

GUILT AND GRACE (“NOT GUILTY!”)

1 Timothy 1:18-19 (NLT) Cling tightly to your faith in Christ, and always keep your conscience clear. For some people have deliberately violated their consciences; as a result, their faith has been shipwrecked.

Paul tells us that a clear conscience (being “NOT GUILTY”) is essential in having and maintaining a relationship with God. Why? Because GUILT is one of the most debilitating of all human emotions. It wreaks destruction in our relationships with others and in our relationship with God. And all of us have certain things in our life of which we’re ashamed.

Unresolved guilt affects us both emotionally and spiritually. **One psychiatrist estimated that 70% of people in mental wards could be released today if they knew how to find forgiveness!** Guilt breaks our relationships, because it creates a natural tendency to avoid people we’ve wronged. **GUILT PRODUCES SEPARATION.** And the same phenomenon occurs in our relationship with God!

- **Isaiah 59:2 (KJV)** But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.
- **Isaiah 59:2 (CEV)** Your sins are the roadblock between you and your God. That’s why he doesn’t answer your prayers or let you see his face.

None of us is faultless. We’ve all sinned and made mistakes, so we all have regrets and remorse. We all sometimes wish we could turn back the clock and do things differently. So we feel guilty about it and carry it around with us – sometimes consciously, but most of the time unconsciously. There are a lot of ways you react in life that are caused by unconscious guilt, things you feel bad about that you may not even be aware of. You may deny or repress the guilt. You may excuse or rationalize the guilt. And if you’re like most of us, you may even blame other people for your guilt.

- Mohammed: “Guilt is anything you did and fear others to know about.”
- Peter McWilliams: “Guilt is anger directed at ourselves.”
- Humorist Erma Bombeck: “Guilt is the gift that keeps on giving.”
- Philosopher Seneca: “Every guilty person is his own hangman.”
- Charles Fox: “He that is conscious of guilt cannot bear the innocence of others, so they will try to reduce all others to their own level.”

Many years ago Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, writer of the Sherlock Holmes novels, played a prank on five of the most prominent men in England. He sent an anonymous note to each of them which simply said: “All is found out, flee at once.” Within twenty-four hours all five men had left the country!

Guilt keeps me living in the past. It’s like always looking in the rearview mirror. You’re going to end up crashing if you do that. Guilt tends to replay in your mind over and over the things you wish you could change but you’re never going to be able to change. Guilt damages your relationships by causing you to respond to people in wrong ways (that sometimes you don’t even understand) ... impatience, overreacting, indulging, isolating ... etc.

Guilt cannot change the past just like worry cannot change the future; they just make today miserable.

If you’re really going to recover from the hurts, habits and hang-ups in your life, you’ve got to learn how to let go of guilt and live with a clear conscience. Psychologists tell us that we can’t get rid of our guilt, that we just have to learn to live with it. So people try to rationalize their guilt. When I rationalize my mistakes and sins, my HEAD says it’s okay while my HEART says it’s wrong. (But my heart always wins, because it will not keep quiet!)

Proverbs 20:27 (TEV) The Lord gave us mind and conscience; we cannot hide from ourselves.

The greatest holdup to the healing of your hang-ups is YOU! It all starts with being radically honest and saying, “I’m the problem.” We say, “If I just change relationships, jobs, or locations, then everything will be fine.” The only problem is wherever I go, there I am! And I keep messing things up.

Proverbs 28:13 (TEV) You will never succeed in life if you try to hide your sins. Confess them and give them up; then God will show mercy to you.

Psalms 139:23-24 (NIV) Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

If I really want to stop defeating myself, then I've got to stop deceiving myself. Accept responsibility for your faults!

1 John 1:8 (PHI) If we refuse to admit that we are sinners, then we live in a world of illusion and truth becomes a stranger to us.

1 John 1:9 (PHI) But if we freely admit that we have sinned, we find him reliable and just – he forgives our sins and makes us thoroughly clean from all that is evil.

The word “admit” in 1 John 1:9 (KJV: “confess”) is a compound Greek word, HOMOLOGEO, from HOMO (meaning “same”) and LOGEO (meaning “word”). To admit or confess means to speak the same thing about your sin as God says about it. Just give up and agree with God – He’s right anyway!

The basis for forgiveness is that God is utterly reliable, because it's His nature! "But it doesn't seem fair – somebody has to pay for my sin." SOMEBODY DID! That's why Jesus Christ died.

Romans 3:23-24 (NLT) For all have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet now God in his gracious kindness declares us not guilty. He has done this through Christ Jesus, who has freed us by taking away our sins.

The good news is that the Bible tells us how to do what psychology tells us we can't do! And when we take this step, we will reap the benefits of it in our mind and heart ...

Psalms 32:1 (LB) What happiness for those whose guilt has been forgiven! What joys when sins are covered over! What relief for those who have confessed their sins and God has cleared their record.

Romans 8:1 (KJV) There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

SO WHY DON'T WE DO THIS ?!? Remember riding a seesaw as a child? What happened when a mischievous playmate suddenly scrambled off the seesaw? CRASH! The only way you and your partner could ensure a safe landing was to get off the seesaw simultaneously.

In the human mind, there is a seesaw with one side labeled "GUILT" and the other side labeled "BLAME." The only way to keep the seesaw in balance is to make sure you have enough "blame" to balance your "guilt."

The more guilt you feel for your own mistakes, the more blame you must pile on to remain in emotional equilibrium. But what happens if you suddenly ask God for forgiveness, without also quitting the "blame game" that you are so used to? You will CRASH! So we keep on living the same old way, with the same old "victim mentality."

One reason we're hesitant to stop blaming is that it is much easier and safer to blame others for our problems than to blame the most logical culprit – ME! After all, that would put all the weight on my side of the seesaw! THE ONLY WAY TO GET OFF THE SEESAW SAFELY IS TO REMOVE YOUR GUILT AND STOP BLAMING OTHERS AT THE SAME TIME.

Matthew 6:14-15 (NLT) If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.

James 4:6 (NRSV) God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

What is grace? **GRACE IS THE POWER TO CHANGE!** Grace is the power God gives me to make the changes in my life that I want to make – and, more importantly, that He wants me to make! And there's only one way to get grace! God only gives it to the humble!

What needs changing in your life? What hurt or hang-up or habit have you been trying to ignore? It's hard for most of us to admit that we have a problem because it's humbling. It's saying, "I don't have it all together as much as I'd like everybody to think that I do."

When you tell that to somebody, they're not going to be surprised ... because they know it, God knows it, and you know it! You just need to be honest and admit it ... then God can go to work on your behalf!

Are you tired of dealing with, living in, or running from the past? The good news is that **FORGIVENESS FROM THE PAST IS POSSIBLE!**

- God hates sin, but He loves the sinner!
- Satan loves sin, but he hates the sinner!

Are you suffering from a guilty conscience? Are there scenes from your past that you wish you could erase? Has unresolved guilt caused you to keep your distance from others or from God? Are you blaming everything else?

Remember King David? (**2 Samuel 11-12**) He was guilty of shirking his responsibilities as King when his soldiers went out to battle. His idleness led to his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah. The baby born from their adulterous affair also died due to David's sin. David's son Amnon would subsequently rape his half-sister, and his son Absalom would later kill Amnon and repeat his father's adultery, this time with several of his father's wives and in the sight of the entire nation! The sword would never depart from David's house, and he would watch his sons scheme against each other, even to the point of killing one another and leading the nation into civil war. And to top it all off, David never even confessed the sin that started it all until he was directly confronted by the prophet Nathan! Talk about a load of guilt! **But David repented and received forgiveness!**

Psalms 51:1-3, 7-12 (NLT) A psalm of David, regarding the time Nathan the prophet came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba. ¹ Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love. Because of your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins. ² Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin. ³ For I recognize my shameful deeds—they haunt me day and night ... ⁷ Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. ⁸ Oh, give me back my joy again; you have broken me—now let me rejoice. ⁹ Don't keep looking at my sins. Remove the stain of my guilt. ¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a right spirit within me. ¹¹ Do not banish me from your presence, and don't take your Holy Spirit from me. ¹² Restore to me again the joy of your salvation, and make me willing to obey you.