is expanded to adequate housing, the number rises to 1.6 billion.² Jesus could say "I have been there" to so many people. When you are tempted to say to

¹ Max Lucado, "Not Guilty." *He Still Moves Stones* (1994). <https://maxlucado.com/finding-courage-to-overcome-the-past/>

² <https://www.homelessworldcup.org/homelessness-statistics#:~:text=The%20last%20time%20a%20global,million%20people%20were%20homeless%20worldwide.>

someone “walk a mile in my shoes,” don’t forget: Jesus can. Jesus has. He’s walked where you walk. And he did it barefoot.

At dawn, Jesus went to the temple courts. All the people gathered around him, so he sat down to teach them.

And that’s when it happened. The story goes like this: The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, “Teacher this woman was caught in the act of adultery” (John 8:3-4).

I love how Max Lucado sets the scene for us:

*Jesus has been teaching.
The woman has been cheating.
And the Pharisees are out to stop them both.
“Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery” (John 8:4 NIV). The accusation rings off the courtyard walls.
“Caught in the act of adultery.” The words alone are enough to make you blush. Doors slammed open. Covers jerked back.
“In the act.” In the arms. In the moment. In the embrace.
“Caught.” Aha! What have we here? This man is not your husband. Put on some clothes! We know what to do with women like you!
In an instant she is yanked from private passion to public spectacle. Heads poke out of windows as the posse pushes her through the streets. Dogs bark. Neighbors turn. The city sees. Clutching a thin robe around her shoulders, she hides her nakedness.
But nothing can hide her shame. From this second on, she’ll be known as an adulteress. When she goes to the market, women will whisper. When she passes, heads will turn. When her name is mentioned, the people will remember.
Moral failure finds easy recall.*

We could talk about the set up. The man who is nowhere to be found. The unlikelihood of two or three witnesses happening upon this event alone, much less at a time when Jesus is nearby, with a crowd to watch him fall into a trap, no less. We could talk about that.

But would any of that change the facts of what *she* did? Have you found that in the most distressing mistakes of your life, explaining away the circumstances and the other participants frees you from carrying the burden of shame and guilt? Me neither.

And what to do. What to do. “The law of Moses commands that we stone to death every woman who does this. What do you say we should do?” (John 8:5)

They form a circle and place her in the middle. Well, her and Jesus. She is the subject of the controversy; he is the object of the entire inquisition. She was the bait. He is the catch.

Listen to Max again:

The woman stares at the ground. Her sweaty hair dangles. Her tears drip hot with hurt. Her lips are tight, her jaw is clenched. She knows she's been framed. No need to look up. She'll find no kindness. She looks at the stones in their hands. Squeezed so tightly that fingertips turn white. She thinks of running. But where? She could claim mistreatment. But to whom? She could deny the act, but she was seen. She could beg for mercy, but these men offer none. The woman has nowhere to turn.

What to do. What to do. Jesus...stoops. He writes on the ground. The crowd is ready to use their hands to destroy. Jesus uses his to create. They were staring daggers at her and at him; now, with Jesus bent over, they are staring at each other. And Jesus says “Anyone here who has never sinned can throw the first stone at her” (John 8:7).

I doubt it was long before the woman, surrounded by blood-thirsty men, now senses the loneliness, surrounded by left-behind stones. There is no one there. No one, that is, except for Jesus.

And here is where the story takes one final, dramatic turn. The Judge of all the earth (Gen 18:25; Heb 12:23) stands to pronounce his sentence.

“Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?” (John 8:10 TLB), or in the ESV: “Has no one condemned you?”

“No one, Lord” she replied.

“Well then,” Jesus said, “I do not condemn you either. Go, but do not sin again.” (John 8:11, GNT)

“If you have ever wondered,” writes Max, “how God reacts when you fail, frame these words and hang them on the wall. Read them. Ponder them. Drink from them. Stand below them and let them wash over your soul.”

“Go and sin no more” is expected. The God of holiness and righteousness has always, in every covenant, called for us to live pure lives, to present our bodies as living sacrifices.

But it’s also true that in every covenant, people were called to offer their sacrifices not to earn or attain his love; but because they had already received it. A sacrifice is a thanksgiving tribute. After God saved Noah from the flood waters, he offered a sacrifice. In the New Testament, after Jesus visits the home of Zacchaeus, calling him a son of Abraham, and worthy to dine with the Master, Zacchaeus offers to give back and more. That is his sacrifice. When the church gathers, we offer to Jesus the fruit of our lips in praise like a sweet fragrance offering. Go and sin no more is a call to freedom: to live like free men and women, set free from sin and declared holy, righteous, and good.

But it’s the first part of the line that stuns us. It stuns me. And I want you to say it to yourself over and over again. You who feel guilty. You who know that you are guilty. You who relives that event in your life—the one many years ago—the one that everyone who was there knows you were guilty. Listen to the judge of all the earth declare you “not guilty.”

“Well then, “said Jesus, “I do not condemn you.”

LOVE FOR THE WORLD

John 3:16 is perhaps the most beloved verse in all the Bible. And for good reason. The world is dark. The world is anti-God, without God, angry at God or dismissive of God. But God so loved that world that He gave his one and only Son.

God so loved the world. Why do we believe the lie that God only loves you conditionally? God loves me when I try hard. God loves me when I do well. God loves me when I don’t sin. God loves me when I achieve greatness. Pick the line you tell yourself. All we know is conditional love. Your boss. Your coach. Your teacher. It seems like everyone we know loves us *as long as*. We are loved for what we do. How we look. What we have. And this is from people who only know some things about us. But God knows *everything* about us! How can God look at me—look at this—when I’m drowning in “less than’s,” “not enough’s,” and “missing the mark’s.” How can he look at me, with my list of sins and embarrassing facts, and love me?³

When you had nothing to offer him, when we were ungodly, when we were wallowing in our lostness, when we were enemies of the cross of Christ, without hope, without God in the world, God so loved you and me, and so loved the whole God-forsaken

³ See James Bryan Smith, *The Good and Beautiful You: Discovering the Person Jesus Created You to Be* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2022), p. 69.

world, that he gave his one and only Son to die for us. If he loved you that much when you were like that, what makes you think now—now that you offer him a stumbling, incomplete, struggling obedience, he could love you less? There is a reason we call it “good news.”

Unconditional love. A love that is not based on your performance, but on HIS inability to ever stop loving! He can’t help it! He is pure, unadulterated love. And you, made, sought, bought, redeemed, and reconciled you—you are the object of His love.

Faith in him can lead even the farthest soul back to the arms of God, and there is no distance he won’t travel, and no barrier He won’t cross to find any lost lamb and bring them home. That’s John 3:16. It’s a beauty.

NO CONDEMNATION

But I like John 3:17 **even better**. Do you know why Christ came into the world? He tells us. “God sent his son into the world, not to condemn the world, but to save the world (GW). That second part is expected; he already said that in verse 16: He came to save the world. But it’s the first part that stuns us. It stuns me. “God did not send his Son into the world to condemn it.” (TLB)

Haven’t we figured this out already? That’s not what he’s about. Some of us are so neurotic that there isn’t a person on earth who can condemn us as much as we condemn ourselves. Paul shares the struggle in Romans 7 of the desire to do right, and the present evil that seems to always be close at hand. And he cries out, “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?” (Rom 7:24). We know about the deliverance—God came to save the world. But do you know what that means? Paul wants to put the emphasis on the stunner. Listen to how Paul begins the very next chapter:

“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1). That’s how he begins this glorious chapter, full of encouragement of how God’s spirit prays for us and fights for us. How our future is secure and glory awaits us. And here is how he ends the chapter:

If God is on our side, who can ever be against us? Since he did not spare even his own Son for us but gave him up for us all, won’t he also surely give us everything else?

Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? Will God? No! He is the one who has forgiven us and given us right standing with himself.

Who then will condemn us? Will Christ? No! For he is the one who died for us and came back to life again for us and is sitting at the place of highest honor next to God, pleading for us there in heaven.

Who then can ever keep Christ's love from us? When we have trouble or calamity, when we are hunted down or destroyed, is it because he doesn't love us anymore? And if we are hungry or penniless or in danger or threatened with death, has God deserted us?

No...despite all this, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ who loved us enough to die for us. For I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from his love. Death can't, and life can't. The angels won't, and all the powers of hell itself cannot keep God's love away. Our fears for today, our worries about tomorrow, or where we are—high above the sky, or in the deepest ocean—nothing will ever be able to separate us from the love of God demonstrated by our Lord Jesus Christ when he died for us. (Romans 8:31b-39 TLB)

For the Christian, condemnation has already happened. Christ was given the sentence of condemnation (Lk 23:40), and in his death, Christ condemned sin in the flesh (Rom 8:1-4), so that whoever believes in him is not condemned (John 3:18). There is, therefore, now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1). You are free, church! Free!

FORGIVEN FOREVER

Even when we know his love for us is deeper than the ocean. Even when we believe that he has declared us “not guilty” and free from condemnation through the cross, we still can't get over that sin we committed last week, or last month, or last year. That terrible mistake lingers in our mind—sometimes for decades—as we tell ourselves over and over “Maybe he has forgiven me, but I just can't forgive myself.”

If that sounds all too familiar, please know you are not alone. John heard this line in the first century—in congregation after congregation. He heard it from church members in conversations over pot-lucks and during hospital visits and in counseling sessions in his office.

So he wrote the letter of 1 John for people like us. So, in chapter 1, he reminds those of us who have chosen the way of Christ that our daily walk—with its ups and downs, with its sinless streaks and its hard falls—our daily walk is in the light of Christ. That's what it means to be saved. It doesn't mean we are perfect. It doesn't mean you are only in the light as long as you are perfect. There is none righteous, no not one. But for those of us who have chosen the Christian walk, who have Christ holding our hand and the Spirit of God living in our hearts, we have this wonderful hope: “the blood of Jesus Christ continually cleanses us from all our sins” (1 John 1:7).

We know we are not perfect. We don't just confess when we know we've committed a wrong. We live a confessional life, recognizing we aren't even aware of all our missteps. The things we did that were wrong and the things we didn't do that would have been right. And as we live this confessional life—acknowledging that “nothing in my hands I bring, only to thy cross I cling,” God is “faithful and just. He forgives us our sins. And he cleanses us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

And when we do sin we have the world's best lawyer. Everyone wants the lawyer who is golfing buddies with the Judge. That's what it means to have the advantage. But in our case, it's even better. Our lawyer is the Judge's own Son. And the defense? Christ's death on the cross paid any penalty I owe, and his death frees me from any cell I deserve. That's 1 John chapter 2.

But what if we are just neurotic. What if no matter how many times we hear the good news that we are forgiven, we are set free, we are not guilty, we just can't stop all the negative self-talk. John must have known a few neurotics in his own day. Because he talks to us in chapter 3.

Does your heart condemn you? Jesus doesn't condemn you. But does your own heart condemn you? “Whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything” (1 John 3:20 ESV).

John can't write forever. He needs to sum up. He wants to leave his struggling people with one final message of hope—one that says it all. A one-liner that we can cut and paste onto the mirror in the morning, or on the dashboard of the car, or on the background of our phones. So here it is:

“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13).

Read that again. Slowly. Savor every word.

Eternal life. You have it. It's yours. John 3:16 reminds us that He loves you. John 3:17 reminds us that he is not out to condemn you. And John 3:18 shows us how we stand innocent, free, and justified in his sight: “Whoever believes in Him is not condemned.”

“The Lord redeems the life of his servants,” said the Psalm; “none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned” (Ps 34:22 ESV)

There is now NO...NO...NO...NO...NO condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. You are accepted. No stones. Just peace.