

## **Sin and Guilt**

### **I. Preachers preach a lot on SIN but "*Guilt*" is a subject that is seldom the topic of a sermon.**

- A. This lesson is mostly about guilt.
- B. Our purpose is not to try to send anyone on a *guilt trip*; we think the subject is important and one we need to study.
- C. We especially want to encourage you to get rid of your guilt in the divinely prescribed way.

### **II. The points to be discussed include:**

- A. What Is Guilt?
- B. Importance of Studying Guilt: Are sin and guilt the same thing?
- C. What Causes Guilt Feelings.
- D. The Effects of Guilt and How to Deal With It.
- E. Examples of how people have dealt with guilt.

## **Body**

### **I. What is Guilt?**

- A. **Webster** defines "*guilt*" as:
  - 1) *"The state of one who has committed an offense especially consciously.*
  - 2) *"Feelings of culpability especially for imagined offenses or from a sense of inadequacy."*

- B. A friend of mine...jokingly said, "It is the feeling you have when you do something bad and get caught."
- C. We use the terms "guilt" or "guilty" to describe someone who has committed a wrongdoing.
- 1) It describes the normal feeling one has after saying, thinking, or doing something he knows is wrong or failing to do something he should have done.
  - 2) "**Guilt** is a negative emotion that arises from focusing on a specific action or non-action that violates societal or personal standards" [4], [5], [6].

## II. The Importance of Studying Guilt: Is Sin and Guilt the Same Thing?

- A. *Guilt* is important because of its role in moral and social functioning [7], [8].
- 1) "The anticipation of feeling guilty in the future may help prevent individuals from participating in immoral acts that violate biblical and social standards" [9], [10].
  - 2) Feelings of guilt can be expressed as a "***weight on one's conscience.***"
    - a) "The language suggests that guilt has properties similar to an object with actual weight" [1].
    - b) Imagine the WEIGHT on Judas

Iscariot who sold out Christ to the Jews for a bag of money.

B. The importance of guilt can be minimized if one has the wrong idea about whether one is guilty of sin if he did not know he did it.

1) The apostle John taught “continual cleansing” for those who “*walk in the light*” (1 John 1:7).

1 Jn 1:6 *If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*

2) A sizeable number of preachers do not believe this text.

a) They insist that no sin is forgiven unless it is specifically confessed.

1. It would seem that those who hold this view (that the Christian is not continually cleansed) who know they sin, would have no confidence...or hope of heaven.

b) But they do, and the way they are able to have it is to convince themselves that one is *not guilty of sin* unless he feels guilty—i.e., that he knew someone was sinful and went right ahead and did it.

1. These individuals equate sin with feelings of guilt; if there are no feelings of guilt, then there is no sin.
  - a. Thus, sins committed out of ignorance or inadvertently are considered non-condemning.
  - b. I've yet to understand how anyone can hold this view while arguing that any unconfessed sin results in loss of salvation.
  - c. One cannot confess to something of which he is not aware. This is where continual cleaning comes in – God judges the person, not a single act.

C. In considering whether a particular sin can be damning, even if one is unaware of it, let us take a look at Paul's admonitions to the Corinthian church regarding their misconduct during the Lord's Supper:

*“Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body”* (1 Cor. 11:27-29).

- 1) Not “he that feels guilty” *“drinketh damnation to himself”* but he that commits this sin.

a) One who eats and drinks unworthily, i.e., not thinking about what our Lord did, turning it into a regular meal, evidently is one that God would not consider to be walking in the light.

2) Sin is simply the *transgression* of God's law (1 Jn. 3:4; Rom. 4:15).

3) When one sins, he is *guilty* of a trespass.

a) This is true whether it is with or without knowledge.

b) If a sin is committed with knowledge, there will be a feeling of guilt, whereas if a sin is committed without knowledge, the guilt is there, but not the guilt feeling.

1. For example, you may have offended someone without realizing it, so you would not feel guilty about it.

2. Nevertheless, you would be guilty of the trespass, but if a faithful Christian the blood of Christ removes it. (**Matt. 18:6**).

D. Sin results in *guilt*, but the terms "*sin*" and "*guilt*" differ in meaning.

1) In addition, we can be confident that sin results in guilt even when done in ignorance (Nu. 15:29-31).

*29 Ye shall have one law for him that sinneth through ignorance, both for him that is born among the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourneth among them. 30 But the soul that doeth ought presumptuously, whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people. 31 Because he hath despised the word of the LORD, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him.*

- 2) Whether or not a faithful Christian is *charged* with guilt is another matter.
  - a) Some say every sin is charged against the Christian, but that thinking diminishes the grace of God and has unacceptable consequences – like, it has all of us being lost -- it is the other extreme of the OSAS teaching.
  - b) Thankfully, the word of God teaches *continuous cleansing* of all sin for God’s children whose “walk” or manner of life is pleasing to Him.

### **III. What Causes Guilt Feelings?**

- A. Every person has been endowed with a conscience whether he appropriately responds to it or not.
  - 1) It is a warning device - it warns us if we are doing something that we know we should not be doing or are failing to do, and constantly reminds us of the wrong.

2) God gave us the ability to learn to differentiate right from wrong and a conscience to prod us in the direction of what is right and good.

B. Separating *guilt feelings* and *hurting conscience* may be difficult or impossible to do, but there is a difference between "*guilt*" and a hurting conscience.

1) A person's conscience may be causing him great discomfort after committing an act that is only thought to be a sin.

2) Since conscience troubles an individual only when he has done what he thinks is wrong, we can readily see an essential reason for learning the truth.

a) It is essential that we give thought and study to important Bible teachings and issues of life that are matters of right and wrong.

b) This would help prevent people from committing sins of ignorance and help them avoid needless pain.

#### **IV. The Effects of Guilt and How to Deal with it.**

A. Guilt affects all people in a similar manner.

1) It prevents peace of mind, happiness, causes depression, affects physical health adversely, it can destroy a life and a soul.

- 2) Sin affects people in various ways, but we deal with sin and guilt in different ways:
  - a) Some try to hide or deny their guilt, some even brag about things of which they are guilty, for whatever reason.
  - b) Others try to do the “right thing,” even though their actions may be contrary to the New Testament teachings, like alien sinner praying to be saved.

B. Every man, woman, and child is, at some point in life, faced with the question, "What will I do about my guilt?".

- 1) Children sometimes tell lies, steal things, and hurt others with unkind remarks, deeds, etc.
  - a) Dealing with guilt is a part of growth and spiritual development.
  - b) When we know right from wrong and do wrong, we feel guilty and it shows on our face – not good – we want a happy face.
- 2) It is best for everyone to admit and confess their wrongdoings and make amends.
- 3) It is possible to deny an evil act and to deceive others, but God cannot be fooled.
  - a) God said, "*...I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them*" (Ezk. 11:5).
  - b) The Lord also said, "*For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed;*



*neither hid, that shall not be known"*  
(Luke 12:2).

4) Everyone is going to experience feelings of guilt at some point.

a) We may do the right thing to remove these unwelcome feelings, but our actions may not always be accepted by the person we have wronged.

1. The latter is true with mankind and also with God.

2. But God has written what we are to do to receive forgiveness.

a) When an alien sinner does as God instructs (obey gospel...), he can be sure God has forgiven him. (Acts 2:47)

b) Yet, too often, people misunderstand God's word and feel they have done the right thing to receive forgiveness, they feel good, but the *guilt* is still there.

i. The problem is, they did what men have taught that had no biblical support.

3. The writer of Proverbs tells us,

*"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end*

*thereof is the way of death"* (Prov. 14:12).

**C. Some people who have been wronged are unwilling to forgive.**

- 1) When such happens, how do we deal with it?
- 2) If a person is not a Christian, there really is nothing more we can do than ask for forgiveness; however, if they are a Christian, we can remind them that God will not forgive those who do not forgive others (Matt. 6:15).

**D. Many Christians experience feelings of guilt because of sins of omission.**

- 1) James wrote, "*Therefore to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin*" (Jas. 4:17).
- 2) The sin of omission is simply a *failure to do what one knows is right*.
- 3) One of the biggest concerns of Christians is the responsibility to help spread the gospel – we may be plagued by the question, “Am I using my time wisely?”
  - a) One must deal with this problem because of what guilt can do (depression, etc.).
  - b) No one has a greater need to be high on life and have high self-esteem than a salesman.
    1. One who spreads the gospel is indeed, a salesman.
    2. Anyone who labors needs and deserves a certain amount of

relaxation and *recreation*, but the question of how much cannot be answered by someone else.

a) It is something that each individual must work out on his own (Phi. 2:12).

b) Time is precious, and we should feel guilty if we over-indulge in anything that keeps us from doing the will of God.

E. When there is guilt in your life, it is not going to be brought to your attention with flashing, colored lights and a siren...or with a loud voice from heaven.

1) Yet we can easily recognize the feeling that guilt produces, but repeated *suppression* without addressing the problem can lead to the conscience being *seared* – like with a hot iron that takes away all feeling.

2) Also, the greater the sin that one commits, the greater the discomfort the conscience causes.

a) "*Guilt*" can destroy and prevent happiness—among other things.

b) On the other hand, those who harbor no feelings of guilt are likely to be a happy, contented individual.

3) Feeling guilty about something does not necessarily mean you sinned (you might be mistaken about some Bible teaching) but the

action you take to remove the guilt must be in harmony with N.T. teachings.

- 4) We have all had feelings of guilt before and it is likely to be repeated.

F. When we sin, what will we do about it?

- 1) You can deny it or try to place the guilt on someone else, do nothing in hopes it will go away, or you can own up to your mistake and correct it?
- 2) If you are not a Christian, there is only one thing that will cleanse you of your sins and free your conscience.
- 3) If you want to be forgiven, heed the teachings of Peter found in Acts 2:38, to *repent and be baptized for the remission of sins.*

**V. Let's look at some Bible examples of people affected by guilt and take note of how they dealt with it:**

A. David (2 Sam. 11:2-17, 12:1-13; Psalms 51:1-14):

- 1) David committed adultery and murdered a good man.
- 2) He couldn't find peace because of the guilt weighing on his mind.
  - a) He said, "*...My sin is ever before me*" (Psa. 51:3).

- b) The overwhelming sense of guilt nearly consumed him until he earnestly sought God's forgiveness.
- c) David had confidence that God would forgive him.
  - 1. It is important to note that David forgave himself.
  - 2. As a result, he was able to release his feelings of guilt and move forward with his life.

B. Peter (Matt. 26:69-75):

- 1) Peter did two things:
  - a) He denied the Lord, and
  - b) He cursed and swore.
    - 1. He did these things to keep from suffering persecution for being a disciple of Christ.
    - 2. The guilt from his actions made him weep bitterly.

C. Judas (Matt. 26:14-16,47; 27:5):

- 1) This apostle of Christ betrayed the Lord for the sake of money.
  - a) The guilt was more than he could bear.
    - 1. Judas repented and confessed, and certainly, God will forgive anyone for anything. However, Judas took his life, placing the destiny of his soul in God's hands.

D. Paul (Acts 22:1-20):

- 1) He persecuted Christ by delivering Christians to the Jews to be killed.
- 2) He was guilty of accessory to murder, if not murder itself.
- 3) When he became aware that he had sinned, he sought the answer to what he “*must do*” to be forgiven (vs. 10, 11) and followed up on it.

E. Cornelius (Acts 10):

- 1) Here is an example of a *good man*.
- 2) Nothing was mentioned of any specific sin committed, yet when he heard the gospel, he sought forgiveness of past sins and obeyed the divinely prescribed conditions for becoming a Christian.

F. Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10):

- 1) It is noteworthy that these two did not get a chance to do anything about their *guilt*.
- 2) They conspired to lie to God and were struck dead shortly after having been confronted with their deed.
  - a) As with these two, we may not get a chance to deal with the guilt of a sin because death may come first.
  - b) How often do we hear in the news that a group of young people were drinking and driving, and one or more were killed in a wreck?

1. In such cases where the driver survives a horrible wreck, he still must deal with the guilt of the deed.

G. Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 8:9-24):

- 1) Simon entertained an evil thought.
- 2) He thought that the *gift of God* could be bought with money.
  - a) In so doing, he committed a sin, but he was not immediately aware of the transgression.
  - b) We have no reason to think that he entertained guilt feelings before the sin was brought to his attention.
    1. When Simon became aware of his *transgression*, he became aware of his *guilt* and sought forgiveness.

H. Jews (John 8:1-10)

- 1) The Jews wanted to stone a woman to death for a sin of which she was apparently guilty.
  - a) They were persistent in the matter, but Jesus said to them, "*Ye who are without sin cast the first stone.*"
  - b) Those present recognized their own guilt and chose not to address the woman's sin.
    1. They walked away and perhaps gave thought to what could be done about their own sin and guilt.

## I. Achan (Joshua 7)

- 1) God caught Achan in a sin, but he was not able to UNDO the damage or prevent the consequences.
  - a) His actions had great consequences.

## Conclusion

### I. Are you Walking In The LIGHT?

If not, what will you do about the sins presently in your life since they are not covered by the blood...

- A. If you are not a Christian, will you deny your sins, do nothing in hopes your conscience will quit bothering you, or will you accept the Lord's invitation to come unto him.

(Matt. 11:28-30)? **Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. 30. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.**

- B. When one does not do the right thing to get rid of his guilt feelings, the bad feeling might go away over time, but no one wants that to happen.

- 1) Your conscience is the best friend you have.



- a) You do not want it to quit working for you as it did with those whom Paul spoke.

(CEV) *They will also be fooled by the false claims of liars whose consciences have lost all feeling.* (I Tim. 4:2).

- C. If you are not a Christian, why not appeal to God for a clear conscience this very hour?

- 1) In talking about Noah and his family saved by the flood waters, Peter said,  
*"And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you - not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience - through the resurrection of Jesus Christ"* (I Pet. 3:21 N.A.S.)

## What To Do To Become a Christian

Believe – John 8:24

Repent – Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38

Confess – Romans 10:9

Be Baptized for Remission of Sins - Acts 2:38