

The nation is still aghast at the verdict from the decision of the jury in the trial of [Kyle Rittenhouse](#). On Friday, a jury in Kenosha, Wisconsin acquitted Kyle Rittenhouse of all charges. The Presbyterian Church (USA) expresses outrage by this verdict. It condones private citizens acting as vigilantes. Kyle Rittenhouse crossed state lines with a weapon under the guise of protecting property. He took the lives of two people, Joseph Rosenbaum and Anthony Huber, and wounded a third, Gaige Grosskreutz. This act of violence must be acknowledged as it affirms America's obsession with guns and further polarizes the nation.

As tragic as the entire episode is, there are additional elements that compound the heartbreak. This verdict delays any movement the families might have towards healing. Their loved ones have been slain, and wounded, and cannot be made whole. In a statement, [Huber's family](#) responded that the verdict rendered them "heartbroken and angry. Today's verdict means there is no accountability for the person who murdered our son. It sends an unacceptable message that armed civilians can show up in any town, incite violence, and then use the danger they have created to justify shooting people in the street." Judicial outcomes can grant a sense that we are a nation of laws and that those who murder face the consequences of their actions. A related tragic element is the fact that a 17-year-old has access to an automatic rifle and is applauded by adults when he uses it as a weapon of death. Race is also an element that is deeply intertwined in this case. If Kyle Rittenhouse were Black or Brown, would he have been acquitted?

This verdict is an indictment on the soul of the nation. Something is deeply wrong in America morally and spiritually. Our society uplifts the rights of the individual over those of the community, and we cry out that any societal limitations are infringements upon our rights and freedoms. Violence is a part of our DNA. We are so accustomed to it that it has infected every aspect of our living. Rather than having the right to "[Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness;](#)" Americans have the right to murder, mayhem, and the infliction of chaos. The right to own a gun outweighs the sanctity of human life despite the pain, suffering, and misery the abundance of weapons in this country is inflicting upon our children's mental and physical health. Something is deeply wrong!

Our morals are deeply distorted when we assume that individuals have the authority to decide who gets to live based on their own sense of who is has worth and who does not. When we create "Stand-Your-Ground" laws, it results in a mentality that whomever is assumed to be a threat can be murdered without provocation or consequence. A prime example is the murder of [Ahmaud Arbery](#), a Black man who was murdered for jogging down the street. When we place no limitations on the type of weapons that are sold on our streets and consider it a divine right to own an automatic weapon based on our interpretation of the constitution, our sense of morality has gone astray.

Have we crossed a line wherein our commitment to a just God is subservient to the other masters we serve? Do we have a greater allegiance to our politics than to our faith? Is the word of God as found in the Bible subject to the cultural norms we adhere to? Do the teachings of Christ Jesus against violence hold any sway or are they are simply too inconvenient and unrealistic for modern living?

The soul of America is in need of healing and a reconnection with the spiritual foundation that connects us one to another, a belief in a God who created us to live as children of God, as sisters and brothers.

The book of Joshua (24:14-15) challenges us to choose whom we will serve. *"14 Now therefore revere the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. 15 Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."*

We are faced with a choice. We cannot endorse the ways of violence and follow Jesus at the same time. When the laws of the nation are unjust, we must say that they are and stand for justice, truth, and love. We must bring people together and not allow societal differences to break them apart. Will we live as men and women who believe that Jesus, the Prince of Peace, is the Son of God and the Savior of the world? Or will we only give lip service to our faith and decide for ourselves what word we will live by?

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