

dealing with guilt & the past



Understanding _____

1. Definition of guilt and shame

- Guilt is a legal or judicial term that implies criminal responsibility in the eyes of the court of law, whether human or divine
- Shame may be defined as a feeling of having done wrong or failed in an obligation
- Shame may also be defined as the feeling someone experiences as a result of being sinned against
- Guilt is used in the Bible as the exposure of someone's actions, identification of the reason(s) and assessment of an appropriate punishment to restore the guilty party to God and/or to others

2. Guilt is good for our souls

- The Holy Spirit using the Word of God through the conscience is responsible to convict and produce guilt (John 16:8; Acts 2:37; John 7:7)
- People can be used by God to produce guilt in the lives of others using the Word of God with the sole purpose of restoration (Gal 6:1)
- Guilt is a direct result of sinful actions (Ps 32:5)
- Guilt must be acknowledged before God grants forgiveness (Hos 5:15; 1 John 1:9)
- Some bear the burden of guilt unnecessarily for lack of faith (Matt 11:28-30)
- Forgiveness is available for all sin and the associated guilt (1 John 1:9; Ps 32:5)
- God has graciously provided the appropriate sacrifice for our guilt (Isa 53:6, 10; 2 Cor 5:21; Col 2:14)
- Through Christ, we can live with a clear conscience before God and man (Acts 24:16; 1 Tim 1:5; Heb 9:14, 13:18; 1 Pet 3:16)

3. Guilt is never false

- Guilt should never be minimized – there is a reason why someone is guilty or thinks he is guilty
- You may think you are guilty through the manipulative tactics of others in order to control you – this is often referred to as the “guilt trip”
- You may believe you are guilty because of wrong standards – you may have an untrained or ill-informed conscience

4. The role of our conscience

- Conscience refers to your self-awareness to judge whether or not a desire, thought or action is in harmony with your moral standards
- Conscience is a gift of God to provide light in matters of good and evil, but your conscience is not the final judge – it must be biblically instructed and trained (1 Cor 4:4; 8:7)
- We all have one conscience, but that conscience may respond to various issues differently because of the “facts” informing it
 - You may have a seared conscience that is no longer activated by biblical criteria (1 Tim 4:2; Titus 1:15; Eph 4:19)
 - You may have an untrained conscience that has never been taught by biblical truth (cf. Lev 4:22-24; 1 Tim 1:13; Heb 5:14)
 - You may have an overactive or weak conscience that is activated by unbiblical criteria (Rom 14:1-5, 23)
 - You want to have a biblical conscience that is activated by biblical truth

ways of dealing with our guilt

1. We try to cover up the problem (Gen 3:7)

- Sin more – deceive and lie
- Try to do enough good

2. We seek to hide from the problem (Gen 3:8-10)

- Stay away from church
- Stay away from fellow believers
- Don't read the Bible
- Find churches that don't preach the “whole counsel” of God's Word, emphasizing the love and grace and acceptance of God, believing that the word “sin” is a dirty word

3. We seek to avoid, blame others or circumstances for the problem (Gen 3:11-13; James 1:12-15)

- Use chemicals, believing that we feel guilty because we are sick
- Blame our genetics
- Focus on self-esteem, believing that our guilt is “false” and we really are a good person
- Self-pleasure, seeking to mask the effects of guilt by gratifying our flesh

4. We seek to forgive ourselves

- Some believe that “forgiving self” is the **key** to peace and joy
- We have never nor shall we ever sin against ourselves or offend ourselves or transgress against ourselves necessitating our forgiveness of ourselves – we are not the judge of ourselves (Ps 51:4; Job 4:17; Jer 32:19; Acts 17:31; Rom 3:26; 1 Pet 1:17)
- When God says that He forgives you and cleanses you from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9), there is absolutely nothing you can or need to do to complete His work
- “Forgiving self” has no biblical support. Scripture supports two perspectives on forgiveness:
 - You can and need to be forgiven by God (Col 1:13-14; 1 John 1:9)
 - You are sincerely to forgive others, following the example of God’s forgiveness of you (Matt 18:32-33; Eph 4:32; Col 3:13)
- Dredging up, holding onto and beating yourself up over your sin does not glorify God and it depreciates the truth of the cross of Christ

ways of dealing with our guilt

1. Don’t minimize guilt
2. Don’t underestimate the effects of guilt
3. Identify what we are guilty of – is our conscience informed and educated biblically
4. Confess our sins to God (Ps 32:5; 51:3-5)
5. Confess our sins to the appropriate people (James 5:16a; Matt 5:23-24)
6. Make any necessary restitution (Ex 22:1; Num 5:7; Luke 19:8; Philemon 18)
7. Repent of and forsake the sin (Prov 28:13; Job 34:32; Acts 26:20; 2 Cor 7:9-11)

Biblical ways of dealing with our _____

1. Your past typically falls into one of four categories
 - An unconfessed guilty past
 - Confess it
 - Make necessary restitution

- A confessed guilty past
 - Don't wallow!
 - Believe and rejoice in God's forgiveness (Rom 8:1)
 - Learn any lessons you can (Prov 26:11)
 - Move on (Phil 3:13-14)
- A past where someone has directly sinned against you
 - Consider the fallibility of your memory
 - Consider whether you were truly innocent
 - Consider whether you responded biblically
 - Consider whether or not you should confront the person¹
 - Consider whether or not the person asked for forgiveness
 - Consider the responses of Joseph (Gen 37), Daniel (Daniel 1) and Christ (Heb 12:1-3; 1 Pet 2:22-24)
 - Fulfill your biblical responsibilities
 - Do not use your past to justify a life of sin
 - Practice the biblical principles of forgiveness
 - Overcome evil with good
 - Remember the sovereignty, goodness, faithfulness and justice of God
- A past when bad things happened due to living in a fallen world
 - Remember the servants of God who faced tough times and how they handled them (esp. Joseph, Paul and Christ)
 - Remember biblical truths to focus on during trials (esp. the goodness, sovereignty, and wisdom of God and our eternal hope)
 - Remember that God wants to make you more like Christ through your trials

¹ Go to the following website for an article by John MacArthur about a criteria for knowing whether or not to confront someone: <http://www.gty.org/resources/articles/A198/Let-Em-Know-or-Let-It-Go>

2. Your past does not determine who you are

- You are not a recovering victim who lives in fear of suddenly becoming the old person you were
- In Christ, you are a new creature, moving farther and farther from who you were (1 Cor 6:11; 2 Cor 5:17)
- In Christ, you are growing progressively into the likeness of who you are in Christ (Phil 3:12-16)
- Our past does not relegate us to uselessness in the eyes of God

Consider that Rahab the prostitute and Solomon born of adultery were both descendants of Jesus and consider Paul who was once a terrorist of the church

3. Your past reveals life patterns of thought and behavior

- When experiencing the guilt of wronging someone you may have developed the habit of covering, hiding, avoiding and/or blaming instead of confessing to God and others
- You grew up in a culture where gifts often came with strings attached and you developed a habit of trying to earn or deserve your gifts, making it difficult for you to believe and receive Christ's forgiveness
- When others sinned against you may have developed a thought that they are only doing that to you because of how bad you are and that you are to blame for everything bad thing done to you instead of training your conscience by the Word
- When others have sinned against you typically seek revenge instead of developing a pattern of forgiveness
- When horrible events have taken place, by no fault of your own, you think God hates you, is not in control, or is not good instead of trusting the sovereignty, wisdom and goodness of God
- When any horrible event has taken place in your life you may have developed a pattern of unbiblical responses for dealing with it instead of trusting God through prayer, counsel and obedience

4. God was at work in your past

- Understand and accept the sovereignty of God
 - Recognize God was in your storm (Gen 5:20; Acts 2:23; Rom 8:28-29)
 - Recognize God as our avenger (Rom 12:19; 1 Pet 2:23)
 - Recognize God's goodness (Ps 25:8; Nah 1:7; Matt 19:17)
- Understand and accept the plans and purposes of God
 - Consider Ruth – circumstances that seemed terrible were used of God to bless the family presently, but also in the future by maintaining the bloodline for David and Jesus

- Consider Philemon – looking at the circumstances in light of what God does; Paul appeals to Philemon to consider that God may have allowed Onesimus to offend him in order that he might be restored to him as more than just his slave, but a brother in the Lord
- Consider your past and present sufferings in the light of eternity (Heb 12:2; Rom 8:18)
- Consider that present trials due to decisions made in the past do not necessarily mean they were bad decisions – walking by faith does not guarantee an easy life (Heb 11:36-38)
- Understand and trust the sovereignty, wisdom, character and heart of God