



On Guilt

By

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Teaching Notes are Bible studies we taught before GraceLife Ministries began publishing articles online in 1995. Some were presented as sermons, others as group studies.

Our hope is that these older studies will be a blessing to you in your life and ministry. Please use them in any way God leads you.

These teaching notes are from a series of broadcast studies about **guilt**.

[These notes are from a radio broadcast study taught more than 40 years ago.]

Problem

One of the biggest problems Christian counselors hear about is guilt. Many Christians have difficulty accepting forgiveness from God, others or even themselves. On today's broadcast we are going to address the problem of guilt. We will look at the signs of guilt, how guilt can affect you physically, mentally and socially, and we will state the reasons for guilt and begin sharing concrete solutions for guilt.

Signs

There are many signs in people's lives that show they are plagued with guilt. Some people will be withdrawn in inter-personal relationships and avoid people. They will many times become very critical of other people and try to make excuses for not being with people.

- "All people are bad"
- "They're just a bunch of hypocrites"

In reality they are using these vague generalities to hide the fact they are filled with guilt. Many guilt-ridden people dwell on the past and will question the motives of others. All of this leads to loneliness because of their withdrawal from people.

They will cry out, “nobody loves me!” When you tell them you love them they may say, “I’ll bet! Prove it! You’re just like all the rest. All you want to do is use me.”

They may think this way because they feel guilt over their lack of love for others and how they have used people for their own advantage. This will often lead to disorientation in priorities and values. They will emphasize little things and forget or ignore the big areas of their lives. They are often self-centered and easily condemn others.

Depending on the degree of guilt they feel, they may experience everything from muscular tension to shyness to touchiness to bitterness to suicidal thoughts and actions. They may be verbally or physically violent. They may become physically, emotionally or socially paralyzed. They may experience rapid weight gains or losses. They may have severe headaches, hallucinations, anxiety and ulcers. Guilt can literally destroy people!

Reasons

There are two basic reasons why Christians think they are guilty:

1. They don’t understand what God’s Word says about forgiveness
2. They need reconciliation

Many new Christians are hung up with false guilt because they don’t understand temptation. Temptation is not sin. Christians are not sinning because they are tempted, tried or tested. We are all tempted.

It's interesting to hear a group of Christians talking about a brother or sister who is being tried or tested. "I wonder what he did? It must have been a terrible sin. The Lord must be breaking him for something he did."

Those comments sound like something Job's friends said to him or what Jesus' disciples said.

Jesus was ministering one day when He and His disciples passed by a man who had been blind from birth. The disciples turned to Him and asked, "Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" Their immediate supposition upon seeing a man blind from birth was that he or his parents had sinned against God.

This was a thoroughly Jewish question and showed just how much the disciples had been affected by the evil precepts of men. It was a common Jewish view that the merits or demerits of the parents would appear in their children. Certain sins of the parents could cause or result in specific diseases in their offspring. Notice Christ's answer –

"Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be manifest in him." John 9:3

The Lord was not teaching that this man or his parents had never committed a sin or didn't have a sin nature. Jesus was answering their question in the context of what they were asking.

Before we judge someone and say they are experiencing trials or testing because of some sin they've committed, let's think about the answer Jesus would give.

Let me repeat: temptation is not sin. Every Christian can expect to be tempted, tried and tested and every Christian can be victorious over them, in them or through them. Study 1 Corinthians 10:13 for more insight into this precious, practical principle of God's Word.

Guilt and Forgiveness

What does God's Word teach about guilt and forgiveness?

Romans 3:19 tells us that the purpose of the law is to demonstrate or show that all the world is guilty before God. The word "guilty" is literally translated "under judgment." In Classical Greek it meant "brought to trial or liable to be tried." God is the judge and the injured party. We could render the verse, "But we know absolutely that whatever things the Law says it says to those within the sphere of the law, in order that every mouth may be closed up and the whole world may become liable to pay penalty to God." (Wuest, *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*, Eerdmans, 1955) Every man, woman and child of every race or every nation is guilty before God. John 3:18 says that the unbeliever is already condemned.

I remember seeing a tract that began with a question: "What must you do to go to hell?" When you opened the tract you read this word: "Nothing." You don't have to do a thing to go to hell. Every person is headed in that

direction from birth. We have all sinned and come short of God's glory and presence. We are all under the condemnation of God. We have already been judged and found guilty before God. Everyone will suffer the penalty of everlasting death in hell ... unless.

We read in Romans 8:1 that "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." This means that there is not even one bit of judgment lying over the heads of those who are in Christ Jesus. Praise God! We stand justified before God. He is no longer our judge. He is now our Heavenly Father. How good it is to be a child of God!

We are free because of the effectual work of Jesus Christ on the Cross for us. We aren't justified because we did anything to get out from under the wrath of Almighty God, but because Jesus Christ took our sins and God's judgment on those sins upon His own body. Jesus paid the price for our sins and satisfied the judgment of God. There is nothing we have to do or can do to be saved. God has done it all – through His Son – the Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 8:1 goes on to share that a child of God will not order his or her behavior in the sphere of the flesh, but in the sphere of the Spirit. This is not a commandment to the Christian, but simply a statement of fact. A true child of God is in the process of following the Spirit and will not be in an active process of following the flesh.

Please don't misunderstand me. A Christian will have a battle with the flesh, but will not "order" their behavior in the flesh. You cannot be comfortable in sin and still claim to be a child of God. If you are living in some known and identified sin and it doesn't bother you, yet you claim to be a Christian, then somebody's confused. Either God didn't mean it when He inspired John to write that the child of God will not habitually commit sin or you are still in your sin and under the law of sin and death. 2 Corinthians teaches clearly that a child of God is in a transitional period from the moment they are saved. They are in the process of putting away the things of the flesh and are actively walking in the Spirit.

These may sound like harsh words, but listen for a moment to the words of John the Apostle: "Hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He that saith, I know Him, and keeps not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." Very simply John is telling us that if we do not as a habit of life obey God and His Word but claim to be His child, we are lying and are not saved.

Changed Life

The Christian life is a changed life. A changing life is proof of a saved life. No change — no life. Notice, I didn't say "conformity" — I said "change." Lots of people can conform to what they know they ought to be as a Christian, but that doesn't mean they are changed.

When I was a young person, my family took me to church every Sunday and Wednesday and special meetings during the week. It was a Gospel preaching church and I heard the Word of God thousands of times in my early years. When I was ten years old I walked the aisle of the church and told the pastor I wanted to be saved. I filled out a card, answered questions, was baptized and added to the membership roll of the church. I conformed to everything they told me to do, but I wasn't changed. The evil, wicked sin nature was still alive in my heart and soul. I claimed to be a child of God, but was still a child of the devil.

As the years went by I was always careful to do what every good Christian teenager was expected to do. I sang in the choir, went to youth meetings and activities, won many Sword drills, and was a leader in R.A.'s. I memorized Scripture and did everything else they wanted me to do. I even went to a denominational retreat during the summer and served as a staff member. I got up in front of my church and gave a testimony to how God saved me, but I wasn't changed. I was still lost — dead in trespasses and sins.

My dear friend — have you conformed or been changed? The Christian life is a changed life. A changing life is proof of a saved life. Is there any evidence to prove and back up your profession of salvation? Or is it only words? Are you ordering your behavior in the sphere of the Spirit or the sphere of the flesh?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, I pray You will speak to each radio listener today and ask them deep questions about their relationship with you. May they know we love them and You love them — most of all that You love them. Lord, if there is any person today who has been playing church with you and has tried to live the conformed life, please point out to them their sin. Lord, show them that they are now under the condemnation and judgment of Your righteousness. Show them, Father, their need for salvation — true salvation.

[Thank you for reading these teaching notes from more than 40 years ago. My prayer is they will be a blessing to you and your ministry.]

A Higher Law

Romans 8:2 reads – “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.” Notice that two laws are mentioned here. First, the law of the Spirit of life .. second, the law of sin and death. Earlier in Romans we have seen the devastation of the law of sin and death, but what of this law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus?

State laws are higher than city laws and federal laws are higher than state laws. It doesn't mean that the city and state laws are not effective or real, but it does mean that federal laws have preeminence over them. So, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ is higher than the law of sin and death. The law of sin and death is real. In fact, every person in the world today is under that law .. unless they are in Christ .. then they are under the law of the Spirit of life.

Sin and death is a law that will hold up in any court in the universe, but there is a Supreme Court and there is an Advocate with God the Father. Jesus Christ is our Champion. He is our Friend close by our side. He is the Lamb slain for our iniquities, our sins. He has paid the penalty for our sins, death. If you and I were under the law of sin and death, we would have good reason to feel guilty. But we've been freed from that law. We've been extradited from the penalty of the law to the freedom of the Spirit. We're under a different jurisdiction. We live in Christ under the law of the Spirit of life.

Hallelujah! Praise God! We're not going to die forever. We're not headed for hell. We're not going to perish. We're not going to suffer the tortures of eternal fire. We're saved! We're made freemen. We're children of the most high God. Glory!

If that doesn't get you excited, brothers and sisters, then we'd better check our religion. Jesus set us free! We are no longer a slave to sin. We are conquerors through Christ. We are liberated souls. Praise God! We no longer have to listen to Satan. We now listen to the sweet, still voice of our gentle Shepherd, the Lord Jesus. We no longer have to do the devil's will. We can now obey the will of our Heavenly Father. Praise God! We are justified, sanctified, glorified .. in the sight of God.

Where do we go from here?

First, we want to be sure we totally understand that we are NOT GUILTY before God. We are no longer under the condemnation of God. God foreordained us, predestined us, called us, justified us, glorified us (Romans 8:29). Let's get this idea of guilt out of our minds and our mental vocabulary. We are not guilty before God. We do not have to go back in our past and pay for sins we committed 30 years ago. We don't have to bewail something we did before we were saved. We have been totally forgiven for everything we ever did, are doing and will ever do. We stand justified before God!

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Forgiveness

For just a moment, let's look again into the Word of God and see what God teaches us about forgiveness. In the great doctrinal portion of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he wrote this concerning Christ – "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." (Ephesians 1:7) This could also be translated "the dismissal of sins." Our sins have been sent away, dismissed.

Forgiveness used in relation to "sins" means "a release," the letting them go as if they had not been committed. That's difficult to understand from our point of view because of our human inability to forget wrongs committed against us. However, we must not look at this matter of forgiveness from our point of view, but from God's point of view.

We need to "look to Jesus" for a spiritual understanding of forgiveness.

- Acts 5:31 says that God exalted Christ to be a Prince and a Savior to give repentance and forgiveness of sins.
- Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 1:15 that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.
- In Isaiah 53:5, we learn that Jesus was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities.
- Galatians 3:13 says that Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.
- 1 Peter 3:18 says that Christ suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.

- Hebrews 9:28 says that Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many.
- 1 Peter 2:24 says that Christ bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness.
- 1 John 3:5 says that Jesus was manifested to take away our sins.
- John the Baptist, upon seeing Jesus, said, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”
- Galatians 1:4 says that Christ gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father.
- Ephesians 5:2 says that Christ loved us and gave Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God.
- Titus 2:14 says that Christ gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people zealous of good works.
- 1 John 3:16 tells us that we perceive the love of God by the fact that He laid down His life for us.
- Revelation 1:5 says that Jesus loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood.

I don't know how we can argue with that overwhelming evidence. God has totally forgiven us of every sin. God's forgiveness of sin refers to His act of putting sin away on a judicial basis, to His remitting the guilt and penalty.

The Apostle John wrote in his first letter – “I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.” You and I have a new life to lead. We don't have to go around carrying the guilt of the world

on our shoulders. We've been freed from the law of sin and death. Positionally we are forgiven, but putting that into practice is another matter.

Take for instance a young Christian we'll call Bob. Bob was saved just a few months ago and was really getting into the Word and enjoying his new relationship with Christ. But then something happened. He started missing some of the service at church. He didn't come out to youth activities as much and when he did he didn't participate the way he had before. He became more and more withdrawn and less friendly and sociable. Bob was a different person. What had happened? Maybe he wasn't really saved? That's a possibility, but let's look beyond that. Maybe he was living in some deep dark sin? That too was a possibility, but let's not assume that before knowing for sure. The pastor who had noticed Bob's behavior change felt constrained to call Bob into his office one to talk with him. After a few polite words the pastor got to the reason for the meeting. To sum up the session, Bob discovered he wasn't accepting God's forgiveness for his sins before he was saved. Bob said he had been a pretty creepy character prior to his conversion and all of the sins of his former life were coming back to him.

Bob was being hit by one of the devil's favorite tricks, the old "make them think God didn't forgive them for everything" trick. Bob had started to *feel* unforgiven. That was the key for the pastor as the young man's counselor. The pastor wanted to help Bob see that he had been forgiven by God no matter how he felt. We cannot go by our feelings. We must go by the **facts**. Because Bob *felt* he had not been forgiven, he thought he had to do something else to be saved. The pastor shared with Bob that God had done everything in saving him. Bob had to see that God had paid the

penalty, that God justified him, sanctified him and glorified him in a positional sense. Bob saw during that first meeting with his pastor that he must trust not how he *felt* but in what God had *done*. Bob is today a happy and joy-filled Christian enjoying the fruits of God's forgiveness.

Are You?

Are you enjoying all the fruits of God's forgiveness? Or are you like Bob stewing in false emotions? Has the devil tricked you into thinking that God has not forgiven and forgotten? that there is still something more you must do to be saved?

Trust God's Word. Trust God when He says – "Happy, blessed, spiritually prosperous is the man to whose account the Lord does not in any case put sin." (Romans 4:8) Happy are you who have been saved and justified by Christ. Remember the words of Paul in Romans 4 – "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." (Romans 4:5)

Lift your spirit toward Heaven, brethren, and praise the Lord!

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