

Overcoming Guilt

INTRODUCTION:

- A. “Some people still feel guilty after they have been pronounced innocent.”
 B. People can carry guilt around with them for years, all the while allowing it to rob them of the peace of mind they otherwise could have had.

1. **Illustration:** Permit me to read the exact words a preacher acquaintance wrote:

“It was a hot July day in Louisiana. The humidity and temperature both stood at 100 degrees. It seems like it was only yesterday, but in reality it was over thirteen years ago, when I walked upon the front porch and approached the old man sitting in his rocking chair. I was door-knocking in a gospel campaign and this house was on my list of streets to cover. His tan weather-beaten face and calloused hands revealed the toil of many hard years of work. His eyes were sad and revealed a loneliness. He was very warm and friendly.

After discussing the weather and a lot of other small talk subjects, we finally got around to talking about Christ and the Bible. During our discussion of God’s love the old man started to cry. He said sadly, ‘I can’t be saved.’

‘Why?’ I asked (in a voice of surprise).

‘During the war I killed several men; about thirty years ago a preacher told me that I had committed the unpardonable sin. There is no use wasting your time on me.’

After spending another hour with him discussing God’s grace, love and forgiveness, as well as how God forgave Paul of murder, I left the old man with a ray of hope. ‘How sad,’ I thought as I walked away, ‘for thirty years he has been carrying the guilt of omitting the unpardonable sin because a preacher taught him wrong.’”

- C. Guilt is one of the strongest robbers of peace.
1. Guilt stalks the minds of men and women, trying to take away their happiness and mental stability.
 2. Parents hold themselves guilty for the actions of their children.
 3. Millions are suffering with the emotional pain of guilt on a daily basis.
 - a. Some of these people are actually guilty.
 - b. Others are suffering from neurotic or self-imposed guilt.
 - c. In either case, the result is the same . . . Loss of peace and happiness.
- D. It has been stated that most people are harboring some form of guilt in the inner chambers of their souls.
1. It is reported that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, author of the Sherlock Holmes stories, sent a note to twelve of his friends as a practical joke.

- a. The note read: “Fly at once, all is discovered.”
 - b. Within twenty-four hours all twelve of the famous men had left the country.
 - c. Apparently guilty consciences were present and at work.
2. Looming over the heads of most persons is a dark cloud of guilt which they try to:
 - a. Hide
 - b. Deny
 - c. Run from
 - d. Camouflage
 - e. Etc.
 3. Shakespeare wrote: “The mind of the guilty is filled with scorpions.”

DEFINING GUILT

A. Definitions:

1. Webster: The art or state of having done wrong or committed an offense; conduct that involves guilt; Crime or sin.”
2. Dr. Clyde M. Narramore: “Guilt may be defined as feeling sinfulness, evil, wrong-doing and failure to measure up.
3. Dr. Way Dyer gives a practical definition: “Guilt means that you use up your present moments being immobilized as a result of past behavior, while worry is the contrivance that keeps you immobilized in the now about something in the future—frequently something over which you have no control.”

B. Guilt is a product of the mind which occurs when a person realizes that he has violated moral, religious, or ethical standards (rules, laws, principles, etc.)

1. With the realization that one has done wrong comes guilt and a regretful or sorrowful feeling which decreases your feelings of personal worth and peace of mind.
2. The guilt may be real or imagined; as a result the victim suffers mental torment and unhappiness.
3. From one case of wrong the domino occurs: One wrong thought sets off another thought and on and on and on it goes until the person is emotionally ruined. It is at this point that thousands turn to strong drink, drugs, or suicide in an effort to escape the pangs of guilt.

C. We are primarily discussing what is called subjective or self-imposed guilt.

1. Some guilty feelings are healthy because they lead us to get our lives right with God and our fellow man.
2. Most guilt, however, is unhealthy because it is neurotic and unrealistic.
3. Thus, when we speak of a guilt complex we are usually talking about unhealthy guilt which is self-induced.

4. The neurotic person lives with his guilt burden as a way of life. The smallest thing will set it off and send him into deep depression.
- D. When feeling guilty, you should ask yourself two questions:
1. Why do I feel guilty?
 2. What valid standard (rule) have I violated?

THE ORIGIN OF GUILT

- A. An adult is a continuation of the child. (Repeat)
1. Behavioral psychologists tell us that the most important time of psychic growth occurs during the first five to seven years of life.
 2. Man is affected by every experience he has ever had . . . every positive and negative thing he has ever come into contact with has helped to form him.
 3. This is why some people have more guilt than others . . . or why some people feel guilty why some others don't.
 4. For example, some people may murder another person and not feel guilty, and others will feel guilty for running over a dog.
- B. God created man with a conscience.
1. At birth it is free from guilt and distortions.
 2. During childhood growth it develops rapidly and continues to develop throughout life.
 3. Listen carefully . . . On any given day a person's conscience is the result of what has been programmed into it.
- C. Statements about conscience.
1. “Conscience is a safe guide only when God is the guide of the conscience.”
 2. “When you have a fight with your conscience and get licked . . . you win.”
 3. “One should be more concerned about what his conscience whispers than about what other people shout.”
 4. “A lot of people mistake a short memory for a clear conscience.”
 5. “A conscience is what hurts when all of your other parts feel good.”
- D. Many things contribute to feelings of guilt.
1. **Thinking you may have done something wrong may lead to guilt.**
 - a. There may be no evidence to support your thoughts, but you think you are a “bad person.”
 - b. This is distorted thinking.
 2. **A poor self-image leads to guilt feelings.**
 - a. Many psychologists believe that all inferiority is the result of guilt experiences.
 - b. From Chattanooga Times: “It is hard to amount to anything if you have always been told that you wouldn't.”
 3. **Perfectionist attitude.**
 - a. Some think they should be happy all the time.

- b. On days when they feel sad or down, they feel guilty.
 - 4. **Unrealistic expectations lead to guilt feelings.**
 - a. Parents, if they are not careful, will set standards, for their children which are too high or unreasonable.
 - b. Examples:
 - 1. The child may be a B student and the parents keep pushing for an A.
 - 2. Expecting athletic accomplishments the child cannot attain. Trying to re-live their childhood through them.
 - c. Guilt comes because standards are impossible to reach.
 - 5. **False conscience development produces guilt.**
 - a. A popular statement: “Let your conscience be your guide.”
 - b. Some people call right wrong and wrong right.
 - c. **Isaiah 5:20** – “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!”
 - d. “Let the Bible be your guide and success will be your future.”
 - 6. **Actual guilt which is produced by a healthy conscience given by God to help men shun the wrong and do the right.**
 - a. **John 8:9** – “those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.”
 - b. In many cases people feel guilty because they are guilty! This is objective guilt.
- E. We all have grown up with certain values programmed into our minds.
- 1. These are the “shalls and shall nots” . . . the “do this and don’t do that” . . . the “please and will you” commands.
 - 2. From all this we develop our sense of remorse and self-condemnation because of our actions.
 - 3. Examples of subjective guilt.
 - a. A young lady said, “When I go dancing I feel guilty because my parents taught me it was wrong.”
 - b. Jerry felt guilty about being in college. He could still hear the words of his mother, “You are leaving home because you don’t love me.”

VARIOUS KINDS OF GUILT

Guilt comes from many sources. Among the sources that produce objective (real) guilt are:

A. **Personal Guilt.**

- 1. This is the result of violating your own personal standard.
- 2. A person may feel guilty if he cuts down on his work to spend more time with his family. He feels guilty the whole time he is having fun.

B. Legal Guilt.

1. This occurs when one violates one of the laws of the community, state, nation, etc.
2. What would be some examples?

C. Social Guilt.

1. This occurs when a person wears the wrong kind of clothing to a social event, or displaying inappropriate manners for the occasion.
2. That person will feel out of place and feelings of remorse comes over them.

D. National Guilt.

1. Some feel guilty that they purchased a foreign made car instead of an American made one.
2. Some politicians major in guilt tactics in their speeches.

E. Institutional Guilt.

1. Some companies make employees feel guilty if they won't support a certain policy or back them in making certain changes.
2. One man said years ago, “My old alma mater is trying to raise money by hanging a guilt trip on me. It won't work.

F. Religious Guilt.

1. This occurs when you violate the standards of an organized group or fail to take part in certain activities, which may or may not be authorized in the Bible.
2. Some feel guilty because they can't take part in all of the activities of their home congregation.

G. Sin Guilt.

1. This occurs when a person violates a divine standard given by God.
2. This is at the base of most of the guilt in our society.
3. When the sin problem is eliminated the guilt problem usually goes too.
4. **1 Timothy 4:1-2** – “Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,
speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron.”

THE BIBLE AND GUILT**A. Paul Makes it clear that because of sin all the world is guilty before God.**

Romans 3:19, 23

1. Sin is a violation of God's law and leads to separation from Jehovah.
 - a. **Isaiah 59:1-2** – “Indeed, the LORD's hand is not too short to save, and His ear is not too deaf to hear. ² But your iniquities have built barriers between you and your God, and your sins have made Him hide [His] face from you so that He does not listen.”
 - b. **1 John 5:17** – “All unrighteousness is sin”

- c. **1 John 3:4** – “Everyone who commits sin also breaks the law; sin is the breaking of law.”
- 2. Since man is guilty of sin, therefore, it is not wrong for him to feel guilty. This is why he needs an atonement for his sin, to take away his condemnation so that he may appear before God justified.
- B. There are many examples in the Bible of persons experiencing guilt.
 - 1. **Adam & Eve** hid themselves in the garden because they felt the guilt of their sin. Genesis 3:7-13
 - 2. **The sons of Jacob**: “Then they said to each other, ‘It is plain that we are being punished for what we did to our brother. We saw his deep distress when he pleaded with us, but we would not listen. That is why this trouble has come to us.’” **Genesis 42:21**
 - 3. **King David** knew the pangs of guilt.
 - a. Some of his psalms show his inner feelings of remorse
 - b. Psalm 51:1-3
 - 4. **Judas** committed suicide because of guilt. Matthew 27:3-5
 - 5. The **Jews on the Day of Pentecost** felt guilty. Acts 2:37
- C. Psychologists and psychiatrists spend a lot of their time trying to help people handle their guilt.
 - 1. In most cases, however, these helpers fail to take into consideration that the guilt of sin is one of man’s major problems.
 - 2. Until man’s sin problem is Biblically handled, this statement penned by the prophet Isaiah will always be true: “But the wicked are like the storm-tossed sea, for it cannot be still, and its waters churn up mire and muck. There is no peace for the wicked,” says my God.” **Isaiah 57:20-21**
 - 3. The blood of Christ is the answer to our sin and guilt problems.

RESULTS OF GUILT

The results of guilt are as varied as the persons who have the feelings. Some of the reactions to guilt are:

A. Self-condemnation.

- 1. When a person condemns himself because of guilt feelings, he is also opening the door for a host of other emotional problems such as:
 - a. Loneliness
 - b. Inferiority complex
 - c. Anxiety
- 2. He usually feels that he is merely getting what he deserves for being so bad.

B. The Blame game.

- 1. A person who feels the pain of guilt, as a general rule, will try to place the blame on others for his problems and wrongs.

2. At times he will even become angry when the other person deny his charges.

C. **Pessimism.**

1. It is hard for a person with a heavy load of guilt to have a positive attitude.
2. Guilt usually causes a person to develop a negative outlook on life.

D. **Martyr Complex.**

1. It is hard for a person to have a positive attitude.
2. Guilt usually causes a person to develop a negative outlook on life.

E. **Physical Illness.** A person can actually make himself sick through a failure to deal properly with the emotional aspects of guilt.

F. **Growth and change.**

1. These are the positive and healthy aspects of guilt.
2. These come from handling guilt God’s way.

G. **Repentance and turning to God.**

1. This is another positive benefit of guilt. Nothing is more important than getting one’s life right with God.
2. This is the basis of all right and happy living.

H. **Forgiveness.**

1. The acceptance of this is the ultimate surgery for all guilt.
2. How forgiveness must come.
 - a. First . . . It must come from God.
 - b. Second . . . It must come from others.
 - c. Third . . . It must come from self.

OVERCOMING GUILT . . . THE CURE FOR GUILT

A. A number of decades ago, a psychologist , O. Hobart Mower, wrote: “**Man sickens in mind, soul, and perhaps even body because of unconfessed and unatoned real guilt.**”

1. The unusual thing about this statement is that it comes from a man who doesn’t profess to be a Christian, and yet he recognizes the need for confession and forgiveness.
2. Karl Menninger expressed the same idea in his book, *What Became of Sin?*
3. These men, and others, were not approaching confession and forgiveness from a Biblical perspective. It merely reminds us that others are just discovering what God has been saying all along.

B. Suggestions for helping to overcoming guilt.

1. **Admit to yourself that you are experiencing guilt.** Also, pinpoint how long you have been feeling guilty.
2. **On paper write down specifically what you are feeling guilty about.** Be honest with yourself.

3. **Examine the validity of the supposed standard you violated.** Who set the standard?
4. **Ask yourself, “Is this a carryover guilt from my youth?”**
5. **Is someone else trying to manipulate you?** Who? Why do you suppose they are doing this? Are you responding as they want?
6. **Remember that the past is behind you.** It can only hurt you when you use it against yourself.
7. **If you discover that you are actually guilty of a wrong then confess it to God.** He is ready to forgive if you will confess it. **1 John 1:8-9** – “If we say, “We have no sin,” we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”
8. **Repent of your wrong.** Repent means to “change your mind.” Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38
9. Never doubt the power of Christ’s blood that was shed for the remission of sins. Matthew 26:28; Acts 20:28; Revelation 1:5
10. **Remember that God has promised to “remember our sins no more”** (Jeremiah 31:30-32). As far as the east is from the west that’s how far he will remove our transgressions (Psalm 103:12).
11. **Remember that after repentance and forgiveness there isn’t anything you can do.** Your feelings of guilt won’t change the past.
12. **Acknowledge that there may be some things that others don’t like about you.** It’s their problem . . . You can’t please everybody . . . Christ didn’t.
13. **Remember that your guilt feelings that arise after cleansing DO NOT come from God.**
14. **Are you trying to accept someone else’s burden?**
15. **You can remove any label you have placed on yourself** (“I am a bad person”, etc.).
16. Always try to deal with the real problem and not just the symptoms.
17. Remember this syllogism:
 - I am guilty because of sin.
 - The blood of Christ takes away sin.
 - Therefore, I am no longer condemned by my sin.
18. **Meditate upon **John 8:36**** – “If the Son therefore shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.”
19. **If you need to right a wrong with another person don’t be afraid to do it.**
20. **Pray for wisdom to properly handle your guilt.** **Jams 1:5** – “Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives to all generously and without criticizing, and it will be given to him.”

21. **Visualize the blood of Christ washing your sins away.** Also imagine you are in front of the Lord and hear Him make this pronouncement: “You are no longer condemned. Go and sin no more.”

CONCLUSION:

A. In Jesus Christ, I am not guilty anymore!

Illustration: There is a story told about the meanest man in a small community becoming a Christian. Every Sunday morning after church services the man would wait for the preacher so that he could ask him this question, “Do you mean they are all forgiven, preacher?” To which the preacher would reply, “Yes, Sam, they are all forgiven.” This continued for about a month. Then one morning when Sam asked the preacher the same question again, the preacher replied: “Sam, let me tell you for the last time, God, through Christ Jesus, has forgiven you of all your past sins. They have been washed away. This is what He tells us in His word. You are going to have to believe this, or just call Him a liar!”

1. Sam is like so many who find it almost too good to believe that God can take away all sin and its condemnation.
2. This is the good news message of the gospel.
 - a. **John 1:29** – “. . . Here is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”
 - b. **Luke 19:10** – “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost.”

B. The Biblical cure for guilt is confrontation.

1. Confess it and repent of it and God will forgive you.
2. The challenge for you is to accept His forgiveness as well as to forgive yourself.
3. Through the blood of Christ you can win over guilt. **1 John 1:7** – “But if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.”

C. **God’s Plan for Man’s Salvation**